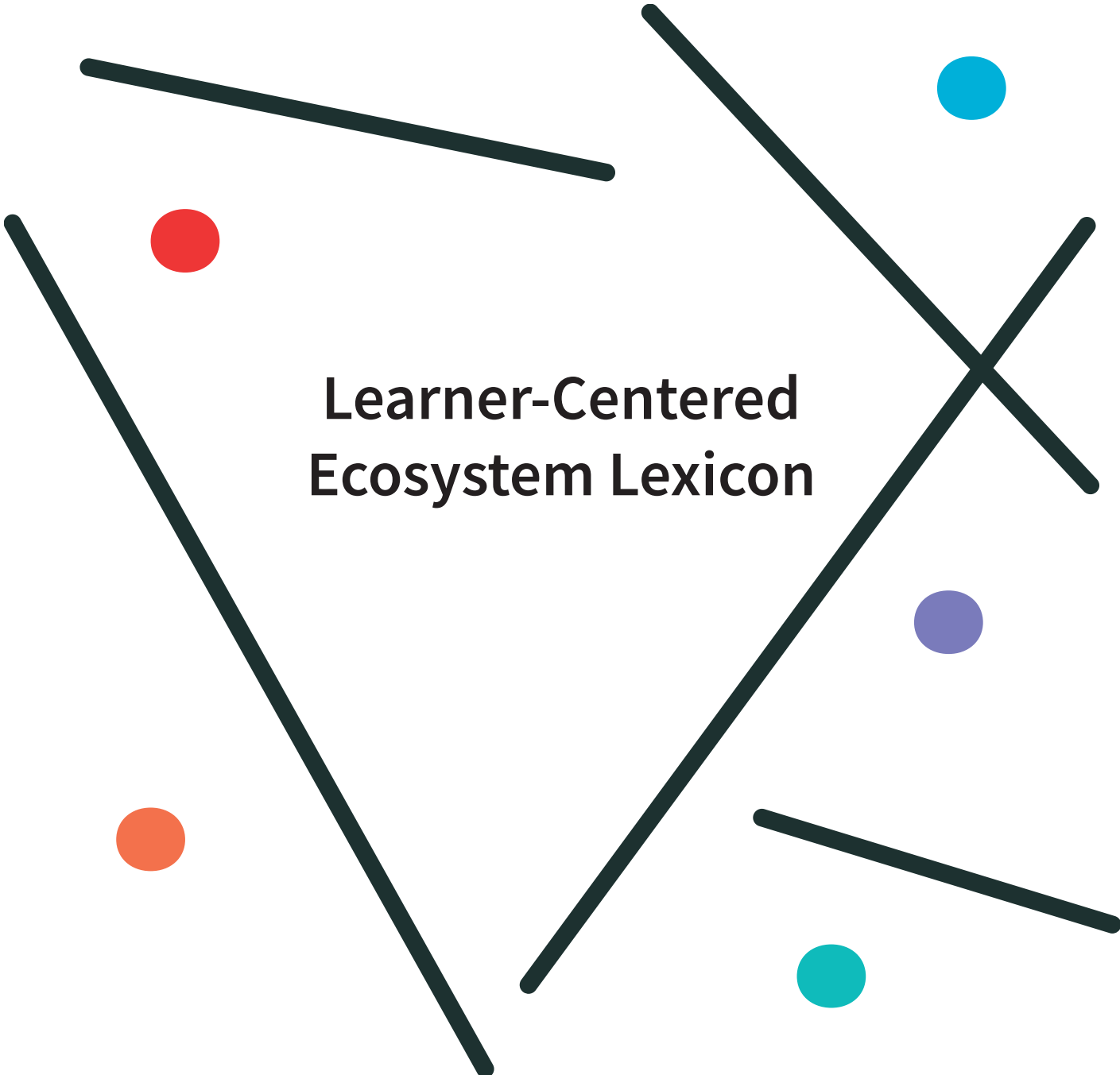


Learners at the center.



**Learner-Centered
Ecosystem Lexicon**



INTRODUCTION

Leaders across the country are envisioning a future for an equitable education system that honors the uniqueness of each child, family, and community; values each child's life goals and contexts; and prepares them to provide for themselves and their families.

This future will require a public education system aimed at a fundamentally different purpose than the current system was ever designed to serve: to support each and every child to discover who they are, their gifts, and how to contribute meaningfully to their community and the world. Pursuing this purpose will further require a transformed education system that organizes, supports, and credentials learning in fundamentally different ways—creating learner-centered ecosystems of learning that interweave the assets, experiences, and wisdom of local communities and the virtual world to support the growth and development of children.

Those with this shared vision are operating in a paradigm distinct from the current one in education; they are advancing a “learner-centered paradigm for education” as laid out in A Transformational Vision for Education in the US:

The learner-centered paradigm for learning functions like a pair of lenses that offers a new way to look at, think about, talk about, and act on education. It constitutes a shift of perspective that places every learner at its center, structures the system to build appropriate supports around them, and acknowledges the need to adapt and alter to meet the needs of all children. The learner-centered paradigm changes our very view of learners themselves. Learners are seen and known as wondrous, curious individuals with vast capabilities and limitless potential. This paradigm recognizes that learning is a lifelong pursuit and that our natural excitement and eagerness to discover and learn should be fostered throughout our lives, particularly in our earliest years. Thus, in this paradigm, learners are active participants in their learning as they gradually become owners of it, and learning itself is seen as an engaging and exciting process. Each child's interests, passions, dreams, skills, and needs shape their learning experience and drive the commitments and actions of the adults and communities supporting them.

(“A Transformational Vision for Education in the US” (2015). Education Reimagined. page 5)

Operating in this paradigm, these learner-centered leaders constitute a movement committed to a new future for learning and education in the United States.

The work this movement is undertaking is that of transforming a major American institution such that it can equitably and powerfully serve each and every child and young person in this country. Seeing beyond the constraints that perpetuate the current education system's ways of operating, we can imagine a public education system that serves as the background for vibrant, community-embedded ecosystems of learning. These ecosystems embody the interconnectedness of natural ecosystems and leverage the community and world as the playgrounds for learning. In doing so, they offer the opportunity to not only disrupt levels of economic and social isolation that can reinforce inequities across communities but also intentionally support youth in building the kind of social capital that correlates with upward mobility and thriving communities. These ecosystems are grounded in relationship, relevance, and a commitment to serving each unique child in context of their life aspirations, family, and community.

Realizing this future requires that we directly and intentionally address the inequities and

biases that pervade our society from systemic, institutional, and individual lenses. Only when social inequity and racism are directly confronted in the work of inventing and bringing to life a new public system of education will the learner-centered movement fulfill its vision and commitment to truly serving each and every child.

Accordingly, leaders in the learner-centered movement hold as central the commitment to directly mitigate and, where possible, disrupt the barriers and social inequities that persist as determining factors of access, opportunity, and life success; and to continually confront and eliminate racism at every level within education. They are engaged collectively in the ongoing effort to ensure the education system itself does not perpetuate racial or other inequities, to seek to remedy the disadvantages stemming from past inequities within it, and to mitigate against those inequities resulting from broader social conditions.

If this work is done with integrity and fidelity, a transformed learner-centered public education system offers the possibility of a breakthrough in creating an inclusive and just society beyond what could be possible from iterations on the current design of education.

Why a Lexicon?

To support the work of realizing the promise of an equitable, learner-centered education system that can support dynamic ecosystems of learning, this technical document seeks to clarify key terms of the learner-centered education movement, as found in A Transformational Vision for Education in the US, and in practice.

Its purpose is to enable a shared language such that those supporting the growth and development of children through a learner-centered approach, as well as those creating new systems and structures that can enable that approach's spread, can communicate and share learnings across various communities, disciplines, and perspectives. By carefully and intentionally distinguishing what is meant by each term, this lexicon creates a “Rosetta Stone” for translating the myriad of conversations going on across the nation and around the world.

Moreover, it is a living document that is updated and adjusted over time to reflect the current conversation in the learner-centered space, as informed by practitioners, systems experts, and advocates working in communities across the country.

What follows is a term-by-term discussion that begins with “Learner-Centered Ecosystem” and follows with “Learning Journey,” as a learner-centered ecosystem is designed to support and nurture the unique learning journeys of all the children it serves. The document continues with four terms key to reconstructing our public education system to operate as an interwoven ecosystem that can equitably serve each child and adapt to the unique contexts of its community:

- **Home Base**
- **Learning Hub**
- **Field Site**
- **Shared Services**

What follows is not a rigid blueprint or set of “how-to” specifications. Rather than providing definitions that describe “typical” or “average”—or even “ideal”—examples of each term, what follows are distinctions that clarify the full domain of possible examples represented by each term.

Lastly, in addition to the terms distinguished in this Learner-Centered Ecosystem Lexicon, Education Reimagined offers a companion lexicon that distinguishes key terms associated with the learner-centered education paradigm for education—A Practitioner’s Lexicon.

DISTINGUISHING “LEARNER-CENTERED ECOSYSTEM”

In Learner-Centered Education, the aim is to equitably nurture and support the development of whole human beings within caring communities where each and every learner is known, accepted for who they are, and supported to learn and thrive now and into the future. Education itself is seen as a partnership amongst young learners, their peers, and adults. Emphasis is placed on developing each learner’s own agency—growing their capacity to act independently and make meaningful choices regarding their learning and their contributions to their families, their communities, and the world.

A Learner-Centered Ecosystem is an adaptive, networked structure for equitably providing Learner-Centered Education to the young people of a community.

What do we mean by a “Learner-Centered Ecosystem”?

Learner-Centered Ecosystems are a new way to organize, support, and credential learning, in contrast to conventional education systems’ centralized management; control of standardized curriculum delivery; and centralized, standardized assessment and credentialing mechanisms. In this discussion, we are assuming that the Learner-Centered Ecosystem is the public education system—publicly accountable, utilizing public funding, and open to all members of the public.

Learner-Centered Ecosystems are designed to enable and support the Learning Journeys of every child, in the context of other learners pursuing their own unique Learning Journeys. These Learning Journeys begin by providing a foundation for holistic growth in a safe, nurturing environment where learners are encouraged to explore and discover, while building the full range of competencies for human development. Learning Journeys are increasingly created by the learner themselves—in partnership with supportive adults and peers—and consist of learning experiences that are tailored to the learner’s emerging interests, gifts, needs, goals, and aspirations. As a learner creates and progresses through their Learning Journey, they discover what they need to fulfill their learning goals and take increasing responsibility and ownership for setting those learning goals and choosing appropriate learning experiences.

To do this, the Learner-Centered Ecosystem structure connects designated spaces of learning and learning experiences throughout the community with a set of shared services designed to bring Ecosystem participants together in a nurturing learning community. By distributing learning throughout the entire community, such Ecosystems are able to tap into a wide diversity of societal, community, and employer opportunities; to offer far more variety of learning experiences and supports than a single school or program can offer; to enable meaningful learning through engagement with authentic, real-world challenges and opportunities; and to have young people’s learning be enlivening for the whole community.

A Learner-Centered Ecosystem is a living system in that it is inherently adaptive, responsive, resilient, and regenerative. This is in contrast to a system built on hierarchy, compliance, and standardization. Like all living systems, a Learner-Centered Ecosystem welcomes the constant surprise that comes from variety and difference, while also striving for reliability in its own functioning. A Learner-Centered Ecosystem is initially built with the creative use of assets already present in a community. Then, the Ecosystem adds, prunes, and adapts learning opportunities in response to the needs and aspirations of the learners engaged with it. At the same time, the diversity of spaces, learning professionals, and engaged members of the community ensures resilience and sustainability when challenges arise.

It is also a system that holds itself accountable to the community and public, creating and supporting a dynamic means through which collective learning and transparent decision-making occur to ensure equitable access, equitable and effective use of resources, a high quality of learning experience and learning outcomes, and the safety of all Ecosystem participants.

Compared to conventional systems, the Ecosystem structure provides the opportunity to more fully and equitably address the unique needs of every single learner in a community and to have their learning be a contribution to family, community, and society. For Ecosystem participants, striving for equity entails supporting each and every child to have what they need to powerfully pursue, complete, and obtain credit for their Learning Journey—compensating for unfair advantages and disadvantages, including those caused by the cumulative impact of historically persistent inequities. This includes support that is dually adaptive to each learner’s developmental, evolving needs and done in the context of other young people navigating their own unique Learning Journeys, generating shared learning, inclusivity, and community. An Ecosystem that is operating equitably further provides the means for every child to capture and share their learning outcomes, at every stage of their Learning Journeys, in ways that clearly communicate those outcomes to relevant stakeholders like employers, higher education institutions, governing bodies, and to educators, parents, and the learners themselves.

What does a Learner-Centered Ecosystem Look Like?

Learner-Centered Ecosystems are based in a learner’s local community with an always-expanding network of individuals and organizations from across the community available to them. Rather than learners being separated from the rest of the community, they are integrated. Their learning becomes a matter of exploring and engaging with the world in safe, developmentally appropriate ways, rather than merely studying it at a distance in isolated buildings. The opportunity is always present for the community to contribute to young learners and for young learners to contribute to the community.

More specifically, Learner-Centered Ecosystems are composed of a network of welcoming, developmentally appropriate learning environments, in-person and virtual, in which learners can plan and carry out their Learning Journeys. These learning environments include specially constructed environments, as well as many of the assets already present in a community such as local libraries, museums, parks, businesses, school buildings, colleges, and social service agencies. Learners are encouraged to take the initiative to craft Learning Journeys that include yet-to-be-networked learning environments within their communities, as well as new learning experiences available beyond the boundaries of their Ecosystem. The Ecosystem is structured to ensure that the boundaries of the physical Ecosystem do not create an arbitrary barrier to the learners’ growth and development.

There are three basic categories of autonomous and interdependent learning environments within a Learner-Centered Ecosystem:

1. **Home Bases** provide a safe space where a young learner’s Learning Journey is planned and nurtured over time and where the learner experiences belonging in a consistent group of peers and adult advisors.
2. **Learning Hubs** provide developmentally appropriate, dedicated spaces for learners to develop their competencies, pursue their interests, and strengthen their agency in the matter of their learning and their lives.
3. **Field Sites** are commercial, public, or not-for-profit organizations that have agreed to partner with the Ecosystem to host one or more young learners for a fixed period of time. Young learners participate in fulfilling the host organization’s goals by establishing a project or area of work that simultaneously addresses a need of the Field Site and one or more of the learner’s learning goals.

These three kinds of learning environments may be co-located. For learners in the earliest stages of development, in particular, co-location of a Home Base and Learning Hub provides a consistent, safe, and nurturing environment for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Likewise, as they co-create their Learning Journey, learners in a Learner-Centered Ecosystem will also engage in learning experiences beyond the Learning Hubs, Field Sites, and Home Bases, leveraging the full assets of their community and the virtual world.

Ecosystems are staffed and supported by a broad diversity of human talent, including professional educators, with diversified and specialized roles to meet the needs of the Ecosystem. All of these professionals operate with a high degree of autonomy, consistent with the policies and values of the Ecosystem, to ensure all learners are engaged and have access to what they need to succeed. To enable this autonomy, these professionals are supported by shared practitioner resources and learning communities where they can learn from each other, tackle challenges together, and develop their professional competencies.

An Ecosystem is connected and supported by a set of Shared Services, whose reach defines the boundaries of the Ecosystem. Each community creates and organizes an appropriate set of Shared Services that is a fit for the needs of their learners and of the rest of the Ecosystem, as well as being informed by local, state or tribal, and Federal requirements. In many circumstances, a Shared Service will be contracted through local businesses, not-for-profits, and social service agencies. When identifying the Shared Services needed for an Ecosystem, a community may consider categories such as: Transportation Services, Technology Services, Safety, Indoor & Outdoor Facility Planning, Maintenance Services, Information, Resource Mapping & Library Services, Human Resource, Financial & Legal Services, Health, Well Being, Food Services, Competency Credentialing & Transcript/Portfolio Services, Communication, Marketing & Development Services, and Adult Credentialing & Communities of Practice Services.

Learner-Centered Ecosystems make possible a new kind of relationship between a community and its education system. This new relationship is one of engagement, partnership, and reciprocity. Learners are nurtured and supported to develop the capacity to pursue their personal learning goals, while deepening their relationship to and regard for their community. At the same time, learners make real contributions to the organizations and people within their community. Youth benefit from the wisdom, experience, and expertise of the community, the community benefits from youthful energy, enthusiasm, and ingenuity. A Learner-Centered Ecosystem provides the opportunity for a deeper sense of shared belonging and purpose to emerge within a community.

DISTINGUISHING “LEARNING JOURNEY”

We use the term “Learning Journey” to refer to the myriad learning experiences that foster a person’s growth and development throughout their lives. The purpose of each of our Learning Journeys is to continually discover who we are, to cultivate our unique gifts, and to find our own ways to contribute those gifts meaningfully to each other and the world. In this discussion, we will focus on the phase of life often referred to today as “early childhood through secondary education.” And, while every community will establish learner outcomes in accordance with state, tribal, and/or Federal guidelines (sometimes called “portraits of a learner or of a graduate”), Learner-Centered Ecosystems are structured to acknowledge that everyone is on their own learning journey, and all of our learning journeys are interrelated.

One’s Learning Journey seldom moves along a singular, predictable path. Rather, it unfolds over time as one grows, develops, experiences new things, and pursues aspirations. One learning experience leads to another in an emergent and responsive way. As they emerge, these individual learning experiences are planned and contextualized to ensure each child is supported to pursue and achieve their learning goals and that the child receives the appropriate credential(s) for them. It is as if each learning experience is a thread of learning that when intentionally woven together becomes the ever-growing tapestry of a Learning Journey. The threads of this tapestry are continually created every time a learner exercises their innate capacity to wonder, discover, and make sense of the world around them.

How are Learning Journeys designed, nurtured, and sustained in a Learner-Centered Ecosystem?

In a Learner-Centered Ecosystem, the weaving together of these threads of learning is accomplished through an iterative planning methodology: creating learning goals to contextualize experiences, planning learning experiences, gathering and reviewing feedback, demonstrating learning to oneself and others, achieving relevant credentials, and explicitly reflecting both on what was learned and how that learning is relevant to one’s life and to the larger world. Whenever an experience is contextualized (or recontextualized) inside one’s learning goals, it becomes a part of one’s Learning Journey.

The Learning Journey for each child in a Learner-Centered Ecosystem develops over time beginning with the youngest learners—respecting each child’s pace, stage of development, and life context, while encouraging exploration, play, and creative expression. As each Learning Journey unfolds, they are organized, woven together, nurtured, and credentialed in a way that aligns with the key tenets of learner-centered education:

- Respecting and cultivating the learner’s agency with regard to their own learning and life;
- Ensuring that each learning experience is relevant, contextualized, and personalized;
- Socially-embedding each Learning Journey within a nurturing community of learners and adults, characterized by trusting, stable relationships, and including and valuing learner’s families as key stakeholders in their journeys;
- Opening the walls to leveraging myriad places and options for where, when, and with whom learning happens, unconstrained by a particular location or time of day; and
- Developing the learner’s capacity to interact with the world (competency building), rather than merely knowing about the world (knowledge building).

At appropriate moments throughout their Learning Journeys, learners seek and obtain credentials for their competency development when they demonstrate their learning to qualified adults within the Ecosystem or to organizations that maintain professional standards outside of the Ecosystem’s staff.

Ecosystems support young people and their advisors to plan and navigate their Learning Journeys and schedules with structures and technologies that allow them to know what options already exist within the Ecosystem, ensure cohesion and equity of access across varied learner's Journeys, and adapt experiences to the unique needs, goals, and stages of development of each child. In an Ecosystem, every time a child accesses a new learning experience, it is generative for the Ecosystem and added to the inventory of opportunities available to others.

To more formally share their Learning Journey with others, learners in Learner-Centered Ecosystems capture and create: (1) their story of learning and development over time, sometimes called a Learning Narrative; and (2) evidence of learning in the form of various learning artifacts and work products, as well as any earned certificates, badges, or credentials, sometimes called a Learning Portfolio. Learning Narratives, Learning Portfolios, and other similar mechanisms provide ways for the learner, those supporting the learner, and the Learner-Centered Ecosystem as a whole to be assured that each and every learner is progressing along a developmentally appropriate continuum, meeting planned learning objectives, and getting what they need to successfully pursue their Learning Journeys. In addition, Narratives and Portfolios serve as a formal record of learning which learners use to qualify for employment or for admission to other educational programs and institutions.

The intentional support of every child's unique Learning Journey, fostering a cohesive, inclusive approach that serves every child in the community, is unique to a Learner-Centered Ecosystem.

DISTINGUISHING “HOME BASE”

Every learner in a Learner-Centered Ecosystem has a Home Base—a safe place where they experience being known, loved, connected, and supported. Home Base is the most consistent, central place for the child and their family within the Ecosystem. It is the place in which the child’s learning journey is rooted, built, and grown and where they belong to and meet with a consistent group of peers and adult advisors. It is a place for self-discovery, self-care, and empowerment for each child as they are supported to develop into confident, self-managed people, able to operate and contribute in the context of community and society.

A Home Base is also a place that fosters relationship building and that encourages mutual support within a small learning community of diverse individuals. Home Bases aim to include meaningful diversity in both their young learners and the adults who are there to support them in order to ensure learners can engage with and benefit from the diverse lived experiences of others. This learning community celebrates together, shares learnings with one another, and witnesses and honors each other’s growth and development. Home Base is a place where learners support each other and prepare themselves to get the most from the whole Learner-Centered Ecosystem.

What role does a Home Base play in a learner’s Learning Journey?

Home Bases are created as spaces for meeting, learning, planning, and building community. In particular, a Home Base is where a learner meets with their Advisor and others to co-develop, plan, chart, and make choices about their Learning Journey. The Learner may also use their Home Base to meet with peers, do independent work, access learning resources, and/or access other community services.

A critical role the Home Base plays is to provide each learner with stability in the Ecosystem: a stable set of relationships with fellow young learners and a stable relationship with an Advisor (or Advisors) that lasts over time. An Advisor is a highly skilled professional who leads a Home Base by:

- Facilitating and nurturing the learners in the Home Base such that they form a small, inclusive learning community (this community is often referred to as an Advisory or Advisory Group);
- Forming one-on-one relationships with each learner and partnering with those learners as they plan and navigate their Learning Journeys; and
- Connecting each learner (and the learner’s family or caregiver(s)) with the rest of the Ecosystem.

Advisors support learners in developing more and more agency with regard to their own Learning Journey, while also ensuring that each learner gets what they need to succeed at every stage of their Learning Journey. They work closely with learners as they establish their personal learning goals—informed by relevant local, state, and/or tribal requirements; pursue those goals along their unique learning pathways; and build learning narratives and portfolios to capture and share learners’ growth. Advisors ensure that each learner is consistently exposed to new ideas, people, and interests; and that they are supported in self-advocating as they engage within the Ecosystem.

Advisors also support each learner to convene their stakeholders—who might include parents/guardians, family members, mentors, learning facilitators, and/or learning specialists—to discuss and support that learner’s progress over time.

Advisors further partner with all the young people in their Advisory and their families to ensure the success of the Home Base overall. In this way, Advisors serve as the stewards of the culture within the learning community, not just for and with the learners themselves but also

with their families and other related community partners.

As such, the Home Base is one important place where families and caregivers are meaningfully engaged with their child's developmental goal setting and journey, without requiring that families serve as navigators and coordinators. Families and caregivers can partner with the Advisor(s) to gain valuable insight about their child's development, contribute to goal setting and choice making, and facilitate desired connections to any service providers and support needed by the family and/or the learner. This intentional engagement of families and caregivers is particularly significant for learners at the earliest stages of development.

Where might a Home Base be located?

Home Bases may be co-located with other spaces of learning such as a Learning Hub or Field Site. While most often Home Bases are a physical location, when necessary, a learner's Home Base may be a virtual environment. And, while a Home Base can be in a private home, it is not the same as homeschooling because Home Bases are a vital part of a public education system and are open to other learners participating in the Ecosystem, not just to the children living in that home.

Likewise, a single Home Base can serve learners across all stages of development; or it may specialize in one or more specific stages of development. When Home Bases cover multiple developmental stages, it enables learners of different ages, levels of maturity, and stages of competency development to benefit from and contribute to each other. Depending on the number of learners at the Home Base and the needs of those learners, a Home Base may be led by one or more Advisors.

Learners at the earliest stages of development will likely spend a significant portion of their learning time with their Home Base learning community or a subset of that community at a similar developmental stage, whether that is in their physical Home Base or in other spaces of learning. As a learner matures, they will engage more and more independently with what is outside their Home Base.

A Home Base offers a safe, stable learning community where each Learner is known and welcomed as a whole person with a full range of unique interests, aspirations, characteristics, lived experiences, and background circumstances. Home Base is one key place within an Ecosystem where a learner experiences belonging, acceptance, friendship, and guidance.

DISTINGUISHING “LEARNING HUB”

Learning Hubs provide learners with an opportunity to be in community with peers who share a common interest or common learning goal. These hubs are places for discovery and immersion into something relevant to the learner’s Learning Journey. Learning Hubs provide spaces for learning practices that strengthen learner agency and encourage learners to discover and pursue their interests. Both adults and young learners in a Learning Hub create a learning community—they reflect on their learning together, demonstrate their learning to each other, and ensure that the learning is recognized and credentialed in ways that serve the learner’s development.

Where might a Learning Hub be located?

A Learning Hub is a space in the community designated specifically for learning and development. From maker spaces to studio spaces to outdoor spaces—Learning Hubs may look very different from one another. They may be specially created spaces; virtual spaces; or already existing, vetted spaces that offer or can be adapted to offer the necessary flexibility to host the kinds of learning that will be taking place there.

For example, a Learning Hub may be housed in such pre-existing spaces as: libraries, museums, and other civic spaces; theaters, concert halls, and other performance spaces; spaces that may only be in use for part of the week or part of the day such as houses of worship, restaurants, shopping facilities, and office buildings; school buildings, community colleges, and area universities; sports fields, gyms, health clubs, and other spaces with fitness facilities; YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, community centers, and other spaces where youth development activities already take place. To be a Learning Hub, these spaces opt in to be part of the network of places within a Learner-Centered Ecosystem.

In this way, Learning Hubs are distinct from other spaces in the community in that when they are being utilized by young learners in the Ecosystem, they intentionally create an environment for learning experiences aimed at competency development, utilize relevant Shared Services of the Ecosystem, and are staffed by at least one part-time or full-time adult who has been certified by the Ecosystem. As such, mechanisms are in place to ensure Learning Hubs are held accountable for their use of public dollars and that they provide equitable and reliable experiences for Ecosystem stakeholders.

What role does a Learning Hub play in a learner’s Learning Journey?

What is provided in a Learning Hub is determined based on a combination of factors, including the community’s agreed upon priorities, demand from learners based on their learning goals, and what accessible assets already exist in the community. In most Learning Hubs, there are some consistent, long-term offerings, as well as other offerings that are shorter term.

Learning Hubs house myriad kinds of learning activities that span the spectrum from exposure to exploration to deep learning. Experiences offered in a Learning Hub take into account the varied ways people learn and process information. In any one Learning Hub, you may see young people relaxing, working independently, participating in hands-on learning activities, video conferencing into a virtual opportunity, learning in a lecture or seminar, conducting research, exploring new concepts, being with friends, and engaging with others who share common interests.

A Learning Hub may be organized to serve particular developmental stages (e.g., early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood). A Learning Hub may also be organized around particular human literacies (e.g., arts, language, digital, financial,

quantitative reasoning, scientific methods, environmental, health and wellbeing, cultural and historical context); and/or around particular professional or civic interest areas.

What learners are doing at a Learning Hub is determined by their own learning goals, their areas of interest, the choices they've made about their Learning Journey, and the schedule they've co-created for themselves with their Advisor. The opportunity to gain exposure to new areas of interest and applicable state, tribal, and/or Federal competency requirements also factor into these choices. Given this, learners engaging in Learning Hubs, even those participating in the same activity, will each be pursuing their own unique learning goals.

For learners in their earliest stages of development, when the physical environment serves a particularly important role in healthy development, Learning Hubs are designed to create a nurturing and supportive environment where learners can engage and explore the physical world, practice motor skills, play, create, and build strong relationships. Learning Hubs organized around serving those in their earliest stages of development may also have the capacity to serve as a Home Base for those learners or be co-located with one or more Home Bases serving those learners.

Learning Hubs may be staffed and supported by a mix of professional educators and community members, bringing varied competencies and kinds of expertise that together, enable the Learning Hub to fulfill its purpose. Often, this is a combination of those who have expertise and professional experience in the process of learning and development, sometimes called a Learning Facilitator; and experts in the content being learned, sometimes called a Learning Specialist. Both competencies may be found in the same individual or may be fulfilled by a combination of individuals who partner together to support the young people in their Learning Hub. Learning Hubs often have opportunities for community members with relevant wisdom and/or expertise to contribute.

Learning Hub staff, volunteers, and learners work together to ensure that the environment is safe, inclusive, and supportive of the kinds of learning that will be taking place there and the kinds of communities of practice that may gather there. This may be fulfilled by a designated leader or set of leaders who are skilled at building a learning community and at connecting that learning community to the larger Ecosystem and to the larger community.

In summary, Learning Hubs serve as reliable, accessible spaces within the Ecosystem that are dedicated to providing myriad and vibrant learning opportunities such that learners can make choices about where and how they pursue their learning goals and do so in the context of a learning community.

DISTINGUISHING “FIELD SITE”

A Field Site is a place where:

1. There is applied learning within “real world” situations;
2. There is an agreement between each learner and the Field Site that includes the learner’s learning goals relevant to their engagement at that Field Site; and
3. There is a relationship with a mentor who can both guide and assess the learner’s development within the competencies connected with the Field Site experience itself.

Where might a Field Site be located?

Distinct from Learning Hubs and Home Bases, Field Sites are places that are designed for the fulfillment of an organization’s commercial, public, or not-for-profit goals and whose leadership have agreed to partner with the Ecosystem to host one or more young learners in connection with their pre-existing purposes. As such, Field Sites become part of the Ecosystem and have access to relevant Shared Services to play their role.

Learners participate in fulfilling the host organization’s goals by creating or contributing to a project or area of work that addresses a need of the Field Site. Through this experience, learners develop skills and competencies related to the Field Site’s work and learn about themselves, their interests, and their gifts. Field Sites provide what is often called “real world” experience to young learners, the kind of workplace experience they can put on their learning portfolios and resumes. For learners in the earliest stages of development, their engagement in Field Sites is organized and constructed in developmentally appropriate ways. As learners grow and mature, Field Sites can offer more and more opportunities for engagement and contribution.

While almost any location within a community has the possibility of serving as a Field Site, every location in a community is not a Field Site by default. Every community will have its own criteria for what qualifies as a safe, high-quality location to designate as a Field Site.

Of course, learners will experience learning in other places in the community; regardless of whether they have been designated as a Field Site, these learning experiences can be recognized and credentialed for the learner, where appropriate. These instances could provide an opportunity for the Ecosystem to grow by adding the location to its portfolio of Field Sites, after vetting it through the lens of equity and safety.

What role does a Field Site play in a learner’s Learning Journey?

Field Site learning itself may be structured in a variety of ways, such as: internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities, independent study field projects, service-learning projects, community projects, job shadowing, or consulting projects. Learners may do their Field Site learning individually or as part of a team. Field Sites may also be remote opportunities. The structure for how learners engage in Field Sites will be based on relevant factors such as the learner’s developmental stage, maturity, and interest; and/or the availability of appropriate Field Site experiences.

With the support of the learner’s Advisor, learners and the Field Site will work together to create clarity on:

- what the learner will be contributing to the Field Site,
- what their relevant learning goals are,
- what competencies are being developed and how those competencies will be demonstrated, assessed, and, where appropriate, credentialed,
- the time period and logistics of their Field Site experience,

- who their mentor will be for the experience, and
- how the mentor will engage in the learning process of the learner.

This agreement is approved by the learner, the learner’s Advisor, and the designated mentor. Each ecosystem will set its own policy regarding compensation or stipends, if any, for the young learners, the mentors, and the Field Site itself. Such policies will balance the goal of equitable access for all learners, while ensuring learners’ time and contributions are not exploited or taken advantage of.

Each learner who spends time at a Field Site will have a designated Mentor, a person who works at or engages with the Field Site and has been approved to mentor young learners during their Field Site learning experience. They help young learners to set and pursue learning goals, adding, where appropriate, knowledge of relevant industry standards. Mentors also guide the learner as they seek to make meaningful contributions to the work of the Field Site.

Mentors are able to provide guidance as someone with experience in the field or work at hand. And, when appropriate, they can assess a learner’s competency development against the professional standards of their field. Typically, Mentors will have demonstrated competency or achievement in their role, field, and/or sector in which the Field Site is situated. Being a Mentor also provides an opportunity for the Mentor themselves to build new relationships, gain inspiration, and further their own learning and development.

In some cases, a learner may pursue work that is needed by the Field Site but outside of the expertise of the Mentor, requiring them to seek additional mentorship. For example, a young person interning at a pet store may take on a project of building a website for the pet store, requiring additional mentorship in the area of IT.

Field Sites connect young learners to life in the community—offering the opportunity to make meaningful relationships with adults engaged in business, government, and the social and cultural sectors. For this reason, regardless of whether it is the mentor or another person at the Field Site, it is pivotal that the young person has someone who they can build relationships with and learn from and with at the Field Site. Field Sites provide learners with a deep sense of belonging in the community and with valuable social capital—the set of relationships a learner has with people who control access to community and economic resources. Building social capital and developing the competencies needed to continue building social capital is a key purpose of Field Sites.

Field Sites offer young learners the opportunity to explore their options for contributing their gifts to the community and to the larger world in applied, “real world” circumstances. At the same time, Field Sites receive the benefits of having expanded capacity, new perspectives, and early access to potential future employees. Field Sites also offer those outside of fields that typically work with children the chance to learn from and with young learners, to contribute to those learners’ development, and to discover for themselves that young people can contribute to the world meaningfully now, no matter their age.

DISTINGUISHING “SHARED SERVICES”

Shared Services provide the connective tissue that holds an Ecosystem together and, as such, these services define the boundaries of their Ecosystem. The Ecosystem’s effective and equitable functioning rests on having a set of Shared Services that offer the reliability, safety, and responsiveness that children, families, and communities need to learn and grow.

What kinds of services are included in Shared Services?

They are the services that connect all the parts of the Ecosystem, enabling the Learning Journeys of each learner and the effective functioning and development of the Ecosystem. For example, Shared Services address such matters as hosting online learning portfolios, resource directories, and menus of learning opportunities; providing learning credentials that align with individual learner objectives, as well as applicable local, state, tribal, and/or Federal requirements; ensuring transportation, safety, and meals; ensuring financial resources are obtained and used responsibly; providing payroll and relevant benefits to Ecosystem staff; and creating feedback loops for Ecosystem development.

Shared Services in a Learner-Centered Ecosystem must themselves align with and enable the principles of learner-centered education, as they play an important role in creating the learner-centered nature of the Ecosystem. Services are considered to be in alignment with learner-centered when they continually strive to:

- Ensure service equity by attending to equitable access and experience of every Ecosystem participant;
- Encourage and create opportunity for agency for all participants in the Ecosystem, whenever and wherever practical;
- Value and enhance the socially-embedded nature of everyone’s Learning Journey, including support for participation of families and caregivers;
- Deliver developmentally responsive services that are appropriately personalized, relevant, and contextualized for each participant in the Ecosystem;
- Enable learners to reach out beyond the boundaries of their Home Base to leverage all of the open-walled learning experiences across their Ecosystem in their Learning Journeys, and enable Ecosystems themselves to be permeable for cross-learning and development; and,
- Recognize that Ecosystem participants are focused on competency-based learning, and as such, support all participants in the Ecosystem to apply and hone their skills and knowledge in real-world situations.

How are Shared Services organized?

Shared Services are not a “central office” by another name. Rather than seeking to manage or control the rest of the Ecosystem, Shared Services are designed to serve the rest of the Ecosystem—enabling, responding to, and underpinning the fluid growth and development of the Ecosystem itself over time. The Home Bases, Learning Hubs, and Field Sites are autonomous users of relevant services. Shared Service users shape the evolution of the services first through their choice to use them, and second by providing feedback on what might be improved or added.

Each community creates and organizes an appropriate set of Shared Services that is a fit for the needs of their learners and of the rest of the Ecosystem, as well as being informed by local, state, tribal, and/or Federal requirements. Service simplicity and transparency, from conception through delivery, is maximized to enable stakeholder participation in shaping the services they opt in to use.

All of the existing assets of the community are looked to when creating a Shared Service. In

many circumstances, a Shared Service will be contracted for using local businesses, not-for-profits, and/or social service agencies. Young learners may also take on some of the work of a Shared Service or use a shared service as a Field Site. There must be a compelling reason for a service to be built for, and provided by, the Ecosystem exclusively, as opposed to utilizing already existing assets and resources.

When identifying which Shared Services are needed for an Ecosystem, choices are made to ensure learning providers can “plug into” what they need, families and learners are connected to opportunities, and equity and safety are upheld for all participants in the Ecosystem. Service categories communities may consider, amongst others, include:

- Transportation Services
- Technology Services
- Safety, Indoor and Outdoor Facility Planning, & Maintenance Services
- Information, Resource Mapping & Library Services
- Human Resource, Financial & Legal Services
- Health, Well Being, & Food Services
- Competency Credentialing and Transcript/Portfolio Services
- Communication, Marketing & Development Services
- Adult Credentialing & Communities of Practice Services

Shared Services operate as the underlying, reliable, connective structures that make an Ecosystem a holistic public education system that can organize, support, and credential learning for all children in the community.