



# The Power of Partnership

Road Map Project: Formative Evaluation Summary

June 2016

# Introduction

The Road Map Project's theory of action is based on four core areas of work.



**Align vision, communication, implementation, and resources across partners collectively working to improve education in the region**



**Build strong systems to better serve the region's children and youth at scale**



**Engage families and communities in improving education systems**



**Use the "power of data" to catalyze improvement, advocate for policy and practice change, and hold organizations and systems accountable for improving education**

The Road Map Project is a collective impact effort aimed at improving educational outcomes from birth through postsecondary completion in the South King County region in Washington state. Started in 2010, the Road Map Project's long-term goals are to double the number of students who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020 and to close opportunity and achievement gaps for low-income students and children of color. The Road Map Project engages stakeholders across the cradle-to-career continuum in efforts to ensure that young people are healthy and ready for kindergarten, supported and successful in school, graduate from high school college/career ready, and earn a college degree or career credential.

The Center for Community Education Results (CCER) is the backbone organization for Road Map Project. CCER coordinates and supports project partners in planning and carrying out the common agenda. CCER participated in the design of this evaluation and is using the results for continuous improvement around their own role and to inform strategic planning across the partnership.



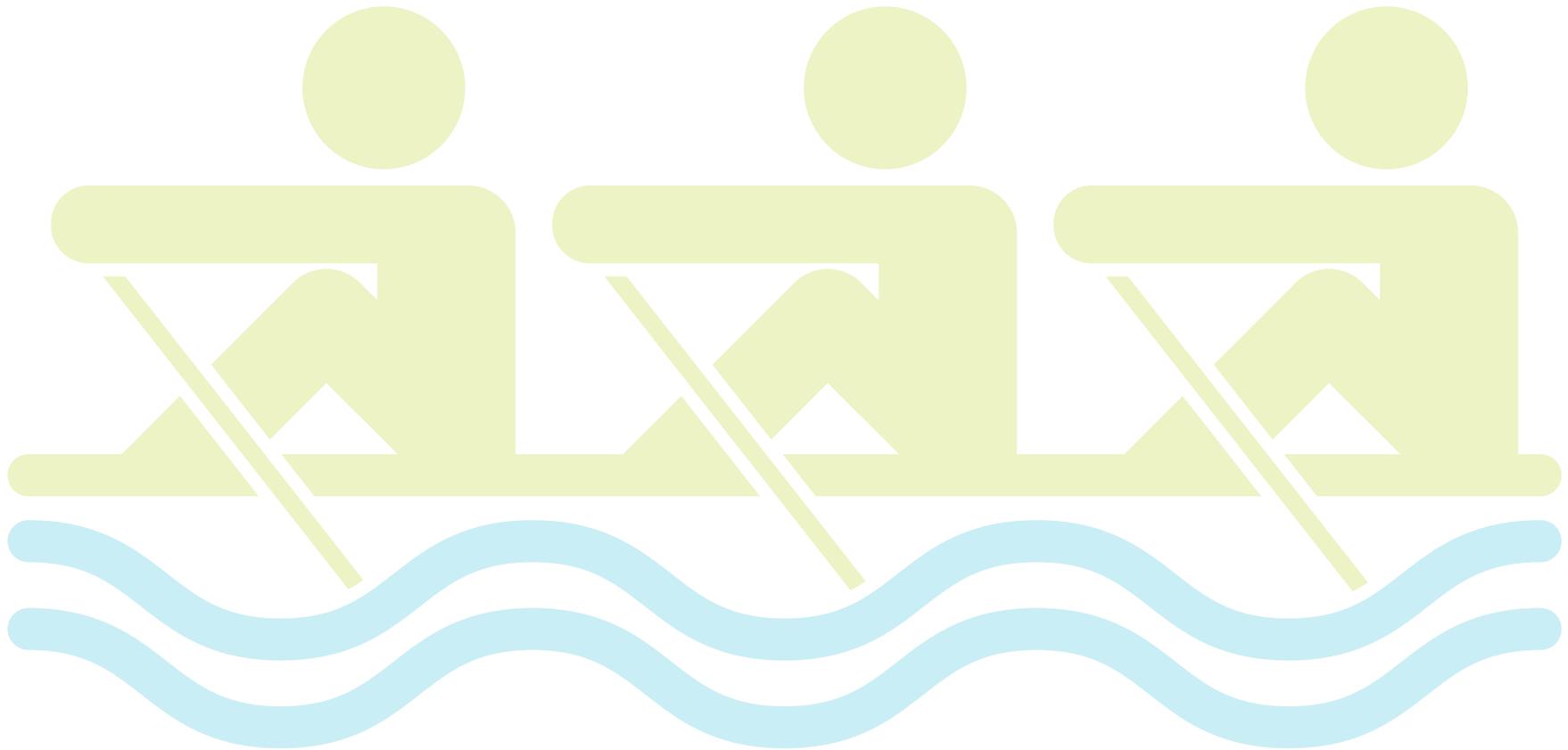
Collective impact is an approach to solving complex social issues through the involvement of multiple stakeholders—government agencies, businesses, education systems, community-based organizations, researchers—to build effective, long-term solutions. Five conditions are proposed to support the success of collective impact initiatives: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

This report summarizes key findings from the 2015 midpoint formative evaluation of how the Road Map Project’s theory of action is evolving and having an impact on the region. The report examines how well the Road Map Project is doing on each aspect of the theory of change and provides insight on how stakeholders perceive the influence of the initiative. The evaluation also explores stakeholder perceptions of how well the Road Map Project addresses issues of equity in all aspects of the project. Findings are drawn from survey data collected from 311 stakeholders across the initiative and interviews with 37 stakeholders involved in three key issue areas: family engagement, birth to third grade, and high school to postsecondary enrollment.

This report is organized around the four theory of action elements outlined above and also includes an evaluation of effectiveness of the backbone organization (CCER) in supporting this theory of action. For each element, we present high-level findings and stakeholder recommendations. Where possible, we include data from the 2013 evaluation for comparison.<sup>1</sup>

*This evaluation project was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.*

1. A more in-depth report is available on the Road Map Project website.



## Alignment

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**Align vision, communication, implementation, and resources across partners collectively working to improve education in the region**

While stakeholders see promise in Road Map Project efforts, there is uneven progress towards closing opportunity and achievement gaps, with only a few indicators on track to meet the 2020 goal.

The majority (75%) of survey respondents indicate that the Road Map Project is influencing improved overall student outcomes in the region, up from 61 percent in 2013. However, more than half report that the region is not yet reducing opportunity and achievement gaps for students of color.

The Road Map Project data confirm that there is uneven progress across the indicators and student groups. There is positive movement in reducing the number of students who trigger early warning indicators for dropping out, and course-taking patterns and high school graduation rates are also improving. However, progress on academic achievement in reading, math, and science is mixed. While the Road Map Project is having a positive impact, changes are not happening fast enough to meet the end goals of doubling the number of students who are on track to earn a postsecondary credential by 2020 and closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for students of color.



### Recommendation

In the past year the Road Map Project began planning for the next phase of the initiative. The partners are exploring how to differentiate strategies to better support specific groups of students and youth. This strategy refinement work may be further strengthened by identifying short-term indicators of progress toward the 2020 goal (e.g., implementation of new culturally responsive curricula) and mapping these indicators to a targeted set of strategies led by the partners that are in the best position to accelerate progress.

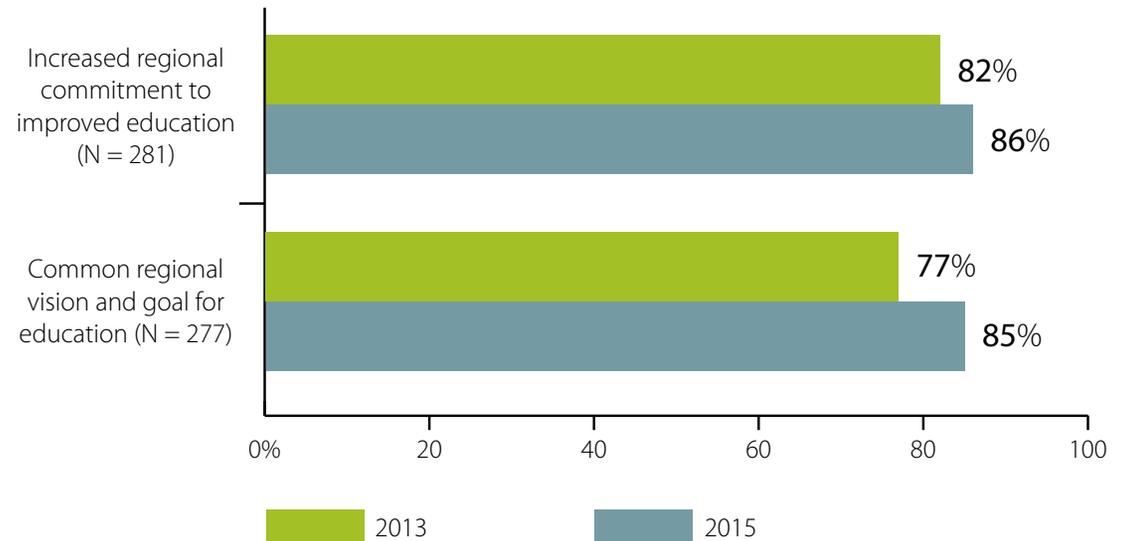
# There is a strong regional commitment and agreement around the 2020 goal, although stakeholders do not yet agree on how to reach that goal.

This commitment is an area of strength for the Road Map Project. A large majority of stakeholders report that there is a greater focus on regional identity and more buy-in to the importance of taking a cradle-to-career approach to improving education outcomes.

While there is strong agreement around the overall goals and agenda of the Road Map Project, there is not yet consensus among partners about what it takes to achieve them. For example, there is less agreement among stakeholders on how to define specific benchmarks such as kindergarten or college readiness. Stakeholders report that a common language is emerging across the region, although it is stronger among institutional partners (e.g., schools and higher education) than in community-based organizations and the community in general.

There are substantial examples of stakeholders working together on regionwide campaigns or events. Stakeholders are also coming together for regionwide professional development opportunities. These collective learning opportunities, which often bridge systems (e.g., districts) and sectors (e.g., community-based organizations and K-12), are helping to create common frameworks around promising practices. However, opportunities remain to deepen collaborative practice within and across sectors. Less than half of survey respondents reported that partners share resources, and many suggested that there is a need for more shared understanding of partner contributions and roles.

Figure 1. Over time, the Road Map Project cultivated a strong commitment to the goal and a common regional vision



Source: Results come from the 2013 and 2015 Road Map Project formative evaluation survey of stakeholders across the region (2013 N = 417; 2015 N = 311). Percentages represent the average level of agreement, calculated by dividing the mean of the item with the number of categories in the scale (in this case four).

## Recommendation

Road Map Project partners emphasize the need for more clear connections between partnership goals, collaborative strategies, and outcomes. Partners might benefit from co-creating a collaboration model that clearly defines partner roles, including which partners should take the lead on a given strategy, how collaboration will lead to intended outcomes, the rationale for collaborative strategies, and how resources can be more effectively shared across partners and systems. Road Map Project partners are currently engaged in a strategic planning process that may result in a more clear, cohesive, and aligned framework across the initiative.

“ There is a spirit of sharing that hasn’t always been around. An example is we have a student survey that we do that looks at a lot of different things, like aspirations and connections to school and noncognitive factors. Other districts are interested in our survey; it’s like wow, can we develop it and tweak it? There is just a lot of sharing of best practices and less competition maybe. Sometimes people are secretive or like, our district is the best, and you know, it’s a competitive thing. Now I think there is more of a spirit of community, of working on it together and that we’re trying things out and learning from best practices. ”



## College Bound Scholarship Campaign

Stakeholders frequently cite the College Bound Scholarship Campaign as a successful collaborative effort related to high school completion and postsecondary enrollment because of the increased number of students in the region enrolling in the program:

*I think things like the College Bound scholarship are a good example. It’s a real-time thing where when you look at participation rates in our region versus the rest of the state, we’ve really taken this on and said we have access to this opportunity. The Road Map Project has taken a lot of different roles around the College Bound Scholarship; everything from policy advocacy to promotion to events to application support to raising awareness and having data support where all of our districts are looking at the portal and doing sign-ups. A lot of our districts are almost 100 percent signed-up. That’s a great success...There is a very big difference with the Road Map Project versus the rest of the state. They’ve led this on and taken that tool and made a huge shift in the way that students are accessing college.*

# Questions remain about whether funding is aligned to support and sustain the effort.

The Road Map Project leveraged significant new funding to support education and improve the efficiency and alignment of existing resources. However, stakeholders question whether there is sufficient aligned investment in the actual strategies that are needed to reach the goal. For example: If the goal is to double the number of students earning a post-secondary credential, then has the initiative sufficiently increased investment in guidance counselors or rigorous high school course offerings? Stakeholders also question whether the funding is being distributed in an equitable manner, with some suggesting that community-based organizations are “forced” to align with Road Map Project activities. Finally, many stakeholders are concerned about the financial sustainability of the initiative once the current large investments from Race to the Top and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation expire.

“ I think all of us are worried about sustainability and that has not been an issue yet but I know that I’m really mindful of making sure that we have enough momentum before the end to our Race to the Top/ Road Map Project funding to be certain that the work will continue. I think in [our district] it will. I think we have the support of our superintendent, and I think we will be in a place where we will continue this work. I am just a little bit nervous about that. ”



## Recommendation

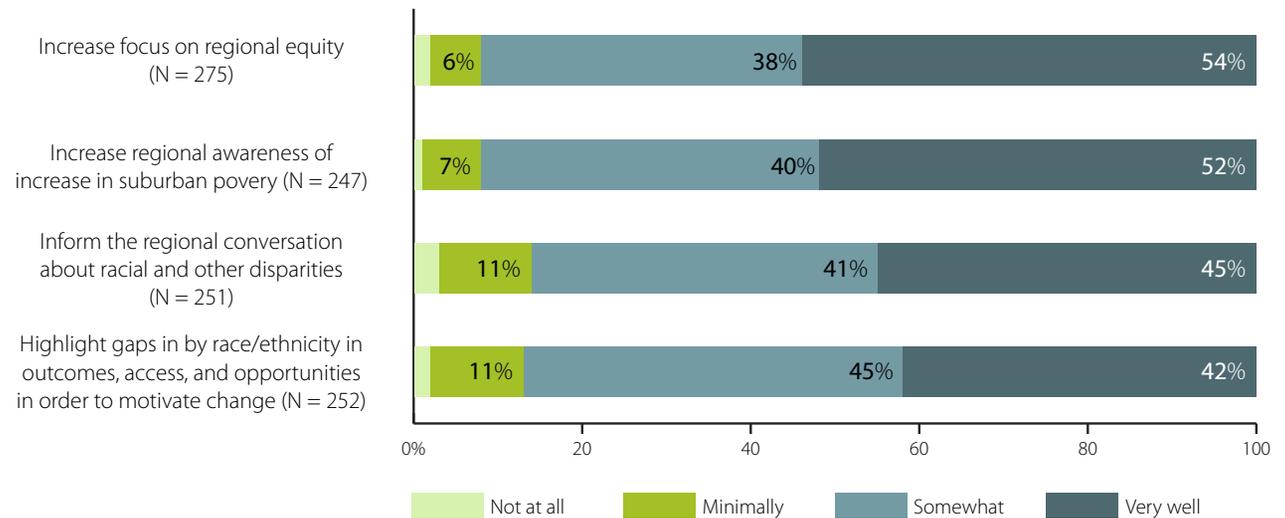
It is essential that Road Map Project partners include financial sustainability in the strategic planning process. Without this sustainability it is impossible to ensure that sufficient resources will be in place to support the recommended strategies over time. Continued efforts to integrate and embed Road Map Project activities within other collaborative efforts led by partners can also support sustainability. Partners may also want to investigate other types of collective impact funding models.

# The Road Map Project is drawing attention to issues of equity in the region. However, it is not yet clear how equity informs the day-to-day work of the initiative.

A significant majority of stakeholders report that the Road Map Project has sparked conversations about educational equity in the region. However, in interviews many stakeholders said they did not understand how equity informs the overall strategies and decision making of the Road Map Project. Stakeholders desire more explicit conversations around racial equity and the implications for the partnership.

Racial equity is a complex issue that influences all aspects of this collective impact initiative. Successfully addressing systematic inequities through collaborative efforts requires a shared understanding of how to infuse equity into all aspects of the work. Given the comprehensive nature of equity issues, additional efforts are necessary to make them more visible in the day-to-day implementation of the Road Map Project.

Figure 2. The Road Map Project has informed and elevated the discussion and focus on regional equity

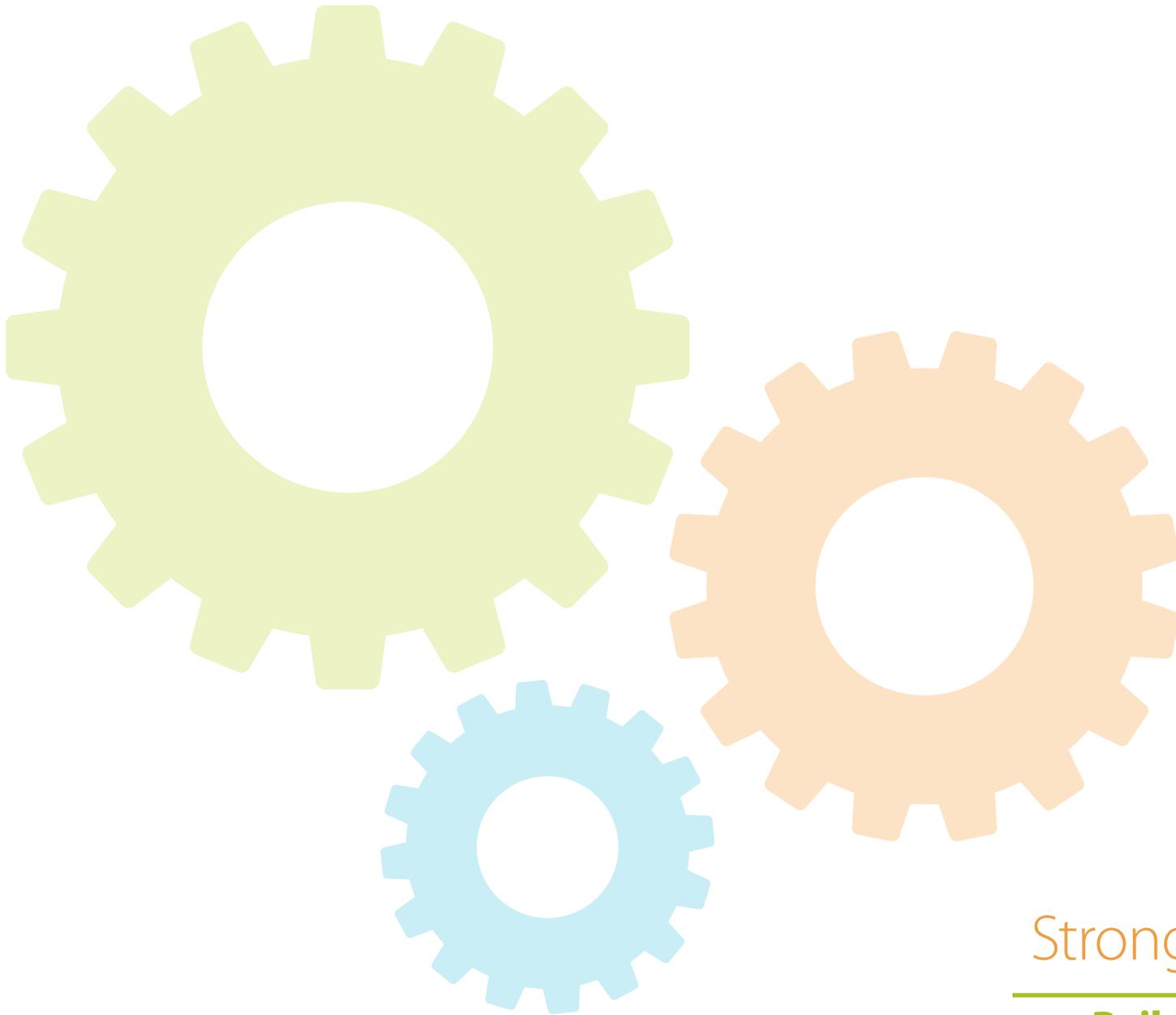


Source: Results come from the 2013 and 2015 Road Map Project formative evaluation survey of stakeholders across the region (2013 N = 417 | 2015 N = 311).

“I think that one of the things that is challenging is not dealing with it [equity] as a separate agenda item but thinking about how racial equity is a part of the work, which means that all of the work groups, everybody who is part of the Road Map, every part of the structure needs to tackle racial equity to see it as a fundamental part of their work. That to me I think would make a big difference in terms of the Road Map focus on, and progress toward, racial equity.”

## Recommendation

To ensure that equity is at the core of all work, the Road Map Project might consider adopting a clear and explicit equity framework to guide all internal and external processes. A shared understanding of equity includes an explicit statement of values, agreement about who leads the equity conversation, how to have that conversation at various levels of the initiative, and how to tackle difficult problems of systemic inequity. This work is underway. For example CCER is adopting a racial equity statement and partners are developing explicit equity goals as part of their action plans.



## Stronger Systems

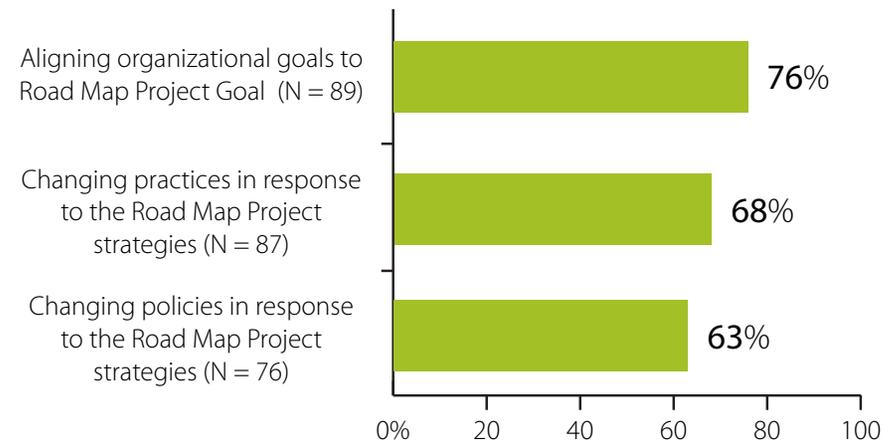
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**Build strong systems  
to better serve the region's  
children and youth at scale**

Organizations are participating in and benefiting from Road Map Project strategies, and in some cases are changing their practices. Questions remain about how to connect the work across the initiative to create long-term, comprehensive systems change.

Many organizations (e.g., school districts, community-based organizations, government agencies) report that they have aligned their goals to those of the Road Map Project and that they have increased their capacity to use data to inform practice. Districts and higher education are increasingly using regional data to inform their practice, including concentrated efforts on promoting the college readiness of college-bound students and widespread adoption of early warning systems. Community-based organizations are adjusting or expanding their service areas to align with the Road Map Project region and are using data provided by the Road Map Project to inform their work—from identifying schools in need of services to selecting the indicators and measures to track. Districts are creating new staff positions, investing resources, and adopting new models, tools, and curriculum to bolster family engagement and early learning efforts. Districts are also engaging in more cross-sector partnerships with early learning, community-based organizations, and higher education.

Figure 3. Partner organizations are aligning to Road Map Project goals and are changing their policies and practices



Source: Results come from the 2015 Road Map Project formative evaluation survey of “more involved” stakeholders across the region (N = 100). Percentages represent the average level of agreement, calculated by dividing the mean of the item with the number of categories in the scale (in this case four).

“The Road Map Project was a very, very supportive advocate of that Act [Early Start Act]. They helped bring support from the region. They helped created coalitions from the region that weighed in in support of the Act. They encouraged everything from editorial boards to other political activity or community support for the act itself. They played a really vital role in generating support for and understanding of what the Act would accomplish.”

There have also been collaborative efforts across sectors. The Road Map Project has supported the passage of state and local policy changes. Success stories for region-wide practice changes include the adoption of a common kindergarten registration date and Race to the Top funding for offering the P/SAT for free in schools. The Road Map Project is also helping to seed and support cross-sector coalitions in early learning and college/career readiness that may advocate for future policy and practice changes.

Promising systems-level outcomes associated with the Road Map Project include: collaborative efforts to improve developmental pathways within and across systems, shifts in resource allocation and funding patterns, and increased joint advocacy and implementation of regionwide policy and practice reform.

While these organizational changes and cross-sector efforts are promising, it is unclear whether these activities are sufficient to catalyze the type of deep structural change necessary to promote more equitable opportunities and outcomes for students. In addition, stakeholders wish to better understand the connections across the initiative: How do all the strategies work together to create long-term change in the lives of children and families? This was a common theme across the 2013 and 2015 evaluations.

“ I think it feels disjointed from Road Map meeting to Road Map meeting. So, what is this meeting for? How is this meeting different from this meeting? How are these people who are at this meeting, who do they need to be? What is the outcome? . . . How does CCER maximize those meetings to be more than just that one thing event? To be influencing the systems that they're working with to think differently? That's not happening. ”

### Recommendation

Deep structural and cultural change takes time. It is important for the Road Map Project to identify more immediate signs that suggest that the region is on a path to improved outcomes for children and families. This includes developing a shared understanding of what parts of a system or systems needs to change to better support children and families, identifying a focused set of strategies designed to produce that change, and creating measurable indicators of systems-level changes that will help the initiative track and report progress.



Stakeholders cite an urgent need for more inclusive, culturally responsive policies and practice. They call upon the Road Map Project to advocate for institutions to better support students and families of color.

Partners consistently draw attention to the need to shift the structure and culture of K–12 education. Without specific policies and strategies to address institutional racism, stakeholders suggest that the Road Map Project will continue to face challenges in addressing opportunity and achievement gaps in the region.

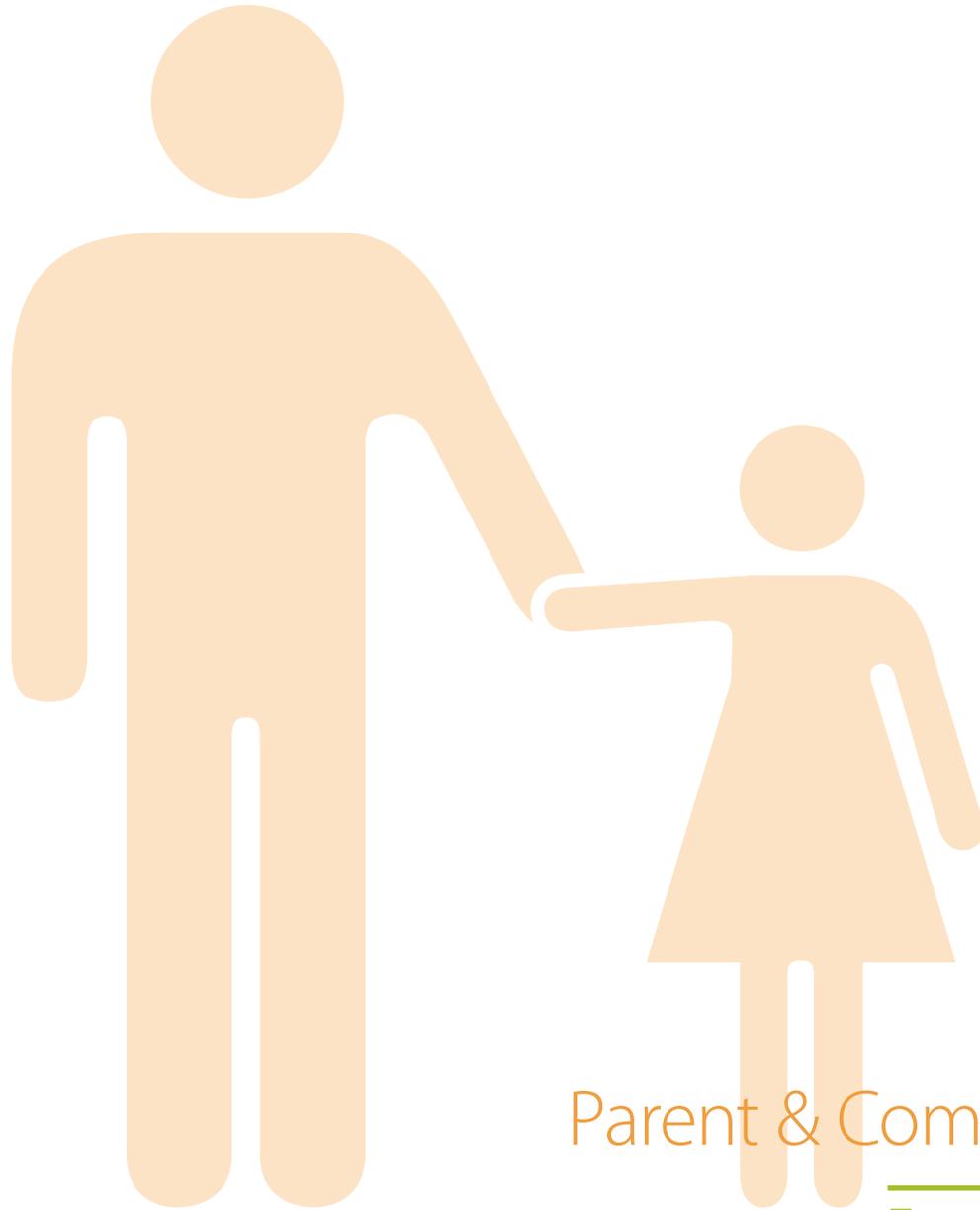
There is a perception that the Road Map Project does not communicate about the root causes of inequity or explicitly call out a need for culturally responsive practice in the strategies advanced by the initiative. Stakeholders believe that the Road Map Project is in a strategic position—both in terms of local power and national connections—to not only draw attention to gaps in opportunity, but to also advance innovative, research-based policy and practice solutions that clearly address these inequities.



### Recommendation

With the power of a regional dataset, cross-sector coalition, and knowledge of innovative models, the Road Map Project is in a strategic position to do more to proactively advocate for policies and practices that promote inclusion and equity in K–12 education.

“ I do think that’s [equity] an area where they [CCER] could better support progress, yes. They have the resources. They have the structure. They have the will. It’s always something I hear is going to happen, but I think there is just so much happening, not everything can be your top priority at once for any organization. It’s not possible. But, I think that this is one where really meaningful improvement could be made in a short-term timeframe. ”



## Parent & Community Engagement

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**Engage families and communities**  
in improving education systems

While the Road Map Project is starting to engage more diverse stakeholders, leadership is still not representative of the communities, identities, and experiences of the young people and families the project seeks to support.

Efforts are underway to increase representation and inclusion in Road Map Project activities, and survey results show the initiative is making progress. However, stakeholders suggest there is a need to further diversify the leadership of the Road Map Project and include more students, families, and practitioners as partners. K–12 system leaders are seen as having the most prominent roles in the leadership, planning, and implementation of the Road Map Project. Community-based organizations are seen as very involved in planning and implementing Road Map Project strategies, and yet are not viewed as having a significant role in leadership. Youth and parents are perceived to be the least involved, although participation rates are growing.

Analysis of Road Map Project working group lists offers additional perspective on the representation of various sectors in different areas of the partnership. In line with stakeholder perceptions, K–12 composes the largest part of the overall membership (30%), followed by community-based organizations (18%), government agencies (14%), and private funders (13%). However, membership is more evenly distributed across sectors in the decision-making groups that support the overall initiative, such as the Community Network Steering Committee and the Project Sponsors group. Non-professionals make up about 1% of the group membership.

“Parents who already had advocacy skills are involved [in Road Map Project]. Parents who need leadership development still are not able to have access. They are benefiting from the work, but their voice around the table is missing.”

Some partners recommend expanding Road Map Project leadership beyond administrators to include practitioners who work directly with children and families. Several cite a need for more “power sharing” with community-based organizations so that collective impact efforts are not just led by K–12 institutions and the backbone organization.

Many stakeholders echo this need for more meaningful engagement of youth and families of color. While survey results suggest mutual respect is growing across partner organizations and between education systems and the community, there is less progress taking place in valuing parents as partners in education and respecting cultural differences.

“Thinking through what power sharing looks like in a collaborative context, in kind of a collective impact context . . . I feel like if they could figure that out a little bit better . . . I think if CCER could practice what it would look like to not be the one who steps in to take the dollars and start sharing who does the work, I think could be really helpful. And, be intentional about communities of color being at the forefront of leading the work. That would be good.”

### Recommendation

The Road Map Project should take intentional steps to ensure that community members and practitioners are represented in the planning, implementation, and leadership of the work. There is a need to use innovative strategies to engage young people and families in the process of issue identification, strategy development, and implementation. Another idea advanced by partners is to have more work groups led by community partners rather than CCER staff.

The Road Map Project has raised the visibility of family engagement in the region, and partners are working on a theory of change and work plan for family engagement strategies.

Several efforts have taken place to increase family engagement and community representation in Road Map Project in the past two years. In 2015 significantly more survey respondents indicate that parent voice is included in Road Map Project activities and goals and that the partnership solicits input from a diverse set of stakeholders.

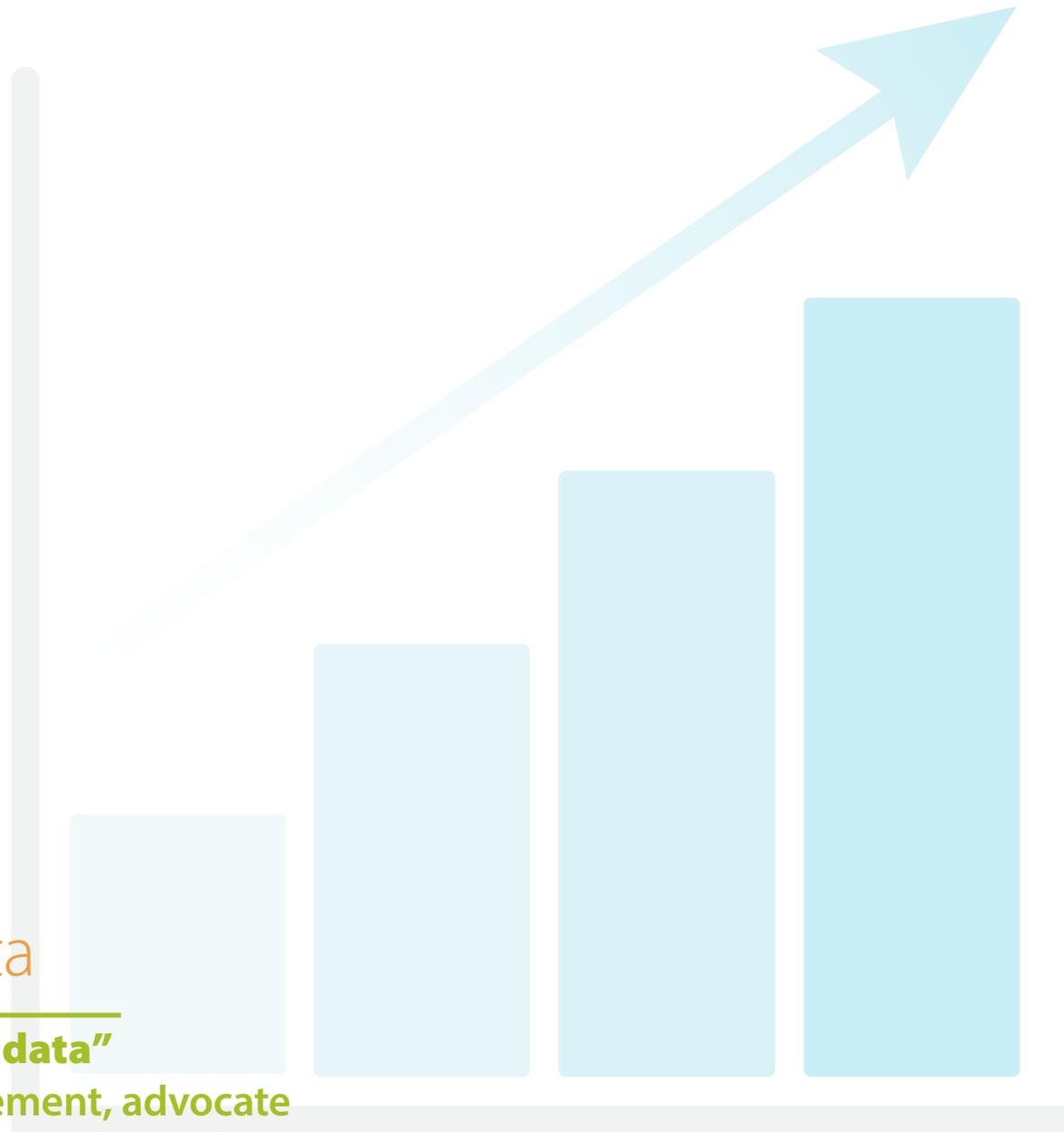
The Road Map Project has increased visibility of family engagement through events for families and learning community activities as well as the development of new data tools with the University of Washington. These family engagement activities link research with best practice and have offered new forums for parents and practitioners to network across the region. Stakeholders highlight Race to the Top projects and the participation of district teams in the Harvard Family Engagement Institute as promising leverage points for change, although it is too early to see the full impact of these efforts.

“The Road Map Project is giving attention and voice and maybe baby steps towards clarity around what authentic family engagement could and should be, especially for low-income and families of color . . . As the work began, there was a landscape assessment done . . . there was not common agreement, there was no common approach . . . Through Road Map Project, the attention that’s been given to the importance of engaging families in different ways has been super helpful. That has been one of the biggest initial values in the first few years of this campaign.”

### Recommendation

Road Map Project partners are developing a theory of change and work plan of family engagement strategies that focus primarily on technical assistance and coaching for schools and districts. Being explicit about how these strategies may be infused into other Road Map Project work plans and issue spaces will ensure engagement happens across the continuum.





## Power of Data

**Use the “power of data”** to catalyze improvement, advocate for policy and practice, and hold organizations and systems accountable for improving education

The “power of data” strategy continues to be one of the most successful aspects of Road Map Project. However, there are significant areas for improvement, including: building stakeholders’ capacity to use data to transform policy and practice, aligning data systems across systems and organizations, and ensuring communities have access to data.

Through public reporting of “results” data, sector-specific data reports, data use tools, and community data forums, the Road Map Project is effectively using data to increase accountability, highlight gaps and opportunities, and document success stories. By breaking out data by student characteristics, the Road Map Project highlights the “true” state of education in the region.

“Prior to the Road Map Project I don’t think communities were aware of sort of the disparity or the data in general. One example that comes to mind is when they talk about the tale of two districts or tale of two cities or something like that and showing kind of the disparities of this child goes down this road and this child. . . - it’s pretty reeling. I think the Road Map Project has helped to sort of shed light on the truth of the state.”



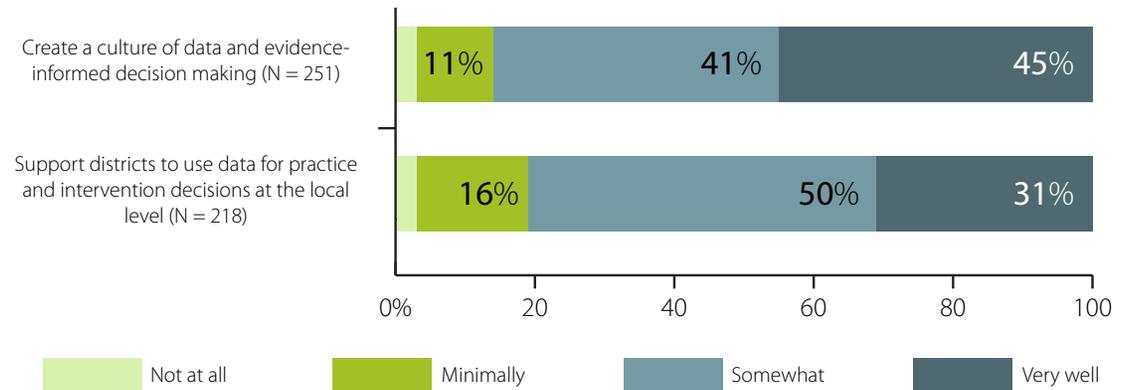
The Road Map Project and CCER have played an instrumental role in increasing partner access to data. Linking data across systems and organizations continues to be highly successful, particularly across early learning and K–12 and across K–12 and the higher education system. Efforts to set targets to focus collaboration, measure progress, and promote dialogue and comfort with data were cited as “great work in helping people understand data.” The Road Map Project data efforts are viewed as driving change across the region, informing the regional conversation on education and equity, promoting advocacy, and increasing public accountability.

“ Their [CCER’s] . . . analysis of the data in the region and how they reflect it back to the region on a regular basis, what we’re seeing in demographics, what we’re seeing in enrollment, what we’re seeing in outcomes, really helps remind and hold the system in South King County accountable. We wouldn’t be as far along as we are in this region without the Road Map Project. There is no doubt. ”

Stakeholders indicate that the Road Map Project is beginning to make progress on creating a culture of evidence and data-informed decision making across the region. This progress is seen in the number of organizational partners who report that they use data to highlight successes and identify gaps in opportunity.

Across the board, there is awareness that data use is critical in transforming practice and policy, although there are also concerns about the capacity of partners to use data for evaluation and continuous improvement. School staff, community-based organizations, and families need additional coaching and capacity to fully utilize the information they receive. Stakeholders also worry there is not enough investment in building capacity for community-based organizations to collect and use their own data.

Figure 4. The Road Map Project is perceived as influencing data culture and decision making



Source: Results come from the 2015 Road Map Project formative evaluation survey of stakeholders across the region (N = 311). Percentages represent the average level of agreement, calculated by dividing the mean of the item with the number of categories in the scale (in this case four).

### Recommendation

There have been huge investments in public data reporting through the Road Map Project, which have been successful. However, there are still challenges in regard to explicitly connecting data to transform practice and policy. Future investments should support partners’ ability to utilize data to catalyze policy and practice changes and to build capacity and sustainability for these data efforts.



CCER

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**Effectiveness**  
of the backbone organization

Partners see CCER as a helpful and responsive backbone organization in roles that are best suited for them, such as data, advocacy, and convening. Stakeholders recommend that other partners could take a more active role in leading implementation.

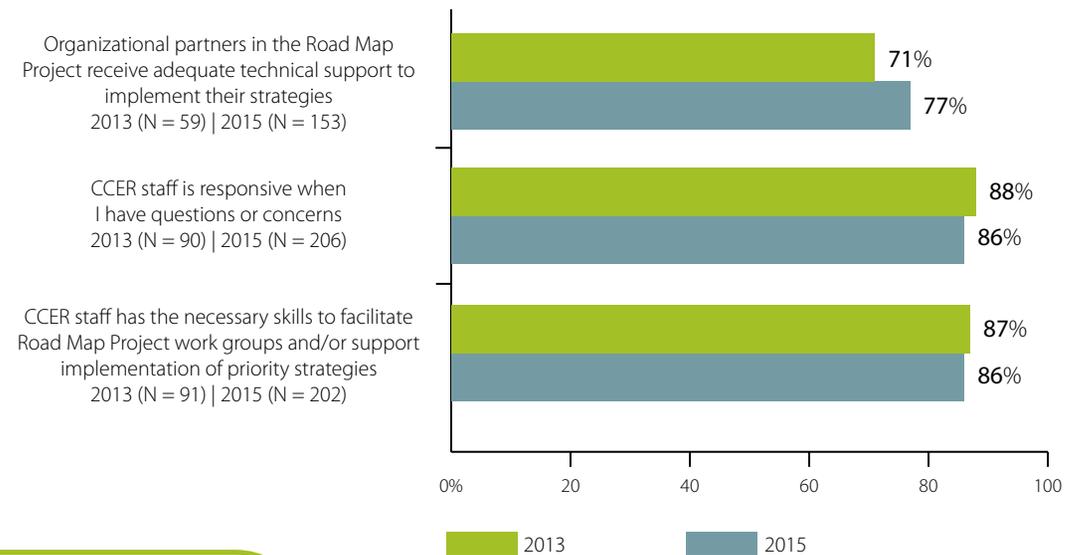
CCER is the backbone organization for the Road Map Project. CCER coordinates and supports project partners in developing and implementing strategies designed to produce change around their common agenda. Stakeholders overwhelmingly reported that CCER is helpful and responsive to partner needs, and organizations feel they receive technical support to implement their priority strategies. They describe CCER leadership and staff as passionate, hardworking, and invested in making progress on the Road Map Project goals, with significant strengths in promoting data use and convening stakeholders.

While there is consensus that CCER is a strong backbone organization, stakeholders were mixed in their perceptions of CCER's effectiveness in guiding the work from talk to action. Some felt that having partner organizations lead work groups, rather than CCER staff, might lead to more traction and better facilitation. Survey respondents indicate that school districts and community-based organizations should be the primary drivers of capacity-building, policy, and alignment efforts, while CCER should drive data, public communication, and advocacy. These issues were raised in the context of increasing the diversity of perspectives and promoting long-term sustainability for the initiative.

### Recommendation

Partners suggest that it is time to rethink the leadership, structure, and facilitation of work groups. Increased co-facilitation with partners would promote shared ownership of the work and generate more buy-in from the work group members. CCER is currently in the process of implementing these changes.

Figure 5. Stakeholders perceive CCER support to be responsive and helpful



Source: Results come from the 2013 and 2015 Road Map Project formative evaluation surveys of stakeholders across the region (2013 N = 103; 2015 N = 311). In 2013 only “more involved” stakeholders responded.



## Conclusion

This midterm evaluation of the Road Map Project partnership offers signs of progress as well as lessons learned in the journey to strengthen the cradle-to-career support system in South King County. Bright spots include the growing commitment and alignment around a common agenda for the region; increased access to data and use of data to inform policy and practice; and responsive backbone support. The Road Map Project is effectively using data to draw public attention to issues of educational equity in the region. And like many groups, the Road Map Project is actively reflecting on their role in transforming systems to ensure that all children, youth, and families thrive.

In line with recommendations from this evaluation, the Road Map Project is starting to develop a more explicit equity lens to examine and revise group structures and governance within the initiative. Diverse partners are coming together to reflect on the current progress on 2020 indicators and to set more targeted, systems-level goals and strategies. In the future, Road Map Project partners might consider how to deepen capacity-building efforts so that data and equity work can be sustained in classrooms and communities beyond the life of this initiative. This is a critical time for the Road Map Project, as committed partners come together to reflect on their collective progress and to map out a common path forward.

# Moving forward: Questions for consideration

## EQUITY

What is the equity framework that guides the everyday work of the Road Map Project?

How might such a framework be useful in focusing and connecting the efforts of Road Map Project leadership, CCER staff, and work groups?

## ALIGNMENT

How does the Road Map Project choose the policies and practices it promotes?

How can this process be made more transparent and consistent across the initiative, with a clear focus on equity?

## STRONGER SYSTEMS

What are the specific systems that need to be strengthened and in what ways?

What capacity is needed to track progress along the way?

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What are the opportunities to integrate the work of the Road Map Project into other activities in the region and reduce the number of meetings for partners?

What are some opportunities to deepen engagement of youth and families in the planning, implementation, and leadership of the Road Map Project?

What needs to shift (e.g., capacity, flexibility, skills) to allow for this deeper engagement?

## DATA

How can the Road Map Project create a stronger link between data reports and action plans?

What opportunities exist to build the capacity of local organizations to use data for continuous improvement?



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