



Harvard Family Research Project



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Building a Cradle to Career Pathway in Cincinnati, Ohio

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[Issue Topic: Family Engagement Across the Developmental Continuum](#)

Voices From the Field

The Cincinnati, Ohio-based Strive initiative has taken a complementary learning approach to scaffolding children's educational growth to ensure a comprehensive, cradle-to-career system of support that includes family and community engagement. Harvard Family Research Project spoke with Jeff Edmondson, executive director of Strive, as well as two of Strive's partners in the community, Liz Blume of the Community Building Institute and Rolanda Smith of Parents for Public Schools of Greater Cincinnati, to find out more about Strive's philosophy, successes, and challenges.

What does Strive's model of a cradle-to-career, cross-context system look like? What are the guiding principles and components of such a system? Where, and how, do families fit into this system?

The Strive Education Partnership brings together cross-sector leaders at all levels to address a fragmented education landscape by weaving together results-based systems and strategies in order to support children's academic, social and emotional success from cradle to career.

There are several core components of the Strive Partnership's work. First, Strive seeks to connect and coordinate the various partners—including non-profits, schools, and other support organizations along the cradle-to-career continuum. This network includes many more individuals and organizations than just schools; it involves everyone that touches a child's life—especially families. Second, Strive seeks to identify key indicators across the cradle-to-career continuum—such as fourth-graders' reading progress scores or high school students' graduation rates—and continuously make progress toward improving them, innovating when necessary. Third, Strive works to transform education by using data to determine which strategies yield the best results and driving resources toward those strategies.

Strive requires that its cross-sector partnerships be comprised of people representing the full developmental pathway spectrum. What value does this range of perspectives provide for the initiative's work?

Partner participation at the table is crucial to the success of children. All of the work of our learning system is connected. Our institutions of higher education prepare teachers who work with our students. Service providers support the work of teachers, students, and families. We must address our challenges holistically in order to achieve systemic change.

What are some of the successes Strive has had in developing a cradle-to-career, cross-context system of education that involves families?

Strive's work to create a culture of continuous improvement among education stakeholders has resulted in improved services and outcomes for local students. This was evidenced in our [2009 Community Report Card](#) in which 34 of 53 indicators improved.

Over the past three years, more than 300 people have been trained in Strive Six Sigma, a systematic approach used to improve an existing process or design a new process. The steps and tools in Strive Six Sigma help groups of like providers, called Student Success Networks, work together toward a common goal to improve student outcomes, avoid duplicating services, make better use of resources, and plan actions that have been shown to be effective based on research and data collection. Notably, the Arts Education Student Success Network secured funding to execute their action plan, which included a pilot focused on increased arts interactions in an effort to improve achievement.

Members of our partnership have realized great successes over the past three years. With the support of partners, Cincinnati Public Schools has brought together nonprofits, community members, and rich resources to create a national model for Community Learning Centers. Parents were an important part of the Community Learning Center process. As Cincinnati Public Schools physically rebuilt schools, we used this as an opportunity to create planning tables that talked about much more than the bricks and mortar. Parents talked about their curricular expectations, the programs and partnerships they saw as appropriate, and in general became more connected to schools. In some cases new parents actually moved into neighborhoods to take part in the planning and operation of new schools, as was the case in the Pleasant Ridge and Fairview neighborhoods.

Over one hundred parents have completed the Parents for Public Schools of Greater Cincinnati's (PPSGC) Parent Leadership Institute program where they have garnered the skills to analyze school data and execute an action-oriented school-based project designed to improve student achievement. Four of these projects are highlighted on the [Ohio Department of Education's website](#) as a Promising Family Engagement Partnership Practice. PPSGC also partnered with STRIVE to release its newest resource, a parent involvement handbook entitled "The Power of Parents as Partners."

In recognition of all of the great collaborative work in our region, more than \$2.5 million in-kind donations have been leveraged.

What are the biggest challenges for this work, and what lessons have you learned in addressing these challenges?

While serving children and families is a priority for the Strive Partnership, more can be done to inform and engage families in the movement to improve outcomes. Our community engagement work has focused on parents and getting their voices to the table. Parents are busy and can be difficult to engage, but they care about their children and so we have used venues where they have the opportunity to connect with their kids. For example, when we held an Education Summit, we asked the children to provide the music, and their parents came to hear them and then got involved

in the conversation. In the future, we will address this issue with our community engagement plans that call upon the entire community to share their hopes and aspirations for education, discuss what should be done, learn what has been done, and develop ownership of education reform solutions. Parents and community members will be empowered to look at school-level data and design their own solutions.

The Strive Partnership LEARN (Leading Education Advocacy and Reform Now) Awards will recognize parents and community members for their contributions in improving outcomes for children. This award not only highlights good and innovative work, it also creates a network of champions and mentors who can help other parents and communities get started on the way to improvements. We are also working in three Greater Cincinnati neighborhoods—Price Hill, Avondale, and Covington, Kentucky—to create community education plans built around the Strive roadmap. This effort will put parents and other stakeholders together to create community-wide strategies that respond to children’s needs. A toolkit is being put together now that will be of use to parents and other partners that are working on reform. Connecting parents and others to each other and helping them see the strength they have and the power to innovate is a key outcome of the process.

What are your next steps with Strive?

Ultimately, we will galvanize our entire Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky community to ensure success for every child, every step of the way; cradle to career. To that end, we are working on developing a rallying cry that will resonate with every member of our society and compel them to take action on behalf of children. When this happens, we will have fulfilled our mission to have successful students, productive citizens, and thriving cities.

For more information about Strive, visit www.strivetogether.org/

This article is part of the April 2010 FINE Newsletter. The FINE Newsletter shares the newest and best family involvement research and resources from Harvard Family Research Project and other field leaders. To access the FINE Newsletter Archive, visit www.hfrp.org/FINENewsletter.

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