# PEOPLE-POWERED PATHWAYS:

## Lessons in how to build students' social capital through career-connected learning

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What will it take to ensure that all students, especially those furthest from opportunity, are on a path to promising and fulfilling careers?

Schools are increasingly engaging in career-connected learning to increase career exposure and skill development. But focusing on skills alone will fall short, particularly if schools hope to address long-standing opportunity gaps. Awareness of possible careers and access to jobs depends not only on learning and achievement, but on personal and professional relationships that serve as gateways to career opportunities. Opportunity sits at the intersection of students' human capital—what they know and can do—and their social capital—who they know and can depend on for support and access. To launch a career, students need more than skills—they also need people willing to take a bet on their potential.

With the aim of helping leaders implement effective, equitable strategies for building students' social capital, this report offers field-tested considerations for piloting social capital building within existing career pathways initiatives. Our observations draw from an 18-month pilot during which we leveraged our social capital playbook to provide direct support to a group of three intermediary organizations—Education Strategy Group, Generation Schools Network, and Hawai'i P-20—collectively supporting 20 sites in the K–12 career pathways space. In the course of the pilot, we sought to understand how schools and nonprofits can make social capital building an explicit, effective, and equitable component of existing career-connected learning models.

Schools and programs that are interested in expanding students' networks can consider 10 lessons learned from the pilot:

1. Stick with relationship outcomes: Use relationship data to develop goals and measure progress.

2. Audit your current practices: Look for untapped opportunities to strengthen students' social capital within existing career-connected activities.

3. Prepare to build, not just buy: Given scarce off-the-shelf curricula, allocate time and resources for social capital training and curriculum development.

4. Honor relational norms and values: Adapt your approaches to both culture and context.

5. Incorporate immersive experiences: Pair social capital concepts with practice and opportunities to build real-world relationships.

6. Skills and access both matter: To seed positive interactions, develop communication skills alongside access to relationships.

7. Prime employers to share their social capital: Shifting employee volunteers' mindsets can orient them to build relationships and share resources.

8. Source social capital across your enterprise: Individual social capital is a critical, but limited, lever for scale.

9. Embed social capital into systems: Enthusiastic practitioners foster change, but infrastructure maintains it.

10. Benchmark collective progress: Communities of practice build practitioner confidence.

Equipped with these lessons, educators can build models that embed both career know-how and know-who into students' journeys, further expanding their access to opportunity.

# INTRODUCTION

At a time when seemingly everything about the way the US education system works is up for debate, few would argue that a fundamental objective of education is to prepare youth to lead prosperous and fulfilled lives. Yet troubling data abound when it comes to young adults' prospects for employment.[1] For too many students, especially those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, getting an education doesn't guarantee an upwardly-mobile job.[2]

The good news is that schools are increasingly engaging in career-connected learning, collaborating with employers to integrate career exposure and skill development earlier and more often.[3] To support those efforts, regional nonprofits and statewide intermediary organizations are stepping in to weave together more coherent career pathways to high-demand jobs. These initiatives aim to modernize siloed "vocational education" efforts, in hopes that all students hone their professional skills alongside traditional academics.

But to address long-standing opportunity gaps, focusing on career skills alone will fall short. Access to jobs depends not only on learning and achievement, but on personal and professional relationships that serve as a gateway to career opportunities. Groundbreaking research on the drivers of social mobility suggests that social capital, or students' access to and ability to mobilize networks, strongly predicts whether students will move up the income distribution ladder.[4] An estimated half of all jobs come through personal connections.[5] On LinkedIn, having at least one connection at a company makes an applicant six times more likely to land a job.[6]

## What is social capital?

Social capital describes access to, and ability to mobilize, relationships that help further an individual's potential and goals. Just like skills and knowledge, relationships offer resources that drive access to opportunity.

Yet access to professional networks in the knowledge economy is not equally distributed. Network gaps start early.[7] Students whose parents have a bachelor's degree are far more likely to know individuals working as CEOs, lawyers, professors, and the like.[8] As students move into middle and high school, network gaps widen further. Families with higher-incomes spend far more on enrichment activities that, in turn, increase their children's access to coaches, tutors, and leaders.[9] Both Black students and students from low-income households are less likely to report access to mentors who are connected to formal institutions and provide career advice, guidance, and access to job opportunities.[10] In fact, young adults from the top socioeconomic quartile report nearly double the number of nonfamilial adults in their lives as their peers from the bottom quartile.[11] These relationship gaps contribute to opportunity gaps that yield downstream employment gaps.

Given these glaring disparities in students' access to professional networks, overcoming network gaps should be a core priority for any system trying to build equitable career pathways. With the aim of helping career pathway leaders implement effective, equitable strategies, this report describes social capital building in action and offers strategies for piloting new approaches within existing career pathways models.

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# PART 1. SOCIAL CAPITAL PROOF POINTS: SMALL SCALE, BIG PROMISE

There are a handful of pioneering organizations outside of traditional education systems aimed at ensuring that students have both the skills and networks they need to access upwardly mobile careers. These organizations—such as COOP, Basta, Braven, Big Picture Learning, and others—help students cultivate new peer and professional relationships and mobilize resources in their existing family and community networks.[12] A hallmark of these promising approaches is treating relationships as outcomes in their own right, not just as inputs to learning and development.

For example, COOP is a nonprofit that helps college graduates who are first generation or from low-income households develop the technical skills and social capital they need to jumpstart careers in upwardly mobile fields, thereby overcoming underemployment.[13] COOP employs a number of intentional social capital–building strategies to create deep, enduring connections with peers and near-peer program alumni (i.e., individuals who have recently completed the program). Its model involves within- and between-cohort relationship-building, as well as hosting client projects, expert panels, and exclusive career events where participants meet hiring managers and employees at major technology firms.

Big Picture Learning is a national nonprofit that supports internship-based learning high schools, with an explicit goal of expanding students' professional networks. With coaching from their teachers, Big Picture students find internship opportunities that align to their interests by reaching out to local businesses and members of their communities. In addition, Big Picture schools encourage internship supervisors to connect students with colleagues across their industry throughout the course of the semester.

Such deliberate efforts to build students' networks have shown promising results. Eighty-one percent of COOP alumni work full-time and earn an average of three times their pre-COOP salary.[14] And in a sample of three of Big Picture's schools, while 95% of Big Picture Learning students were accepted into two-year or four-year institutions, 88% of those who didn't enroll in college secured full-time employment—with 74% reporting that this employment was facilitated through a connection they forged in the course of their internships.[15]

Our team at the Christensen Institute has been studying organizations like these for the past five years. In 2019, we formed a network of 18 such innovative organizations (including COOP and Big Picture Learning) that prioritized social capital as a programmatic outcome—that is, organizations that were deliberately building and measuring their participants' access to and ability to mobilize networks. In an effort to document and disseminate their approaches to a wider array of education leaders, we published a five-step social capital playbook in 2021.[16] The playbook draws on the strategies spearheaded by organizations in our network, empirical research on social capital, and emerging measures that schools and nonprofits might consider in their efforts to build equitable career pathways.

The models and research spotlighted in our playbook are proof positive of the power of deliberately investing in students' professional networks. Integrating these promising strategies into existing education systems, however, presents a complex set of challenges. For decades, schools have focused on what students know, often neglecting efforts that could deepen or diversify their students' networks. What's more, initiative fatigue and teacher burnout are an ongoing challenge to spearheading new approaches on the heels of the pandemic.[17]

This report lifts the hood on implementation successes and challenges in bringing social capital–building strategies to a variety of educational settings. Our observations draw from an 18-month pilot during which we leveraged our social capital playbook to provide direct support to a group of three intermediary organizations supporting 20 sites in the career pathways space.[18] In the course of the pilot, we set out to understand the following:

- Activities: What student experiences did pilot sites pursue in an effort to expand students' social capital?

- Mindsets: What ways of thinking built momentum and sustained new approaches?

- Supports: What tools, coaching, and resources were important for successful implementation?

- Challenges: What barriers should leaders anticipate?

Understanding these dimensions of implementation can start to reveal what it will take for education providers to build students' social capital effectively, equitably, and at scale.

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# PART 2. SOCIAL CAPITAL PILOT STUDY: OUR APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

To surface practical examples and data, we studied implementation of social capital–building strategies in a variety of educational settings, including rural and urban schools, as well as nonprofit-based career pathways programs. We partnered with three intermediary organizations that each serve different student populations, work in different regions of the US, and employ different delivery models. Education Strategy Group (ESG) supports career pathways initiatives at the regional level, Generation Schools Network (GSN) supports district-level work, and Hawai'i P-20 supports statewide career pathways work. Figure 1 provides an overview of the intermediary organizations: ESG, GSN, and Hawai'i P-20. Appendix A provides an overview of student demographic information for the schools and nonprofits that partnered with these three intermediaries over the course of this project.

Figure 1. Overview of intermediary organizations

| Intermediary | Overview | Approach to social capital building | Pilot site selection | Locations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Education Strategy Group** | An education consulting firm that works with K–12, higher education, and workforce leaders to enable economic mobility and prosperity. | Integrate social capital building into regional career pathways initiatives, which consist of collaborations between school districts, workforce-based nonprofits (e.g., chambers of commerce), and postsecondary institutions. Initiatives include mentoring programs, apprenticeships, career coaching, and work-based learning. | Based on an assessment of existing regional career-readiness initiatives that ESG supports across the US, choosing sites where social capital building aligned well to initiatives' overall goals. | Regions: Boston, MA; Dallas, TX; Indianapolis, IN; Nashville, TN; Washington, DC. |
| **Generation Schools Network** | A nonprofit that works with K–12 school districts in Colorado to implement equitable community- and career-connected learning, with the goal of ensuring students' access to opportunities for economic mobility. | Integrate social capital-building strategies within a multi-district, career-connected learning initiative. Embed social capital in "real-world problem scenarios," in which individual middle and high school teachers identify an employer partner that collaborates with students to solve real-world problems faced in their field of work. | Recruited individual teachers to implement social capital-building strategies in their classroom as part of employer-informed projects and offered stipends to teachers for completing each phase of the work. | School Districts: Brush; East Otero; Las Animas; Rocky Ford; Swink; Weld; Weldon Valley; Wiggins; Wiley. |
| **Hawai'i P-20** | A partnership led by the Executive Office on Early Learning, the Hawai'i State Department of Education, and the University of Hawai'i System. A significant component of Hawai'i P-20's vision is to better integrate career-connected learning pathways into K–12 school systems. | Develop pilot partnerships with four local nonprofits that offer programming to youth at O'ahu schools. Programming includes career exposure and exploration, internship training, leadership development, and helping youth at risk of gang membership, violence, and dropping out of high school establish connections with supportive adults. | Utilized a Request For Proposals (RFP) process to select four nonprofits whose goals most closely aligned with their vision for integrating social capital building into career pathways. | State: Hawai'i (O'ahu) |

Over the course of 18 months, we employed a train-the-trainer model in which we helped build each intermediary's capacity to train their school and nonprofit partners in the design and implementation of strategies for building and measuring students' social capital.[19] We met monthly with each intermediary to discuss their progress and troubleshoot any challenges that arose with the work.[20] We also held monthly joint meetings for each intermediary to share their experiences and assist one another with challenges. During these meetings, we utilized the Getting To Outcomes® framework to guide the intermediaries along their implementation journey.[21] In addition to recurring monthly meetings, we also conducted workshops for intermediaries regarding strategies their sites might consider adopting, such as relationship mapping and career chats.[22]

To learn about the challenges and opportunities facing pilot sites and intermediaries, our approach aimed at understanding not *if* these strategies work, but *how* they can work in the midst of unplanned and unforeseen factors that often arise in educational settings. With this goal in mind, our team at the Christensen Institute, in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR) and with support from Mathematica, employed a developmental evaluation approach. Whereas traditional evaluation is focused on improvement and accountability, developmental evaluation supports innovation and adaptation in complex or uncertain environments.[23] This approach allowed us to develop "practice-based evidence" that is more generalizable to other schools than more rigid, tightly-controlled impact evaluations.

To that end, data collection throughout the 18-month pilot involved two distinct processes, collected and analyzed by separate teams. Each intermediary selected two pilot sites to undergo developmental evaluation conducted by AIR, which included quantitative and qualitative data from both staff and students. After each round of data collection, intermediaries and pilot site staff attended a "Reflect and Iterate" session during which AIR presented results from its analysis of the data.

For the remainder of ESG and Hawai'i P-20 pilot sites who were not participating in AIR's evaluation, and a subset of GSN's educator partners who were not participating in AIR's evaluation, we administered quarterly,

internally designed intermediary and site staff surveys, and conducted interviews with intermediary and site staff throughout the pilot. In the final quarter of implementation, we surveyed the remaining educator partners working with GSN to surface any additional tools and activities they found useful throughout the project.

Among the sites we surveyed throughout the course of the project, we collected information about intermediaries' and pilot sites' planning processes, the successes and challenges they faced, and the system- and site-level factors they believe contributed to their outcomes. Each quarter, our team conducted sensemaking of these results with intermediaries and discussed implications for supporting pilot sites moving forward. The data collected through those surveys and interviews directly informed this report. While our team did not collect data directly from students, AIR's evaluation included both staff and student data analysis, and will be published in a forthcoming report.

In the following two sections, we offer a snapshot of student-facing activities that sites implemented, and synthesize lessons learned over the course of this pilot.

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# PART 3. SOCIAL CAPITAL IN ACTION: SAMPLE ACTIVITIES FROM PILOT SITES

Many organizations and schools pursuing career-connected learning would agree that "relationships matter." Yet, designing activities that put relationships at the center of career exposure requires more than just connecting students to one another or to industry professionals.

As such, pilot sites sought to design strategies and activities that made social capital an explicit, rather than implicit feature of the student experience. This included activities aimed at deepening students' relationships with staff, educators, peers, and employers through two-way communication and providing opportunities to reconnect. Sites scaffolded these experiences by building in time for conversations and reflections about students' individual experiences, skills, interests, and goals, as well as their existing networks—both within and beyond school.

Although by no means comprehensive across all 20 sites, below we offer a glimpse of what a few of the common strategies looked like in practice. (More detailed descriptions of each can be found in Appendixes B–D.)

## Personal timelines

A **personal timeline** is an activity that facilitates opportunities for students to picture, make sense of, and identify experiences and patterns in their lives. Creating a personal timeline can help students: 1) anchor their own identities to support their future career exploration; 2) get to know each other, find commonalities, build trust, and develop relationships with peers and staff members; 3) visualize examples of their resilience and practice talking about those experiences to boost their confidence; and 4) articulate characteristics and experiences to share during college or job interviews.

Kupu, a nonprofit in Hawai'i dedicated to increasing high school students' readiness for natural resources careers, was looking for a way to incorporate more two-way communication between students and program staff, as well as between students and outside professionals. They asked students to reflect on their lives by creating a personal timeline as a structured way to practice talking about their strengths, experiences, and interests in preparation for interviews. This activity aligned with Kupu's broader vision to encourage youth to make connections to people, places, and opportunities that support them in pursuing their goals.

Students' personal timelines helped Kupu's near-peer facilitators to dive deeper into students' interests and goals. They then drew upon the goals to narrow in on students' existing connections who might be able to help reach those goals, and asked students to create a map of those connections via a relationship-mapping activity. Kupu staff then facilitated a discussion about the different types of support that each individual provided on their map. They encouraged students to review their maps and identify areas in which they could use more support, introducing the concept of networking as a way to bridge those gaps.

> "This activity helped me explore what experiences in my life led me to this very moment, which was great for personal reflection as well as understanding what experiences I had that can stand out in a job interview, further preparing me for my future goals."
> —Near-peer facilitator

*To read more about this activity, see Appendix B: Personal timeline.*

## *Goal-setting based on interests and values*

Like personal timelines, completing **interest and skill inventories** and having **conversations about goals and values** can help students: 1) align network-building activities with topics or disciplines they're interested in; 2) set a goal and make a plan to build supportive relationships that can help them achieve it; 3) express interests and goals to potential mentors; and 4) consider who they are, who they want to be, and who within or beyond their existing networks can reinforce that vision.

To anchor career exploration in personal strengths and interests, during their multi-day Learning Through Interests/Internships (LTI) training, Hawaii Workforce Pipeline (HWP) asked students to complete assessments of their career interests and personality types, including students' approaches to career paths and workplace habits. HWP, a work-based learning nonprofit that connects teachers and students with industry professionals in careers they want to explore, then asked students to think about how understanding their strengths might influence the support they seek from teachers.

Adult Friends for Youth (AFY), a nonprofit serving young people in Hawai'i at risk of gang membership, violence, and dropping out of high school, asked the young people they work with to identify one or two goals they could work toward by the end of the year. During their weekly counseling sessions, staff members asked participants to consider the steps they might need to take to achieve their goals, what kind of help they might need, and who could provide that help. They did this in conjunction with a conversation about trusted adults in their lives. Staff paid particular attention to discussing the qualities and characteristics young people were looking for in the adults who could provide support. AFY intended to use goal-setting conversations to ground their network-building efforts in students' intrinsic motivation and values. As one staff member described, youth might have goals in mind, but it "ultimately has to connect to how it makes them feel, because that will motivate them to get to their goal."

"Kids and students always all want to be close to others. Everybody wants close connections to other people. They want to have people who they can be themselves with. But not everyone knows how or what that would look like or why they might be close to these people, but not other people... It comes down to shared values, because you're not going to be close to someone that doesn't share your values."
—Nonprofit leader
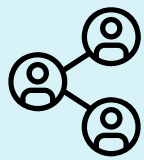
## *Relationship mapping*

**Relationship mapping** is a strategy that can allow students to visualize, reflect on, and keep track of the people they know. Pilot sites used relationship maps to help students: 1) identify trusted people they can talk to about their futures; 2) brainstorm individuals who are familiar with or already invested in their community who can open doors to future opportunities for them or their peers; 3) monitor the growth and change in composition of their network; and 4) reflect on who they might not know yet but want to meet in the future.

To understand more about the individuals on students' relationship maps, some organizations asked students to also include the industry, organization, role, types of support each individual on their maps provided, or types of resources they might access through existing or desired connections. In most cases, students mapped their relationships toward the beginning of programming to identify sources of career support and opportunities. A few organizations reserved mapping for a post-reflection exercise to identify and quantify new connections students forged over the course of an experience or program.

Staff from Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Montgomery College, and the Universities at Shady Grove worked together as the Montgomery County Partnership (MCP). MCP works with high school juniors who are first in their family to pursue college, first-generation Americans, immigrants, from a low-income family, or have differing abilities that have limited their ability to pursue a bachelor's degree. MCP provides students with individualized coaching, transition support, career-readiness training, and skill development over the course of a six-year program. During this pilot, MCP created relationship maps in the form of a digital contact list spreadsheet that high school juniors could build, maintain, and refer to with support from their coaches. MCP included information such as the student's relationship to the person, the event at which the student met the person, the month and year the student met the person, how talking to them could benefit their future, potential action steps to take, and whether the student considered the person to be a "strong tie" (close relationship defined by high levels of time investment, emotional intimacy, trust, and reciprocity) or a "weak tie" (relationship characterized by relatively less time, emotional intimacy, and reciprocity, but is more likely to contain new information and opportunities).

To source people for their contact list, MCP encouraged students to think back to a prior activity in which they drew pictures of people who provided different types of support in their lives. To structure the contact list in a way that reinforced their leadership's focus on "community cultural wealth," MCP was careful to center family and community connections. As one staff member described, staff took a more deliberate approach to "saying and making family part of social capital and being very intentional of that because it resonated very well with our students, and for some of our students their families are their main source of information."

To make the contact list actionable, MCP and MCPS encouraged students to include things they had in common with each contact that they could mention when reaching out. In addition, the contact list document also gave students the option to share each contact's information with staff, allowing staff to connect these contacts with other youth as appropriate. MCP coaches paired the contact list activity with conversations about the reciprocal nature of relationships, the importance of mobilizing new connections by completing action steps, and the development of relationship-building habits by revisiting the contact list each year throughout students' high school and postsecondary journeys.

Other organizations integrated maps into student projects. The Center for Tomorrow's Leaders (CTL), a nonprofit that prepares high school students and recent college graduates in Hawai'i to be future leaders, had high school students in the first year of their program complete a concentric circle map of individuals in their lives sorted by degrees of closeness. The goal of the activity was to identify a topic for a leadership project by prompting students to discuss how challenges facing their communities impacted various members of their immediate and wider networks. Students started by talking with their intimate circle of family and friends about things going on in their lives. Then, they spoke with people at their school, such as the principal or custodian. Lastly, students went out into the community and talked to others who were affected by the topic of interest. As a staff member described, through this approach "students begin to understand that I cannot just live in my own little world" and that they "have to talk to other people and see what's going on with them, and how they're being impacted as well, if I'm going to lead."

"[Relationship mapping] brought to light to the students that there are already people in their lives who are available to support them, such as their weak ties, those relationships they need to cultivate. We added an action step that can direct students to do something with their capital. For example, you know somebody who is interning at this organization, or your mom or your teacher says they have a connection, what is an action step you can do to follow up with your teacher, who is a weak tie, so that you can get access to an organization? Essentially helping students identify potential mentors or potential resources in their community."
—Program staff.

*To read more about this activity, see* Appendix C: Relationship mapping.

## *Social capital 101 presentations*

**Social capital 101 presentations** can help students: 1) realize what social capital is and that they already have it; 2) understand different types of support and the importance of having a diverse support network; 3) recognize that there are systemic factors shaping their stock of social capital; and 4) understand why and how relationships and networking can help them achieve their goals.

Some organizations disseminated research and statistics through the presentations, while others prioritized a more experiential path with reflection, activities, and practice built in. Kupu and Hawaii Workforce Pipeline distilled information about the concept of social capital and integrated it into training sessions preparing students for internships or career exposure events. Both emphasized the idea that social capital consists of everyone students know. Kupu also highlighted the value of investing in relationships before needing to call on people for their support, as well as the importance of maintaining relationships over time.

The Montgomery County Partnership and the Transformative Mentoring Program at Thomas Edison K–8 School in Boston included interactive approaches to teaching the concept of social capital. MCP had students draw examples of the tangible "stuff" support, informational "info" support, companionship "connection" support, and emotional support they received from individuals in their lives. They also showed students a video of a program alumnus and asked them to identify examples of the support that the alumnus received.

Students at Thomas Edison K–8 School identified types of support featured in popular songs. Teachers also facilitated a game in which they told one or two students a piece of "confidential information" and randomly assigned each student one to four other students they were allowed to interact with. The expectation was that students who only talked to one person were least likely to have heard the confidential information, whereas the students who spoke with four individuals may have been told multiple times. Afterward, teachers asked students to reflect on how weak ties differ from strong ties and the role each type of tie plays in life.

Organizations also taught their staff about the concept of social capital. Generation Schools Network (GSN), HWP, and EmployIndy gave presentations to teachers or program staff on the power of connections to prime them to think about how they could support social capital building more effectively and equitably in their classrooms and programs. A throughline among the presentations was a commitment to ensuring programs started to position students as active builders of their networks who are confident in their ability to engage with peers and adults. Student agency was described by one organization as "voice, choice, and self-management" in building their networks, and by another as "the capacity of individuals to have the power and resources to fulfill their potential." For example, GSN described this project as striving to strengthen "students' will and ability to manage their own learning and key relationships to advance life success."

"[We] wanted to illustrate this concept of social capital in a way that felt valuable to students and then have them understand what it is and why it's important. [We] wanted there to be interactive elements that helped the learning stick and [we] wanted it to be small enough … there's no point in teaching them everything at this point. This is a new concept. What we felt was the most important is that they learned that relationships are going to be critical to their success, and being intentional about that mattered. We wanted it to be youth friendly, fun, and short."
—Program leader

*To read more about this activity, see* *Appendix D: Social capital 101 presentations.*

## Communication lessons

**Communication lessons** can help students: 1) strengthen their relationships with peers; 2) adjust their communication habits through feedback from individuals they have relationships with; 3) engage in small talk or informal conversations with new individuals; and 4) increase their confidence in their ability to speak publicly to a variety of audiences.

Several pilot sites thought that students would benefit from practicing their communication skills in conjunction with deepening existing relationships and developing new connections both in a personal and professional capacity. Some felt that it was necessary to strengthen this muscle *before* they felt comfortable asking students to converse with external partners and professionals. A handful of organizations taught the importance of professional communication skills through training or videos asynchronously, while others engaged students in shorter, interactive activities. Relevance, specifically to students' lives, experiences, contexts, cultures, and pop culture, was an important principle for many organizations.

Graduation Alliance, an organization that provides coaching support to high school students in Dallas, introduced high school students to the importance of soft skills generally, and communication skills specifically, by sharing articles, statistics, and videos about how soft skills can lead to job success via weekly text messages. A staff member focused student outreach efforts on communication skills during the first two months of the program before broaching topics like networking, college, and career options. One short video described how communication helps build relationships through interacting with classmates, advisors, teachers, and coworkers; active listening; and developing empathy. To apply these concepts, the staff member followed up with students on a weekly basis and asked questions about the conversations students had with their managers and coworkers. During those sessions, the staff member also shared her own relevant high school experiences, finding that consistent, regular conversations with someone relatable proved impactful for students. By the end of her experience in the program, one student gave a presentation about the benefits of these activities to a room full of prominent people at a local college.

Generation Schools Network was intentional about providing students with activity-laced experiences—with built-in time for practice—that aren't just between two individuals, but that span across an entire network. GSN introduced the importance of building a rapport with others by expressing genuine interest in them. One activity involved describing symbols to a partner, which led them to see the importance of being specific and detailed with their language. Students also discussed how open- and closed-ended questions affect conversations, and how finding commonalities can sustain conversations. To practice, they searched online for things they had in common with a famous person of their choice. Students also practiced picking up nonverbal communication cues by playing charades and acting out skits. Another activity challenged students to adjust their messages according to the audience (peers, principals and teachers, professional supervisor, or politicians), providing students with an opportunity to showcase their verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

"We emphasize the power of connections and communication as a way to prime [teachers] to think about how they could support [students]. Communication might be a subconstruct of connection. You need to know how to communicate to connect. [Teachers also] needed a way to ease into this work. The communication exercises broke down mindsets, built trust, and made it fun for both the teacher and the kids. It is both a durable employment success skill and it's a social capital skill—perhaps the most essential social capital skill."
—Intermediary staff member

## College and career event preparation

Providing targeted and timely **preparation in advance of college and career events** can help students get the most out of events by helping them to: 1) feel confident that they know what to expect and what the norms will be at the events; 2) navigate future college and career events professionally to build new relationships; 3) prepare questions that allow them to have conversations about possible opportunities; and (4) identify which colleges or careers interest them.

The Montgomery County Partnership and Hawaii Workforce Pipeline supported students prior to career exposure events by having conversations to prepare them or by sending questions to consider ahead of time. These organizations delivered their support via different mediums and at different frequencies.

MCP hosted both a virtual professional pathways panel and career simulation activities. In the morning prior to the panel, students received a 30- to 60-minute online, asynchronous "professional reputation" module, which took students through a hypothetical first day on a new job, provided an overview of "how to be professional," previewed what the pathways panel would be like, and offered guidance regarding the kind of questions to ask and how to do so with the platform. Students were matched to virtual panels based on the interests they selected in their applications. The following day students participated in-person in activities that mimicked the tasks that the professionals engage in for their careers with the same individuals they met during the panels. After they completed those activities, students received email templates to follow-up with the professionals they were interested in continuing to connect with and learn from.

Students working with HWP received daily tips and topics for reflection from the high school's morning news announcements the week before and the week of their Career Day event. Staff asked students ahead of time to think about the careers they were interested in and why, and whether they were attending the event to learn more about careers in general or specific entry-level jobs or volunteer opportunities. Staff members encouraged students to come up with at least one question to ask a guest speaker.

"We've done that for years ... bring six or seven different industry panels together of employers and academic rep[resentative]s and we put the students in there and they asked questions. But we've never taught them that, 'Okay, this is somebody who can tie into your network of support.' We already knew we were doing these things but we did not have that intentionality about teaching these students that it was important that these were resources for them and how to capitalize on them."
—Program leader

# PART 4. SOCIAL CAPITAL IMPLEMENTATION: 10 LESSONS LEARNED ACROSS SITES

The strategies described in Part 3 offer a glimpse into the student-facing activities and experiences that emerged among pilot sites. But over the course of the year, pilot sites also worked through opportunities and challenges at the organizational level, learning what it would take to operationalize a sharper focus on students' social capital within their existing processes and competing priorities.

In the midst of education's perfect storm of teacher burnout, worrisome academic performance metrics, and enrollment declines, implementing any new strategy, or redesigning one, can feel incredibly challenging—especially if there's no guarantee of success. In the course of this pilot, we observed mechanisms that supported or hindered schools and nonprofits' ability to implement and sustain these strategies despite, or because of, myriad demands facing practitioners. Below, we outline what we learned about the mindsets, supports, and challenges of integrating social capital into existing career pathways initiatives.

1. Stick with relationship outcomes: Use relationship data to develop goals and measure progress.

2. Audit your current practices: Look for untapped opportunities to strengthen students' social capital within existing career-connected activities.

3. Prepare to build, not just buy: Given scarce off-the-shelf curricula, allocate time and resources for social capital training and curriculum development.

4. Honor relational norms and values: Adapt your approaches to both culture and context.

5. Incorporate immersive experiences: Pair social capital concepts with practice and opportunities to build real-world relationships.

6. Skills and access both matter: To seed positive interactions, develop communication skills alongside access to relationships.

7. Prime employers to share their social capital: Shifting employee volunteers' mindsets can orient them to build relationships and share resources.

8. Source social capital across your enterprise: Individual social capital is a critical, but limited, lever for scale.

9. Embed social capital into systems: Enthusiastic practitioners foster change, but infrastructure maintains it.

10. Benchmark collective progress: Communities of practice build practitioner confidence.

Educators are no stranger to achievement data. However, relationship data that speaks to students' access to and ability to mobilize connections is relatively novel in K–12 education.

## 1. Stick with relationship outcomes: Use relationship data to develop goals and measure progress.

During the planning phase, many site teams were unsure how to accurately measure students' social capital. Surveys of site staff indicated that 85% felt that having student surveys and other measurement tools for social capital would be helpful or very helpful. However, some staff were hesitant to add another survey on top of existing student surveys due to concerns about survey fatigue. With so many potential indicators of social capital, it was sometimes challenging to choose one or two that aligned to the team's vision and could easily be tacked onto an existing survey.

Without clarity about what constitutes a good indicator of social capital, some had difficulty articulating concrete goals. In turn, these sites usually took one of two approaches to goal development. Some defaulted to implementing activities as the goal itself (e.g., "Our goal is to introduce social capital to 12th-grade students as part of our career-readiness curriculum"). While this type of goal articulates the school or program's actions, it doesn't specify the student outcomes that programs hope will result from those actions. Other sites focused on long-term outcomes (e.g., "Our goal is to increase employability skills") rather than shorter-term, observable changes in students' access to and ability to mobilize relationships. These goals were often too broad to be useful in determining how specific relationship-based experiences and activities could help them achieve those goals.

To rightsize goals, schools and programs can ask themselves "What relationships do we want students to have access to or be able to build and maintain as a result of the experiences in our program?" A site may end up with a goal such as "By the end of the school year, each student will have had at least four 30-minute career conversations with professionals in a potential field of interest" or "By the 12th week of their internship, students will have obtained at least two references from supervisors or colleagues at their internship site whom they feel confident reaching out to."

Setting concrete, relationship-specific goals requires upfront work: because most programs have not measured students' social capital, it may take time to unpack various indicators and select a few that best align with their program philosophy and capacity. But by working backward from the goal statement, schools and programs can then design experiences that help students move the needle on these meaningful, relationship-oriented competencies.

**Lesson in practice:** Adult Friends for Youth (AFY) is a nonprofit serving young people in Hawaiʻi at risk of gang membership, violence, and dropping out of high school. Although AFY has created a safe, supportive environment in which youth have built trusting relationships with their staff and leadership, most of the youth they serve have found it challenging to develop close relationships with adults outside of AFY. As part of this initiative, AFY sought to help their participants build positive support networks external to their own staff.

When considering their goals, AFY leadership felt that they needed a good indicator for gauging students' ability to cultivate connections with adults in service of education and career goals. In turn, they developed a goal specifying that they would help each youth acquire the skills and confidence to develop positive relationships with adults outside of AFY and cultivate them to the point where they felt comfortable enough to obtain a reference from at least two of those individuals. This goal helped guide the development of group counseling sessions in which AFY staff helped youth identify adults in their lives that they felt could help them with career or college preparation, and to begin having conversations with these individuals about their goals. It also guided the design of experiences in which AFY introduced their youth to new relationships. To ensure that these relationships were positive and supportive, AFY was very intentional about who they chose to connect with their students. For example, AFY helped one youth connect with the owner of a t-shirt printing business with whom AFY staff already had a close relationship. After a few initial conversations, the business owner offered the young person an apprenticeship and quickly became a close mentor.

AFY also gradually built students' confidence to create connections that could improve their lives in other ways, such as offering their participants the opportunity to meet with a Hawaiʻi state senator to advocate for renovations to the public housing community they lived in. Although nervous at first, AFY's youth later reflected about how this meeting was a major turning point that increased their confidence in talking with authority figures because the senator was highly approachable and genuinely interested in what they had to say. This meeting led to a series of additional meetings with public officials that further bolstered their confidence, including an opportunity for some students (whom AFY felt had made significant progress with communication skills and self-efficacy) to travel to Washington, DC, to meet with a US senator about the housing renovations. Because of the success of the trip, AFY is planning to expand these types of opportunities to other youth as they progress in their self-efficacy to have conversations with adults beyond AFY staff.

## 2. *Audit your current practices: Look for untapped opportunities to strengthen students' social capital within existing career-connected activities.*

Schools and programs that were new to the idea of social capital building often had a desire to develop activities from scratch. However, given competing demands on educators and staff, many lacked the time and resources to develop novel activities. According to site surveys, 71% of site staff who had been implementing social capital strategies for less than 4 weeks reported that lack of time was a moderate or significant barrier to getting started. Among staff who had been implementing for more than 4 weeks, that figure was 50%.

The good news is that social capital building is well-positioned to integrate within many activities that students are already engaged in, including interactions with guest speakers, mentoring, guidance, advising, college or job interview preparation, peer-bonding activities, work-based learning, and internships. Latent reservoirs of social capital can often be tapped with a small shift in the way activities are conducted. For example, students completing internships can be asked to create a network map of people they meet at their worksite.[24] Teachers can encourage students to follow up with a guest speaker to have a more in-depth career conversation, or (if applicable) have students ask their peers whether they could introduce them to a family member who works in a field of interest.

One site lead reflected on the importance of supporting students beyond simply increasing their exposure to careers: "We've done our best to create career experiential learning opportunities and also leverage those that exist in our county, but what we haven't necessarily been strategic about is teaching students how to best capitalize on the relationships built through those career experiential learning opportunities—the follow-up."

**Lesson in practice:** Building on prior career pathways initiatives, Education Strategy Group (ESG) partnered with EmployIndy, a nonprofit organization focused on career pathways for youth and young adults. EmployIndy's leadership felt that their Modern Apprenticeship Program (MAP) was a natural fit for building students' social capital, as a primary goal of the program is to position students for high-value, entry-level employment.

Although the MAP team initially planned to build social capital via networking events, they noticed that these events involve very brief, formal interactions between students and industry professionals that rarely allow for stronger, longer-lasting bonds to form. At the same time, they came to the realization that students' daily interactions with coworkers and supervisors at their apprenticeships were low-hanging fruit for building professional relationships. The team then began to focus on helping students build and strengthen those professional relationships on a daily basis during their apprenticeships.

To do so, the team began to train their apprenticeship mentors—EmployIndy staff who work directly with student apprentices—to incorporate discussions about professional relationships into their regular check-ins with students. They also created a quarterly competition to incentivize students to engage in behaviors that build their social capital and encouraged apprenticeship supervisors (who work for the employers providing apprenticeships) to help students build social capital while they're in the workplace. These strategies proved to be a relatively low lift for the MAP team because they involved modifications to existing strategies, rather than entirely new activities.

## 3. *Prepare to build, not just buy: Given scarce off-the-shelf curricula, allocate time and resources for social capital training and curriculum development.*

Currently, the number of educators nationwide who have experimented with explicit social capital–building strategies is relatively small. In this emerging market, most of the existing off-the-shelf curricula are high-dosage and cost prohibitive, particularly for schools and programs just starting to experiment with embedding social capital designs and measures.

In the planning phase, surveys of site staff indicated that over half felt that lack of access to tools and resources was a barrier to implementation. Programs typically didn't have room to add a new, comprehensive curriculum entirely dedicated to social capital building. Instead, staff were looking for free, low-dosage lessons and activities that they could efficiently adapt to their particular needs. When asked about what kind of tools and resources her program needed, one leader said, "Thinking about the workload that frontline practitioners have in education, the simpler things can be, the more actionable tools and resources can be, that would be better."

Sites typically took one of two approaches to curriculum development. Some created their own curriculum by pulling in ideas and activities from the few free tools for building students' social capital. For example, when designing its introductory social capital lesson, Kupu incorporated activities and vignettes from Connected Futures—a free, research-informed online curriculum designed to help students form meaningful connections with supportive, nonparental adults in their lives.[25] For other sites, the intermediary partner was heavily involved in resource development. Generation Schools Network (GSN) and ESG drew upon their knowledge of the career-connected learning space to create or co-create resources that fit their sites' particular needs.

Our overall experience suggests that, at least for the next several years, designating staff with the time and expertise to design student-facing lessons and activities, as well as providing staff- and employer-facing training, will be a key determinant of success for programs implementing social capital–building strategies.

**Lesson in practice:** ESG played an important role for its sites, both as a technical assistance provider who helped sites develop and refine resources, as well as a connection to others who had expertise in building students' networks. At the outset of the pilot, ESG created a template for an implementation plan that was based on each site's stated goals. During early meetings with site teams, ESG and each site collaboratively filled in the plan, which included a list of activities that mapped onto each goal, a schedule of when those activities were set to occur, and who was responsible for each. At each planning meeting, the teams looked ahead to the activities that were scheduled over the next few months and identified resources they needed to design or implement those activities.

In cases where a site already had a pre-existing resource it was intending to use for a given activity, ESG and each site worked to identify adaptations that might be needed to use that resource for social capital building. For cases in which sites needed a resource they didn't currently possess, ESG drew upon its relationships with experts in the field. For example, when the site team in Boston needed to survey middle school students about their existing networks, ESG collaborated with the Search Institute to adapt its SCALE survey items for a middle school audience.[26] Similarly, when the Boston team was attempting to integrate social capital–building activities into its Transformative Mentoring curriculum at Thomas Edison K–8 School, ESG pulled in a curriculum development expert to help create a scope and sequence of 13 social capital "units" that aligned with the Transformative Mentoring programming and could easily be integrated into existing activities.

Over the course of the pilot, ESG developed a resource guide, consisting of a running list of resources that had been helpful across all sites. Sharing this resource guide with sites served to streamline the process of resource development, allowing sites to draw upon a database of resources that they could modify according to their needs and goals.

## 4. Honor relational norms and values: Adapt your approaches to both culture and context.

Building students' social capital requires both students and staff to view their relationships through a new lens—one that sees hidden potential in both existing and new connections. When it comes to unpacking the concept of social capital, tailoring strategies in ways that align with cultural values and norms can mean the difference between an approach that sows the seeds for new kinds of opportunities and one that falls completely flat.

Two types of adaptations proved important for pilot sites. First, adapting social capital–building strategies to students' specific cultural norms was a critical component when it came to ensuring that the content and activities were relevant to students' lived experiences. For example, Hawaiʻi-based sites sought to frame social capital concepts in keeping with collectivist cultural norms and connection to ʻāina—the land—among Hawaiian communities. One intermediary staff member relayed that "Native Hawaiian teaching and learning recognizes that cultural values, beliefs, and traditions are transferable knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote connections to people and place." Additionally, in integrating social capital into career pathways initiatives, some sites found that although students may feel a strong sense of emotional support from their family and community, it was difficult for some to ask for support with professional goals or access to career-related opportunities. Consideration of these cultural norms led sites to begin thinking more deliberately about how they could both highlight the power of relationships already central in students' lives and also help students navigate conversations about professional pursuits while still adhering to Hawaiian values.

A second type of adaptation involved modifying strategies to ensure that they promoted equity for all students. Many sites felt an inherent tension in embracing social capital within their models, as networks have long been used by groups of privileged individuals to create exclusive spaces and practices that work against equity. With this in mind, these sites were thoughtful about addressing inequity on three fronts. On one front, they engaged employers in dialogues about how and why sharing social capital can benefit students—especially those from marginalized groups. On another front, some sites began having open conversations with students about the inequity that still exists in society, how it affects them, and how to look for signs that someone is trustworthy or untrustworthy. One site lead described how these conversations require program staff who understand their students' unique needs and adapt their approach accordingly. In particular, she suggested that school and program staff who have shared experiences or identities with students may be best positioned to facilitate these conversations.

On the final front, many sites were intentional about using asset-based framing such as "who's on your team?" or "who do you rely on?" that honored the fact that students bring with them a rich set of relationships, experiences, and talents, versus deficit-based framing that focused on the relationships and resources that students don't currently have. At the same time, and while acknowledging students' inherent assets, they stressed the importance of schools and their partner organizations providing the structure for relationship-building opportunities and skill development instead of placing all of the pressure on students.

While there is no easy solution to these systemic and societal barriers to equity, students are often aware that the challenges they face in forging relationships depend on a range of factors like race, income, and age. Rather than sweeping them under the rug, schools and other youth-serving organizations who undertake social capital work would be wise to address these head on with all stakeholders—including students, teachers, employers, and parents.

**Lesson in practice:** EdVestors is a Boston-based school improvement organization that leads multiple initiatives to create equitable career pathways for youth. During the pilot, EdVestors worked with two of Boston's public middle schools to integrate approaches for social capital building into existing career-readiness and mentoring initiatives. Given that over 90% of its participating students identified with one or more marginalized racial groups, the Boston team was thoughtful about adapting its approach to social capital building in response to student, teacher, and parent concerns about safety in the wake of violent behavior against Black young people.

Boston's site lead described how these incidents sparked conversations about the need to address fears about personal safety and security before students are able to effectively build trusting relationships with adults—especially in the case of Black students developing connections with White adults. "Students of color and students with other marginalized identities are experiencing what I would describe as cognitive dissonance—a concept of social capital that suggests new opportunities and support alongside legitimate fear and fundamental lack of safety. It has pushed our team to dig in on the heart of this work and the importance of attending to the lived realities of students."

To tackle these dynamics head on, program staff at one of the Boston schools facilitated a dialogue among their students about their feelings regarding cross-race relationships and the challenges they faced when it came to securing a positive future. Discussing the need for grounding this work in the reality of societal inequality, the program lead explained, "All of those things impact our young people and how they move, and I do think it's important for us to have that conversation. Because otherwise it feels like you're saying [to students], 'If you do this, the world will be better for you.' And that's not always the case."

While the Boston site team felt that these candid conversations were critical for building students' trust and confidence to connect with others, they also acknowledged that building trust in any new relationship takes time, especially youths' relationships with adults. That hurdle may be even greater for youth of color who have directly or indirectly experienced the effects of systemic racism. Because building trust takes time, the Boston team wasn't able to systematically assess changes in students' beliefs or behaviors based on these discussions within the timeframe of the initial pilot. However, future pilots would be wise to make trust-building a foundational component, and to collect data at key intervals to determine how the dosage and content of these conversations is associated with students' trust in different adults.

## 5. *Incorporate immersive experiences: Pair social capital concepts with practice and opportunities to build real-world relationships.*

As schools and programs moved into the implementation phase, some discovered that maintaining a focus on what students know was a difficult habit to break. Although program facilitators were enthusiastic about helping students develop helpful career connections, it was natural for many to teach social capital as subject matter rather than immerse students in experiences that build it. A number of sites took a tell-not-show approach: explaining the importance of social capital to students by teaching them that relationships can lead to job opportunities and telling students that networking is how people become successful.

That approach proved necessary but insufficient. Two-thirds of site staff who had been implementing for at least three months reported that their students weren't sure how social capital is relevant to their lives. While there are many implicit benefits that come with relationships, students aren't likely to fully grasp the power of social capital unless they also learn to apply it within their everyday experiences. As one intermediary staff member remarked, "You don't learn social capital in school by making it explicit. You make it part of the everyday experience. I was not optimistic going in that we could treat social capital as a subject matter, and I'm even less enthusiastic about that [now]. You learn about leveraging and managing relationships by living and reflecting on relationships."

Staff surveys and conversations revealed at least three barriers to creating immersive experiences: First, teachers and staff were understandably inexperienced with making social capital an explicit part of their curriculum. During the planning phase and first four weeks of the pilot, 86% of site staff reported that a barrier to implementation was lack of clarity about what social capital–building activities should look like. Providing staff with sample activities, like those detailed in Part 3 of this report, can help teachers and program staff picture activities in their own programs. Additionally, as described below in lesson No. 10, creating communities of practice in which practitioners can share ideas and benchmark progress

with one another can help demystify social capital–building strategies.

Second, finding time during the regular program or class schedule for immersion opportunities was a challenge, as 86% of teachers and staff felt that in-program time constraints were a moderate or significant barrier. In these cases, teachers and staff may consider priming students with skills in the classroom and asking students to practice those skills outside of the classroom with family members, friends, or other trusted adults. Teachers and staff can then debrief with students about the successes and challenges they faced during these experiences.

Lastly, out-of-program time constraints also played a role for teachers and staff, with 71% reporting that they didn't have enough time to learn how to adapt and implement social capital–building strategies. Some sites reflected that they would have benefited from allocating time and funds for professional development on the front end of the school year. Others believed they could have been more intentional about embedding social capital training into existing professional development for other related initiatives, rather than as a standalone training. One site lead described her team's approach by stating, "What we're trying to do is transform the way that we engage with young people in a relationship-centered way and make this embedded into how we are as a school. So, we're really actively working on building out a bigger school-wide strategy to shift culture, to shift mindsets, and to do that training."

In sum, prioritizing experiential learning doesn't mean that student experiences shouldn't be scaffolded. Building the skills necessary for effective adult and peer interactions is an important precursor to having positive relationships. Still, talking about social capital concepts shouldn't come at the expense of opportunities for students to practice building and maintaining relationships.

**Lesson in practice:** Kupu, a nonprofit in Hawai'i dedicated to increasing high school students' readiness for natural resources careers, designed a week-long program to provide high school students with opportunities to develop career connections. The primary aim of the program was giving students the chance to visit a variety of natural resources work sites and college campuses to interact with industry professionals, college students, and professors. For the initial pilot, Kupu created a classroom-based PowerPoint presentation that explained social capital, mentorship, and the different types of support that relationships can provide. However, that lesson remained separate and disconnected from the site visits. At the end of the pilot, students rated their satisfaction with the social capital lesson lower than the other outside-the-classroom experiences throughout the week, suggesting that the presentation didn't actively engage students in learning how to use the site visits to build their social capital.

In planning for its second iteration of the program, Kupu decided to integrate opportunities for relationship-building into site visits. To build students' self-efficacy, Kupu gave students opportunities to practice having career chats in preparation for the site visits. After the site visits, students were then asked to reach back out to at least two people they met during the site visits to have a more in-depth conversation about their career interests. Practice and follow-up allowed students to hone their skills in expanding their networks and maintaining those relationships over time as they progress in their careers. At the end of the second pilot, five out of the six students in the pilot reported feeling very confident in their ability to reach back out to people they met during the site visits to have further conversations about their career interests.

"You don't learn social capital in school by making it explicit. You make it part of the everyday experience."
-Intermediary staff member

## 6. Skills and access both matter: To seed positive interactions, develop communication skills alongside access to relationships.

Social capital depends on both access to relationships *and* the ability to mobilize them. Building social capital, in turn, hinges on schools being able to play two distinct roles on behalf of students: relationship broker and skill builder.

The majority of teachers and staff involved in this initiative felt more comfortable building students' skills than providing them with access to relationships. Two dynamics shaped this sentiment: schools' and programs' desire to provide students with foundational interpersonal skills, and the challenge that some teachers and staff faced stepping into a broker role—a role that enlists employer partners and community members to connect with students. The majority of programs found that students needed stronger communication skills to effectively engage with external connections. Eighty-three percent of site staff who had been implementing for three months or more felt that their students weren't confident in their ability to communicate with adults about their career interests and that this was a significant or moderate barrier to the work. Part of this is managing employer expectations. As one program facilitator noted, "I've been in other workspaces where adults expect young people to know how to interact as though they are adults. They're not developmentally ready for that." At the same time, skills matter. Some program facilitators felt that providing access to new connections too soon—before honing students' communication skills—could hurt students' self-efficacy and reflect poorly on the program in the eyes of employer partners. One intermediary staff member noted, "Teachers would be nervous to bring these kids in front of adults if they didn't think they had the communication chops to do it. And so they wouldn't even do it unless we were prepping their kids."

In light of this concern, teaching students communication skills before connecting them with external relationships may increase program facilitators' and students' comfort with social capital–building initiatives. At the same time, pairing that with efforts to rightsize employer expectations is key. One nonprofit staff member shared, "We have to educate some of our seasoned professionals with excellent intentions to sort of adjust their expectations on how to develop a young person and what a young person can actually do in the workplace."

A second factor at play was that most educators feel their training and responsibilities don't adequately equip them to play the role of a relationship broker. Developing and delivering a lesson inside of a classroom is a much more straightforward process than reaching out to employers or families, educating them about goals of a specific lesson or initiative, getting their agreement to participate, coordinating the logistics of having them interact with students, and maintaining that relationship over time. Time is also a concern, as one intermediary staff member acknowledged that due to individuals' work schedules, relationship brokering often requires meeting with connections outside of the classroom and outside of regular working hours. Specifically, the intermediary staff member noted, "[Sometimes] to be that relationship broker you need to set it up on a weekend. You need to set it up after hours. So we may be asking more than the traditional 40-hour work week for these teachers to do [this]."

Programs and staff who don't have training and existing connections to be relationship brokers may need to develop partnerships with key intermediary organizations who can play a broker role, such as chambers of commerce or education-based nonprofit organizations that have this expertise. At the same time, investing in professional development for program facilitators to learn how to broker relationships for students may be a worthwhile endeavor.

**Lesson in practice:** When thinking about how to prime students for their interactions with employers, GSN sought to reduce the intimidation factor that often makes it difficult for young people to have conversations with adults. Pairing this aim with the goal of offering engaging student activities, they provided teachers with a series of communication lessons that were designed to be fun and relatable to students' experiences.

While the topics they covered (e.g., verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, finding commonalities, public speaking) were not new for students, it was the way they were taught that resonated with youth. Teachers were encouraged to bring creativity and imagination to the lessons and to use real-world examples to make content more relevant. One activity asked students to role-play scenarios such as how they would convince an Instagram influencer to mention them in a post or how to persuade a parent's friend they met at a jazz concert to lend them five dollars. Other activities encouraged students to engage in conversations with their teacher and peers to uncover similarities with respect to topics such as education, hobbies, current events, and places they've been.

The lessons also created space for teachers to facilitate dialogue with students about how nerve-racking it can be to talk with someone they don't know. In one activity, students were given 20 seconds to point to objects in the room and call them the wrong name (e.g., point at a chair and call it a rock or point at a desk and call it a cloud). The goal of this activity was to launch a dialogue about the need to be kind to oneself—acknowledging that people often put pressure on themselves to "perform," but when they talk freely without pre-planning or over-rehearsing, they often appear more genuine and authentic.

In addition to thinking about "what" and "how" communication skills were taught, teachers made intentional choices around the "who." A number of teachers scaffolded communication practice by having students talk and practice with multiple groups of their peers before branching out to students in other grades, other adults in the school, or external professionals. Even within the classroom, teachers were strategic when it came to grouping students. One teacher described how he paired students with different peers and watched as they learned how to change their tone of voice and be "a little more caring and compassionate" with peers who weren't their friends. Practicing these communication skills with both peers and trusted adults prepared students with the knowledge, composure, and confidence to communicate with professionals.

## 7. Prime employers to share their social capital: Shifting employee volunteers' mindsets can orient them to build relationships and share resources.

Although building students' skills can boost their confidence when interacting with professionals, successful relationships depend on both parties investing in building trust. Employers play an important role in providing real-world experiences and introducing students to people who can become part of their professional network. But employers need to understand the goals of social capital building, what will be expected of them, and how it can benefit both parties.

Employee volunteers like internship supervisors or guest speakers may see their role as providing job-specific knowledge. But these individuals have another important role to play in students' networks: creating lasting relationships that involve sharing resources, connections, and opportunities. As one nonprofit leader explained, helping employers take on that role may require upfront reflection, encouraging them to consider pre-conceived notions they may have about young people. "[If] everybody is committed to working on interrogating all of the thoughts that we as adults have about young people, good and bad, then the effect ends up being social capital. Because you've actually taken down the barrier or the silo that says 'I am this and you are that. I'm here to provide a service and you're here to get one.'"

For organizations and schools brokering connections to employers, infusing social capital into the purpose behind those connections impacted how they recruited, vetted, and prepared employer partners who would be interacting with students. One nonprofit leader stated, "We vet our employers that we work with and we have an orientation. They start perhaps from different places and they might not know how [to work with us]. They might have an idea about what an eighth grader is or is not, what 'risk factors' youth of color may come with or what their story may be. Part of what is important to us is working with worksite partners so they can see a whole person, an eighth grader who is a complete asset now, and the net value later of working with young people."

Surveys of site staff revealed that 40% found it somewhat difficult to educate employers about how they can help build students' social capital. Although nonprofits who were heavily involved in internship or apprenticeships often had the time and expertise to design and conduct orientations for employers, other sites with less capacity were wary of asking too much of their employer partners. In these circumstances, additional training for employers specifically focused on building relationships with students was rarely an option.

While emphasizing return-on-investment (ROI) can help some employers see the long-term benefits of this type of work, one intermediary partner pointed out that for some employers it's also about avoiding the short-term burden it places on their employees. In addition to ROI, the partner explained, "There's also BOI, which is 'burden of investment.' Making it easier for [employers] to see that the burden of their investment in this is not that burdensome, and that the experience is enjoyable. [Employees] enjoy the experience of the personal relationship with the kids, and that reduces the burden of investment as well. And it grows our partners' social capital." When working with employers concerned about upfront burden on their employees, one option is to provide a menu that describes different options for getting involved based on employee volunteers' capacity and interests. This arrangement not only allows employers to understand what is expected of them and their employees, but also allows them to choose the types of experiences that they feel will be enjoyable and meaningful for them. With this mutual understanding, work-based learning can take shape much more easily.

**Lesson in practice:** Apprentice Learning is a Boston-based nonprofit organization that provides real-world work experiences for eighth graders. Given that Apprentice Learning's students were already immersed in work settings as part of their apprenticeships, the Boston site planning team felt that these experiences were a natural fit for building social capital.

Most career-readiness programs ask, "How prepared are young people to build relationships with adults?"; Apprentice Learning equally emphasizes the other side of the equation by asking "How prepared are adults to build relationships with young people?" During the pilot, Apprentice Learning communicated its vision to employer partners in multiple ways. First, it held an orientation for employers in which Apprentice Learning staff used an asset-based frame to gently challenge employers' beliefs about what young people can do and what it means to have relationships with them. The goal was to help employers realize that they are building meaningful relationships with human beings who are still learning, yet capable of tremendous success.

Apprentice Learning also communicated with employers via weekly emails. These emails contained guidance for apprenticeship supervisors about how they could best support students, including conversation starters such as "consider talking with your apprentice about your first job," or "consider sharing about a time when you encountered a struggle in your job and how you navigated it." As one program leader stated, "Because of the questions that we put in our weekly letter to our worksite partners, there are more opportunities for them to have conversations about their interests and their trajectory. One of the things that's resulted in is that at least three, maybe four of our kids have been offered possible summer opportunities. And it is because the worksite partner and the young person took the time to get to know some things about each other a little bit beyond the 'how to work' part."

Finally, Apprentice Learning staff visited each student's worksite and engaged in one-on-one conversations with their worksite supervisors. These conversations further reinforced the foundation that Apprentice Learning built during the orientations and maintained with the weekly emails. Describing a recent visit to a worksite where two students were apprenticing, a program leader recalled how the conversations they had with employers about building social capital influenced supervisors' behaviors. When she walked into the worksite, the students' supervisor immediately offered to provide references for the students if they needed them. "We didn't have to ask the guy—it was offered. And [the students] understood that their [supervisors] are a resource that they didn't necessarily know that they had."

"[Employees] enjoy the experience of the personal relationship with the kids, and that reduces the burden of investment as well."
-Intermediary partner

## 8. Source social capital across your enterprise: Individual social capital is a critical, but limited, lever for scale.

Within career-connected learning initiatives, the role of relationship broker usually fell upon one or two key individuals within a school or program. Often, these individuals were work-based learning coaches or internship and apprenticeship supervisors who tapped into their own personal networks in service of expanding students' access to opportunities. In other cases, teachers and program staff who had extensive personal networks naturally gravitated toward being a broker. But not all educators felt equipped to play that role. One intermediary staff member reflected that some educators—often veteran teachers—took an "entrepreneurial" approach to mining their own networks. But other teachers, especially those newer to the classroom and community, needed help. As one intermediary leader noted, "they're kind of looking at us going, 'Who do I connect with? Can you help me connect?'"

Individuals' personal networks proved to be a quick and easy way to get some students connected with helpful resources. However, the capacity of a small handful of individuals' networks does not lend itself to scale. Not long after beginning implementation, some found that they had exhausted all of their personal social capital while there were still students who were in need of valuable career connections. As one practitioner stated, "Halfway through the year, I realized that my professional network was tapped out and I needed to find new work-based learning partners."

Make no mistake—individuals can be powerful brokers. But if social capital–building initiatives are to successfully expand beyond pilots, schools and programs also need to find ways to supply relationships from a variety of sources within and outside their organization. This can be as simple as creating a shared "Rolodex" spreadsheet that any teacher or staff member can update with contact information for potential career-based connections from their personal or professional networks. In addition, conducting relationship-mapping activities—with students, teachers, and families—can surface individuals and organizations to add to that shared Rolodex. And unlike cold-calling employers or other individuals, these contacts are inherently connected to the school community.

Two considerations arose when it came to these types of crowd-sourced tools. First, to ensure students' safety and privacy, it's important for program leaders to vet the individuals and organizations on the spreadsheet as they would with any other work-based learning experience. As one program staff member relayed, "I don't want to just refer my students to some random person, though I know my students will have to learn how to interact with people out in the world, but I think for … their safety, there is a vested interest to know if people may not have the best interests or malintent… [and] learning how to gauge people who … don't know how to work with high school students." Second, while collective approaches are likely to be welcomed by teachers and staff who aren't inclined to act as relationship brokers or possess limited industry networks, they may feel inefficient and impersonal to those who are more drawn to play this connector role. Relationship brokering will scale at the speed of need and trust.

Therefore, employing a combination of individual social capital with organization-wide networks allows schools and programs to take full advantage of the latent social capital that exists within and outside their walls.

**Lesson in practice:** Hawaii Workforce Pipeline (HWP) is a work-based learning nonprofit that connects teachers and students with industry professionals in careers they want to explore. As the work-based learning intermediary for two school districts in Oʻahu, HWP supports multiple schools with creating career awareness and readiness opportunities. Importantly, however, only two HWP staff were tasked with playing a relationship broker role for all schools in a district.

Over the course of the school year, one HWP staff member was asked by nearly a dozen schools to find employers who could attend career fairs, with each school requesting 30-60 employers. A few months into the school year, she discovered that she had exhausted most of her professional networks and began cold-calling businesses to find new employer partners. After thinking about her process through a social capital lens, she realized that instead of relying entirely on her own social capital, she could tap into the professional network of each respective school, including networks of school alumni, educators, counselors, students, and their families.

Seeing the efficiency of this approach, the HWP intermediary team revised its recruiting process for employers to focus on school-wide recruiting first and then utilize staff members' own social capital. According to one HWP staff member, "Recruiting for career fair presenters has never been easier … and we get the added bonus that the career fair presenters are in some way connected to the school or the community it resides within."

"Halfway through the year, I realized that my professional network was tapped out and I needed to find new work-based learning partners."
-Practitioner

## 9. *Embed social capital into systems: Enthusiastic practitioners foster change, but infrastructure maintains it.*

It was no surprise that leaders and practitioners who were passionate and committed to building students' networks were able to quickly implement social capital programming. These individuals often found efficient and creative ways to secure buy-in, provide training to staff, mobilize resources, and design engaging student experiences. But key staff members are bound to change over time. To sustain these practices over the long term, they need to be institutionalized by embedding them into curricula, roles, and data systems. One intermediary staff member observed, "If you have multiple people leave, or just someone leave from a school, you need to bring someone on that has the skill set that I would have in terms of the college and career work that I do, and all the social capital, knowledge, and institutional knowledge I have with social capital."

Sites that were successful in this regard usually employed at least one of the following levers for sustainability: First, some sites designated roles specifically intended to help students build networks. Allocating a budget for relationship brokers served to legitimize the role in the eyes of organizational staff, and allowed them to place trust in the institution rather than a single individual. Second, some were able to codify relationship-oriented requirements for specific courses and tracks. These requirements facilitated the spread of social capital building by getting larger numbers of teachers and staff to design experiences that ensure students meet those milestones. Third, some created measurement systems to use data as a starting point for conversations about how social capital and other career-connected outcomes can benefit students. The hope was that, over time, these measurement systems could create an organizational culture centered around career competencies, rather than academic achievement alone.

Although these efforts to systematize social capital building are promising, several challenges also emerged with respect to sustainability. Some pilot sites were run in isolated pockets of a school or organization. While pilot initiatives are typically tested in a smaller, more siloed fashion, this sometimes made it difficult to secure buy-in from personnel outside of those pockets. In addition, some sites' activities were contingent on a permanent capacity they didn't have, such as providing staff with training in brokering relationships or providing students with engaging experiential learning opportunities. Finally, some sites weren't able to codify social capital within a broader organizational strategy. Without this connection to a specific vision, it was easy for social capital to fall by the wayside.

In sum, creating systems that routinize social capital building requires buy-in from both leaders and practitioners. In both cases, providing clear evidence that social capital improves high-priority outcomes can generate support for scale.

**Lessons in practice:** From the start of the pilot, HWP's staff were enthusiastic and ambitious, quickly adapting students' internship training to include activities to help students think about how to build social capital during their internship experiences. Thinking toward the future, HWP staff then collaborated with Oʻahu's Windward District to add social capital milestones to their Career and Technical Education program. Around the same time, the Hawaiʻi Department of Education announced the allocation of funds to employ a work-based learning intermediary at every high school throughout the state. This development proved especially encouraging because it created the potential to systematize HWP's work across other districts that now have personnel specifically dedicated to this role.

While HWP's plan for sustainability emerged as the pilot unfolded, GSN employed a more deliberate, two-pronged approach to systematizing social capital. On one front, GSN targeted the practitioner level by recruiting teachers to implement social capital building as part of a "real world problem scenario," evaluating feedback from teachers and investigating effects on students' career readiness. At the same time, they developed community- and career-connected learning dashboards to create a conversation among district leaders about the vision for, and purpose of, career-connected learning. Ultimately, the aim is for these bottom-up and top-down efforts to converge around a host of promising strategies to accomplish that vision.

## 10. *Benchmark collective progress: Communities of practice build practitioner confidence.*

At this early stage of implementation, researchers and practitioners in the field are still working to codify a robust collection of best practices for building students' social capital. In our study, surveys of site staff indicated that 86% believed that lack of clarity about what social capital–building activities should look like was a barrier to implementation. Given that lack of clarity, site staff often wondered, "Am I doing this correctly?" Without standards or objective benchmarks, teachers and staff from various sites were eager to hear about the strategies that other implementers were using.

Independent of one another, each of the three intermediary organizations organized recurring collaborative sessions for their site teams to share and learn alongside each other. Unlike some more mature communities of practice, these group sessions ended up more focused on sharing progress rather than exchanging concrete resources. But sharing progress played an important role: it helped teams to build confidence by calibrating their progress against others, learning from each other's successes, and troubleshooting challenges. As an intermediary staff member relayed, "I think the [sessions] help because we meet them where they're at. We set the norms that they could be honest with each other and with us. No harm, no foul. They learn from each other. They get affirmed by one another. They get pushed by one another." In sum, designating time for practitioners to explore new practices by sharing progress and relationships builds confidence and perseverance in the face of uncertainty.

**Lessons in practice:** When designing a forum for collaboration, each intermediary created a format that best suited the needs of their sites. ESG treated these sessions as formal professional learning opportunities, inviting guest speakers such as researchers, practitioners, and students to share their ideas and experiences. ESG then set aside time for breakout groups, where site teams could discuss how they might apply what they learned during the session to their own practice. Reflecting on these opportunities, one ESG site team lead noted that "[Getting together the] five [project sites] was extremely helpful. To see that we were having extremely similar experiences to other [pilot sites]. There was a whole lot of wondering, 'Are we even doing anything that's the right thing?' And so getting together with the others … was super helpful and surprising."

Similar to ESG, Hawai'i P-20's community of practice meetings focused on predetermined themes or challenges that Hawai'i P-20 observed among its four sites. But because each of the Hawai'i sites work within many of the same communities, these sessions presented a unique opportunity for sharing social capital among program staff, further building their capacity to design relationship-rich experiences for students. One session in particular focused on understanding each site's specific needs, and exchanging connections that could meet those needs. The proximity and overlap in communities served by Hawai'i P-20's sites built bonds that these sites continue to draw upon, including the development of inter-site collaboration outside of these sessions.

In contrast to a more structured format, GSN created an informal "water cooler" format, which usually didn't involve a predetermined agenda. The water cooler sessions were held virtually and educators had the freedom to "drop in" any time during the session window. Initially, the water cooler sessions were created as a logistical solution to having multiple individual meetings, but upon reflection, one intermediary remarked that "those water cooler spaces are social capital–building spaces." He noticed that three or four out of the 14 teachers were "social capital builders" themselves. "They get on [the call] and they stay on. They engage the other people when they come on. They share their professional knowledge. They expose their own practice. They're building a peer community." Educators were encouraged to share difficulties they encountered and received feedback from others about potential solutions, creating a sense of camaraderie among the group. According to one educator, "The biggest thing is that it's reassuring to know I'm not alone in the challenges I'm facing."

# CONCLUSION

Most working in education and workforce development would agree that relationships are critical. But all too often, "relationships matter" is a slogan, not a strategy. That blind spot risks career pathways models leaving social capital—a leading predictor of economic mobility—to chance. To gauge how effective and equitable their career pathways efforts are, schools must begin to ask: Are students forming connections who can serve as role models, channels to job information, and references down the line?

The pilot sites and intermediaries featured in this report are showing what's possible—and what challenges to expect—when organizations begin to get strategic about social capital building. They are demonstrating a path forward to scaling practices that have research in their favor.

Ultimately, the work of designing strategies and measures that center networks—alongside skills—will be the differentiator between good-enough career pathways initiatives for some students and those that level the economic playing field for all students. Inspired by approaches like these, institutions blazing more holistic and equitable career pathways can start to take the concept of "relationships matter" from perception to purpose.

# Appendix A: Student demographic information

The following provides an overview of student demographics across all three intermediaries' efforts. Although there were a total of 20 pilot sites, there are more than 20 organizations detailed here because of various ways in which intermediaries organized the work. In some cases, a 'site' was comprised of a single classroom within a school or district; in other cases, intermediaries defined a 'site' as a partnership between a school and a third-party nonprofit. In still other cases, a 'site' consisted of a career pathways program across multiple high schools. The following table provides the level of demographic detail available among all participating entities.

*All data included below draws on NCES SY2021-22 data, unless otherwise indicated.*

| Education Strategy Group (ESG)† | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Boston—Thomas Edison K–8 School***<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced lunch eligible: 80.2% | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.8%<br>Asian: 12.1%<br>Black: 13%<br>Hispanic: 55.8%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.2%<br>White: 14.4%<br>Two or More Races: 3.7% | **Dallas—Dallas College Workforce Scholars Program**<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Data not available | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>Data not available |
| **Boston—Dearborn STEM Academy***<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced lunch eligible: 82.8% | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.2%<br>Asian: 1%<br>Black: 58.9%<br>Hispanic: 33.3%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.9%<br>White: 1.9%<br>Two or More Races: 3.8% | **Indianapolis—EmployIndy Modern Apprenticeship Program**<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced lunch eligible: 55.4% | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%<br>Asian: 0%<br>Black: 58.9%<br>Hispanic: 21.4%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%<br>White: 12.5%<br>Two or More Races: 7.1% |
| **Boston—Apprentice Learning**<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Data not available | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%<br>Asian: 2.5%<br>Black: 40%<br>Hispanic: 37.5%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%<br>White: 0%<br>Two or More Races: 20% | **Montgomery County—James Hubert Blake High School***<br><br>**Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced lunch eligible: 48.7% | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.2%<br>Asian: 10%<br>Black: 40%<br>Hispanic: 31.9%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1%<br>White: 14.5%<br>Two or More Races: 3.4% |

# Education Strategy Group (ESG)†

### Montgomery County—Montgomery Blair High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 41.7%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.2%
Asian: 12.5%
Black: 24.7%
Hispanic: 35.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1%
White: 23.3%
Two or More Races: 4.1%

### Montgomery County—Springbrook High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 58.7%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 10.4%
Black: 38.4%
Hispanic: 42.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1%
White: 5.6%
Two or More Races: 2.7%

### Montgomery County—Northwood High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 59.4%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.2%
Asian: 5.7%
Black: 25.8%
Hispanic: 53.2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 12.6%
Two or More Races: 2.5%

### Nashville—Pearl-Cohn High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 68.4%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.3%
Asian: 0.5%
Black: 90.6%
Hispanic: 6.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 0.8%
Two or More Races: 1.4%

### Montgomery County—Paint Branch High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 51.9%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.1%
Asian: 11.6%
Black: 59.2%
Hispanic: 23%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 3.7%
Two or More Races: 2.4%

### Nashville—Maplewood High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 56.3%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.1%
Asian: 0.8%
Black: 64.3%
Hispanic: 25.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 7.4%
Two or More Races: 1.8%

## Education Strategy Group (ESG)†

| Nashville—<br>**John Overton High School\*** | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%<br>Asian: 6.3%<br>Black: 19.6%<br>Hispanic: 48.4%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%<br>White: 24.9%<br>Two or More Races: 0.8% | Nashville—<br>**Whites Creek High School\*** | **Race/Ethnicity:**<br>American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%<br>Asian: 0%<br>Black: 80.8%<br>Hispanic: 7.8%<br>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%<br>White: 10.6%<br>Two or More Races: 0.8% |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced<br>lunch eligible: 29.5% | | **Income Status:**<br>Free/reduced<br>lunch eligible: 61.3% | |

†Several of ESG's pilot sites consisted of organizations who partnered with schools listed in the table above. These organizations are as follows:

- **Boston:** *EdVestors*

- **Dallas:** *Dallas Regional Chamber, Graduation Alliance*

- **Montgomery County:** *Montgomery College, The Universities at Shady Grove*

- **Nashville:** *Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce*

## Generation Schools Network (GSN)

### Brush High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 37%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 0.3%
Black: 0.8%
Hispanic: 45.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.5%
White: 51.7%
Two or More Races: 0.8%

### Las Animas Junior High School

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 61.1%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 1.4%
Asian: 0%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 51.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 44.4%
Two or More Races: 2.8%

### La Junta Jr/Sr High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 72.3%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.8%
Asian: 0.6%
Black: 0.8%
Hispanic: 67.9%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.4%
White: 27%
Two or More Races: 2.6%

### Las Animas High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 55.7%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.9%
Asian: 0%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 45.2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 52.2%
Two or More Races: 0.9%

### Las Animas Elementary School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 69%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 2.9%
Asian: 0%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 40%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 53.9%
Two or More Races: 3.3%

### Rocky Ford Jr/Sr High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 72.9%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.6%
Asian: 0.6%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 76.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 21%
Two or More Races: 1.6%

## Generation Schools Network (GSN)

### Swink
### Jr/Sr High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 34.8%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 3%
Black: 0.7%
Hispanic: 23.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 72.6%
Two or More Races: 0%

### Wiley
### Jr/Sr High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 33.9%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 0%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 19.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 76.8%
Two or More Races: 3.6%

### Weld Central
### Senior High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 25.5%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.1%
Asian: 0.6%
Black: 0.6%
Hispanic: 45.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.1%
White: 50.8%
Two or More Races: 2.1%

### Wiggins
### High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 28%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.5%
Asian: 0.9%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 25.7%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 69.7%
Two or More Races: 3.2%

### Weldon Valley
### Jr/Sr High School*

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced
lunch eligible: 31%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 0%
Black: 2.3%
Hispanic: 10.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0%
White: 86.2%
Two or More Races: 1.1%

## Hawai'i P-20

### Adult Friends for Youth (AFY)

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced lunch eligible: 83.3%

*Data provided directly by program staff*

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0%
Asian: 41.7%
Black: 0%
Hispanic: 0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 58.3%
White: 50.8%
Two or More Races: 2.1%

### Hawaii Workforce Pipeline (HWP)

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced lunch eligible: 39.5%

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.1%
Asian: 12.4%
Black: 0.9%
Hispanic: 14.4%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 37.8%
White: 18.7%
Two or More Races: 15.6%

### Center for Tomorrow's Leaders (CTL)

**Income Status:**
Free/reduced lunch eligible: 39%

*Data provided directly by program staff*

**Race/Ethnicity:**
Data not available

### Kupu

**Income Status:**
Data not available

*Data provided directly by program staff*

**Race/Ethnicity:**
American Indian/Alaska Native: Data not available
Asian: Data not available
Black: Data not available
Hispanic: Data not available
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 35.3%
White: Data not available
Two or More Races: Data not available

*Demographics shown include data for the entire school and are not limited to students participating in social capital–building activities.

# Appendix B: Personal timeline

**Intention:** A personal timeline activity was originally suggested as a way for professionals to begin conversations with students that might surface hidden similarities. **Kupu** decided to use the personal timeline activity as a structured way for students to practice talking about their strengths, experiences, and interests in preparation for interviews and to spark conversations and bonding opportunities with staff and peers.

**Logistics:** It was challenging to fit new social capital activities with existing programming during the first iteration, so Kupu decided to hold two 2-hour pre-sessions one week apart before its one-week program started. Program participants were introduced to the personal timeline activity during the first pre-session. The participants then had one week to complete their personal timeline on their own. During the second pre-session, participants brought back their timelines and used them to identify their interests and goals.

**Strategy at-a-glance: Personal timeline activity**

*The following lesson plan was created by Kalei Holt at Kupu and includes adaptations and complementary strategies from the Christensen Institute. This activity was adapted from Infobase's "Self-awareness personal timeline strategy" and includes questions from Read-Write-Think's "Possible interview questions."*

**Length of time:** Approximately 60 minutes

- 10 minutes to introduce activity and share an example personal timeline

- 20 minutes to create participants' own personal timelines

- 30 minutes to discuss participants' interests and goals

**Goals:**

- Self-reflection to support career exploration and identify personal experiences or characteristics that could be shared with mentors and colleges

- Support team bonding and find commonalities

**Materials:** Minimal

| In-person | Virtual |
|---|---|
| • Paper (printer paper or graph paper is ideal)<br>• Pencils or pens<br>• Optional: colored pencils, markers, or crayons<br>• Erasers<br>• Optional: Rulers | • Computer<br>• Internet<br>• Either presentation slides, email, or document with the URL |

**Preparation:** Minimal

- Create an example of a personal timeline

- Gather materials

- Test the computer program/internet connection if conducting the activity virtually

**Part 1: Timeline activity**

You will be making a timeline of significant events in your life. When selecting significant or meaningful events, tie in events where you discovered a strength or talent that may influence your future career planning. You can also include goals or events you hope to attend after today. **Please only include information that you are comfortable sharing with others and be respectful as you will discuss your timelines in groups.** Depending on your comfort level, you can share positive and negative experiences. See the prompts and questions below to help you think of key life events.

**Prompts:**

- "What is it that makes you happy? What do you like to do?"

- "What do you want to do for work?"

- "An important event in my life was when _____."

- "One of my favorite memories is _____."

**Questions:**

- Where and when were you born? Are there any interesting stories associated with your birth?

- Where did you grow up? Have you lived in one place/town your whole life or have you moved around during your life?

- What schools have you attended? What did you study? Which classes did you like the most?

- What are some significant events in your life that you recall? (These could involve school, club activities, religious organizations, and family events.) Why were these events significant?

- What activities do you enjoy in your spare time? How did you get involved in them?

- Have you had any jobs? If so, which jobs did you like and why? Which jobs were not for you and why not?

- Have you been recognized by others in any area of your life? (Again, this could include school, clubs, religious organizations, or competitions.)

- What are some personal goals you have had in the past? How did you accomplish the ones you achieved?

- Have you met anyone who was influential in your life? Did you learn about any role models?

**Part 2: Student reflection**

_Presenting timeline:_ Look at your timeline and consider the following questions. Write down your reflections and identify what you want to share with the group. Answer questions from the audience. If you prefer not to answer a question, say "pass."

- How did the activity affect your perceptions of the events?

- What did you learn about yourself through this activity?

- What feelings did you experience when completing your timeline?

- Did making the timeline show a pattern of incidents?

- Did any reflections come up around your goals?

_Audience member:_ Look at your group member's timeline. Do you notice any shared experiences? Ask thoughtful, respectful questions around things you observe.

**Adaptations:**

- Focus on professional over personal experience: Instead of listing events that were personally meaningful, adjust the prompt to emphasize documenting professional experience(s) in jobs or internships, or experiences that relate to specific skills. Ask young people to reflect on what made each experience positive or negative.

- Reflect on program experiences: Instead of asking about the entirety of students' lives, adjust the scope to focus on their experiences over the course of the program or class. Ask program participants to include field trips, work-based learning experiences, career talks, or projects that were the most impactful for them.

**Complementary strategies:**

- Source for a relationship map: After completing the personal timeline, have students think about the individuals associated with the events listed. Encourage students to include them in their relationship map (see the next strategy listed below).

- Prepare for a career conversation: Have students use the experiences from their personal timelines to identify talking points for conversations and questions with trusted individuals about their future career plans.

- Pair with a career talk: Encourage guest speakers to prepare for the event by completing their own personal or professional timeline. Have them start their presentation by sharing their experiences to build rapport and trust with students.

# Appendix C: Relationship mapping

**Intention:** Relationship mapping was suggested as an asset-based way of taking into account students' existing family, community, friend, and school connections. By monitoring the growth of their network, students might feel more confident or start thinking more intentionally about the breadth of their exposure to individuals, careers, and industries.

**Logistics:** Some organizations found it helpful to sequence relationship mapping after students had conversations about their interests and goals, in order to orient maps around identifying individuals who could help them accomplish those specific, personal goals rather than generic questions about students' entire networks. Other times, relationship mapping was embedded within introductory social capital 101 presentations to make the concept of social capital relevant to students' lived experiences. For a few sites, relationship mapping served as a way to not only help students identify connections, but also to help programs discover individuals or organizations they could partner with in the future to invite to speaking events, host field trips, or provide internships, jobs, or leadership opportunities.

**Principles in practice:** While an intermediary leader at **Generation Schools Network (GSN)** thought individual relationship maps were "really great indicators of kids' evolving networks," he noted that GSN was "not ever into head counting… [we] just didn't think it would be accurate or valuable at this point in time or it might have an income bias." Instead, GSN viewed the composition of relationships as what mattered most, and as a "good indicator for continuous improvement" for the organization.

"[We hope to see] from seventh through twelfth [grade], more integrated social capital, more movement toward that right hand column [positions of power] because that's where the bread and butter is for classic social capital—Will they write me a letter of reference today or help me get into my college of choice? After five or six years, do they have external social capital that has grown and is usable?" —Intermediary leader

The **Montgomery County Partnership (MCP)** and **Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS)** approach to relationship mapping emphasized reciprocity and a commitment to keeping track of connections in a way that outlasts individual institutions. One staff member told students how having them in their network "helped me learn about the perspectives affecting young people and helped me learn about jobs and opportunities that I can refer other students to." The staff member let their students know "yes, I'm your ally, but you're also my ally" and talked about "getting [students] into this mindset that you look to them as members of a team and as partners in your growth and in their growth, so you're also helping the [other person]."

"I'm also aware that my colleague, who is a career coach at the community college level, is implementing some sort of networking, social capital–building curriculum for her community. College students are also part of [our program]. So this [relationship mapping] activity is starting in high school, but it's progressively going to continue from junior year to senior year to community college to higher education." —Program staff

**Strategy in action:** Adult Friends for Youth (AFY) asked participants to identify references at the beginning and end of the program as well as any peers or staff members they'd like to get to know better to gauge how their support system changed. Staff checked in with participants who were able to identify references to make sure they stayed connected to them.

**Kupu** prompted students to map their connections based on the type of support each person provided, their areas of interest, and their goals in order to surface potential mentors. Students also worked with staff to identify career interests in which they didn't yet know anyone. Sharing this information with program staff sparked ideas regarding who they might want to cultivate relationships with to meet students' needs.

**Hawaii Workforce Pipeline (HWP)**'s first relationship-mapping exercise asked students to name the people in their lives who helped them succeed or accomplish their goals. Their second round focused on students' relationships across various contexts (e.g., home, school, community, and intermediaries) and those individuals' occupations as well as the resources they could provide. HWP combined all of the students' connections to generate a class-wide relationship map as a collection of individuals that students could introduce their teacher to when it was time to look for guest speakers and internship opportunities.

**Generation Schools Network** used relationship mapping as a way for students to keep track of new peer and employer connections that formed or deepened over the course of their projects. Students were asked to reflect and identify individuals they met who were "similar to them, different from them, and in positions of power" based on prompts from the Forest School. These categories were selected because GSN wanted to see if there might be shifts in the ratios of types of relationships students form over time as a result of changes in their curriculum or experiences. GSN believes industries and jobs change, whereas skills are enduring. Given this, they talked about relationship mapping that could help students look at who they should know in certain industries, but also who they know that possess certain skills that could be useful, even if they work outside of students' industries of interest.

**Graduation Alliance** reached out weekly to high school students, typically via phone, to check-in on whether they: connected with anyone new at their workplace or in their community; met any coworkers with similar interests, college, or career paths; asked their coworkers how they got into their field; and would be comfortable asking someone at work for a reference letter. Graduation Alliance staff updated an internal Google sheet at least once a month with information from each Workforce Scholar about any new contacts they made and how they engaged with individuals they mentioned in previous sessions.

**MCP** and **MCPS** built their contact list to help students make a plan with their coach for reaching out to weak ties so that students could "articulate the common connection that initially brought them together" because "some students don't feel confident [without having] an action step they can do" and support to complete it. Coaches asked students to brainstorm potential action steps to take since they believed "future-orientedness may provide that factor for motivation" to take action. MCP and MCPS also decided to include a place for the student to indicate whether they'd be open to sharing the contact with others because they thought "if we know the student's network, maybe we can tap into their network for future opportunities for other students."

**Considerations:** Organizations adapted relationship mapping by making decisions around the timing, frequency, format, and level of detail included in the relationship maps.

- If information from the relationship maps is being used to track changes in networks over time (at the individual or program level), then consider conducting the activity before programming starts, during the program, and after the program.

- If information from the relationship maps is being used to show new connections forged during programmatic experiences, then consider conducting the activity after each experience.

- If information from the relationship maps is being used by high school and college students to track their own connections, then consider conducting the activity with a digital Rolodex that they can add to over time (providing support if needed).

- If information from the relationship maps is being used by program staff to source individuals or organizations for future partnerships or events, then consider conducting the activity toward the beginning or middle of the program after trust has been built and asking for permission to reach out.

- If information from the relationship maps is being used by program staff or students to reach out, then consider the type of contact information needed.

**Practitioner perspectives:**

Participants struggled to name individuals outside of **AFY** staff in the beginning of the year. Instead of placing the burden on youth to find connections, AFY built in experiences and facilitated recurring conversations with leaders in their community to increase the quantity of connections, as well as participants' confidence in communicating with adults. When asked again at the end of the year, AFY staff said "[participants] were like, 'Oh, okay, I mean I don't have their phone number, but I've got this teacher I like.'" They said identifying references the second time was "a lot more positive" and there was "no hesitation." When asked why the change may have occurred, a staff member said, "I don't know if we can take credit for it, but it's probably a combination of things like some of them just growing up and having to have different conversations. It was nice to see that the one with the intern[ship] put his boss. So that we can take credit for."

"If they only have one or two bubbles [on a student's map], so be it. That's our baseline. From there, their goal is expanding by one other bubble. That's it. Sometimes staff have this pressure to be super high level…. No, that's not what I'm asking for. I just want to know where the kids are at." —Nonprofit leader

Teachers participating in the **GSN** pilot described ways to use the relationship map information for students' future needs and for planning purposes. One teacher was initially interested in relationship mapping because they wanted students to have other sources of help besides them and thought it might help their students build relationships for future needs like scholarships. Another talked about how they "wanted to see not only where they [students] started their map, but [also] how many extensions they have now [as] opposed to when they first started." By the end of the school year, GSN staff talked about how the teachers found the list of individuals who were similar to them particularly helpful because that information "deals with [teachers'] everyday reality" and "provides immediate data for them" when making decisions around which students or other teachers students might like to work with in the future.

**Strategy at-a-glance: Relationship mapping**

*The following guide was based on conversations or materials developed by the individuals and organizations listed (in alphabetical order by organization, program, or school): Deborah Spencer-Chun and Lisa Tamashiro at Adult Friends for Youth; Katie Chang and April Nakamura at the Center for Tomorrow's Leaders; Dr. Shannon Varga and Dr. Jon Zaff at CERES Institute; Samantha Perez at Education Strategy Group; Tyler Thigpen at the Forest School; Brad Mitchell at Generation Schools Network; Kim Smith and Melissa Soria at Graduation Alliance; Dr. Rachael Aquino and Dr. Jennifer Sagon-Taeza at Hawaii Workforce Pipeline; Elia Herman and Kalei Holt at Kupu; Sandra Amaya, Nicole Brown, Freidricka Camille, and Sara Wells at the Montgomery County Partnership and Montgomery County Public Schools; and Edward DeJesus at Social Capital Builders.*

**Length of time:** Approximately 2.5 hours or more

- 30–60 minutes or more of pre-work with staff to align the tool to programmatic goals

- 10 minutes to explain the activity

- 20–60 minutes to conduct the activity with students (depending on the number of students, format, and type of relationship mapping)

- 20–60 minutes to discuss the activity

- 1 hour or more for program staff to reflect on the data without students present

**Materials:** Varied

| In-person (Minimal to moderate) | | Virtual (Minimal) |
|---|---|---|
| Personal relationship map (Minimal) | Community relationship map (Moderate) | Personal or community relationship map |
| • Paper<br>• Pencils<br>• Optional: Colored pencils or markers | • Poster board with potential connections (mom, dad, teacher, aunt, uncle, sibling, coach, principal, etc.) labeled on one side, and categories labeled on the other side (family, school, community)<br>• Post-It notes (approx. 10/student)<br>• Pencils<br>• Tape | • Computer<br>• Internet<br>  ▪ Word cloud software (Mentimeter)<br>  ▪ Jamboard or similar presentation tool with drawing capabilities<br>• Presentation slides, email, or document with the URL |

**Preparation:** Moderate to significant

- Think about what data you want from the relationship map and how it will be used

- Create an example relationship map

- Gather materials

- Prepare the poster board if doing a community relationship map

- Prepare the Jamboard/slide deck if doing a virtual relationship map

- Test the computer program/internet connection if doing a virtual relationship map

**Questions:**

- Who are you close to? Who offers you emotional support?

- Who helped you succeed in school, life, or your career?

- Who helps you with homework or a ride to school?

- Who is a close neighbor?

- Is it a "strong tie" or "weak tie" relationship?

- Who are you less close to, but you can rely on?

- Who offers you advice or information?

- Who helped you get better in a sport, music, or a skill?

- Where are these relationships formed?

- What types of resources do they provide?

- Who works in an industry of interest?

- What type of industry professional do you need for [insert event] or would you want to meet?

- Who is someone you're closely connected with who is like you?

- Who is someone you're closely connected with who is different from you?

- Who is someone you're closely connected with who is in a position of power?

**Reflection questions for students:**

- How did you feel doing this exercise?

- Were there parts of this that were easy for you to fill in? Why do you think that was?

- Were there parts of this that were difficult for you to fill in? Why do you think that was?

- Did anything surprise you about your map?

**Reflection questions for staff:**

- Are there specific students or subsets of students with gaps in their relationship assets or their needs that emerged during this process? How will you address those?

- How can you include the individuals your students identified in your broader partnership efforts? Can you reach out to these individuals to see if they could offer job shadows, guest speaking, project feedback, or internship opportunities?

- Students may already know a lot of people, so the relationship map may not change over time. If this is the case, how could programmatic strategies focus more on the quality of these relationships?

**Adaptations:** Depending on your goals for relationship mapping, students can be prompted to name individuals in a number of different ways.

- Degrees of closeness: People I turn to for support

- Context: People I know from my family, school, community, other

- Goals or interests: People I know who align with my various interests

- Similarities/differences/positions of power

**Complementary strategies:**

- Preface with a conversation about the importance of forming and maintaining connections: Before creating the relationship map, have a discussion with students about how the people they know can help them further their goals or careers.

- Prepare for a career conversation: Use strong ties from the relationship map as a source for trusted individuals for students to have conversations with about their future. Identify individuals who may be related to specific goals and might be able to offer guidance or opportunities.

- Pair with a career talk: Invite guest speakers who have connections to the community and who are already invested in the students.

**Additional resources:**

- CERES Institute's Using the web of support framework

- The Christensen Institute's report: Students' hidden networks: Relationship mapping as a strategy to build asset-based pathways

- The Christensen Institute's social capital playbook (specifically Step 1. Take Stock: Getting to know who your students know)

# Appendix D: Social capital 101 presentations

**Intention:** Organizations that gave social capital 101 presentations to a student audience were likely to explain the four dimensions of social capital (see the Christensen Institute's "Missing Metrics" report for more on the quantity, quality, structure, and ability to mobilize relationships) and the differences between strong ties and weak ties. Organizations often used definitions and examples in their presentations to discuss companionship, conflictual ties, emotional support, informational support, mentors, networks, networking, social support, strong ties, student agency, tangible or instrumental support, and weak ties.

**Logistics:** Organizations often provided students with an introduction to social capital early on in their programming. Many also paired the presentation with activities such as walking students through how to create a relationship map (listed as a strategy in Appendix C) and reaching out to others.

**Hawaii Workforce Pipeline** began by explicitly stating that all students already have social capital. To illustrate the potential extensive reach of one's network, they talked about Dr. Ivan Misner's Squared Connection Effect, which highlights the ratio of people in a group compared to the total connections that are created. Specifically, they brought up the example, "If you have a network of 16 people, then you potentially have access to their network, which collectively has 256 connections." Although this is true anywhere, the fact that the organization emphasized this made sense in a context that has been described as family- and community-oriented, and where "everyone knows each other"—particularly since they live on an island.

The natural resource professionals that **Kupu** surveyed across Oʻahu identified social capital as one of the three most important factors in helping them break into the industry. Kupu's first iteration of the presentation began by defining terms (e.g., mentors, social support, social capital). Students then created a relationship map, watched videos of people reaching out to people they didn't know, and discussed logistics of how to schedule meetings with new connections. In its second iteration, Kupu decided to change the flow so that the presentation started with two activities (creating a personal timeline and a relationship map) that involved students sharing about their lives. Students learned about different types of support in the context of their own networks and identified potential mentors who could help them with their goals. Kupu then discussed what social capital meant, and how it applied to their program and upcoming career exposure experiences specifically.

The **Montgomery County Partnership** had students reflect on the different types of support people provided in their life and draw illustrations of examples. MCP talked about how social capital matters because it is "similar to having money in the bank and can translate into resources that make you more successful," followed by a video testimonial from a program alumnus who talked about who helped him and how the program led him to where he is today.

**Strategy at-a-glance: Social capital 101 presentations**

*Many definitions, key components, principles, and discussion topics came from Connected Futures, a free, research-informed online curriculum designed to help students form meaningful connections with supportive, nonparental adults in their lives. The following guide was based on social capital 101 presentation slide decks and lessons developed by the individuals and organizations listed (in alphabetical order by organization, program, or school): Samantha Perez at Education Strategy Group in partnership with Heather Johnson at EdVestors, Trenisha Jones at EmployIndy, and Krystal Semper at Thomas Edison K–8 School; Brad Mitchell and Elliot Zettas at Generation Schools Network; Dr. Rachael Aquino at Hawaii Workforce Pipeline; Kalei Holt at Kupu; and Sandra Amaya, Nicole Brown, Freidricka Camille, and Sara Wells at the Montgomery County Partnership (MCP) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS).*

**Length of time:** Between 30 to 120 minutes

**Materials:** Minimal

> ### In-person or virtual
>
> - Computer
> - Internet
> - Either presentation slides, email, or document with the URL

**Preparation:** Moderate

- Identify the student outcomes hoped for through this work

- Think about what students need to know about social capital

- Think about what staff need to know about social capital

- Create slide deck

- Gather materials if needed

- Test the computer program/internet connection if conducting the presentation virtually

**Adaptations:** Each organization had a slightly different way of describing social capital, but the power and value of networks was consistent and named explicitly upfront in the presentations. Some organizations that had an adult audience used the definition put forth by the Christensen Institute: "Social capital describes access to, and ability to mobilize, relationships that help further an individual's potential and goals. Just like skills and knowledge, relationships offer resources that drive access to opportunity." Another organization that talked about the importance of being "strengths-based" adapted the definition to fit its values by describing social capital as the "relationships that empower personal and collective autonomy" in a presentation to teachers.

Other organizations, particularly those presenting to students, simplified it as "all the networks of different relationships you have with other people that allow you to be more successful" or "all of the people in your life who provide different types of support." One organization with a student audience condensed it to "connections to people." Many organizations noted that all students *already* have social capital.

In addition to defining social capital, organizations also described why it is important. Some talked about how networks "help build confidence, identity, and agency" and are a "critical ingredient to your access to career planning and growth." They pointed out that the "quantity and quality of relationships matter" and that "more relationships increase access to opportunities" and "different kinds of relationships serve distinct but important functions." Given that, they explained "we need both strong and weak ties in order to have sufficient social capital" particularly since "we get most of our day-to-day support from strong ties, but weak ties provide access to information and opportunities that strong ties might not have." Multiple organizations included statistics that showed the percentage of jobs that come through personal connections.

Some organizations thought it was important to note that "there are persistent equity challenges" to leaving student social capital building to chance, since "systemic racism creates barriers for students of color to access certain opportunities and people." They noted "there are differences in types of connections based on income and parental education level," which "include unequal access to informal mentors, many of which come from enrichment experiences that cost money."

**Prompts:**

- Take the next two or three minutes to think about your career journey and answer the following questions:

    - Who was the person or people who helped you get your current job?

    - How did they help you? What resources did they provide?

    - What skills or strategies (if any) do you think you used to connect with them?

- Who is the first person you would turn to if you needed advice about something important in your life? Explain why you chose that person.

- Think about the closest relationship you have in your life. What factors make the relationship close (e.g., trust, liking the same things, etc.)?

- How many close relationships do you currently have in your life? Do you feel satisfied with this number, or would you like to have more or fewer?

- How do you show appreciation for the people in your life? Do you think you could be doing more to strengthen your relationships and make them more meaningful?

- Do you think you've networked before? When?

- How do you feel about the idea of networking? If you feel nervous or uncomfortable, what would make you feel more comfortable?

- What is social capital and how does it connect to student agency and life success?

- What if a person says "no" to meeting or helping? How does that make you feel? Why might the person have said no?

**Complementary strategies:**

- Share your own personal timeline to build rapport: Before talking about the importance of social capital generally, tell students a little bit about how you got to where you are today.

- Make concepts relevant to students' lives with relationship maps: When talking about the importance of strong ties and weak ties, have students think about their own connections.

# Acknowledgments

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Last, but certainly not least, we owe tremendous thanks to Meris Stansbury, senior director of communications at the Christensen Institute, for her keen wisdom and guidance in shepherding this report from inception to completion.

# Notes

1. Youth unemployment is roughly double the overall unemployment rate despite millions of job openings in high-demand fields. See Chris Bierly and Abigail Smith, "Taking Flight: How to Maximize the Potential of Career-Connected Learning," Bain & Company, January 25, 2022, https://www.bain.com/insights/taking-flight-how-to-maximize-the-potential-of-career-connected-learning/#.

2. In 2022, Black young adults ages 20–24 were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as White young adults in the same age group (see "Unemployment Rates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed June 7, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm). In March 2023, 40% of college graduates ages 22–27 were underemployed. Only 37% of underemployed graduates ages 22–27 worked what the Federal Reserve Bank of New York defines as "good non-college jobs"—those paying at least $45,000 a year—down from around 48% in the 1990s (see "The Labor Market for Recent College Graduates," Federal Reserve Bank of New York, accessed June 7, 2023, https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/index#/underemployment). As with unemployment, underemployment also hits recent graduates from minority groups harder. In 2019, nearly one in seven Black, Hispanic, and Asian American/Pacific Islander graduates were underemployed, while one in 11 white graduates were (see "Class of 2019: College Edition," Economic Policy Institute, May 14, 2019, https://www.epi.org/publication/class-of-2019-college-edition/).

3. Career-connected learning can take several forms, from offering exposure to a range of professions through job fairs, guest speakers, and job shadowing to offering real-world work experience through internships, pre-apprenticeships, career and technical education courses, and capstone projects. See Susan Goldberger, Robert Keough, and Cheryl Almedia, "Benchmarks for Success in High School Education: Putting Data to Work in School-to-Career Education Reform," Jobs for the Future, 2000, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED448324.pdf; and "What is Career-Connected Learning and Why Do We Need It?," Career Connect Washington, accessed June 4, 2023, https://careerconnectwa.org/programs/. A rigorous 12-year evaluation found that participation in Career Academies produced statistically significant increases in earnings over an eight-year follow-up period.

See James J. Kemple and Cynthia J. Wilner, "Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment, and Transitions to Adulthood," June 2008, https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_50.pdf.

4. Researcher Raj Chetty and his team at Opportunity Insights, a center based at Harvard University, have conducted extensive research on the drivers of social mobility. For an overview of Chetty's work and his emphasis on social capital, see Gareth Cook, "The Economist Who Would Fix the American Dream," The Atlantic, July 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/08/raj-chettys-american-dream/592804/.

5. Many studies demonstrate the centrality of social networks in job hunting and job-getting. For example, a 2015 Pew survey found that 55% of respondents used information from acquaintances or friends-of-friends, 63% used professional or network connections, and 66% used connections from close friends or family. See Aaron Smith, "Searching for Work in the Digital Era," Pew Research Center, November 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/11/19/searching-for-work-in-the-digital-era/.

6. Sara Fischer, "Exclusive: LinkedIn Aims to Close 'Network Gap,'" Axios, September 26, 2019, https://www.axios.com/2019/09/26/linkedin-in-equality-network-gap-job-opportunities.

7. For example, using patent registration data, researchers found that children from high-income families are 10 times more likely to become inventors than those from below-median income families. See Alex Bell et al., "Who Becomes an Inventor in America? The Importance of Exposure to Innovation," Opportunity Insights, Harvard University, November 2018, https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/patents_paper.pdf.

8. See Robert D. Putnam, Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

9. Sabino Kornrich and Frank Furstenberg, "Investing in Children: Changes in Parental Spending on Children, 1972–2007," Demography 50, no. 1 (February 2013): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-012-0146-4.

10. Grace Gowdy and colleagues' research suggests that Black adolescents and adolescents from low-income households are more likely to have "core" mentors who provide mostly emotional support, as opposed

to "capital" mentors who are connected to institutions and provide career advice and guidance. See Grace Gowdy et al., "One of These Things Is Not like the Other: Predictors of Core and Capital Mentoring in Adolescence," American Journal of Community Psychology, November 2022, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12627.

11. Robert D. Putnam, Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

12. The Christensen Institute has profiled some of these organizations online; to access these profiles, visit https://whoyouknow.org/research/#case-studies.

13. For more information, see COOP's website at https://coopcareers.org/.

14. "Case Studies: COOP," Clayton Christensen Institute, 2021, https://whoyouknow.org/research/coop/.

15. "Big Picture Learning: High School Alumni Report," MPR Associates Inc., December 2012, https://www.bigpicture.org.au/files/high_school_alumni_report.pdf.

16. "5 Steps for Building & Strengthening Students' Networks," Clayton Christensen Institute, 2021, https://whoyouknow.org/playbook/.

17. See Elizabeth D. Steiner and Ashley Woo, "Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply: Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html.

18. Given that each intermediary employed a distinct delivery model, some pilot sites consisted of a single classroom within a school; in other cases, a pilot site consisted of partnerships between nonprofit organizations, school districts, and/or institutes of higher education. For a detailed breakdown of all organizations participating at each site, see Appendix A.

19. At the outset of the project, each intermediary completed a planning exercise to identify its vision for how it intended to grow students' networks and what strategies it intended to pilot. Intermediaries then articulated this vision to the pilot sites they were supporting, and conducted various trainings, which often involved planning exercises to help site-level staff determine which strategies they wanted to implement and how they planned to accomplish their goals.

20. Given that Hawai'i P-20 wanted its pilot sites to directly interface with our team, we also held monthly check-in meetings with each of Hawai'i P-20's four sites.

21. Getting To Outcomes® is a 10-step accountability framework that helps organizations achieve their desired outcomes for a given initiative by identifying their needs, goals, best practices, capacities, and planning for process evaluation, outcome evaluation, continuous improvement, and sustainability. For more information, see Abraham Wandersman et al., "Getting to Outcomes: A Results-Based Approach to Accountability," Evaluation and Program Planning 23, no. 3 (August 2000): 389–95, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0149-7189(00)00028-8; and "Getting To Outcomes," The Wandersman Center, 2022, https://www.wandersmancenter.org/getting-to-outcomes.html.

22. For more information on how to map students' relationships, see "Students' Hidden Networks: Relationship Mapping as a Strategy to Build Asset-Based Pathways," Clayton Christensen Institute, 2022, https://whoyouknow.org/relationship-mapping/.

23. See "Developmental Evaluation," BetterEvaluation, November 6, 2021, https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/developmental-evaluation.

24. For an in-depth look at when and how to use relationship mapping, see Julia Freeland Fisher, "Students' Hidden Networks: Relationship Mapping as a Strategy to Build Asset-Based Pathways," Clayton Christensen Institute, August 2022, https://www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/relationship-mapping/.

25. For more information, see https://connectedfuturescourse.org/.

26. For more information, see "Social Capital Assessment + Learning for Equity (SCALE) Measures" (webpage), Search Institute, accessed June 4, 2023, https://searchinstitute.org/resources-hub/social-capital-assessment-learning-for-equity-scale-measures.

## About the Institute

The Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to improving the world through Disruptive Innovation. Founded on the theories of Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen, the Institute offers a unique framework for understanding many of society's most pressing problems. Its mission is ambitious but clear: work to shape and elevate the conversation surrounding these issues through rigorous research and public outreach.

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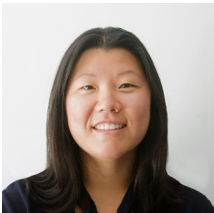
Anna Arsenault is an education research consultant at the Christensen Institute. Her work focuses on integrating social capital, disruptive innovation, and youth development research with practice. She advises organizations on developing and implementing strategies and activities to build and strengthen young peoples' networks.

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