

UP FOR LEARNING 2021-22



ANNUAL REPORT

UP for Learning supports educational communities' work toward systemic transformation, increasing the authentic voice of youth in learning and decision-making. We believe educational equity is a basic human right and *all* young people deserve a meaningful and engaging education. The heart of this work lies in youth-adult partnership, fostering youth voice and leadership to drive change. As our organization has grown, so has the number of youth and the level of youth engagement in partnership and facilitation of our programming and advocacy work. We use research-based models that transform the relationships between youth and adults to one of shared ownership and shared responsibility. UP offers facilitation, strategies, tools, and ongoing coaching to ensure all young people can pursue active roles in their learning, their lives, and their community.

At UP for Learning we understand that youth, and the educational system that has been built around them, are more successful and empowered if they have the opportunity to share their experiences, wisdom, and ideas in a space that respects their voice. This voice does not thrive separately; its full impact is realized when an adult partner authentically values youth voice, serves as a champion, and shares their experience, supporting movement toward positive change. **What does this look like in action? Read on!**



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

UP By the Numbers

Number of youth-adult teams:

74

500 teams since 2008

Number of youth leaders:

966

4,297 leaders since 2008

2 youth voting members on UP's Board of Directors

3 Youth Program Specialists (high school/college students)

25 Youth Advisory Council members

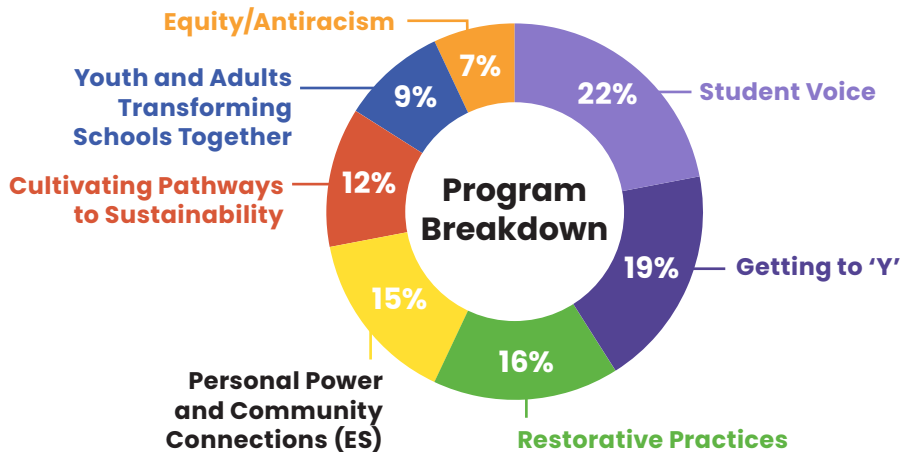
1,500+ hours of compensated time for UP's Youth Co-Facilitators (this is over twice as many hours from FY21)

74 youth-adult teams engaged in yearlong Youth Participatory Action Research projects

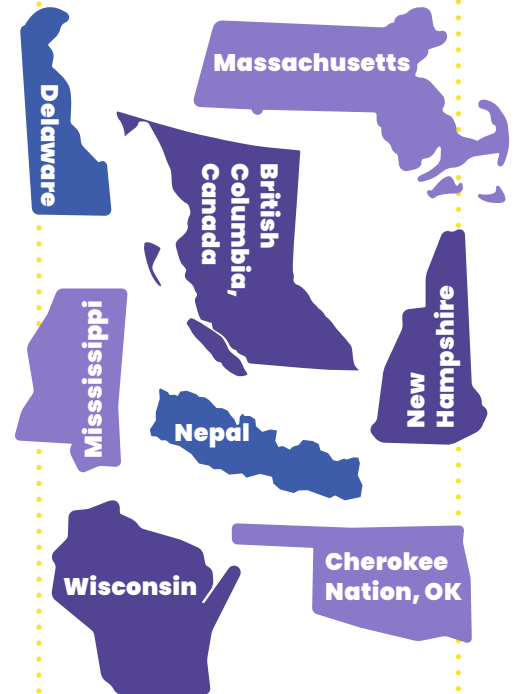
9 monthly virtual racial justice dialogue events led by Vermont and Mississippi youth leaders

UP for Learning's programming created a significant increase in **confidence and trust in youth potential**, and a significant increase in youth feeling that people at school **listen to and respect their ideas**.

Source: analysis of 2021-2022 pre- to post-survey data from all participants



Expanding Beyond Vermont



Collective Impact: Working Together to Create Systemic Change

UP has partnered with a number of nonprofits and community partners to support the role of youth-adult partnership within their organizations and in the larger community.

- Shelburne Farms
- Essex Community Justice Center
- Burlington Community Justice Center
- Spectrum Youth and Family Services
- Howard Center
- HTI Catalysts/Listening 4 Justice (Atlanta, GA)
- Vermont Student Anti-racism Network
- VT Restorative Approaches Collaborative

8 schools

13% of UP schools

8 teams

11% of UP teams

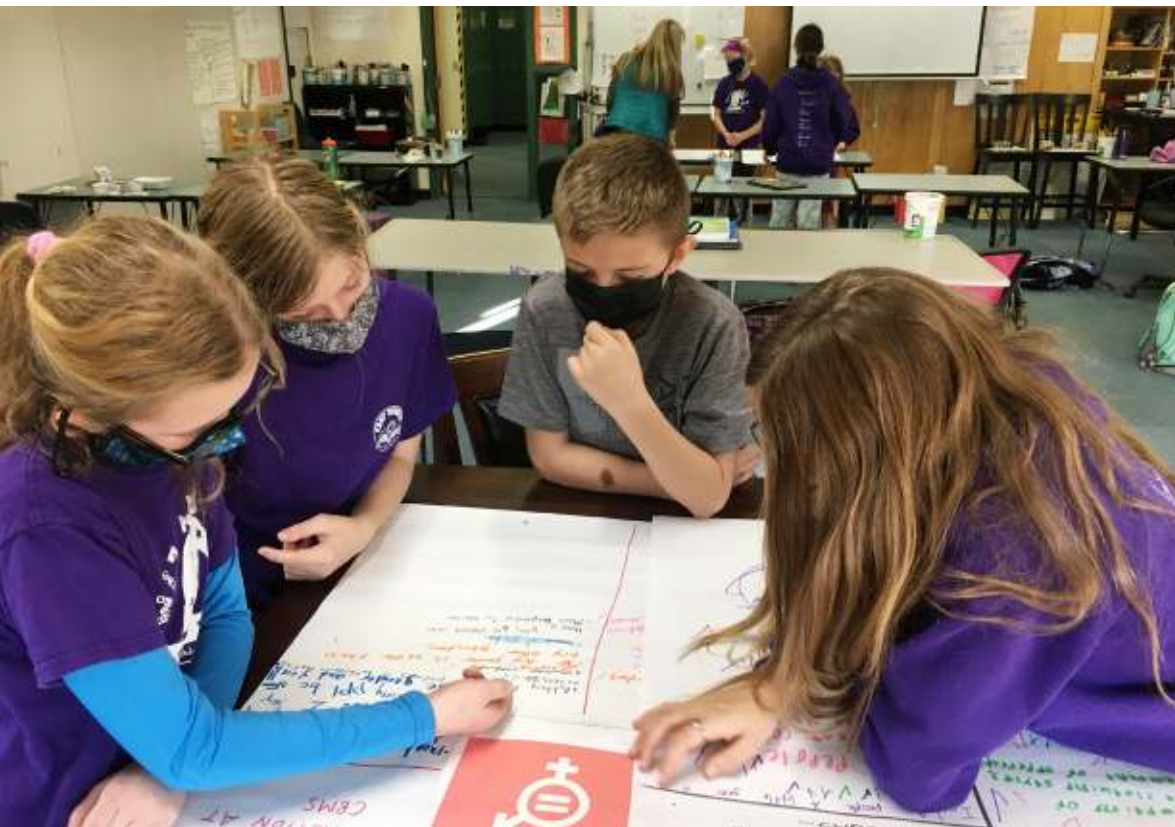
66 adults

23% of UP adults

160 youth

17% of UP youth

2021-22 Stories



“Partnership allows for more possibilities, with the students bringing the fresh ideas and outlook, while the adults bring resources and the opportunities for the youth to put their ideas into action.”

—CPS youth participant

CULTIVATING PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY: LOCAL CHANGE WITH A GLOBAL IMPACT

Cultivating Pathways to Sustainability (CPS) brings youth voice to the forefront of building healthy and just communities. After exploring the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the virtual kick-off retreat, each school team began researching areas in their communities where they would like to make positive change. Through data collection and meeting with community partners, teams drafted their action plans and set to work.

Some examples of projects included:

- **Crossett Brook Middle School (Duxbury, VT):** The team conducted a survey to learn more about student and community needs. They worked to eliminate the use of plastic spoons in their cafeteria, provide free period products in their school bathrooms, and hold a food and toiletries drive for a refugee resettlement center.
- **Piney Woods School (Piney Woods, MS):** The team recognized that COVID had created many setbacks

for their school, including faculty and resources. This sparked the idea for a landscaping team that would lead a campus beautification project to create a more sustainable community for the people, plants, and animals on campus.

- **Harwood Middle School (Moretown, VT):** After data collection the team identified a strong need for youth to feel valued by all adults. The team advocated for students' pronouns to be included on attendance lists for substitute teachers.
- **Kopila Valley School (Nepal):** The youth interviewed local elders to gather information about local plants, building partnerships with the community along the way. The team created new signage to support future students' understanding of what's growing there, supporting quality education.

At a virtual retreat in June, the teams shared their experiences, celebrated their accomplishments, and connected with each other!

EXPANDING PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH VOICE AND LEADERSHIP: MILTON HIGH SCHOOL



"I learned that not all problems are fixed in a day and that's okay, things can and will take time. [The work this year] impacted me in a good way because I will be able to take a better look at myself and my actions."

—11th grade youth, Milton High School

Youth and adults formed three advisory teams focusing on equity, teaching/learning and curriculum (TLC), and restorative practice.

After discussing strengths and opportunities regarding equity at their school, the **Equity advisory** created and distributed a survey that posed questions about feelings of belonging at MHS, and how comfortable students feel standing up for others. The team plans to use this data to inform this year's work, with the ultimate goal of creating a near-peer mentor program within advisories. They also gave feedback on the district wide equity policy, and members of the advisory presented the policy to the school board.

The **TLC advisory** group brainstormed changes they would like to see in teaching, learning, and curriculum along with action steps. Youth voiced a strong need for a better understanding of course offerings, so they could make informed choices when designing their schedules. They decided on a video project to make the Program of Studies "come to life" and inform students about the variety of classes offered through interviews with staff and students. The team built an online platform with links to staff and student videos describing what makes each course unique, including expectations and highlights.

The **Restorative Practices advisory** wrote community building circle discussions, visited advisories to facilitate activities, games and circles, and discussed their vision for community at MHS. In the upcoming year, they hope to make advisory a more comfortable place for people to share, and to make circles a more commonly used practice for discussion.



BRINGING POLICY TO ACTION: AUTHENTIC YOUTH VOICE IN GOVERNANCE AT LAMOILLE SOUTH UNIFIED UNION

Working with the Equity Sub-Committee of the LSUU School Board, UP helped the youth-adult team elevate student voice in decision making at the governance level by establishing protocols that have built strong connections between committee members and the community. The conversation has built a shared understanding of the experience of students, staff, and community while upholding the goals of engaging in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work. The committee crafted an equity policy that reflected the LSUU community's values and aspirations. When the school board approved the policy in March, the committee began integrating the policy into the work of the school district and the community. Going forward, this committee will build on the foundation established by the new policy, conduct an equity audit by engaging all voices in the community, and continue communicating the purpose, process, and progress of their work.



YOUTH TAKING ACTION FOR HEALTH EQUITY: CHEROKEE NATION GETTING TO 'Y'

In partnership with the [Cherokee Nation Public Health Department](#), students in Oklahoma's Tahlequah High School joined Getting to 'Y' (GTY) this year. Seven student council members and their advisor volunteered to take the lead as the Core Team. Throughout December, the Core Team worked with UP staff and epidemiologists from the Cherokee Nation Public Health Department to lead a larger group of peers through analysis of their local Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data. The students created a Circle of Courage to document existing assets in their school and community, then reviewed their region's 2019 YRBS report to identify strengths and concerns about youth health and well-being. The group then thought about root causes of their concern areas and brainstormed possible solutions. The Core Team shared their data priorities and gathered input and ideas from community members at the Community Coalition Annual Meeting. The Coalition was so impressed with the students' work that they invited them to join the Coalition, and offered funding to help implement action steps!

*"The LSUU School Board has made a very conscious effort this year to amplify student voice and empower our youth as critical decisions are made. **UP for Learning has been a phenomenal partner to help us create the environment for those conversations and to really foster a positive climate throughout.** We are tackling some very important work and their organization has been able to help guide the process with highly skilled student and adult facilitators. It feels good to make such progress and know we are listening to and learning with our next generation of leaders."*

—Ryan Heraty, Superintendent,
Lamoille South Unified Union School District

REIMAGINING WELLNESS THROUGH RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: MONTPELIER ROXBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The youth-adult team at Montpelier High School met weekly to learn about restorative practices, build connections on their team, and plan ways to share restorative practices with their community. One way they chose to invite others into restorative practices was by offering a circle keeper training for anyone in the school. Team members organized the location and date for the training, and created a plan for how to share foundational principles of restorative practices such as using a talking piece, guidelines and sample scripts. The youth-adult team modeled a community building circle, and then broke into smaller groups to practice leading and participating in them. One participant shared that they left “[with more training] in how to create a more positive place in advisory where everyone connects.”



PERSONAL POWER AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP GROWS WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEAMS

Teams of youth and adults in elementary schools in Slate Valley, Greater Rutland County, and Orleans Southwest Supervisory Unions in VT explored listening, resilience, values, and empathy through hands-on activities and reflection. These teams created norms and values for their work, looked at their school climate survey data and then took action based on their analysis. Teams organized whole school community events, visited younger classes in their school to share their learning, and used mini-grants to purchase new materials as ways to improve their school climate and create more community.

Spotlight on Middletown Springs Elementary (MSE): Fifth and sixth graders made meaning of their school climate survey, identifying their top concerns of feeling safe and getting along with others at school. The team threw a whole school celebration with indoor rock climbing, and designed and implemented classes about respect with the 2nd and 3rd graders. The training was co-facilitated by an MSE alum!



*“The large team of youth and adults from our school is an indication of the endorsement for UP for Learning, and **the creation of an environment where everyone feels respected, has a sense of belonging and experiences equity.** I am moved by the willingness of students and staff to embrace Restorative Practices, and by the increased positivity I am witnessing in this short time. Continued training and support from UP for Learning is essential for additional growth and sustainability. I speak from the heart, endorsing much needed expanded opportunities from UP for Learning. Our students, staff and community would greatly prosper.”*

—Adult restorative practices team member



STUDENT VOICE AT VERMONT CAREER CENTERS: CENTRAL VERMONT CAREER CENTER, BARRE, VT

Youth and adults at the Central Vermont Career Center (CVCC) have been working together to build a more connected community and to bring more student voice to decision making and learning. CVCC students come from all over central Vermont to take classes in automotive technology, digital media arts, natural resources and sustainability, emergency services, cosmetology, baking and culinary arts, plumbing and heating, and medical professions. Since students come from several different towns, and attend different programs, many youth and instructors expressed that the community can feel disconnected, and the Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) team has been working on addressing this concern.

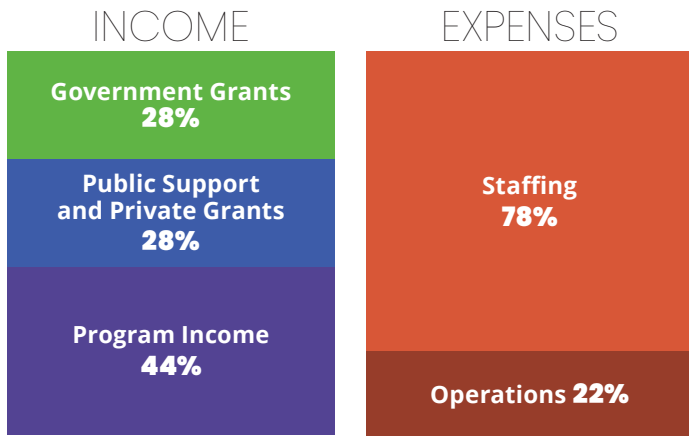
Using a series of surveys and dialogues, the team initiated action to build on the “Four Rs” of 21st century education: relationships, rigor, relevance, and shared responsibility. Looking at how these play out in the experiences of CVCC youth and adults, the team selected three areas where they want to make positive change: classroom management, empowering youth voice in decision making, and helping to address students’ fears of failure. The spirit of their work is extraordinarily “caring and candid” as they work to build a culture where youth feel cared about and validated.



ELEVATING AND EMPOWERING STUDENT VOICE: BRANDYWINE SCHOOL DISTRICT

In 2020, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) created the Equity Education Framework: Strategic Intent 1.0 Elevate and Empower Student Voice with a commitment to centering student voice to ensure equitable access to education. The goal was to find schools, districts, and communities exemplifying student voice in action to guide establishing, sustaining, and scaling effective student voice practices in Delaware. Through ongoing dialogue with the DDOE’s Office of Equity and Innovation, they connected UP with our current partners in Brandywine School District (BSD) in New Castle County, DE, to pilot this project. During 2021-22, UP and BSD partnered to support the BSD Equity Action Council, composed of Principals and Equity Champions, in building understanding and structure for youth and adults working together as full partners in learning and change. The work continues with more youth training as co-facilitators, design of the Student Voice Advisory Team, and development of a Student Voice Vision, Framework and Action Plan. This project will increase the scale and impact of student voice pathways in DE schools.

2020-2021 FINANCIALS



UP's Commitment to Anti-Racism

UP strives to be actively anti-racist in our work as an organization, and in our lives as the youth and adults who form our organization. UP Faculty, Board of Directors, and Youth Advisory Council members meet regularly to check in about how we are holding ourselves accountable, educating ourselves, and taking action to combat systemic racism. **We commit to continuing to deepen and strengthen our organization's anti-racist policies and practices as we work towards educational equity and justice for communities across the country and world.**

Economic Equity and Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring affordable access to our programs, and prioritizing our work with our most economically challenged and underserved schools. UP for Learning is committed to systemic social justice and closing the opportunity gap — ensuring that all schools have access to UP's work regardless of their ability to pay. **Thanks to our philanthropic supporters we were able to realize our vision of greater educational equity across Vermont and beyond.**



DONATE to support our work!

Reading a paper copy of the annual report? Look for a donation envelope tucked in these pages, or go to upforlearning.org and click "donate."

Core Values and 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.

Empowering youth and adults to reimagine & transform education together