

# WEC Bulletin - Summer 2022

## Welcome, Dr. Monárrez!

On July 1, Worcester welcomed Rachel Monárrez as our new Superintendent of Schools. Dr. Monárrez hails from California, where she most recently served as Deputy Superintendent of the San Bernadino Unified School District. Dr. Monárrez brings a wealth of experience as a classroom teacher, principal, and senior district administrator. In addition to her professional expertise, she is a dynamic and charismatic leader skilled in inspiring teachers, parents, and the community toward the best in service of our children. The staff and board of WEC are very much looking forward to working with her.

Our Worcester Education Equity Roundtable hosted a Meet and Greet event with Dr. Monárrez in early June. The Roundtable is now developing a task force to support Dr. Monárrez, in concert with her office, in a community onboarding process to share with her all that Worcester has to offer. Stay tuned for more information about community events!



See [here](#) for Dr. Monárrez's welcome message and entry plan

## Reading Together: WEC's Signature Program

### TOTAL REACH:

**2,400  
STUDENTS**

**16,200  
BOOKS**

### School Year Programming Returns

WEC's Reading Together program made a roaring return this year. Through this program, over 1,300 children at 7 Worcester elementary schools received a selection of new, high-interest books chosen to emphasize qualities of character and community or aligned with elements of the curriculum. Special thanks to our Reading Assistants, Lisa Kunhardt, Patty Jacobs, Nadine Telenson, Tammy Fleming Maus, and Cathy Knowles—all retired teachers—who continue to share their energy, enthusiasm, and love of reading with kids and their families!

### Summer Literacy Kits

Building on a successful program during the summer of 2021, WEC is working with 8 Woo-Labs partners to deliver Summer Literacy Kits to over 1,100 students this summer. The Summer Literacy Kits will provide a set of 10 books, a summer activity guide, and school supplies for K-6 grade students enrolled at these summer programs. The Kits are intended to prevent learning loss typically experienced during the summer months (the “summer slide”) during what continues to be a critically important time following multiple years of interrupted learning as a result of COVID.



## Recent Happenings

WEC continues to regularly offer its series on trauma and learning, Understanding Trauma-Sensitive Practices, by request to organizations in Worcester and beyond.

Developed with funds from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts and the Fred H. Daniels Foundation, Understanding Trauma Sensitive Practices (UTSP) is an evidence-informed series for parents, teachers, youth development workers, and other educators and staff in the learning and youth development ecosystem.

Using concepts of child development as a foundation, the series focuses on cultivating the skills and tools to support sound social and emotional development in young people and to provide them with the resilience to meet personal challenges.

WEC facilitated three sets of the series this winter and spring, reaching over 80 individuals. Another series is planned for July.

### Demand for WEC's Trauma Training Grows



### Roundtable Community Capacity Building



WEC's Worcester Education Equity Roundtable, a partnership of organizations in Worcester's learning ecosystem, has been working closely with the Worcester Coalition for Education Equity to host a series of gatherings to provide timely information to city residents on matters regarding education. With the support of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the two groups hosted a two-part forum on the Worcester Public School budget. Part 1, with speakers Brian Allen, WPS Chief Financial Officer, and Natasha Ushomirsky, Massachusetts State Director of the Education Trust, provided a deep dive into the budget in the context of new sources of revenue from state and federal sources. Part II introduced a toolkit created by the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) and used the WPS budget and budgeting process as a case study to build public skills to engage in effective advocacy.

Along with a group of community partners, WEC received a Fred H. Daniels Foundation planning grant to create a new innovative program called Transformations. Transformations is a two-strand initiative focusing on creating a rite of passage program for adolescent Black girls that supports them on a healthy developmental journey toward adulthood as well as the training of their adult mentors to support girls' needs and to foster trauma-sensitive environments that build resilience and agency. WEC is working closely with the SHINE Initiative, Urban League of Springfield, YWCA, Boys and Girls Club of Worcester, and Black Excellence Academy on program development now.

### WEC & Partners Receive Daniels Foundation Planning Grant



### Funding for a Woo-Labs Project-Based Learning Library



WEC has received a total of \$40,000 from several sources including the DCU for Kids Foundation and United Way of Central Massachusetts for the development of a Woo-Labs Project-Based Learning (PBL) Learning and Lending Library (for more on PBL and Woo-Labs, see page 3). This funding will support the creation and oversight of a library of well-vetted PBL lesson plans developed by partners, Hanover Fellows, and WEC staff as well as the durable goods required for these projects. All Woo-Labs partners will have access to the Library. Partners will be able to download detailed lesson plans developed by others to use and adapt for their own students. They will also gain access to state-of-the-art durable goods required for the projects.



## Woo-Labs: An Extraordinary Pilot Year

June marked the end of the first year of WEC's Woo-Labs Initiative, a network of partners committed to advancing educational and racial equity for historically marginalized Worcester K-6 students by improving their capacity to provide high-quality, culturally responsive, student-centered, project-based learning opportunities. **Here are some highlights from Woo-Labs' school year programming:**



### Over 500 Students Reached Across 10 Partner Sites

Woo-Labs' 10 partner sites collectively served over 500 K-6 students, predominantly students of color from Worcester's most under-resourced schools.



### Hands-On, High-Quality Project-Based Learning

This school year, Woo-Labs continued its ambitious goal of **bringing project based learning (PBL) to kids** enrolled in programs hosted by our 10 partners. Partners harness PBL to foster deep, engaged learning in content knowledge and critical 21st century and social emotional skill development. PBL involves working on a long-term project to solve a real-world problem relevant to students' lives and culminates in knowledge demonstration through a public product or presentation. Research demonstrates PBL has positive impacts on academic outcomes as well as social emotional competencies such as collaboration and persistence. Woo-Labs partners align their offerings with PBLWorks' Gold Standard PBL, a comprehensive, research-informed model to promote a high-quality learning environment and enrich student learning.

#### Partner Spotlight: YMCA Greendale

At the YMCA Greendale, Hanover Fellow Erin Lally has taken on the role of a PBL coach, developing resources, running training sessions, and regularly observing afterschool staff to help them enhance the site's PBL opportunities. "Having Erin Lally as a Fellow with the Greendale Y through Woo-Labs has been invaluable," said YMCA Greendale Executive Director Christina Puleo. "She works side by side with our front line staff as a mentor and support. In addition, she works side by side with our leadership team by advocating for well-developed curriculum focused on PBL and engagement. Her attention to the program as a whole and her ability to work on multiple levels has increased our program capacity for sure." This spring, Erin developed and implemented a multi-week "Spring into Action" project on how to encourage YMCA members to protect the environment that culminated with students creating posters now displayed at the YMCA.



YMCA Greendale students urge members to protect the environment through their "Spring Into Action" projects



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# Woo-Labs: An Extraordinary Pilot Year

## A Robust Community of Practice

Learning happens in community. Woo-Labs partners engage in an ongoing Community of practice to discuss issues, learn about essential topics, and devise action steps to address areas for improvement.

Activities to date this school year include:

### Implementation & Data-Driven Continuous Improvement

- 2 Sets of Biweekly Check Ins, all-partner and organization-specific, to support implementation
- An all-network Data Debrief co-run by WEC and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) to identify trends in observation results and corresponding best practices to promote key student outcomes
- 25+ organization-specific Action Planning Sessions to analyze data and explore areas for improvement

### Project-Based Learning

- An Introductory PBL Training run by Woo-Labs partner The STEM Education Center at WPI to provide a hands-on introduction to PBL to build foundational knowledge (see more below)
- A Six-part PBL Workshop co-created and facilitated by WEC and The STEM Education Center at WPI to provide program staff and Fellows with sustained support to enhance and refine their PBL offerings
- 5 organization-specific consultation sessions run by The STEM Education Center to provide individualized feedback on PBL project plans

### Cultural Responsiveness & Racial Equity

- 4 Partners engaged in participatory action research to promote racial equity in collaboration with the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color and Education Development Center and shared their findings (see more below)
- Woo-Labs Partner Latino Education Institute presented on Culturally Responsive Facilitation
- Woo-Labs partner African Community Education presented on Supporting African Immigrant and Refugee Students

### Spring PBL Workshop Series

Woo-Labs partners and Fellows engaged in a 6-part PBL Workshop training series this spring co-facilitated by WEC and The STEM Education Center at WPI to support them in developing and improving their PBL projects. Participants enhanced their knowledge of the Gold Standard PBL model, accessed PBL resources, workshopped their ideas with peers, and collectively tackled problems of practice. Each partner produced a detailed, peer-reviewed PBL project lesson plan at the conclusion of the workshop to add to the Woo-Labs PBL database.

### Participatory Action Research Focused on Racial Equity



See [here](#) for February Forum slides and COSEBOC and EDC's Final Report

A subset of Woo-Labs partners—African Community Education, Girls Inc, Mass Audubon Broad Meadow Brook, and the YMCA—engaged in participatory action research with the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color and the Education Development Center this school year. PAR is a collective inquiry process that seeks to actively drive meaningful change in a community by authentically engaging with its stakeholders and beneficiaries. With the support of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, these partners studied how to change their organizational structures and practices to promote racial equity. Partners shared their findings in a February Racial Equity Forum.





## Woo-Labs: Looking Ahead

### Guild of St. Agnes Joins to Make Woo-Labs 11 Partners Strong

Woo-Labs is thrilled to welcome a new partner, the Guild of St. Agnes, to the network this summer, bringing the network to a total of 11 partners, 8 of whom run programming over the summer. Organizations will focus on designing and implementing project-based learning, engaging in measurement-for-improvement, and fostering students' critical social emotional and academic skills this summer and are expected to reach over 1,000 students.

### Fantastic New Hanover Fellow Cohort



Woo-Labs is welcoming 10 Hanover Fellows to the network this summer. Hanover Fellows support with the implementation of core Woo-Labs strategies such as project-based learning and measurement-for-improvement while building affirming relationships with their students.

Fellows also engage in deep professional development through pre-service training, regular convenings, and targeted training on youth development topics such as project-based learning, social emotional learning, and trauma-sensitive practices.

This year's cohort hail from Quinsigamond Community College, Worcester State University, Clark University, and Salem State University.

Back Row (left to right): Gahna Adaval (Broad Meadow Brook); Eli Jurado (Boys & Girls Club of Worcester); Emmett Cashman (Main IDEA); Britney Acquah (Guild of St. Agnes); Front Row (left to right): Erin Lally (YMCA); Tiffany De Oliveria (Girls Inc); Hailey Mullings (YMCA); Gabrielle Gedeon (African Community Education)  
Not pictured: Eva Kadriu (YWCA); Whitney Acquah (African Community Education)

### Thank you to all of our steadfast supporters.

**We are so grateful for your continued commitment to education excellence and equity for all!**

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