



WORCESTER
EDUCATION
COLLABORATIVE
TEN YEAR ANNIVERSARY



WHO WE ARE



▶▶ THE BRAIN-CHILD OF JOHN BASSETT, PAST PRESIDENT OF CLARK UNIVERSITY, THE WORCESTER Education Collaborative (WEC) opened its doors in the spring of 2010 as the only organization in our city focusing solely on pressing education matters in the city of Worcester. The Collaborative has a simple aim: to demand educational excellence for each one of our children and to work toward that by catalyzing, coordinating, and driving action. We serve as both a critical friend and partner to the Worcester Public Schools (WPS) and our community.

OUR MISSION

To engage our community in fulfilling its responsibility to ensure that excellence in education is available to all public school students and that they are prepared for success in college, career, and life.

OUR VISION

That every Worcester Public School student graduates with the knowledge, skills and habits of mind and qualities of character to live a rewarding and productive life.

Over our ten years of operation, we have gained a well-earned reputation as a knowledgeable contributor to the work of education and as a tenacious and critical friend of both our schools and our community—one that keeps the needs of our children unrelentingly at the fore. We are regarded as an honest broker and are consistently called upon to lend our expertise to projects and working groups focused on teaching and learning. We have made our contribution so far in three broad areas:

- work toward education improvement and school and district accountability;
- community awareness, education, and capacity building;
- and educational achievement and attainment.

To accomplish our mission we employ a collective impact strategy. This strategy, informed by the work of the Stanford Social Innovation Institute, is used nationally to bring together organizations from different sectors to solve a specific social problem using a common agenda, aligned efforts, and common measures of success. We systematically tackle key issues by arming the public, along with state and local leaders, with data and information about best practices. We also partner and collaborate with other organizations and subject matter experts to develop aligned tactics for action.

“WEC’s work is consistently thorough and well-researched. Our city is stronger for its presence.”

MAYOR JOE PETTY

“WEC is an important asset in our community. The organization makes the needs of students primary and it takes its dual role as a partner to the schools and critical friend to the schools and community very seriously.”

MAUREEN BINIENDA Superintendent Worcester Public Schools

We work collaboratively, deliberately, and strategically to find solutions in our three areas of emphasis, aiming for deep systemic impact. Underscoring our work is the recognition that education is not just about stuffing information into the heads of students, but rather is about recognizing and cultivating each young person’s gifts both for their own development and to enhance the quality of our common life in this city. Also informing our work is a belief in education equity—the concept that every child deserves the education that they need, regardless of their background, and that their education considers the requirements of the head, the heart, and the hand.





A TRUE COLLABORATIVE

We have earned a reputation as an honest broker, one that “leans in” with sound expertise in education. As a result, we are called upon to contribute to a variety of groups and initiatives:

- Our Executive Director serves as a Gateway Cities Fellow and a liaison with MassInc on the Gateway Cities education initiative
- We’re chair of the School Climate subcommittee of the Mayor and City Manager’s Youth Violence Prevention Initiative
- We’re members of the Greater Worcester Community Foundation Children’s Initiative
- We’re members of the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership and in Fall 2018 co-published the report *No. 1 For Some Opportunity and Achievement in Massachusetts*

Nimble and influential, we are a small but powerful organization. As a result of the generosity of the United Way of Central Massachusetts which serves as our fiscal sponsor and provides the in-kind support of financial management as well as space, we can devote the entirety of our resources to our mission. A collaborative both by design and necessity, we frequently partner with other organizations with a vested interest in education and the future of our city.

Our portfolio of work and our approaches are informed by national research and best practices as well as national, state, and local education initiatives. This work guides our research agenda with the aim of refining national research and tailoring practices for action in our city.

OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS

- Boys and Girls Club
- Edward Street Child Services
- The Greater Worcester Community Foundation
- Latino Education Institute
- League of Women Voter
- Lesley University
- Mass Advocates for Children
- Massachusetts Citizens for Juvenile Justice
- Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership
- Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition
- MassINC
- UMass Medical School
- UMass Memorial Health Care
- Worcester Community Connections Coalition
- The Worcester Office of Youth Opportunities
- The Worcester Regional Research Bureau
- Worcester State University CityLab

WHAT WE DO

WORK TOWARD SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

AS A PRIVATE, NON-PARTISAN ORGANIZATION THAT PUTS THE NEEDS OF WORCESTER'S CHILDREN and schools first, we frequently work behind the scenes for change. We raise issues with policy makers and decision makers and collaborate with them to find workable solutions.

DEFINING OUR PATH: STRATEGIC PLAN FOR WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Beginning in 2016, in partnership with the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, and with the support and expertise of the District, we assumed the leadership for the development of a Strategic Plan for Worcester Public Schools. The plan, *Defining Our Path*, details a vision and strategy for the schools through 2023 and focuses on the areas of technology; governance, finance, and operations; academics; social and emotional learning and healthy schools; and educator support. With the completion and

adoption of the Plan in the fall of 2018, we have shifted our focus to the plan's implementation. To that end, we are convening and staffing a set of Study Groups comprised of students, parents, district administrators and business and civic leaders to assess school and community needs and assets, identify best practices, and craft plans for the creation of an after school Enrichment Academy, a Teacher Residency, an Incubation Hub based on a Community Schools approach, and a plan for a universal approach to social and emotional learning in all schools. As an outgrowth of this work, fueled by critical local need and heightened attention on Beacon Hill, we have also taken a leadership role in informing the revision and updating of the state's K-12 funding formula participating in legislative hearings and submitting testimony in support of increased funding for our state's neediest schools.

"As the former co-chair for the strategic planning process, I was honored to be involved in this critical and collaborative effort among the Worcester Public Schools, Worcester Education Collaborative, Worcester Regional Research Bureau, and the community. In our year-long process, we heard from voices across the city about their commitment to a vibrant public education system and their willingness to roll up their sleeves to make it a reality. Jen Carey and the team at the Worcester Education Collaborative have been and will continue to be essential thought leaders in shaping and moving this ambitious strategy forward for Worcester."

TIMOTHY J. MCGOURTHY former Exec. Director, Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Deputy Secretary Housing & Economic Development



"This training has changed my thoughts about how to react to difficult behaviors within my students. Trauma is experienced by just about everyone and I feel society needs to understand that fact. I am thankful to have been informed about this topic. It has truly changed my outlook on life."

WPS TEACHER

WORCESTERHEARS

Adverse Childhood Experiences, stressors resulting from family dysfunction, neglect, entrenched poverty, and community disorder, can have a dramatic impact on children's ability to learn. Since 2013, we have been a leader in the community and a partner with the Worcester Public Schools in the work related to mitigating the effects of children's exposure to trauma.

The WorcesterHEARS (Healthy Environments and Resilience in Schools) project is a clear example of our work and approach. An outgrowth of our work on exclusionary discipline, commonly called suspension, the project is a joint effort of the Central Massachusetts Health Foundation, the Worcester Public Schools, the Daniels Foundation and our organization. WorcesterHEARS, with WEC as a part of the leadership team, brings together multiple sectors (education, health, and youth development) to address issues of trauma and learning.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA SENSITIVE PRACTICES

Drawing on the resources of Lesley University's Center for Trauma and Learning and range of other sources, we developed a comprehensive curriculum—*Understanding Trauma Sensitive Practices*. This ten-hour curriculum, which can be accessed either in-person or through blended learning (a combination of online and face to face sessions), provides a foundation for and core strategies to incorporate trauma sensitive practices into schools and classrooms. It was crafted on the belief that every child at some point will be exposed to adversity and that the results of such exposure can be mitigated by the development of resilience. As a result, a universal, environmental approach is employed. The modules include principles of child social and emotional development, trauma and trauma syndromes, implicit bias, school wide trauma sensitive practices and developmental, in contrast to punitive, discipline. Last year alone we trained nearly 200 teachers and administrators at no cost to the schools, impacting over 5,000 students.



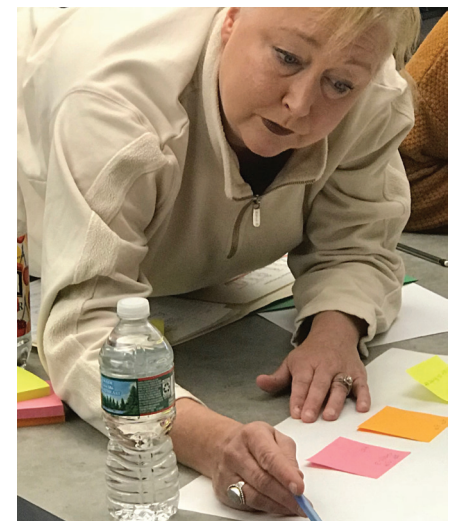
NOT PRESENT, NOT ACCOUNTED FOR: SCHOOL SUSPENSION IN WORCESTER

In 2013 we partnered with the Latino Education Institute at Worcester State University and began looking into the issue of exclusionary discipline in our schools. Together we collaborated with the Gaston Institute at UMass Boston to publish the report *Not Present, Not Accounted For: School Suspension in Worcester*. Since then, we have been working with the District, local, and state partners to reduce the suspension rate overall and to address ethnic and racial disparities in its use.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION & CAPACITY BUILDING

▶▶▶ BECAUSE WELL-INFORMED CONSTITUENTS MAKE STRONGER PARTNERS AND COME TO BETTER decisions, central to our portfolio is the work to inform various sectors of our community—business and civic leaders, educators, service providers, youth development workers, and parents and caregivers—about important education matters. Our goal in this work is to offer sound information to opinion leaders, policy makers, and others with a stake in the quality of teaching and learning in our city. In addition, this work aims to develop capacity—the skills and tools—among parents and other caregivers so that they may better support their child's learning.



PRINCIPAL FOR A DAY

In November of 2019, we will host our tenth Principal for a Day. This program offers business and civic leaders the opportunity to visit a school, shadow the principal and experience first-hand the challenges and rewards of education leadership in our urban schools. The in-school program is followed by a luncheon with a speaker addressing a current issue or trend in education. Since its revival we have hosted nearly 300 community members and visited every school in the district.

"I found that my participation in Principal for a Day was the very best way for me to immerse myself in the daily life of a Worcester Public School and to gain insight into the challenges and rewards of education leadership in our district. It is a very valuable experience."

MARK FULLER *The George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation*



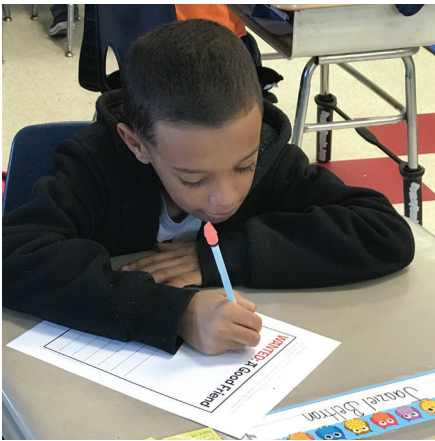
“I accepted a job at Burncoat Middle School in large part because of my Leadership Worcester experience. BMS is where I toured on our school day and I felt really drawn to the idea of teaching back in my home city.”

LEADERSHIP WORCESTER ALUM

LEADERSHIP WORCESTER

Leadership Worcester is a nine month program sponsored by the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. The program allows participants to connect with key stakeholders, learn from influential leaders, and forge relationships that help them take the next step in contributing to our

community. Since Leadership Worcester’s inception in 2014, we have led the education module, introducing the more than 100 emerging leaders to the successes and challenges of public education in our city and in the context of the commonwealth overall. Proudly, two of the program’s alumni currently serve on the WEC Board.



COMMUNITY BRIEFINGS

As a part of our work to keep education and related issues at the fore of public conversation, we host periodic Community Briefings on important and timely issues in education. Past topics have included: *Innovation Schools, Education Funding, Family Literacy, A Review of Education Reform in Massachusetts, the Intersection of Foster Care and Education, and Exclusionary Discipline.*

WECtalks

We also host more focused, intimate WECtalks (formerly TEDxWorcester) periodically on emerging topics of interest to education and youth development practitioners. These dinner conversations include a speaker, a reading of an excerpt from literature, and facilitated discussion.



WE ALSO

- Host the Superintendent’s State of the Schools Address
- Host School Committee Candidate’s Forums, in election years
- Produce periodic briefs on important topics in education in our city*
- Write opinion pieces for the Telegram and Gazette newspaper

on important issues in education* **Available on our website wecollaborative.org*

STRATEGIC TARGETED SERVICES TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

▶▶▶ WE IMPLEMENT A TARGETED PORTFOLIO OF PROGRAMS FOR WHICH WE PROVIDE SERVICES DIRECTLY to students and their families. These niche programs address specific issues in a targeted set of schools.

READING TOGETHER

With the support of the AbbVie Foundation, we deliver the *Reading Together* program in the kindergarten, first, second, and third grade classes at seven of Worcester's schools where children are challenged to reach the critical learning benchmark of reading with proficiency by the end of grade three. The program, delivered four times a year, couples read aloud by a retired teacher (who serves as a consistent guest reader) with an engaging classroom activity, reading extension activities to take home, and for each child, a new copy of the book to keep and to provide the basis of a home library. In its six years, the program has delivered over 22,500 books to over 2,300 children. Programs benefits extend beyond just the child, including parents reading to children and as they gain reading fluency, children reading to siblings.

THE CLASSROOM LIBRARY PROGRAM & THE FEATURED BOOK PROGRAM

Also, part of our program portfolio are the *Classroom Library Program* and the *Featured Book Program* funded by the DCUkids Foundation. The *Classroom Library Program* provides a curated set of children's books to the classrooms in the *Reading Together Schools* without a school library. The *Featured Book Program* operates in the same schools and provides a selection of children's books to teachers for structured read-aloud along with a subscription to a service that provides literacy extension activities. Each of the programs in the reading portfolio works to get books in the hands of children, build reading skills, and create a culture of reading that will serve children through their school years and beyond.

"Something very interesting about this program is that my daughter has developed a higher self-esteem. I love it! Before, she liked me to read to her, she always looked for the way to say "mommy, read to me", but now SHE wants to do it herself. That's one of the instructions that I loved most about the program; seeing how she is growing on her own in her studies, growing as much as she is in height as she is in intelligence. Thanks to the program, she has grown a lot!"

A READING TOGETHER PARENT

"[Reading Together] ...sends a valuable message to our students and families. Reading is important. People in the community care about you and want you to become a proficient reader. Books are things to be treasured—special enough to be given as a gift—from someone who's never even met you. I think of one student from the first year of the program, who was homeless and in and out of shelters. The family was encouraged to take things of value with them during the day so that they wouldn't get taken (from the shelter) Among the things that this little boy kept in his backpack every day were the books he'd been given through this program. Does that say it all?"

A WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS TEACHER

"These books are wonderful [the Classroom Library]! Excellent titles. It is clear that someone put time and thought into choosing them."

A WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS TEACHER

LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to our established portfolio, we will be working in the following areas:

LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

A recent report by MassInc suggests that the next phase of our state's long-term commitment to education reform and improvement will be local and community accountability. Given the recent strategic plan work, our ongoing work to reduce reliance on exclusion as a disciplinary tool, and recognition of the importance of community engagement in the work of the schools, we will be increasing its focus on accountability in the coming years.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Over the last several years, the work related to social and emotional learning has taken on growing importance. We have developed deep expertise in this area and will continue to contribute that expertise to the community and schools.

EQUITY

Research by the Education Trust, the UCLA Center for Civil Rights and others indicates growing inequality in education opportunity, resources, and access. We will continue to work with partners to consider the impact of these trends in Worcester and to ensure equitable access to a challenging education for all students.

A NOTE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

PATTY EPPINGER

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IT WILL BE TEN YEARS IN APRIL SINCE THE WORCESTER EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE OPENED ITS DOORS, BUT IT HAS been longer than that since a group of concerned members of the community came together to create an organization that would engage the public in the work to assure that each student in the Worcester Public Schools graduates with the knowledge, skills, habits of mind, and qualities of character to live a rewarding and productive life. WEC is unique in its role as both an unwavering partner and critical friend to our schools and community regarding the education of our children. The organization's approach of bringing rigorous national research and best practices to bear on our local issues — school funding, grade level reading, social and emotional learning, trauma and learning — has yielded substantial results. WEC has been a leader or a catalyst in a host of issues that have improved the quality of education and the quality of life in our city. We led the development of the first strategic plan for the schools in 25 years, advocated for work on a more equitable school funding formula at the state level, delivered a robust reading program in seven of our most challenged elementary schools, heightened awareness of the impact of trauma on learning, presented training for educators in social and emotional learning—and many more critically important initiatives to benefit our schools.

It is an honor and pleasure for me to be a part of this committed board and to collaborate with a staff whose focus and fearlessness with respect to this critical work is tireless. I am grateful for the support of the community, our partnerships with so many committed organizations, and the support of School Committee and Worcester Public Schools. I look forward to WEC's future as we continue this important work to assure that our children have the best educational opportunities possible, for their futures and ours.

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TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Thank you to all of our supporters, colleagues, and partners who have been with us, some since the very beginning. We have accomplished so much in the past decade; however, we understand systemic change is a marathon and not a sprint. We are looking forward to continuing our work together.

OUR SUSTAINING FUNDERS

AbbVie Foundation
DCU for Kids
George I. Alden Trust
Health Foundation of Central MA
Fred Harris Daniels Foundation
George F. & Sybil H. Fuller Foundation
Greater Worcester Community Foundation
Hanover Insurance Group Foundation
Stoddard Charitable Trust
United Way of Central Massachusetts
Unum

Fletcher Foundation
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care
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SALMON Health & Retirement
Unibank
United Way of Central Massachusetts
Webster Five Bank
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COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Anna Maria College
Assumption College
Becker College

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FOUNDING DIRECTORS WHO HAVE BEEN WITH US SINCE THE BEGINNING

Tom Del Prete
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Tim Garvin
Dawn Johnson
Patsy Lewis
George Tetler