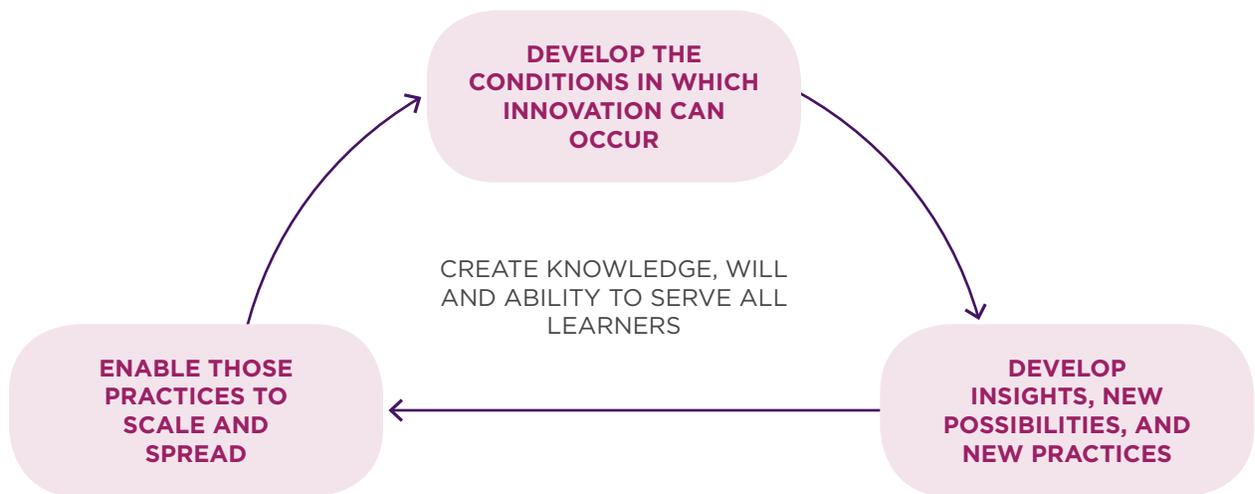


REIMAGINE LEARNING IMPACT AND LESSONS LEARNED

Regional Initiatives

While most of Reimagine Learning's efforts were focused on supporting and aligning an ecosystem of education nonprofit leaders and funders, we also recognized the value of establishing a set of proof points that manifested our theory of change on the ground in school districts in a specific region. This created a reciprocal feedback loop that enabled us to pressure test our ideas and determine what lessons we might need to bring back to our broader field-level work. Reimagine Learning took an adaptive approach to these regional initiatives, as school districts are complex public systems with many interdependent parts. Beginning with the premise that effective district leaders know what they need, we worked with a set of Superintendents in Essex County, Massachusetts to identify the "sweet spot" where their district needs aligned with our capacities and interests. Together we designed three demonstration projects that represent each arm of our theory of change for how transformative change happens:



DEVELOP THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH INNOVATION CAN OCCUR

Reimagine Learning facilitated a strategic planning process for Salem Public Schools to demonstrate how to develop the conditions for district-level innovation. At the beginning of this project, the school district was

in Level 4 status—meaning that it was a step away from state takeover—and the new superintendent was eager to hit the reset button and create meaningful change. We advised the school district to engage in a community-driven strategic planning process because people support what they help to create. To this end, we made a conscious decision to stay behind the scenes and ensure that there were many opportunities for school leaders, teachers, and community members to engage, including participating in the six work teams driving the planning process, serving as members of the strategic planning steering committee, attending the three Citywide Conversations about the strategic planning process, and participating in focus groups and surveys. The Salem Public Schools’ 2017-2022 strategic plan was ratified unanimously by the School Committee in May 2017, and is being used to guide the district’s future direction. In 2017 and 2018, we continued our support of Salem Public Schools as the district began to implement the strategic plan.

DEVELOP INSIGHTS, NEW POSSIBILITIES, AND NEW PRACTICES

After a 2015 Harvard study showed that Lawrence, Massachusetts’ Acceleration Academies—weeklong intensive and hands-on learning for students in grades 3-12 led by exceptional teachers during the February and April school vacations—were a key factor in the district’s turnaround, then-Superintendent Jeffrey Riley asked the Reimagine Learning team to conduct a qualitative study and create a codification of the Academies in order to share lessons learned.

In partnership with Lawrence Public Schools, we created [The Golden Ticket](#), a multimedia case study of the Acceleration Academies that can be utilized by educators, philanthropists, and policymakers to implement the Academies in other districts.

ENABLE THOSE PRACTICES TO SCALE AND SPREAD

Throughout the course of our regional impact work, we made it a priority to share lessons learned with the field. At Reimagine Learning’s 2017 convening, we assembled a panel consisting of Margarita Ruiz, superintendent of Salem Public Schools; Jeffrey Riley, then-superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools; and Tracy Sawicki, executive director of the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, to share lessons learned about how district leaders and the social sector can effectively partner to drive transformational change in school districts. We also created the [Educator’s Guide to Community-Engaged Strategic Planning](#)—a

BY THE NUMBERS

SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS | *An Educator’s Guide to Community-Engaged Strategic Planning*

- We engaged approximately 70 community members and district staff on 6 strategic planning work teams on a Strategic Planning Steering Committee
- We co-facilitated 3 Citywide Conversations attended by up to 200 community members
- We traveled to Salem 50+ times to meet with the work teams and Steering Committee, School Committee, the superintendent, and the District Leadership Team

LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS | *The Golden Ticket*

We conducted:

- Video interviews with ~40 teachers, principals, and central office employees
- ~27 videotaped classroom sessions and focus groups, and
- Surveys of 238 teachers, 38 administrators, and 350 students

codification of the steps and tools we used in our strategic planning process with Salem Public Schools—and officially launched it at SXSW EDU 2018. In 2018, we built on the momentum we developed within Essex County and partnered with the [Center for Collaborative Education](#) to bring together six districts in the region to form the Essex County Learning Community (ECLC). Over eight months, district lead teams with seven representatives each met monthly to learn from one another and create plans to improve the ways in which their districts serve students with diverse learning needs. Three cross-district teacher topical groups—focused on high quality differentiated supports for all students in academics, social-emotional learning, and cultural competence and proficiency—also met monthly to inform the work of the district lead teams. Three cross-district teacher topical groups—focused on high quality differentiated supports for all students in academics, social-emotional learning, and cultural competence and proficiency—also met monthly to inform the work of the district lead teams. We enlisted eight thought leaders and practitioners from the Reimagine Learning network to provide their deep expertise to the ECLC—whether by teaching at the monthly meetings or offering on-site or remote coaching to the districts.

BY THE NUMBERS

ESSEX COUNTY LEARNING COMMUNITY

In partnership with the Center for Collaborative Education, we held:

- 5 district lead team meetings
- 4 cross-district topical teacher group meetings
- A 2-day Summer Institute for the six districts
- A Showcase of Learning for district teams to present their action plans to one another and special invited guests, including the Massachusetts Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Jeffery C. Riley

Impact

SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In facilitating a community-engaged strategic planning process, we helped Salem see that school and community are inextricably linked and that the future of the city depends in large part on how well its young people are educated. We also helped the district establish its vision and create the enabling conditions for short and long-term change. Salem Public Schools' strategic plan now guides the direction of the school district and its ~3,700 students, 48.2% of whom are economically disadvantaged¹ and 23.6% of whom have disabilities. Our presence in Salem also enabled us to monitor needs and then

¹ The “economically disadvantaged” statistic is calculated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education based on a student’s participation in one or more of the following state-administered programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); the Transitional Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC); the Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) foster care program; and MassHealth (Medicaid). For more information, please visit <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>.

connect organizations in the Reimagine Learning network with different schools and departments in the district. For example, we introduced Salem Public Schools to one of our portfolio organizations, [City Connects](#), which is now working with SPS to provide a set of personalized in-school and out-of-school resources designed to address students' holistic needs.

LAWRENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

[The Golden Ticket](#) shares important lessons on teaching and learning from the Lawrence Acceleration Academies for teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and students. In documenting and codifying this exemplary intervention that was responsible for much of the effects of the district turnaround, we helped embolden the Lawrence team to create a new nonprofit, the [Sontag Prize in Urban Education](#). In 2017 and 2018, we provided support to Sontag as it honed its theory of change and began operations. Sontag has used The Golden Ticket as a tool for recruitment of funders, district partners, and teachers. In 2018, Sontag's Acceleration Academies served 1,300 students in three school districts (Chelsea Public Schools, Lynn Public Schools, and Salem Public Schools), with 100% of these students coming from low-income families and 90% identifying as people of color.

ESSEX COUNTY LEARNING COMMUNITY (ECLC)

The formation of this network has enabled the six participating school districts—who collectively serve over 21,500 students, 32% of whom are economically disadvantaged and 21% have learning disabilities—to spread ideas for how to better serve diverse learners more widely. For example, these small districts realized that they could achieve economies of scale by sharing the costs of professional development. At the end of 2018, 74% of ECLC participants agreed that the learning community approach motivated them to do something different in their practice.

Lessons Learned

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS KEY

Before starting the strategic planning process in Salem, Reimagine Learning carefully built a relationship with Superintendent Margarita Ruiz over the course of eight months from our initial outreach to her to the approval of our project proposal by the School Committee. This long period of relationship building ensured that we had a strong foundation on which to build the planning process, and helped the Superintendent have a sense of trust that we would be effective stewards of the process.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES MUST BE ADAPTED FOR THE SPECIFIC LOCAL CONTEXT OF THE DISTRICT

There is no such thing as a cookie-cutter plan. Each plan must be informed by local context and need, driven by local community leaders, and aligned around the priorities of those most deeply affected. The solutions must also resonate with these constituents.

GENUINE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF ANY SCHOOL DISTRICT CHANGE PROCESS

For change to stick in schools, everyone in the community needs to be at the decision-making table—including parents, teachers, district leaders, community members, students, business leaders, cultural and faith leaders, and policymakers. So much more can be accomplished when relationships between and among people and within and across stakeholder groups are continually strengthened. When the community is the primary owner and driver of the process, change is much more likely to be sustained over the long term.

BUILD ON ASSETS

Oftentimes, in trying to improve an organization, it is natural to focus on what is not working. We adopted a stance of “appreciative inquiry” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) by recognizing the existing “bright spots”—those aspects of the school district that are valued by internal stakeholders and produce value for the external stakeholders. Change can often be accelerated when these bright spots are identified and amplified, with an eye toward replication or the application of larger lessons learned.

CAPTURING AND SHARING LESSONS LEARNED IS ESSENTIAL

Too often, valuable insights and lessons learned are lost in the shuffle because they are not documented and codified. School leaders often do not have the time in their day to do the kind of reflection that yields effective documentation. This is an important contribution that external partners are ideally suited to make.