

Network Engagement

“More now than ever, I’m grateful to be part of a community working together to support children who will be inheriting our country and its future, in addition to helping them make sense of the world today. Reimagine Learning has pushed us all to ask ourselves if we’re doing enough to support ALL kids. With equity at the forefront of our minds, Reimagine Learning has been an ideal space to challenge our organizations to be leaders as we pave the way forward.”

— Ellen Moir, Founder of New Teacher Center

In the early days, Reimagine Learning regularly brought together the founding group of 32 funders, grantee-partners, and other experts to solidify a collective vision and purpose for Reimagine Learning. Our conversations were captivating, but were bound by the voices and organizations represented in the room. We both experienced interest from others who wanted to be in the room and realized the value of expanding the conversation and community to include those who represented different parts of the education ecosystem and had expertise in a wider range of topics, from designing trauma-sensitive schools to community organizing. In particular, we recognized the need to engage more people representing the two parts of the education ecosystem we hoped to bridge: general education innovators and special education innovators.

While it was powerful for us to fund and support individual organizations, we knew that the most powerful way for leaders to become curious, change their mindsets, make commitments, and build capacity to support diverse learners would be from engaging with each other. We wanted to create the conditions that would enable a diverse community of education leaders to align around shared values

and goals, despite their different areas of focus. We saw this as the first step to inspiring broader mindset shifts around the promise and potential of all students, and inspiring culture change in schools oriented around creating learning environments that enable that potential to flourish. If we could build a network of champions who were starting to change their own mindsets on learning and how schools need to be designed to better support it, then they could then help change practices within their own organization and adapt the way they relate to the broader field, opening up opportunities for new collaborations and partnerships.

Over six years, Reimagine Learning built and engaged a cross-sector network of K-12 education leaders to share insights, generate ideas, and collaborate through in-person convenings, virtual learning opportunities, and network communications. Aligned by a shared commitment to Reimagine Learning's vision and three core beliefs, the network grew into a diverse network made up of more than 700 social entrepreneurs, funders, policy-influencers, practitioners, and thought leaders. These leaders represent over 200 organizations leading innovative work across the country to advance social and emotional learning, student-centered learning, learner agency, project-based learning, competency-based assessments, and family/community engagement, while also maintaining a steadfast focus on serving the diverse needs of underserved students.

Impact

CONVENING ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Reimagine Learning gathered network members at 13 cross-sector convenings to build relationships and connections, share knowledge and best practices, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

SPURRING COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

300+ formal partnerships between network organizations were formed, with 31% of survey respondents reporting formal collaborations with other organizations in the network. For example, Eye to Eye, a mentoring program for the 1 in 5 students with learning differences, piloted their program in City Year's Compass Academy, a school designed around diverse learners, and one other City Year school.

CREATING FUNDING CONNECTIONS

Over a third of network survey respondents connected with potential funders through Reimagine Learning and, of those, almost two-thirds reported new funding as a result. Over \$30M in new funding,

outside of Reimagine Learning's own grantmaking, was directed to network organizations from relationships created within the network. These relationships were often fostered at network convenings, which network members identified as the most beneficial offering of the Reimagine Learning network.

“The most valuable part of this network has been the connections that it allows people to make across different organizations that have related goals. They're not just surface level connections; they're deep connections where we're able to support, expand, and build on each other's work in ways that allows us to have a bigger and deeper impact.”

— Gabrielle Rappolt-Schlichtmann, EdTogether

Lessons Learned

GROUND A NETWORK IN SHARED VALUES

Reimagine Learning's vision and three core values served as a strong connecting force for the network, in large part because they were co-created by the 32 original network members who represented the broader ecosystem we sought to engage.

NETWORK CHAMPIONS HELP FUEL NETWORK GROWTH

This vested, committed group representing both funders and grantees of Reimagine Learning served as a nucleus that attracted and engaged a broader network that included thought leaders, policymakers, and others in the education space over time. There were concentric circles of the network that grew organically out of this nucleus: a circle of 100+ “fellow travelers” fully committed to the Reimagine Learning mission and a broader circle of 600+ “visitors” who made up a porous boundary of people who came in and out of Reimagine Learning's work based on their overlapping interests. We sought to create distributed power by having information move both from the broader group in and from the core group out and consciously sought to increase the diversity of network members along a number of different verticals.

EXPLICITLY NAME THE STRATEGY BEHIND ENGAGING THE NETWORK

As a backbone organization facilitating a network, it is valuable to be explicit about applying an

adaptive leadership framework, which is centered on individually and collectively taking on a gradual but meaningful process of change. The Reimagine Learning team was intentional in our efforts to create a learning space that had an optimal level of pressure and a holding container so that pressure would not only create discomfort, but would push to open thinking, challenging conversations, and ultimately changed beliefs, behaviors, and forward progress.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS NEEDS TO BE INTENTIONAL

Creating the conditions for partnership to flourish takes time and intentionality. Reimagine Learning created space for CEOs and staff from network organizations to meet and engage in 1:1, small group, and large group settings, creating and conditions for conversations about shared interests and activities to take place. We also introduced trainings on best practices on creating and managing partnerships and gradually facilitated direct conversations between network members when we saw opportunities for organizations to collaborate.