

Education Reimagined

Learners at the Center,
Communities as the Playground

PRESENTED BY

Siegel Family Endowment

We are a foundation focused on understanding and shaping the impact of technology on society.

Our Focus on Learning

We strive to understand how we can better equip individuals with the knowledge they need to contribute to and engage with a rapidly changing society. Yet, we also recognize that every factor in a learner's education— from broadband access to safe and affordable housing to the development of social-emotional skills— can widen inequality and impact success. Our work supports and shapes programs and solutions that build lifelong learning opportunities and envision an education system that works for everyone, by addressing long standing social and economic inequities.

Schools as Community Infrastructure

For schools to become the most effective and powerful versions of themselves, it's critical to understand their place within and connection to the communities they serve, and how both systems – school and community – must be strengthened in tandem. Using a multidimensional framing for school allows us to consider their infrastructure needs in a holistic way that elevates the school community's strengths and resources, and identifies needs that remain unmet. By conceptualizing and conceiving of schools as bigger than the buildings in which they operate, we have an opportunity to expand what schools can do, and ensure that they are set up to do that critical work.



About Education Reimagined

Education Reimagined focuses on making learner-centered education available to each and every child in America, inclusive of race, background, or circumstance. They partner with visionary leaders to imagine, invent, and bring to life the new systems and conditions necessary to enable a learner-centered, socially just future for education to spread and thrive. Their ultimate vision is to transform the US education system towards one that is tailored to the unique needs, capacities, and strengths of each child, and prepares them to thrive in a complex and fast-changing world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Helping learners to see the whole world as their classroom presents **massive opportunities for many community stakeholders beyond education**, including local economies and social infrastructure institutions
- Expanding the range of places where learning happens beyond the classroom can **level the playing field** in areas that have historically been defined by inequity
- **Everyone has a role to play in reshaping our education system** - from teachers and students, to parents and community members, to local institutions and cultural leaders

Executive Summary

Schooling and education have been ripe for reconsideration for a long time. Correcting the longstanding inadequacies and inequities built into our existing systems requires urgent and far-reaching reimagination that goes beyond currently popular strategies predicated on incremental change. As we examine the fundamental flaws of our broken education system, the need to create learning environments that can help bring about a more equitable world is more relevant than ever before. At Siegel, we're partnering with a diverse range of grantees that think ambitiously about these deeply entrenched challenges, and develop bold strategies to engage learners, educators, and entire communities of support.

[Education Reimagined](#) is one such grantee whose work uses an expansive approach to think about where and how learning can happen. Their bold vision poses a set of unconventional questions: what if students could use the world as their classroom? What if a child's education involved the collective efforts of a diverse range of community stakeholders? How might a student's satisfaction

and engagement be impacted by the freedom to pursue their own personal interests using their favorite methods of learning?

As we start to reconsider what learning can look like and the range of circumstances where it can happen, answers to questions like these are starting to come into focus. The vision proposed by Education Reimagined activates entire communities of mentors, advisors, teachers, family members, and more around meeting the individualized needs, interests, and learning styles of each student, and envisions a world in which learning is the result of a collective effort. This view of learning goes far beyond the walls of a school building, and engages directly with the real world to bring meaningful lessons to bear in practice.

Bringing this vision to life, however, is not that straightforward. This case study explores the aspects of Education Reimagined's work that engage with these complex topics, examples of work that has challenged and advanced their thinking, and the road ahead for implementing their ambitious vision in communities around the country. ■

Program: Catalyzing Ecosystems

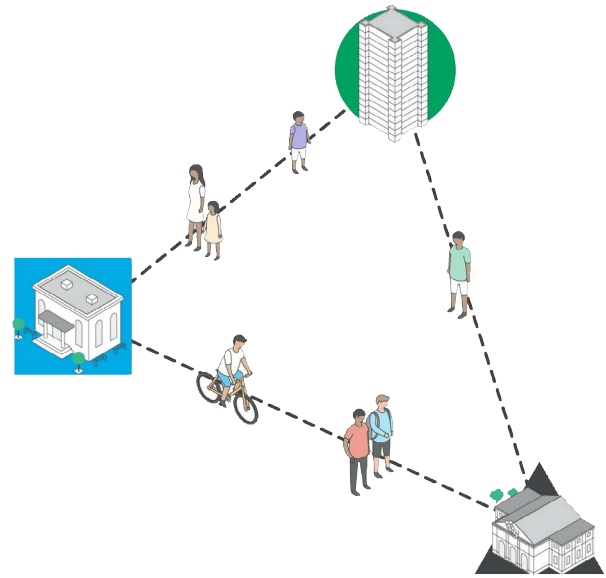
At its best, a school is a place where students and young people have the opportunity to explore, think creatively, form social bonds, and learn about the world around them. Education Reimagined’s framework is a call to “stop reforming around the edges of a system built for standardization and stratification and instead invent one on the foundations of equity, community, and youth empowerment.”

Education Reimagined recently published [The Big Idea](#), a digital resource designed to help more people to see a completely transformed way of approaching education. It includes a series of provocations that ask individuals to consider what might be possible in a community-driven learning environment - and what it might take to bring this vision to life in their own communities. The Big Idea is a powerful way to engage with these ideas because it directly implicates anyone who touches a part of the education system. Every member of a community has a potential role to play in this new vision, and all elements of a community’s resources - from libraries, to museums, to local businesses - can be leveraged for educational purposes. This asset-based approach is less about creating a broadly replicable, top-down system, and more focused on producing a tightly tailored match between local resources and real, demonstrated community needs.

The heart of this vision is the “Home Base” - a community-driven advisory system that serves as a hub for all participating children and families. Every child is embedded into a small group where they build relationships with a close network of advisors that help them navigate individualized learning journeys over many years. Each Home Base belongs to a broader network that coordinates vital services like transportation, community building, safety, and culture. The governance system for these networks is meant to be

The Homebase

A community-driven advisory system that serves as a hub for all participating children and families."



dynamic; it is made up of components that can be assembled and disassembled according to need. Similarly, Education Reimagined sees leadership roles in these communities as highly flexible, and open to change based on individual and community priorities and needs.

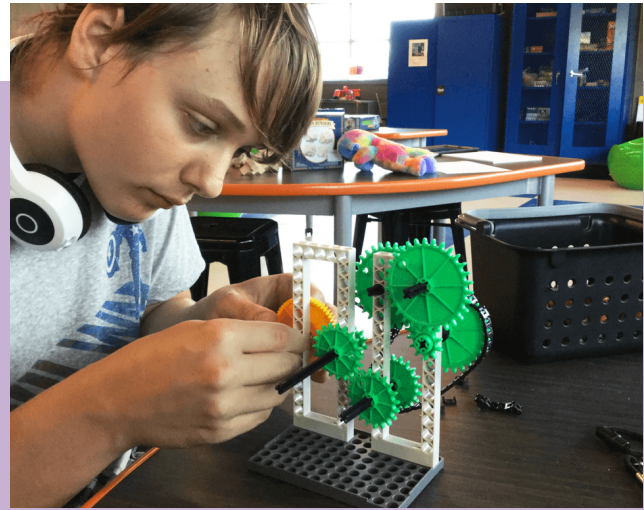
Glimmers of the Future

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PROFILE

Big Picture Learning

Substantial elements of the Home Base are already being used in Big Picture Learning’s (BPL) advisory model. Often described as a family within the school, the advisory matches students with an advisor and a group of classmates for multiple years. At BPL schools, the learning experience is personalized to each student’s interests, talents, and needs. Each student has their own learning plan, written by the student with support from their advisor and family members. Advisory serves as a place to actualize that learning plan beyond the walls of school such as internships, field site visits, mentorships and more. The first BPL school to use this advisory model was launched in Providence, RI in 1996, and now serves as the model for an international network of more than 50 BPL schools.



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FabNewport

FabNewport is a community-based makerspace designed to engage underserved youth in Newport and Providence, Rhode Island. Founded in 2013, FabNewport offers year round programming for youth, families, teachers, and community members. Their hallmark summer program, the Newport Experience (NEX), is a 6-week program that allows students to choose three 2-week experiences based on specific interest areas. Students are organized into “teams,” and the experiences are co-designed by both students and professional educators. These teams are comprised of: an adult coach, a young adult assistant coach, 1-2 navigators (teen interns), and 7-8 middle school aged learners. The coach serves as the team “guide,” who either has an expertise in the interest area or can facilitate connection with an appropriate community partner. Teams explore their interest areas using relevant community assets, all while deepening relationships and collaboration within their group.

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Norris Academy

Norris is the smallest public school district in the state of Wisconsin and serves primarily disadvantaged youth. With a commitment to an educational model where all learners are leaders, it focuses on exercising youth voice to create relevant, powerful learning experiences. Each learner works with a community of peers in conjunction with their Learning Specialist to meet their goals, while parents or guardians act as learning coaches, offering oversight and guidance. At Norris, both students and professionals are considered “learners,” and develop and maintain a Learner Profile. The Learner Profile is a fluid collection of who the learner is and who they want to become across each of the four dimensions: academic, employability, citizenship and wellness.



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High School for Recording Arts

Located in St. Paul, Minnesota, the High School for Recording Arts (HSRA) is a public charter school for students in grades 9-12. HSRA connects mostly out of school youth - many of whom were expelled or pushed out from traditional schools - through hip hop culture (music, dance, art and entrepreneurialism), pedagogical practices, and other forms of creative expression. The school operates within and around two professional recording studios, where students develop life skills through relevant, hands-on learning tailored to their individual talents, strengths, and passions. The curriculum combines daily mandatory courses in Language Arts and Mathematics with innovative, interdisciplinary courses and projects that connect traditional academics with dynamic, real-world learning. HSRA features both project-based and classroom learning, with teachers serving as facilitators and instructors. Each HSRA student has a personal learning plan and an advisor who serves as a key component to their success.

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Avalon School

At Avalon School in St. Paul, Minnesota, project-based learning has replaced conventionally structured classes and grade levels. Students are assigned to multi-age advisories, which have an advisor-to-student ratio of ~1 to 18. These low numbers allow for advisors to get to know their students and help them to develop their own individualized learning plans, which include individual and group projects, student-centered seminars, public presentations, and multidisciplinary senior thesis projects. Students take an active role in the school's governance through a student congress and peer mediation program. Finally, the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) enables Avalon students to pursue college level courses and credit through enrollment in local colleges and universities.

Impact and Next Steps

Impact

While no two Home Bases or community networks will look exactly the same, the benefits for learners, families, and communities will be expansive. Education Reimagined sees major potential for impact across sectors that can strengthen community ties and wellbeing in two major ways.

1

SOCIAL IMPACT: Learners become fuller participants in the life of the community.

Designing for students to engage directly with community resources as a part of their daily learning process helps them to become active participants in all areas of their local community. They will create projects, attend meetings, embed in local businesses, and lend new ideas. Belonging to a small, local, home base can connect families around a shared purpose, and strengthens relationships within the community on a smaller scale.

2

ECONOMIC IMPACT: Learners gain meaningful access to career pathways and social capital.

Following their interests and developing real relationships with local business and leadership can help learners develop organic professional networks.¹ Businesses also stand to gain by offering themselves as field sites, and can build a pipeline of future employees. With the growing aging population, there is an opportunity for intergenerational programming and mentorships that are mutually beneficial.

Members of Education Reimagined's network have shown strong evidence that letting individual learners set their own learning goals produces successful outcomes. A longitudinal study² about the Big Picture Learning network shows that learners and alumni of programs that follow these experimental structures "reported being deeply connected to peers and to adults, and that they developed the skills to build and maintain connections and forge relationships over time." They also were equally as likely to enroll in college, regardless of their race, gender, or parents' level of education.

Students have also described feeling more empowered to recognize and pursue internship and professional opportunities that align with their personal and academic goals. Factors like

internships and competency-based learning allow students to have agency over their education and give them the power to set their own individualized learning goals. Having the opportunity to pursue these interests and objectives across different contexts and situations allows learners to explore the business, social, and community aspects of each of those interests, and to tailor their educational and career pathways accordingly.

Next Steps

Bringing this vision to life at scale will require the participation and engagement of many communities, composed of a range of stakeholders. Everyone has a role to play, and there are a number of ways for different types of community leaders to get involved.

These are just a few of the ways that members of different constituencies can help advance this important work:

- Download this [Conversation Kit](#) and explore these ideas with colleagues and stakeholders.
- Map out your own community, and consider what spaces and services are available
- Reach out to [Education Reimagined](#) if you want to explore this possibility in your community.

Education is primed for a powerful realignment. Education Reimagined's ambitious vision is within reach, and with continued support and interest from a diverse range of stakeholders, stands to alter the way we approach learning and community for the better.

1. <https://www.siegelendowment.org/insights/article/building-an-equitable-innovation-economy-access-to-empowering-social-connections/>

2. <https://education-reimagined.org/findings-from-the-big-picture-learning-longitudinal-study/>