Empowering youth to create, innovate, and lead

We believe that every young person should...

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—Amy Rex, Milton Town School District superintendent

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PHOTOS: Left, Youth & Adults Transforming Schools Together team shares a joyful break after a day of drafting their action plan. Center, Youth Advisory Council member Maryann Songhurst leads a discussion about youth-centered issues. Right, Grace Johnson, youth facilitator from U-32 High School, interviews Jonathan Carrigan of Bellows Falls Union High School at the High School GTY orientation.
The Challenge: Vermont is losing the potential of too many of our young people. A widening opportunity gap is limiting their options.

How do we know this?

2 out of 5
VT youth report that
They are not valued by their community. (Students of color and LGBT students are significantly less likely to feel that they matter to their community.)

Only 61% of students believe that they have a voice in their learning and their lives upon entering middle school. This drops to 37% by twelfth grade.

Less than half of youth (44%) report a sense of personal power.

Result:
- Disengagement from learning
- Sense of hopelessness
- Decrease in critical life skill development
- Decrease in high school completion and post-secondary options
- Decrease in civic engagement

Solution:
- Ensure that every young person:
  - Is known and valued in their community
  - Has a sense of purpose
  - Has the ability to shape their own lives, and the lives of others

UP Programs

- Communicating School Redesign: Youth-adult teams build support for school redesign.
- Getting to ‘Y’: Young people become leaders in improving the health and wellness of their communities.
- P4 Advisory: Personal Power & Purpose through Partnership: Youth build self-awareness, effective communication, and self-advocacy skills over the course of a school year.
- M3: Mindset, Metacognition & Motivation: Youth master the ways brain-based strategies can drive their learning and share this knowledge with their peers and teachers. Concurrently, M3 teachers engage in professional development to hone their practice.
- Youth & Adults Transforming Schools Together: Students and teachers join together to ensure that learning is engaging and effective for all students, and youth are agents of change.
- Transforming School Culture through Restorative Practices: Youth and adults weave restorative principles and practices into the fabric of their school culture.
- Cultivating Pathways to Sustainability: A partnership with Shelburne Farms: Youth and adults create year-long projects focused on pathways to building a socially, economically, and ecologically just society.
- Customized Programs & Support: Schools partners with UP for Learning to create a wide variety of opportunities to position youth as change agents in partnership with adults.

I had many opportunities to listen to youth; they reflected such a high level of introspection and passion. My takeaway was simple: No longer can change occur in education without youth and adults partnering together.

―CSR principal and team member

“M3 changes the culture at our school. Assignments become opportunities, not obligation; challenges are embraced, not avoided; and mistakes are viewed as steps to growth, not signs of failure.”

―M3 teacher advisor

“I now know that education is a collaborative process between students and adults working together... I know that meaningful action can be taken by anyone and that it is an important part of democracy.”

―CSR youth participant

When people ask me for an example of high quality work on student voice and youth-adult partnerships, I always send them to UP for Learning. It is the premier nonprofit in the nation that draws upon evidence-based practice and research to carefully design projects aimed at improving schools and empowering young people.

―Dr. Dana Mitra, Pennsylvania State University

Opening Doors to Youth as Innovative Leaders
Core Values & Beliefs

Our fundamental value is to SEEK EQUITY & JUSTICE

We believe that educational equity is a human right. All young people have the right to a meaningful and engaging education. In order to pursue this aim, we are guided by these principles and values...

SHARE RESPONSIBILITY
Learning and change must be transparent and must be driven by adults and youth as equal partners.

START FROM STRENGTHS
Youth and adults have the wisdom and capacity to orchestrate change. Beginning with what’s working provides hope and energizes a community to embrace change.

CREATE OPEN DIALOGUE
Deep conversation is central to changing school cultures. When systems are designed for youth to be engaged as full partners with equal value, the work of school transformation can occur by creating a shared vision for education and the learning process.

EMPLOY DATA TO DRIVE CHANGE
Research is a vitally important way to build credibility between youth and adults. When a community works together to make meaning of their own data, they are strengthened by what they learn and emboldened to take action.

YEAR 1

- 4 high school teams engaged in improving schools
- Served schools in 4 of 14 counties
- 32 youth involved in changing their schools
- 1 school transformation program
- 0 graduate courses
- 1 faculty founder
- An operating budget of $60,000

YEAR 12

- 388 high, middle and elementary school teams engaged in improving their schools & communities
- Served schools in 14 of 14 counties
- 3,000 empowered & skilled youth leaders made a positive difference in their schools & communities
- 8 youth-adult partnership programs transforming schools & communities
- 11 accredited graduate classes supporting teachers in their role with youth as co-creators of change
- 7 experienced and passionate educational leaders
- An operating budget of over $600,000

WE ARE GRATEFUL to the individuals, foundations, and organizations who have made our work possible over the past 12 years!

SUPPORTERS & COLLABORATORS

In collaboration with the following foundations and organizations, we are proud to ensure that all young people have opportunities, support, knowledge, and skills needed to pursue active roles in their learning, their lives, and their community.

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