

WEC Bulletin - Winter 2021

Woo-Labs Phase I: Celebrating our Fantastic 5

In September, we came together as a Woo-Labs community to look back on all that we accomplished through our summer Phase I pilot program.



College Corps Fellow Fatima Diallo engages a Girls INC participant in The National Association of Women in Construction's Block Kids Building Competition

Highlights include:



5 SITES



775 STUDENTS



STUDENT-DRIVEN LEARNING

All sites implemented project-based learning, where students had opportunities to engage in hands-on, multi-week, rigorous projects based on their individual interests



MEASUREMENT CATALYZED IMPROVEMENT

Collectively, partners improved in 5 critical measures of program quality according to expert third-party observers, including building relationships and stimulating thinking



RACIAL EQUITY RESEARCH

Four Phase I partners are engaged in ongoing participatory action research with the Coalition for Schools Educating Boys of Color and the Education Development Center on how to harness our student-centered project-based learning approach to promote racial equity



Check out
WSU's write-up
of ACE Hanover
Fellow Zak
Dabbagh [here!](#)

Welcome, Phase II Partners

This fall, we doubled in size to 10 partner sites with a projected reach of 500 students. New partners include:

Our 10 partners have focused on fostering students' social emotional skills, particularly peer relationships, this fall. In the new year, we will convene to examine and learn from fall observation, survey, and attendance data as well as kick off our Project-Based Learning Community of Practice to support partners refining and implementing high-quality PBL.



Recent Happenings

We are delighted to share that WEC recently welcomed a new team member, Nia Alicea, through the Clark Community-Based Work Study Program. Nia, a Junior Psychology major, will take on the newly created role of Woo-Labs Coordinator to support communication, event planning, and Fellow coordination. Nia's experience working at Generation Teach and years spent helping run their family's daycare ignited their passion for education equity. We are so glad to have you join our team, Nia!

Welcome to the team, Nia!



Reading Together is Back

WEC is thrilled to be back in-person at seven elementary schools for our Reading Together program this school year. Reaching over 1,300 students, WEC Reading Assistants lead an interactive reading session followed by an engaging activity for each K-3 grade classroom at our partner schools. First quarter books included *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, *A Chair for My Mother*, *Grace for President* and *Tito Puente, Mambo King*. Each student takes home a copy of the book as well as literacy books and activities to help make reading a fun activity for the whole family. The program, supported by the AbbVie Foundation, has been a roaring success and is enormously popular with the kids, their families, teachers, principals, and our community readers.

November's election brought significant change to the Worcester School Committee. With longtime members Jack Foley and John Monfredo bringing their service to an end and a surprise loss by incumbent Dianna Biancheria, a substantially new committee will be seated in January. Members-elect Jermaine Johnson, Jermoh Kamo, and Sue Mailman will bring fresh voices and perspectives to the work of education. We are looking forward to working with the new committee.

School Committee



Leadership Worcester

WEC hosted the Education Module of the Leadership Worcester's Class of 2022. The session covered a lot of ground, from challenges and opportunities facing the district and an overview of Woo-Labs and emerging collective action efforts to address ongoing opportunity gaps to state-level policy and advocacy updates and considerations of the WPS budget. Speakers included Jack Foley on the role of the School Committee and Superintendent Binienda, who provided an overview of the District. Natasha Ushomirski from the Education Trust provided a review of state and federal funding and initiatives and our own Emily Dodge introduced Woo-Labs and the concept of an education ecosystem.

We are happy to share that with the generous support of the Hanover Insurance Group Foundation we have re-named our College Corps members *Hanover Fellows*. Our 10 Fellows are now hard at work at their respective Woo-Labs sites building affirming relationships with students, designing robust project-based learning opportunities, and supporting with measurement-for-improvement efforts.

Hanover Fellows Hard at Work



Two Fellows, Erin (YMCA) and Katy (Broad Meadow Brook) continued their Fellowship while 8 new Fellows joined. Welcome, Kennedy (African Community Education), Mariah (Boys and Girls Club Worcester), Victoria (Black Excellence Academy), Michelle (Girls Inc), Yetzi (Latino Education Institute), Jaeleene (Main IDEA), Bella (Worcester Art Museum), and Tim (YWCA)!



Recent Happenings

With the creation of Early College Worcester, a partnership between Worcester State University, Quinsigamond Community College, and the Worcester Public Schools, our city has been a leader in this area. Recent legislation expands opportunities for early college and provides the resources to support, create, and maintain partnerships connecting districts and high schools with our state's colleges. Used creatively and intentionally, Early College is a tool for equity, providing access to demanding coursework and the opportunity to earn college credit at no cost while in high school.

This is particularly worthwhile to first-generation college-goers and low income students.

Worcester is the only district in which all high schools, a community college, and a four year university are participating.

Early College Successes Continue



WEC has been involved in this work at the state level, working with Chris Gabrieli of the Board of Higher Education and Tripp Jones of 21C to advance this work. We are a founding member of the Massachusetts Alliance for Early College (MA4EC), a group focused on identifying and disseminating best practices for the development and expansion of these important opportunities.



Coalition Building

With the important changes that will happen over the next year to 18 months in the education sector in Worcester, the need for an aligned response is paramount. Now more than ever, Worcester is in need of a community-engaged, transparent, and accountable education system that prioritizes equity. With new funding from Nellie Mae Education Foundation, WEC's Worcester Education Equity Roundtable will be working closely with Worcester Interfaith to align our efforts in promoting educational equity for historically marginalized students in Worcester's schools. This alliance will allow us to strengthen our two coalitions and amplify our influence.

Searching for Excellence

As the superintendent search process begins, WEC and The Research Bureau came together to host an event featuring experts and perspectives from outside Worcester on the challenges and opportunities facing urban leaders, and the skills and qualities needed for successful leadership as our district looks to fill this role. Education Trust Writer-in-Residence Karin Chenoweth served as moderator of a panel including Keri Rodrigues of the Massachusetts Parents Union, Glenn Koocher of the Mass Association of School Committees, and Paul Reville, former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth and Francis Keppel Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Key takeaways include:

- From Keri Rodrigues: Once a Superintendent is selected, the community must come together to provide the resources, support, and engagement to assure success.
- From Glenn Koocher: The contract, along with the expectations laid out in it, are as important as the search and selection process.
- From Paul Reville: The ability to communicate with all stakeholders and to balance the need to be champion and cheerleader for the district while understanding its challenges are critical.

A recording of the event can be accessed [here](#).

"Effective
leaders believe
that all kids can
learn and
organize schools
around that
belief"
-Karin Chenoweth

TELEGRAM & GAZETTE [Worcester Schools superintendent
search topic of virtual panel event](#)



THE WORCESTER EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE
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Toward a More Perfect Union

The events of 2020 and 2021, from the video-taped extra-judicial murder of George Floyd, through the civil uprisings of the summer, to the capstone (so far) event of the storming of the US Capitol, have made clear that not only has a bill come due, but that much work is to be done at all levels in the work to recognize matters of race and racism and to transition to the multi-cultural, multi-racial democracy that is the promise of our country. That work can begin with us and in our community.

Toward this end, WEC Executive Director Jennifer Davis Carey developed and facilitated a study group, Toward a More Perfect Union: Achieving our Multicultural, Multiracial Democracy. This work brought together a cross-sector cohort of leaders from our community to understand and engage individually and together in the work to realize what is best about our increasingly diverse community.



The purposes of the study group were:

- to provide a community for shared learning and best practices in the areas of racial equity, anti-racism, cultural competence among leaders in Worcester's government, corporate, civic, and non-profit sectors
- to develop an understanding of and vocabulary for shared, cross-sectors solutions to entrenched issues in our community and
- for individual participants to develop a plan of action in one of their spheres of influence to advance matters of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism

The six full day workshops were organized by the Worcester Education Collaborative staff. Fath Davis Ruffins, Curator at the Smithsonian Museum of American History; George Sanchez, Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California; Margaret Chin, Associate Professor of Sociology at Hunter College; and Valerie Zolezzi-Wyndham with Promoting Good, LLC served as faculty.

The theme connecting this exploration was the aspirations stated in our founding documents and the laws, policies, and practices that have run counter to those beliefs, as well as the work, ground level and beyond, that must happen to re-imagine and realize a sound present and future in our city.

Surveys from participants were enormously positive. We are exploring ways to amplify and build on this work while aligning it with other efforts toward equity, truth, and reconciliation in our city.

“The group was thoughtfully formed and I believe there is a foundation for each of us in our respective functions and with the support of each other to forward the work and the message

“The content is eye-opening. I would say most people learn a brief, white-washed version of history with regard to other cultures and specific to racism. The faculty were insightful and engaging

“Faculty was beyond amazing!!!! Five stars - an experience in my life due to their expertise that will remain unparalleled



Learning Beyond Limits

Worcester Education Collaborative's 12th Annual Meeting Highlights

Following a presentation on Woo-Labs, Juana Matias, Chief Operating Officer of MassINC, facilitated a critical conversation with Massachusetts Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley and Massachusetts Higher Education Commissioner Carlos Santiago. The conversation, "Reimagining Education; Breaking Down Walls," covered topics related to in- and out-of-school alignment and shifting to a P-16 Continuum.

Key takeaways and highlights included:

- A **major focus should be on early childhood education**. We must approach all issues through a racial equity lens, in order to build the right infrastructure for students and families to succeed from the start.
- Colleges and universities need to **hyper-focus on multifaceted issues that affect marginalized students**. Schools have to deal with affordability, eliminating remediation, and changing admissions practices.
- The COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to step back and **rethink how should assess students** moving forward. We need assessments that tell us how students are doing with multiples intelligences.



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We have told our campuses that we must begin
to look at students differently.

**Rather than looking at them to meet a particular bar, we must ask ourselves:
do we have what it takes to support them?**

We need to be honest about how we are guiding students.
Especially those who are the first in their family to attend college.
This must be a cultural change.

Massachusetts Higher Education Commissioner **Carlos Santiago**

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Worcester Education Collaborative
12th Annual Meeting

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