Practitioner's Lexicon
What is meant by key terminology.

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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. Fulfilling this purpose will further require a transformed education system that organizes, supports, and credentials learning in fundamentally different ways—creating learner-centered ecosystems 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. This 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, 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 the Learner-Centered Paradigm itself, follows with a clarification of the shift from a School-Centered to a Learner-Centered Paradigm, and continues with three terms key to ensuring learner-centered education is pursued equitably:

• **Diversity**

• **Inclusion**

• **Equity**

We acknowledge the terms diversity, inclusion, and equity exist beyond the learner-centered paradigm for education and are used in different ways for different contexts. They also exist within and are core to the paradigm itself. Thus, this lexicon aims to distinguish these three terms as they are relevant to the learner-centered paradigm and for those whose work and focus is on the growth and development of children and young people.

The document then moves to the five elements of a child's learning journey and learning environment that naturally emerge from looking at education through a learner-centered lens:

• **Learner Agency**

• **Socially-Embedded**

• **Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized**

• **Open-Walled**

• **Competency-Based**

It is important to keep in mind that the five elements should be understood to be interrelated in practice, with every element empowering and advancing what is possible for the other elements. In the absence of the Learner-Centered Paradigm, any of the five elements become a mere adjustment or addition to conventional practice.

The Lexicon then concludes with a set of terms associated with the systemic conditions that would enable learner-centered education to be equitably supported, spread, and sustained in the form of a transformed learner-centered, public education system:

• **Learner-Centered Ecosystem**

• **Learning Journey**

• **Home Base**

• **Learning Hub**

• **Field Site**

• **Shared Services**

It is important to keep in mind that 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. It is a document intended to create new space for clarity, collaboration, discovery, and invention for those with the shared ambition—to create and sustain community-based, learner-centered ecosystems that interweave the assets, experiences, and wisdom of local communities and the virtual world to support the growth and development of our children to lead meaningful, fulfilling lives of their own design.

DISTINGUISHING A "LEARNER- CENTERED PARADIGM FOR EDUCATION"

Let's begin by stating specifically what we mean when we use the term "paradigm." In his groundbreaking book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Thomas Kuhn uses the term "paradigm" to mean a coherent and closed set of foundational assumptions, premises, or theories that are well accepted in a practitioner community. This set of foundational premises shape and constrain almost every practice but are themselves mostly unexamined and accepted without question.

According to Kuhn, when a practitioner is working on something, for example on improving or reforming a particular practice, they do so inside their closed set of assumptions and premises. It is the closed nature of that set which makes a paradigm difficult to penetrate or change. The set is closed in the sense that each premise or assumption refers back to the others— reinforcing each other and leaving little to no room for a different way to look at things. In fact, practitioners will go to great lengths to explain away data that challenges any aspect of their paradigm, rather than using that data to question their paradigm. In most cases, they are not even aware of the paradigm in which they are operating because it is just how they see the world—all of the assumptions, premises, and theories that make up their paradigm are operating in the background.

A paradigm, sometimes called a "worldview," can be thought of as the particular lens through which a community of practitioners (and those in the broader community who are influenced by those practitioners) look at the world. Looking through any particular lens, some of what is being examined may appear more significant and some things may appear less significant—or their significance may even disappear entirely. Other things can be distorted by the lens, giving a practitioner a false impression regarding what is right in front of them. But, the practitioner is generally unaware of these limitations and distortions because they rarely look at the lens; rather, they look right through the lens.

In this discussion, we are interested in the particular paradigm or lens through which those supporting the growth and development of children and young people look. What do they see when they look at a child or young person, or at the various methods for supporting a child or young person's learning journey and well-being? Given their paradigm, how do they then think about providing the structures and conditions for broad populations of children and young people to learn and grow? We are specifically interested here in that particular paradigm for education we refer to as "Learner-Centered." We are interested in: 1) the set of background theories and assumptions that are generally accepted by the community of learner-centered practitioners today; and 2) the shift from the conventional School-Centered Paradigm to the Learner-Centered Paradigm.

The Learner-Centered Paradigm for Education has as its fundamental assumption that each child is unique in meaningful and valuable ways—they have their own backgrounds, circumstances, interests, needs, and aspirations. By contrast, whenever an education system seeks to define and aim education at the "average" or "typical" child, the uniqueness and humanity of every child is not seen as something that needs to be directly dealt with.

In Learner-Centered Education, the aim is to nurture and support the development of whole human beings within caring communities where each 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 to effectively make meaningful choices regarding their learning, so that they are able to follow their own interests and pursue their own aspirations.

Before going any further in clarifying this paradigm, we will first head off a few common misconceptions by briefly discussing what the Learner-Centered Paradigm for Education is **not:**

1. **The Learner-Centered Paradigm is not about caring more for the learners.** Everyone involved in education cares deeply for learners, regardless of which Paradigm is operating in the background of their thinking.

2. **The Learner-Centered Paradigm is not about letting learners do whatever they feel like doing, whenever they feel like doing it.** While the learner's role in co-creating their learning journey will be critical, this is not about giving up our commitment that each young person is supported to develop themselves to their full potential and to contribute meaningfully to their families, community, and world.

3. **The Learner-Centered Paradigm is not about individual learners working in isolation without supportive learning communities.** In the Learner-Centered Paradigm, learning is seen as a social process, and healthy learner relationships with both peers and adults are essential.

4. **The Learner-Centered Paradigm is not about children learning different things, in different ways, or at different paces as a means for higher achievement on standardized tests.** Rather, this approach to education is about setting learning goals with each learner that reflect community standards and honor who each young person is, their lived experiences, how they learn, and their aspirations for their futures.

5. **The Learner-Centered Paradigm is not about providing an alternative only for those children and young people who cannot or will not fit inside a standardized system.** Learner-centered environments are designed to flexibly provide what each and every learner needs to pursue their unique life goals. The task is to partner with each learner to shape and create a learning journey that enables them to discover interests, develop aspirations, and navigate their circumstances effectively. All learners, without exception, are supported to pursue different arenas of learning, different ways of learning, and different ways of demonstrating that learning.

What, then, is the Learner-Centered Paradigm?

As with any Paradigm, the Learner-Centered Paradigm is constituted by a coherent and closed set of fundamental assumptions or premises which create a lens through which we look at education. These assumptions are about:

•   Who the learner is and what role they play in their own education;

•   What role adults play in a young learner's education;

•   What is required to make a learning environment equitable for all children;

•   How education systems are best organized; and

•   What learning actually is.

Who the learner is and what role they play in their own education

The Learner-Centered Paradigm is built around a small set of fundamental assumptions about the young learners themselves. First, each learner is related to as unique in meaningful ways—there are no "typical" or "average" learners. They have unique backgrounds and circumstances, individual strengths and challenges, and their own interests and aspirations. Second, each learner is seen as having inexhaustible potential—potential that will unfold in different ways for

different learners. Third, each learner has an innate desire to learn and grow. Every single learner can be supported in being extraordinary in their own way. Fourth, only when learners co-create their educational goals and pathways for reaching those goals will they be at the center of their own education.

What role adults play in a young learner's education

There is also a small set of fundamental learner-centered assumptions regarding the role that adults play in a learner's education. First, the role of the adults is to be a partner with young learners in creating and navigating their learning journeys. To be partners, adults work with learners and their families to set goals and navigate the child's learning journey. To do this well, they must respect and cultivate the initiative and agency of the young learner, allowing their uniqueness to be revealed and truly honored. Second, because the desire to learn is innate in all human beings, the role of the adult is to encourage and support that natural desire so that it has the space to flourish. Third, adults play the role of being a resource to a learner's journey, at times facilitating and at other times providing expertise with regard to the learning challenge at hand. And finally, adults play a mentoring role: setting a positive example, believing in the inexhaustible potential of the learner, encouraging the exploration of new learning opportunities, and helping remove obstacles that may arise along the learner's journey.

What is required to make a learning environment equitable for all children

A foundational premise held by those operating with a learner-centered worldview is that in order to support all children, we must confront and address social inequity and racism explicitly and intentionally. Under this premise, intentional focus is placed on: 1) ensuring the education system itself ends inequities connected to such factors as race, cognitive and physical difference, gender, native language, culture, religion and religious expression, and sexuality in its own operations, and recognizes and seeks to remedy the disadvantages stemming from past inequities within it; 2) mitigating the negative impacts of racism and other biases coming from other institutions and systems; and 3) increasing the awareness of conscious and unconscious racism and bias in each individual in the system and enabling them to do the work to eliminate it.

How education systems are best organized

The Learner-Centered Paradigm also includes a set of background assumptions regarding how education systems are best organized. The first assumption involves the goal of education. In the Learner-Centered Paradigm, the goal is to develop the enduring capabilities needed to enable lifelong learning and to support the pursuit of a great life. For learner-centered practitioners, these capabilities go beyond the retention of knowledge in academic subjects to include competencies in such areas as:

- **Self-Knowledge & Identity** (The ability to know, value, and develop oneself)
- **Relatedness & Belonging** (The ability to know, value, and develop relationships with others)
- **Self-Direction & Agency** (The ability to set one's own goals and confidently pursue them)
- **Essential Human Literacies** (The ability to access, navigate, and make meaning of the world around them)
- **Lifelong Love of Learning** (The ability to engage the world with curiosity and pursue those curiosities with a learning mindset)

The second assumption about how education systems are best organized is that the central work performed in developing these capabilities is the work of learning itself, and therefore, the central worker is the learner. Those who are involved in a learner's journey—including educators and youth development workers, families and friends, and participating community members—are supporting learners to make meaning of their learning and navigate their learning journey. It follows that the education system must then be structured to support and respond appropriately to each unique learner's agency and circumstances. Learner-centered education systems—including the approaches to assessment, credentialing of learning, accountability, funding, roles of adults, and governance—must be built to adapt to the needs, strengths, interests, circumstances, and aspirations of the learners and to enable learners to pursue and demonstrate learning in meaningful, myriad ways.

What learning actually is

Finally, the Learner-Centered Paradigm includes assumptions about what learning is and can be. Learning is understood to be the exercising of our innate capacity to wonder, discover, and make sense of the world around us. It is a natural process going on all the time, beginning when we are born and continuing throughout our lifetimes. We know learning has happened when we are able to interact with the world in new and effective ways. In this paradigm, the most critical form of learning is learning to take ownership of and responsibility for our own learning journey—a journey that will last a lifetime.

CLARIFYING THE PARADIGM SHIFT: FROM SCHOOL-CENTERED TO LEARNER-CENTERED

When people first hear the term "Learner-Centered," they may initially think, "How else can someone look at the challenge of education? Doesn't everyone take a learner-centered perspective?" In our way of distinguishing "Learner-Centered," the answer to that question is "no." Of course, everyone involved in education cares deeply about the learner, but that does not make them Learner-Centered.

Learner-Centered thinking overturns the dominant, School-Centered worldview with its fundamental assumptions about who the learner is and what role they play in their own education; what role adults play in a young learner's education; what is required to make a learning environment equitable for all children; how education systems are best organized; and what learning actually is. Because these fundamental assumptions are generally left unexamined to operate in the background, they can be difficult to see at first. And, because School-Centered assumptions about education are so pervasive in the United States, it can be startling the first time someone escapes them.

The School-Centered Paradigm for Education emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s, during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. It was a time whenEuropean colonialism was at its zenith and when the European economies were shifting from an agrarian labor force to an industrial one. European colonialism had normalized the idea that one group of people can dominate and exploit another. This destructive practice sought to rob nations of their resources, while simultaneously eradicating their native culture and ways of being. The education system was a significant mechanism for achieving that latter aim. Although society does not openly subscribe to this belief currently, many of the systems and structures that were created in the initial design still result in that outcome.

Moreover, at the time, industrialization had brought about the new challenge of preparing a labor force for their new industrial jobs, and mass production—with its efficient assembly lines— was enabling rapid growth in one industry after another. So, an education system was built that would sort people according to what role they would play in the industrial economy (largely segregated along lines of race, gender, and socio-economic status) and then prepare them to play that role. Applying the industrial approach to make education more universally available, we created standardized schools that looked a lot like factories and a standard progression from kindergarten through 12th grade that looked a lot like assembly lines. Learners could be seen as unfinished works in progress, as vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge in subject after subject as they moved down the assembly line.

The system was designed to move learners, grouped by age, at an average pace through a standard curriculum and to sort them according to who the system deemed had the innate potential to play different roles in the economy—some would be managers and professionals, others would be workers and technicians. Learning was assumed to be about teaching students a standard set of knowledge deemed appropriate for that age and then assessing what was retained so students could be sorted according to their potentials. The sooner we can sort above average, from average, and below average, the more efficiently we can make the assembly lines work.

The assessments of learning had their own biases built into them. The largely white, neuro-typical, male European academics who created the tests favored methods and topics which they themselves excelled at. The sorting and sifting of students would perpetuate a colonial order for another century.

While some students were able to move effectively through this new education system, it did not and does not serve anyone particularly well. The concept of "average" is a single dimensional mathematical construct, which does not actually apply to multi-dimensional human beings. There is no "average human being," and there is no "average learner." So, when learning experiences are designed for this "average learner," they are designed for no one in particular. Every learner in these school-centered environments, regardless of the ways in which they are unique or extraordinary, is expected to adapt and conform to the standardized system.

Learners who performed well on standard tests in these standard subjects are deemed more capable (not surprisingly, these are most commonly the learners who are most like the people creating the tests). Separate lines, or tracks, are created to respond to the perceived differences in capability. For nearly 150 years, this School-Centered Paradigm for Education has dominated our thinking in the modern world. It seems normal.

What happens when we seek to improve this education system? In a School-Centered Paradigm, the assumption is that education happens in a school. So, when we improve the school, we improve education. The basic question from a School-Centered perspective is: What will make this school more efficient and effective in the task of teaching our young people? Follow-up questions include: How should a school be organized? How do we ensure this school is meeting its goals? How come some schools do better than others? How do we fix "failing schools"? How do teachers increase their control of student behavior? How can we close the standardized test score gap between white students and students of color? How can we increase student engagement with the content in the classroom? What do we do with "failing students"? In a School-Centered Paradigm, the industrial school is placed at the center of our thinking as the obvious place to get to work.

By contrast, in a Learner-Centered Paradigm, the unique learner is placed at the center. And, no longer do we narrowly think of learners as above average, average, and below average. Instead, we start by seeing each learner as being unique in meaningful ways, and every learner is seen as having inexhaustible potential. When you put the learner at the center of every decision and make those decisions with the learner, rather than for the learner, you are in a different world. The basic questions from a Learner-Centered perspective are: Who is this learner? What and who will support each learner to develop their own agency; discover their gifts, interests, and talents; and develop the skills to pursue their goals? What are this child's aspirations for their life and for their community? Are we ensuring race, zip code, socio-economic status, and learning differences are not predictable indicators of a learner's success in life?

Follow-up questions in the Learner-Centered Paradigm include: Are we supporting each learner to know, value, and develop themselves and to build healthy relationships with others? Are we nurturing each learner's ability to set and confidently pursue their own goals? Does every learner equitably have the opportunities, supports, and resources they uniquely need to learn and thrive, particularly those who are most marginalized in our society? How do we best support learners to explore their interests and meaningfully contribute to their communities now and in the future? Are we effectively including all of the local community and global resources in learners' journeys? Are we equitably providing opportunities, supports, and resources appropriate to each unique child's needs, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, learning differences, or zip code?

The Learner-Centered Paradigm for Education asks us to transform our way of thinking about education. It requires us to make a shift from School-Centered thinking to Learner-Centered thinking. The following chart outlines this shift.

FROM: SCHOOL-CENTERED	TO: LEARNER-CENTERED
Students arrive not yet ready for life and work. They must be prepared with an appropriate standardized base of knowledge and, based on their performance, sorted according to their potential.	Learners arrive as whole human beings whose context, lived experience, interests, and aspirations should inform and guide their learning and human development. They are living life now and their potential has no limit.
Students are known by how they compare to their class averages on standardized assessments.	Learners are known as individuals—each with their own lived experiences, interests, goals, aspirations, and ways of contributing to others and their communities.
Equity in education is a commitment to students reaching their full potential through high expectations and closing achievement gaps.	Equity in education is a commitment to every learner having access to what they need to live fulfilling lives, and to each person in diverse and inclusive groups being supported to attain all relevant outcomes.
Education is done to the students.	Education is done with and by the learner.
Learning happens in schools during a school day.	Learning happens whenever and wherever the learner is.
Learning happens best when students are focused on the teacher and content, compliant with institutional expectations, and competing against one another for the best test score.	Learning happens best in environments that foster joy in learning, vulnerability amongst adults and learners alike, and mutualism—a reciprocal partnership among learners and adults.
All students follow standard paths within age-based, rank-and-sorted cohorts. Students work within standardized timeframes, demonstrating their knowledge retention and skill development in standardized ways, absent of meaningful context.	Learners are deemed to be successful when they have developed what they need to lead meaningful, fulfilling lives of their own choosing.

Looking at education through a Learner-Centered Paradigm brings us to a very different place when it comes to designing an education system and learning experiences. The result of a Learner-Centered focus will invariably be an entirely different way to educate our children and an entirely different approach for ensuring that a great education is made available to each learner—including an unwavering stand for equity, diversity, and inclusion. We will design systems, learning environments, and experiences with the learner at the center of our thinking.

What do such learning environments and experiences look like when fully expressed? They are grounded in a shared commitment to doing what it takes to serve each and every child equitably and powerfully. This requires facility with three key terms, which are distinguished in the remainder of this document:

• **Diversity**

• **Inclusion**

• **Equity**

Further, these learner-centered environments and experiences are constituted by the following five elements, each of which is also distinguished in this lexicon:
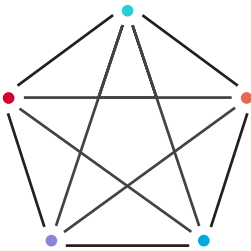
Learner Agency

Socially-Embedded

Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized

Open-Walled

Competency-Based

When these components are present and equitably expressed, they interact to create a learner-centered experience for each and every learner. Each learner is prepared for the future of their lives—for a life of learning and being engaged participants in their communities and in the economy.

DISTINGUISHING "DIVERSITY"

We distinguish "Diversity" as a group characteristic referring to the presence of differences among the people in that group. The more differences that are present, the more diverse we consider the group to be. In discussions of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, the particular differences of concern are those differences which can result in people being disadvantaged or marginalized and which may be underrepresented in the group. In the United States, these differences most often include such factors as: race, gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, ethnicity, cultural background, language, immigration status or background, socio-economic status or background, family status, life experience, geography, education level, veteran status, political perspective, neurodiversity, physical abilities, physical appearance, mental or physical health status, and age.

In the learner-centered movement, we are committed to ensuring that young learners who are most marginalized or undervalued, in particular Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth, have the same opportunity to participate in learner-centered environments as any other young learner. This means confronting and mitigating the structural, systemic, and individual impediments to access and where possible, eliminating them entirely.

Furthermore, diversity itself is valued as an asset within learner-centered environments. The aim is to respond to and support the uniqueness of each child with unique pathways for learning. In standardized, one-size-fits-all education systems, the differences between learners can be seen as a problem; by contrast, in the learner-centered system, differences are welcomed as opportunities to create more meaningful and relevant learning experiences for each learner. The presence of differences is recognized as an opportunity to draw on and enrich the learning with different perspectives, different lived experiences, and different concerns. Likewise, the differences between adults and community members are welcomed and valued as contributing to a rich learning experience for children.

DISTINGUISHING "INCLUSION"

We distinguish "Inclusion" as the practice of ensuring that every group member—especially those who have been historically and are presently marginalized or excluded—be able to be their whole selves; be valued, embraced, and supported; and, be able to fully contribute their gifts. Inclusion goes beyond the mere presence of difference to the honoring of that difference. Each member of an inclusive group can be present as their whole selves, with their uniqueness acknowledged and included.

Inclusive groups strive to ensure that each group member: feels welcomed, experiences their voice being heard and valued, participates meaningfully and appropriately in decision making, has access to needed resources and opportunities, sees the clear opportunity to make their own unique contribution and to make a meaningful difference in group values and direction, and experiences an authentic sense of safety and belonging within the group.

In the learner-centered movement, we see such learner-centered structures as individualized pathways, the cultivation of learner agency, and the fostering of a healthy learning community as supportive of our efforts to include every individual learner. We see Inclusion as the shared responsibility of every member of a learning community. Inclusion is achieved when everyone sees their own role in the inclusion of oneself and of others; takes decisive action to elevate, honor, and amplify the voices of those who have been historically and are presently marginalized or excluded; and attends to all dimensions of inclusion: mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. In particular, for authentic inclusion to occur, concerns of equity and justice must be recognized and shared as the concerns of all.

DISTINGUISHING "EQUITY"

We distinguish "Equity" as an ideal group state where every group member is supported in attaining all relevant outcomes—compensating for unfair advantages and disadvantages, including those caused by the cumulative impact of historically persistent inequities. Where there is a lack of equity, individual success will correlate to attributes or characteristics which should not impact one's potential to be successful. For example, a person's level of practice should correlate with improved outcomes, but a person's race should not. When equity is present, the predictability of outcomes based on such attributes as race is eliminated.

Striving for equity requires the presence of diversity and inclusion, and goes beyond diversity and inclusion by dealing with and addressing the unwanted disadvantages that are negatively impacting real lives, right now. This involves attending to the background structures, systems, and biases which create, magnify, and/or perpetuate unfair advantages and disadvantages, especially those structures, systems, and biases that perpetuate racial injustice. Working toward equity is not about treating everyone exactly the same but, rather, is about treating each individual with the same level of respect and commitment to their success. This will require the dismantling of the systems and structures that continue to disadvantage, marginalize, and exclude groups; and inventing new ones that honor and respond to the unique circumstances, needs, and aspirations of each individual.

At its core, learner-centered education honors and values the humanity and dignity of each child—seeing them as unique, curious, wondrous, capable, and deserving. From this perspective, it is intolerable to value and advantage some children, while devaluing and disadvantaging others. As a movement to transform education, we are standing for social and racial justice and youth empowerment.

Ensuring equity for each young learner requires that we actively combat the barriers and challenges in our society, culture, and education system that operate knowingly or unknowingly for people and unduly impact children of color and other marginalized children. We must 1) provide an environment that is sensitive to different cultures, identities, and backgrounds; that allows for different ways of learning and of demonstrating that learning; and that responds effectively to the different needs and aspirations of individual learners; 2) set individual outcomes that are aimed at each learner reaching their full and unique potential as whole human beings; and 3) mobilize needed resources, provide needed pathways, and empower learner agency appropriately for each learner as they pursue those outcomes.

Given this, learner-centered education offers the possibility of true liberation and equity in education. Thus, in the learner-centered movement, we see an opportunity for a breakthrough in creating equity within our education systems and in mitigating the inequities coming from outside the education system. Realizing that possibility will take our unwavering commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity.

DISTINGUISHING "LEARNER AGENCY"

What do we mean when we say "Learner Agency?"

Let's start with the term "agency." By "agency," we mean an individual's capacity to take purposeful initiative in shaping themselves, their relationships with others, and their circumstances. Agency is the opposite of resignation, passive compliance, and helplessness.

What, then, does it mean for a learner to have agency? Learner Agency is a learner's capacity to take purposeful initiative in the matter of their own learning journey. In other words, Learner Agency is the learner's capacity to generate their own ambitions and effectively exercise their own choices regarding who they are as a learner and a person, how they relate to others in their learning community, and which kinds of learning experiences will best carry them to their learning goals. This capacity depends on the learner being supported by the learning environment to develop the self-confidence to guide themselves and the wherewithal to make informed and responsible choices about their learning and their lives. This requires the structures, systems, and trust from others to enable learners to make meaningful choices about what, when, where, with whom, and how to pursue learning goals, as well as the support to learn from those choices.

In the learner-centered vision, the term Learner Agency does not merely refer to a capacity found in each unique learner; it also refers to a key element of the learner-centered environment itself. A learner-centered environment is intentionally designed with structures and practices that provide the freedom for learners to exert agency over their learning, including what, when, where, with whom, and how they are learning. When this element is strongly expressed, there is a pervasive commitment to the systematic development of each learner's agency and to the maintenance of conditions across the learning environment that encourages that agency. The aim is for every learner to develop into responsible owners of their own learning and empowered actors in their own lives.

To achieve this aim, learner-centered environments are organized and structured to actively create and maintain the necessary conditions that support agency for each and every learner. These conditions include a community-wide commitment to:

- recognizing the full humanity and potential of all young learners;

- seeing every child and young person as the primary driver of their learning and a fully capable partner in designing and managing their own learning journeys;

- doing the work necessary to eliminate each individual's conscious and unconscious biases related to such factors connected to a learner's identity as race, gender expression, age, socioeconomic status, neurodiversity, mental capacity, language, physical appearance, culture, religion and religious expression, interests, and self-expression;

- actively working to offset any limitations on opportunity stemming from structural racism; and

- trusting each learner to develop their self-awareness of and advocate for their learning needs and to play an active role in setting their own learning goals.

With these conditions in place, all adults playing roles in a child's learning journey participate in the systematic development of agency in each young learner. Collectively, they ensure that for each learner there is: an intentional introduction of more and more opportunity to express agency; a focus on developing the wherewithal to both shape and make learning and life choices

effectively; the cultivation of personal responsibility for the consequences of their choices and actions on others; and the development of the self-knowledge and insight needed to grasp the importance of owning their own learning.

In learning environments that do not include a strong element of Learner Agency, the learner is challenged to figure out what the adults want from them, rather than being supported to understand and act on their own learning needs. An emphasis on learner compliance with assigned learning has learners be passive receivers of education, dependent on others for their learning. Said another way, in learning environments that are not learner-centered, learners are backseat passengers to their own learning.

By contrast, in learner-centered environments where Learner Agency is consistently emphasized, learners are in the front seat of their learning journey and supported to become drivers of it. They increasingly take responsibility for setting learning goals that are a match for their life aspirations and adjusting their learning plans based on feedback, lessons learned, and new insights. They take increasing responsibility for the impact of their choices on others who they interact with in their learning journey. And, they grow more and more effective in shaping their identities, their relationships with others, and their circumstances.

When Learner Agency is methodologically developed in each learner and when the conditions for encouraging Learner Agency are fully present, we would expect to see each and every learner developing:

1. The capacity to articulate their own learning needs and goals with insight into how they learn best and what they need to support their own learning and development;

2. A sense of ownership regarding their learning, including a love of learning, an ability to both shape their learning experiences and assess their outcomes, and an interest in continually deepening their learning and improving their learning experiences;

3. The adaptability, resourcefulness, and resilience needed to handle increasing responsibility for their own learning and the learning of those around them, informed by both successful and unsuccessful learning experiences and adult feedback;

4. A growing self-assuredness and self-confidence with regard to their capacity to manage their own learning and to create and structure their own learning experiences; and

5. A growing sense of self-worth that enables them to fully express both their strengths and their vulnerabilities.

Learner Agency thrives when learners know themselves, discover their own gifts, and develop themselves as self-confident, lifelong learners.

DISTINGUISHING "SOCIALLY-EMBEDDED"

We use the term "Socially-Embedded" to refer to a learning environment that fosters relationships between and among the members of its learning community as central to each learner's journey. In learning environments with the Socially-Embedded element in place, we find:

1. a learning community that has been intentionally created to provide every member with a place to be known and a place to belong;

2. a focus on the social nature of learning being consistently enabled and consistently emphasized; and

3. learners being encouraged and supported in building their own social capital.

For the purposes of this discussion, we distinguish a "learning community" as a group of people who share a common commitment to supporting one another's learning. Within that learning community, each learner forms a web of stable, social relationships with people directly supporting their particular learning journey; this includes family members/guardians, other young people, educators, youth development specialists, and mentors from across the broader community. While learners will interact with many others throughout their learning journey, not everyone is necessarily part of their "learning community."

In learning environments with advanced expressions of Social-Embeddedness, each and every learner experiences an authentic sense of belonging in their learning community; they are welcomed by others for who they are and for what they contribute. This means each member of the learning community is known as a whole person with a full range of unique interests, aspirations, characteristics, lived experiences, and background circumstances. As such, every learning community member is welcomed as a whole person, able to bring forth all aspects of themselves. Because of this, within their learning community, learners experience belonging, acceptance, friendship, and guidance.

Like all healthy communities, a healthy learning community focuses attention on building trusting relationships, expanding inclusiveness, and ensuring opportunities for everyone to be involved and to contribute. This necessarily includes a strong commitment to assess and deal with conscious and unconscious bias and racism within each member of the learning community and to have the concerns of equity and justice be shared by everyone. Time and space is set aside to ensure that each member of the community has the opportunity to contribute their unique gifts and to express their unique selves. Each community member has the space to speak for themselves, without obligation to speak on behalf of an underrepresented group that they may belong to. Social norms and mechanisms are established and maintained to ensure that the community remains a safe and welcoming space for each and every member.

Whenever a learner is engaged with others in the process of their learning, we can say their learning is social. This can involve learning with those in and outside of their learning community, such as a family member, a mentor, an educator, someone in the broader community, a boss or supervisor, or another learner. The social aspect of learning can be seen in relationships that encourage the provision of guidance to one another and in the opportunity for shared discovery with one another. Each person has something to learn and each person has something to teach. There is a mutuality to the learning and to the relationships.

When a learning environment strongly expresses a Socially-Embedded element, social learning is a central part of each learner's journey. Each learner's pathway includes continual engagement in sustained relationships that support their learning. These may be one-on-one relationships, such as mentor/mentee relationships or peer-to-peer relationships; or they can be small group relationships, such as those made in project teams; or they can be larger group relationships, such as those made in an entire advisory group or learning community. In all cases, there is mutual support for everyone's learning.

Socially-Embedded learning environments further encourage and support the building of each learner's own social capital. By the term "social capital," we mean the set of resources made available through family and community relationships. Learners in Socially-Embedded environments have the opportunity to form their own social and professional networks as they engage in volunteer efforts, internships, community projects, and their relationships with mentors. While this is of significant value to any learner, it takes on even more importance for young people who grow up with limited contact with and connections to people who control access to community and economic resources. As such, intentional efforts are made to enable those without these connections to both build their social capital and learn how to leverage it. Efforts to support the development of a young person's social capital are one valuable approach to combating structural racism.

When the Socially-Embedded element of a learning environment is well established, we would expect to see each and every learner developing the skills and dispositions needed to:

1. Be responsible for finding one's place in different groups and for handling differences, disagreements, competing values, or adversity that may come up in a group;

2. Feel, express, and accept vulnerability and authenticity in ways that allow one to be and celebrate their full selves in the presence of others and to hold space for others to do the same;

3. Empathize and identify with other people and groups, such as those with differing racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds or those with differing gender identities and expressions, religious views, ideologies, and physical or mental capabilities;

4. Collaborate successfully with colleagues of different ages and lived experiences; different interests and aspirations; different abilities and proficiency levels; and/or different approaches to learning and problem solving; and

5. Build the kind of social capital needed to effectively navigate the community, the economy, and the world.

What learners gain from Socially-Embedded environments is critical to living a meaningful and fulfilling life as part of a family, a community, and a society.

DISTINGUISHING "PERSONALIZED, RELEVANT, AND CONTEXTUALIZED"

When we say that learning is "Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized," we mean that the learning experience is a match for each learner's unique needs, interests, and circumstances. In learner-centered environments, this is achieved through a partnership between adults and young learners who work together to ensure that each learning experience is a good match for each unique learner.

When learning is "Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized," there is a shared commitment for those involved in the child's learning to be attentive to and, as relevant, explore each learner's background, circumstances, lived experiences, strengths, interests, and aspirations. Adults and young learners work together to establish individual learning goals that are relevant for each learner's aspirations and personalized to each learner's strengths and interests. Likewise, they clarify the context for each learning experience so that each experience is meaningful in the world of the learner. Working together in this way, they shape the learner's learning pathways and experiences to be a match for the learner as a whole person.

This is in contrast to school-centered environments where learning goals are standardized by grade level and made the same (with limited variation) for all learners. In such environments, learning experiences are then aimed at these standardized goals and shaped to be appropriate for an "average learner" of that age.

In learner-centered environments, it is the element of Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized that ensures that learner uniqueness is seen as an asset and as central to the design of their learning pathways. Making learning Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized requires sensitivity to the background and circumstances from which each learner comes. Learners arrive into a learning experience with assets, considerations, and external challenges based on their own cultural, social, economic, and family contexts. Learning experiences advancing Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized are attentive to those contexts, seeking to avoid any imposition of harmful bias while also leveraging the richness found in the learner's background.

Working together, adults and young learners continually ensure that learning experiences are Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized. What do we specifically mean by each of these terms?

- **By "Personalized,"** we mean that the learning experience is appropriate to each learner's individual needs and strengths. When learning is Personalized, we have addressed the question: How can each unique learner be best supported in their learning and development? For each learner, this means consistently exploring: how the learning experience is advancing the learner's learning goals and aspirations; what strengths the child brings to the table that can be leveraged; what support may be needed for the learner to engage fully in their learning; and with whom and in what way the learner will best learn for the particular learning challenge at hand.

- **By "Relevant,"** we mean that a learning experience is applicable to the learner's interests, challenges, and/or aspirations. When learning is Relevant for the learner, there is always an answer to the question: Why am I learning this? What is being learned occurs for the learner as useful or in some way applicable to their lives. The learner is clear how their learning supports them in enjoying an area of interest, or in better handling daily life challenges, or in pursuing their learning goals or a long-term aspiration. In addition, learners are encouraged

to explore entirely new experiences and entirely new areas of interest, expanding what is Relevant to their learning as they grow and develop as people. When learning experiences are Relevant, the learner is naturally pulled into them.

- **By "Contextualized,"** we mean that the learning experience is related to within a context or frame that makes the experience significant for each learner. Learners are supported in developing the capacity to identify or create a context in which their learning shows up as meaningful to them. When their learning is Contextualized, there is always an answer to the question: What does this learning mean? When a learner then engages with a learning opportunity within a meaningful context, they can see how what is being learned fits into the world. That context may come from a learner being engaged by an authentic inquiry; the learning challenge's connectedness to the child's development of real world skills; or the learning being a necessary foundation to pursue a meaningful, fulfilling life.

When learning is Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized, learning pathways respond directly and specifically to each child's learning needs, interests, backgrounds, and circumstances. Only then can we say that it is each unique learner who is at the center of their own education.

DISTINGUISHING "OPEN-WALLED"

What do we mean when we say that a learning environment is "Open-Walled?" Taking the term literally, we mean that the learning is not walled into a single environment. The idea is that when young people and the adults supporting them think about learning, what they consider as sources of learning, people to learn from and with, places where learning occurs, and what "counts" as learning, they are not walled in by a single building, time of day, learning provider, or kind of learning—often called academic learning. When an Open-Walled orientation to learning is taken, different choices show up as a learner, their family, and their advisor(s) consider the learner's goals, activites, and learning experiences that may be pursued. Said another way, it is acknowledged that learning can happen anywhere, anytime, and with anyone. When a learning environment is Open-Walled, the broader community and even the whole world become the learner's arena both for learning and for making meaningful contributions.

When we say "Open-Walled", what walls are we talking about? We are talking about the walls or boundaries around a learner's central learning environment—the base from which the learner operates and engages with other sources of learning in their local community and virtually. A learner's home base is a safe space in which learners: engage with their learning community for mutual support, work with their advisors to shape their personal learning journeys, and access the specialized resources they may need as they progress on their learning journeys. In most cases, the central learning environment will be a physical location, which might be referred to as a "home base" or a "school." It is also possible that the central learning environment can be the learner's home, a virtual location, or another gathering place in the community.

When Open-Walled learning is a significant element of a learning environment, such learning can be depended upon to enable the other elements of a learner-centered education, bringing more opportunities for exercising Learner Agency, for expanding Social-Embeddedness, for increasing the Personalization and Relevance of learning journeys, and for the development of competencies that are needed now in the local community and in the world. Part of having an Open-Walled element present is that the learning opportunities that are a match for what the child's interests are, how they learn, and their goals and aspirations dramatically expand. Another part of having the Open-Walled element present is that young people are supported to develop their own ability to design and manage their Open-Walled learning. This is important in preparing oneself to be a lifelong learner.

Simply including some learning experiences that take place outside the walls of the "school" or bringing outside resources in does not make a learning environment Open-Walled. To be called Open-Walled, a learning environment must systematically leverage and integrate the vibrant opportunities available in a community and virtually within a child's learning journey and acknowledge that learning in ways that can be counted toward meeting learning goals. Any learning environment can be made to be Open-Walled by including learning opportunities happening throughout the community and virtually as integral parts of a child's learning journey and by encouraging those learners to demonstrate their learning so that it can be credentialed. When this is done consistently and systematically, we say that the environment is Open-Walled.

The more fully expressed the Open-Walled element is, the more impact learning experiences in and with the community and virtually will have on a learner's journey. Every community has a myriad of organizations, people, and resources that can contribute to and host learning experiences. Learners might engage with these learning resources through such activities as volunteer and/or paid jobs, internships, service learning, and group field projects, to name a few. A learner's engagement will be based on the child's developmental level, maturity, and

learning goals. When Open-Walled is present, such resources as libraries, YMCAs, Girl and Boy Scout troops, and area colleges are embraced as providers of enriching learning experiences and leveraged fully as resources in a learner's journey. In addition to what is available in their local community, learners can access organizations and educational resources online, extending their arena for learning to the whole world. The dichotomy between what is now called "informal" vs. "formal" learning providers no longer dictates what is seen as valuable for a learner's experience.

Open-Walled environments encourage learners to engage in learning opportunities throughout their community, and as importantly, learning opportunities and resources can be brought in to the environment as well. The walls are open in both directions. This is a particularly important option for the youngest learners and those learners who may face barriers that limit their ability to easily access learning outside the safe space of a central learning environment. All of the resources that can be accessed outside the walls of a central learning environment can also be brought into the environment where concerns for learner health, wellbeing, support, and safety can be directly managed.

Moreover, where Open-Walled is fully expressed, there are avenues by which unplanned learning that happens in the course of a child's day and life—through such activities as play, babysitting, and engaging with friends and family—can be counted, when relevant, as contributing toward setting and achieving learning goals.

In enabling Open-Walled experiences, unique and important equity challenges present themselves. A child's race, gender, physical ability, mental capacity, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and any number of other characteristics can limit, present barriers to, or negatively impact that child's Open-Walled experience. It is important the learning environment brings focus to alleviate these inequities in both a child's access to and experience of Open-Walled learning.

In particular, issues of equitable access and the impacts of conscious or unconscious bias must be attended to at the front-end of and during a child's Open-Walled experiences. As a child identifies and pursues an Open-Walled experience, the learning community ensures limits are not placed on where a child might seek an Open-Walled experience and that in taking one on, they are appropriately prepared in a culturally responsive way. Then, while the learning community will do its best to mitigate the impact of the various inequities of the world in a child's learning journey, they must also be prepared to support a child to make sense of and navigate their experiences when they encounter those inequities in their Open-Walled learning.

When the Open-Walled element is strongly expressed and issues of equity in regard to access and the impact of bias are being addressed, we would expect to see each and every learner developing:

- An increased clarity regarding their interests, gifts, and aspirations in life, including how they can meaningfully contribute them to their communities and the world;

- Skills and dispositions needed to be engaged community participants and citizens;

- Experience in the world of work and the skills and dispositions to navigate, engage, and contribute effectively in an evolving economy;

- The ability to locate and leverage assets in their local community, online, and in the broader world;

- An appreciation for and connection to the diverse people and resources in the learner's local community;

- An increasing amount of social capital, the set of relationships a learner has with people who control access to community and economic resources; and

- The lifelong ability to relate to any experience as a learning experience.

When a learning environment is committed to being Open-Walled, it can catalyze a network of learning opportunities, which are hosted by a variety of people, institutions, and organizations in the community, including the education system. Once engaged, these individuals, institutions, and organizations begin to see more and more ways in which one another's missions and assets can be complementary in providing a flexible, adaptable learning ecosystem.

DISTINGUISHING "COMPETENCY-BASED"

By the term "Competency-Based," we are referring to a learning environment's focus on building learners' ability to do things competently in real-world contexts. This is distinct from learning environments where the focus is on each learner accumulating standardized sets of knowledge and skills in subject areas within an arbitrary amount of time and demonstrating the acquired knowledge and skills in contrived settings. While the ability to do things competently requires relevant knowledge and skills, it also requires the dispositions necessary to do things in real-world circumstances.

To be competent at something is to be able to do that something effectively and reliably in a variety of circumstances; it is not the mere retention of a given set of facts, procedures, or theories. The difference between Competency-Based approaches and knowledge-based approaches is like the difference between learning to be a good swimmer and learning the theory of swimming. In one case, the learner is able to perform swimming in a variety of circumstances; in the other, the learner knows the facts and theories of swimming. (Fortunately, swimming classes have always been Competency-Based!)

In Competency-Based learning environments, a "competency" is an area of performance, and a learner may be considered proficient in a competency when they demonstrate their ability to perform in that area. In Competency-Based learning environments, development of a proficiency occurs: 1) in a timeframe that is a match for that unique learner; 2) in the context of their overall learning journey (which itself is not linear); and 3) simultaneously with the development of other proficiencies.

While knowledge acquisition occurs as part of competency development, it is not done for its own sake. When demonstrating a competency, a learner is demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are needed for them to perform competently in a given area or activity. Here, we define "knowledge," "skills," and "dispositions" as follows:

- **Knowledge:** The theoretical, conceptual, or practical understanding of something, which includes but is not limited to what is referred to as "content knowledge"

- **Skills:** The capacities needed to apply knowledge effectively in producing desired results, including the skill to acquire additional knowledge as needed

- **Dispositions:** The behaviors and ways of being needed for a person to engage with the world effectively in the circumstances of life, both currently and in the future

Competencies, as comprised of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, form the fundamental unit of learning in learner-centered environments. Each learner's learning journey emerges from an exploration of which competencies are needed to realize their learning goals and of what kinds of learning experiences will best allow the learner to develop those competencies—all consistent with who they are, how they learn, and where they want to go in life.

While learning environments may differ in how they organize and characterise competencies, the aim is to cover those areas that research indicates are critical for the development of well-rounded, healthy human beings who have an ability to engage productively as members of community, civic society, and the economy, as well as to continue their own lifelong learning journeys.

Typically, these competencies fall within twelve areas for exploration:

1. Physical and emotional well being

2. Self-awareness, self-direction, and self-advocacy

3. Community, history, and culture

4. Self-exploration and identity

5. Relationship, collaboration, and social skills

6. Language, communication, and expression

7. Scientific and mathematical problem solving

8. Creativity and innovation

9. Civic engagement and contribution

10. Connection to the natural world

11. Hobbies and life activities

12. Career options

The particular competencies to be developed in each area for exploration, and the level of proficiency needed, will be unique to each learner. Learners and their advisors work together to create individual plans for their learning journey—setting individual learning goals and identifying appropriate pathways for exploration that are a match for the learner's interests, aspirations, and needs.

Competency-Based approaches fit naturally with the other elements in a Learner-Centered environment. Learner Agency is easier to empower when the connection is clear between what is being learned and the related knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Competency-Based environments also naturally enable Personalized, Relevant, and Contextualized learning, meaning learners take the time they need to achieve levels of proficiency and demonstrate that proficiency in a number of ways, assessed by a variety of stakeholders. Open-Walled learning experiences involving internships, volunteer jobs, or field projects integrate smoothly with the rest of a learner's journey because such experiences easily lend themselves to being Competency-Based. And, the development of competencies is naturally Socially-Embedded— pulling for interaction with mentors, peers, and others in the community.

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 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.