

Learning from

PROOF POINT COMMUNITIES

// Seeding Success
Memphis, Tennessee





Cover photo:
*Lee Harris, mayor of Shelby County,
is committed to ensuring every child
has access to a pre-K education.*

// Foreword

StriveTogether is a national movement with a clear purpose: helping every child succeed in school and in life, cradle to career, regardless of race, ethnicity, zip code or circumstance. Refusing to settle for a world where a child's potential is dictated by the conditions in which they are born, StriveTogether works with nearly 70 communities across the country to break down barriers, change systems and improve outcomes for as many families as possible.

For almost a decade, StriveTogether has used data to illuminate our nation's most pressing challenges, laying the foundation for tough conversations and bringing communities across the nation to the same table to act. StriveTogether helps communities close gaps in education, housing, transportation and more.

These communities are members of the Cradle to Career Network and use StriveTogether's Theory of Action™ — a framework for building civic infrastructure to change the way adults and systems work together to deliver more equitable results for kids. In Tennessee, network member Seeding Success is doing just that.

Seeding Success is holistic in its approach, engaging the whole community. Its evidence-based community planning looks at the capacity of its partners and builds upon existing resources.

// Overview

Established in 2013, Seeding Success represents a partnership in Memphis, Tenn., among more than 100 organizations, including local K-12 institutions, the business sector and health, civic, faith and philanthropic groups.

Seeding Success supports a cradle-to-career continuum of work that is delivering better results for youth, particularly children of color. Its objectives: to transform systems of opportunity, to understand and address issues of racial disparity and to ensure that every child has the resources needed to succeed from birth to economic and social opportunity. Seeding Success' work goes beyond just practices and people — it seeks to understand the history of systemic inequity in order to transform the underlying principles for why things are the way they are in America for children of color.

Change management

Executive Director Mark Sturgis, responsible for leading Seeding Success since its early days, describes the work as change management. For

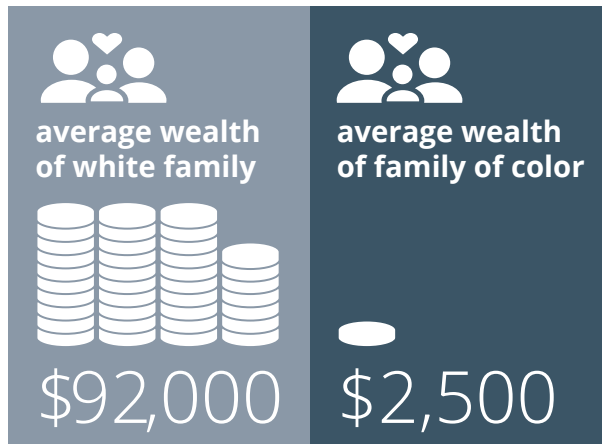
him, it's about taking steps to support educational systems, but that work falls short unless it addresses the fundamental root causes of inequity.

"Inequity is a visceral, structural reality here in Memphis," Sturgis said. "And it shows just how powerful race is in Memphis."

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The landscape

The name Memphis means "beautiful and established." The largest city in Tennessee, many Americans know it as the home of blues, soul, and rock and roll. What is lesser known is its history of racial injustice, slavery and mass incarceration among its African American population. Its location along the Mississippi River has traditionally made Memphis a hub for exporting, and its airport is the second-busiest cargo airport in the world, thanks



Source: Seeding Success

to FedEx's global air hub. But stark disparities between the African American community and its white counterpart have created a divide that puts African American children and families at a unique disadvantage.

Today, in Memphis, the average white family maintains a wealth of \$92,000. The average wealth for a family of color is \$2,500.

The majority of Memphis residents are African American, but the city has historically been politically controlled by a white minority. A growing Latinx population — between 6 and 7% now and expected to climb to 10% — promises to strengthen diversity, yet the power dynamics still underrepresent minority residents, which account for 67% of Memphis' population.

What's more, a study by Raj Chetty shows that economic mobility in Memphis is among the lowest in the nation. The probability that a family in the bottom 20% of the income distribution can move to the top 20% in one generation was a dismal 6.4%, trailing the national average of 8.1% — and the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis has determined that racial composition is a major factor.

"At Seeding Success, we are always pushing ourselves to think bigger," Sturgis said. "Things are the way they are for a reason. We can work to improve them, but if underlying assumptions about the reasons are wrong, you can't make those big changes. If we can radically transform infrastructure — and we think we can — in one

generation, we will interrupt the current cycle of disproportionate opportunity."

A turning point in Memphis

In 2011, there was a buzz in Memphis. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was investing in education policy and the U.S. Department of Education took a particular interest in the city and the state of Tennessee with its Race to the Top initiative.

The environment was prime for transformation, and Memphis braced itself for the most significant educational changes in the city's history.

In March 2011, residents voted to disband Memphis City Schools and merge the district with Shelby County School District. Racial tension and significant disruption followed one of the largest public school district mergers in U.S. history. The Memphis City Schools Board of Commissioners then voted to delay the first day of school until City Council provided funds owed to the school district — an incident that gained national attention.

Meanwhile, StriveTogether had begun high profile work with United Way Worldwide and Target Corporation to engage United Way organizations across the country. StriveTogether's work in Cincinnati also had caught the eye of Memphis' superintendent of schools. After a successful incubation period as a program of the United Way in Memphis, Seeding Success became a 501(c)3 organization to serve as a backbone of the cradle-to-career effort in the community. StriveTogether guided this transition.

"United Way was a key partner in building the foundation for our work," Sturgis said. "We launched Seeding Success with StriveTogether in 2013, and what's so exciting is that it ties together policy, systems, practices, human capability, capacity — all the elements that make things work."

A staff of one grew to three, and then 20. And the organization has built itself on success after success through its partnership with StriveTogether.

How the partnership works

StriveTogether's partnership with Seeding Success

has always been two-way: StriveTogether providing coaching and guidance, but also learning from Seeding Success.

Like most of StriveTogether's network members, the Memphis partnership reached out for help to get started. They wanted to build a partnership using the StriveTogether Theory of Action™.

Through the years, and especially in its early stages, StriveTogether has helped Seeding Success examine what it looks like to identify leaders, set shared goals, find the right governance structure and choose the most appropriate key staff roles. This has included providing coaching guidance, coordinating site visits and setting up one-offs with other communities and cohorts around a specific strategy or competency. ImpactTulsa in Oklahoma, for example, has a robust early childhood strategy, and StriveTogether has provided opportunities for Seeding Success to learn from them.

"Our role is to coach, convene and codify learning for better outcomes. And our mission? Whatever it takes to achieve the vision," said Colin Groth, StriveTogether's executive vice president of strategy and development.

In 2014 and 2015, StriveTogether partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to incorporate the Foundation's Results Count™ into its approach to help leaders, organizations and groups move from intention to action in support of kids and families. That led to the development of a nine-month StriveTogether leadership program that included training and support to network members in using data, facilitating conversations, driving action and focusing explicitly on racial equity issues to achieve better outcomes for children.

In 2015, Seeding Success was in a cohort of five communities to be the first to participate in the StriveTogether Leadership Program. And the organization ran with it.

"They quickly picked up the collaborative leadership skills, brought them home and started to build the ability to use data for improvement," Groth said. The training provides a unifying language and process participants learn to use data to get results.

Not only did Seeding Success use the approach internally, they used it to build the capacity of its partner organizations. StriveTogether helped Seeding Success develop Beyond the Classroom, a training to lead others in the Memphis community through a similar process. It started slowly, then grew to support nine partner organizations in identifying data to understand what is happening within the systems, and identifying areas for improvements and achieving measurable results.

One organization in Memphis, Communities In Schools of Memphis (CIS of Memphis), participated in the training and explored ways to address chronic absenteeism. With the attendance data provided by Seeding Success, CIS of Memphis identified which students needed the most help. The organization then worked with the children's families to find ways to encourage attendance. Simple solutions such as allowing students to wear their own clothes in lieu of a mandatory school uniform led to a 27% decrease in the number of chronically absent students.

Beyond the Classroom is expanding its reach in Memphis to include schools and agencies like the local housing authority. In doing so, Seeding Success has implemented a successful approach to using data to shape policy.

The power of collaboration

Collective impact usually centers around a backbone organization — one lead agency that convenes partners. Seeding Success sees itself as something more.

The organization makes it a priority to build its own capacity to support significant change. It may be a backbone, but it thrives as a change management organization.

Seeding Success initially envisioned that its collaborative action would engage partners and networks to improve specific outcomes. This has evolved to imagine redesigning key education systems together, with the voices of the most affected at the center of the collaboration.



// Success: The First 8

The role of Seeding Success in Memphis is to facilitate the design of equitable systems. But transformational change, they have found, requires getting clear on goals.

Seeding Success, along with city and county leaders, saw many 4-year-old children did not have access to high-quality preschool. This hindered their ability to succeed — not just in the early years of school, but through life. Together, with a group

Pay for success, also known as outcomes financing, is an innovative way for governments to invest in social programs that are proven to work. Impact investors provide upfront funding for programs, and government agencies agree to repay that investment if, and only if, the program achieves predetermined goals for improving people's lives. The model leads to improved accountability and better results for communities.

of leaders across the community, Seeding Success committed to provide high-quality pre-K to every low-income 4-year old in the city and county.

"We've spent the last four years iterating kindergarten readiness with a pre-K program," said Sturgis, "but if we really want kids to arrive at school with equitable footing, that starts before birth."

It's this thinking that led to First 8, Seeding Success' Early Childhood Education Plan. The plan positions early childhood education as an investment in core economic mobility and sets a goal of 90% kindergarten readiness in Memphis by 2025. How it reaches that goal is what sets First 8 apart — best practice interventions begin for vulnerable children at birth and continue through age 8. And families are supported through two-generational comprehensive supports.

Seeding Success got the city of Memphis and Shelby County Government to provide \$40 million to increase the number of classroom seats for 4-year-old pre-K for the students most in need over the next three years. The plan leverages public sector dollars and a partnership with Maycomb Capital, thanks to an introduction from StriveTogether, which was critical to creating a pay for success model.

// Success: Destination 2025

Seeding Success collaborated with Shelby County Schools to develop Destination 2025, a 10-year strategic plan designed to elevate student

achievement. Key accomplishments between 2017 and 2018 include:



Grade 3 reading proficiency **increased from 21.4% to 27%.**

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S SUMMER LEARNING ACADEMY **INCREASED TO 10,000 SEATS**, INCLUDING NEW MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

The number of schools that achieved the state's **highest growth score rose from 38 in 2017 to 62 in 2018.**

Free Application for **Federal Student Aid applications** were completed by **86% of seniors in 2018, up from 48% in 2014.**

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS EARNED THE STATE'S **SECOND HIGHEST ACCOUNTABILITY RATING** FOR IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND STUDENT SUBGROUP PERFORMANCE.

The number of third-graders reading on grade level **increased by 400 students.**

The percentage of former pre-K students who were kindergarten ready **rose from 42% in 2017 to 59% in 2018.**



The number of students who earned professional industry certifications **rose from 150 in 2017 to 267 students** (including 140 graduates) earning 352 certifications **in 2018.**



Over 15,000 students received reading and math support via Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²).



The number of graduates who entered a postsecondary institution **increased by 3% in 2018 to 58%.**



The **79.1% graduation rate** in 2018 keeps Shelby County Schools **on track** for its 2025 goal of 90%.

PRE-K WAS OFFERED TO **5,500+ STUDENTS, 300 MORE** THAN 2017.

Source: Seeding Success

// Implementing the StriveTogether Theory of Action™

Based on lessons learned through partnerships in its early years, the StriveTogether Theory of Action™ is centered around the themes and practices that emerged as critical to children's success.

The theory of action is a collective impact framework that operates with four simple principles.



1. Engage the community

Seeding Success has found that the most influential voice to spark change belongs to the community. In its strategic planning work, the organization has prioritized interviewing families and students impacted by the systems.

Most recently, Seeding Success put together a plan to address Memphis' "disconnection" rate among 16- to 24-year-olds — the highest in the nation. The U.S. average for disconnected youth, or youth who are not in school or working, is 13.8%. Memphis leads the country with a rate of 21.6%. The policy recommendations in the plan were built directly on firsthand accounts from young Memphis residents. Seeding Success took it a step further, supporting the youth in giving testimony directly to the mayor and other elected officials.

The community's voice made it virtually impossible for leaders not to commit to the plan. Despite all of the barriers the youth had faced in life, they still sought an opportunity to succeed.

Other community engagement work includes addressing chronic absenteeism, which included working with the Memphis Grizzlies on a robocall campaign and implementing the First 8 plan.

"One of the most important factors in engaging the community is building trust," said Sturgis. "We're not here to try and take over or cause unintended consequences. We're here to help connect the dots."



2. Advance equity

At the root of the opportunity gap is inequity. And although many systems are working to

change outcomes for children with the greatest needs, whether programmatically or with funding, Seeding Success understands that these measures will not be successful without addressing the reasons behind the inequity.

Instead of thinking about how to improve pre-K programs to ensure that students of color and students from low-income households are achieving more, Seeding Success tries to identify the things that need to be in place to interrupt racial inequality. The idea of equity, according to Sturgis, is not just something to incorporate into programs; it must be the central design principle if Seeding Success' work is to succeed.

For Seeding Success, advancing equity has been a broad conversation — one that examines access to support and programs, the quality of transportation and housing, and even cultural competency of adults serving students in and out of schools. Seeding Success is currently developing its first diversity, equity and inclusion plan.



3. Develop a culture of continuous improvement

One of the things that strengthens StriveTogether's approach is its support of communities to define success and tools like its collaborative improvement methodology to get results.

For Seeding Success, it's about the community changing its culture. Data and accountability are at the forefront of that culture change — and, ultimately, positive outcomes for children. Seeding Success has developed scalable training that allows the organization to train partners in using homegrown data. In the spirit of continuous improvement, Seeding Success has reviewed the

training each year and created iterations depending on what skills are necessary to improve outcomes and build community capacity.

4. Leverage existing assets

Seeding Success' entire body of work has been built on the precept of identifying existing assets and turning them into something greater.

The organization didn't start with much money, but Seeding Success knew that collaboration would bring better results. It began by supporting the existing infrastructure to improve practices and outcomes. Only recently has it benefited from new resources.

Seeding Success has partnered with a large array of out-of-school time programs and in 2015 began working with six existing providers to explore ways to align to reduce summer learning loss. That year, leveraging existing entities, the program reached 300 students. Building on that success, the school system then began to participate, and the program grew exponentially, most recently serving around 15,000 students. Partner data shows that participating students are less likely to lose prior year English and language arts learning. And, this school year, the district is in talks to provide similar opportunities during spring break, fall break and half-days.



Children work on practical life skills in a First 8 Memphis funded pre-K classroom.

StriveTogether Theory of Action™



// Achieving Systems Transformation

For Seeding Success, learning is a vital part of achieving long-term success.

“At Seeding Success, we have an a-ha moment every day. But one of the biggest was our realization that inspiring change was not quite as simple as getting the data and showing people how bad it was. We tried it, and we thought people would respond immediately. It didn’t work,” Sturgis said.

student achievement. This includes knowing how often children go to school, the types of supports they are receiving and how prepared students are after preschool.

With data, Seeding Success can identify the barriers to achievement and build the capacity of partners to understand and work to overcome them. That often means shifting resources. Recently, Seeding Success approached the Housing Authority to

Seeding Success has built this data system to provide information so the community can understand what’s happening and allocate resources accordingly.

It became clear that systems change was only possible when those working on the ground were able to handle the work. For Seeding Success, that means holding trainings, awarding grants and giving itself and others the space to make mistakes.

But what has been fundamental in achieving results has been Seeding Success’ use of data.

“People are out in the sector using data and information to drive how resources flow and how programs interact, and that’s the big pivot that’s happening in Memphis. This is helping to align public and private resources to the right things for kids and families,” Groth said. “Seeding Success has built this data system to provide information so the community can understand what’s happening and allocate resources accordingly.”

Data is the foundation of every initiative that Seeding Success has undertaken. It underpins the success of First 8, it led to policy change for disconnected youth — and now, it is helping change realities for Memphis students. Seeding Success is responsible for holding student data at the intersection of schools and partners and, as a result, it can use the data to understand factors influencing

explore the effect of evictions and other housing issues on school success. Housing insecurity can have a drastic impact on attendance and overall achievement. As a result of the partnership between the organization and the agency, there is an opportunity to shift policy and funding in a powerful way to provide more support to children and families.

Thanks to the work that Seeding Success has done, the power of data is clear and the roles within nonprofit organizations have fundamentally changed. Data fellows at partner organizations, initially provided by Seeding Success, were kept beyond the anticipated end date because their contributions were undeniable, and nonprofits are now searching for employees with a competency in data.

“We’re fortunate to work with the nonprofits, agencies and people who really care about children in Memphis. Having a strong national support partner in StriveTogether has really enabled us to accelerate our progress and strengthen our approach. Seeding Success has jumped at the opportunities that StriveTogether offers, and in turn, we’ve become leaders,” Sturgis said.

// On the Horizon

Seeding Success is continuing to take what it's learned, leverage the partnerships it's built and take ambitious pathways toward improving youth outcomes. One major step forward has been its work to discover ways in which collaboration between housing and education partners can advance economic mobility. The initiative, driven by a partnership between Enterprise Community Partners and StriveTogether, has paired Seeding Success with the Memphis Housing Authority and Urban Strategies to explore the ways a student's home environment impacts academic success.

An analysis of Seeding Success' data on housing costs, housing challenges, student mobility and housing subsidies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development led to community-wide discussions about student opportunities. Not only was housing instability shown to reduce vocabulary, produce lower test scores and impact graduation and employment, but Memphis' residential segregation is leading to a pronounced racial wealth gap and decreased public revenue.

Together, to address these barriers, the collaborative is in the midst of creating an integrated education and housing strategy that promotes housing stability; improves education-related outcomes for families facing housing instability; and establishes a replicable framework for the coordination of services and resources between housing agencies and early childhood, K-12 and higher education providers. The strategy is currently in development.

Another program in its early stages is currently exploring the impact of school nurses on attendance rates. In recent years, 36% of Memphis' low-income students have been chronically absent, or missing more than 18 days in a 180-day school year — and health is a significant barrier to attendance. Demographically, students of color are nearly twice as likely to be chronically absent than white students are, and youth from low-income households struggle with access to healthy foods and routine health check-ups, leading to higher rates of chronic illness. Chronic



Colleen Maleski and Colin Groth of StriveTogether work side-by-side with Mark Sturgis in Memphis.

absenteeism has been shown to ultimately lead to poverty, unemployment, incarceration and poor health outcomes in adulthood.

With Seeding Success as the data partner, the two-year pilot was created in collaboration with Shelby County Schools, Le Bonheur Children's Hospital and the Urban Child Institute. The initiative, which places school nurses in five Memphis schools with high absentee rates, has seen promising success since its inception at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year.

The reason it works is simple. Attendance is often based on a student's health, but income gaps in cities like Memphis result in a disparity in access to health care. School nurses don't require health insurance and can monitor such chronic conditions as asthma, seizure disorder and sickle cell anemia that can prevent regular attendance from affected students. As a result, 93% of the students treated by the school nurse are able to return to class. Even students who are in generally satisfactory health benefit from the nurses, who administer hearing, vision and blood pressure screenings and keep records on students' vaccines and physical exams. Currently, Seeding Success and its partners are tracking program data for the pilot's long-term impact.

ABOUT STRIVETOGETHER

StriveTogether partners with nearly 70 communities across the country, providing coaching, resources and rigorous approaches to create opportunities and close gaps in education, housing and so much more. Together, the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network impacts the lives of more than 13 million youth — including nearly nine million children of color.



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