

IMPACT UPDATE



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

FEBRUARY 2023

Every member of a community has a **sphere of influence**.

In educational systems, this sphere contains a network of relationships that can influence decisions, policy and practices. The outcomes ultimately depend on the strength of the relationships between students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members. UP for Learning supports these networks as they fully engage youth in reimagining and transforming education. Our grounding belief is that change occurs when youth and adults share power, voice, and responsibility. Humans thrive when we feel valued as equals in meaningful relationships, doing relevant work towards a common goal. Why then, at a time when youth most need to affirm their identity and value in the world, do educational systems ask them to become passive, obedient, and voiceless? What is the cost of this reality for all students, and particularly for those who already feel devalued and disempowered?

Citizen engagement in decision making is a basic tenet of democracy. **Across all of UP's work, we model democratic practices when youth and adults engage in authentic partnerships: feeling agency, finding common ground, establishing deep listening practices, understanding issues, and involving all invested parties in a change process.** What follows are examples from the 2022-2023 academic year that explore the impact on youth and adults, and the overall sustainability of the democratic process, when youth are co-designers and co-implementers of community change projects. **This work would not be possible without YOU, our treasured partners!**



UP by the Numbers

544

hours of compensated time for youth co-facilitators/ interns

77

unique youth-adult teams

64

districts or schools partnering with UP

68

youth interns and Action Council members

8

states/nations with teams working with UP (VT, MS, GA, DE, NH, MA, Cherokee Nation (OK), and Nepal)

6

monthly virtual racial justice dialogue events led by VT and MS youth (continued from 2020-2021)

2

youth voting members on UP's Board of Directors

28

inaugural Vermont State Youth Council members trained by UP youth facilitators

5

state and national conferences where UP youth and staff presented

(Data from July 2022-Jan 2023)

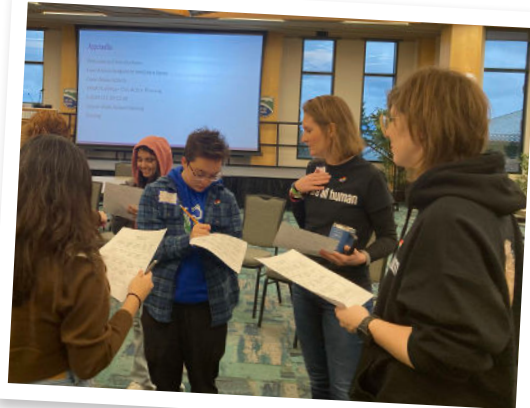
HOW DOES WORKING IN AUTHENTIC YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP REFLECT TRUE PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY?

“We have a right for our voices to be heard. This work in youth-adult partnership is really enforcing and emphasizing that and giving people the skills to make use of their rights.”

—Ana Lindert-Boyes, UP for Learning Youth Program Specialist

Working with UP is often the first time that youth, and even some adults, experience civic engagement and how it feels to impact both the individual and the collective. Everyone adds value and contributes to change! Once youth and adults develop skills and tools to conduct participatory action research, they see their individual and collective value and their role as changemakers in their community.

Inspired and empowered by their experiences as UP for Learning Youth Facilitators, five high school youth created and piloted the Youth Leadership Module, which provides youth with resources, structure, tools and practice to build their own capacity as leaders. This year, schools throughout the country are supporting new and emerging leaders using this module’s progression of lessons and activities. From rural Vermont middle and high schools, to Brandywine School District in Delaware, to UP youth



facilitating the first leadership training for the inaugural Vermont State Youth Council, more and more youth are seeing themselves as leaders and changemakers!

What has this peer to peer training looked like in action?

SNAPSHOT #1: Colchester Middle and High Schools’ social justice-oriented clubs gathered to design meaningful action projects, engage with district-wide equity policies, and envision a more just school for their community. This group has excelled at creating opportunities for youth voices to be involved in decision making and policy governance by bringing the superintendent and school leadership to the place where deep conversations about justice are happening!



SNAPSHOT #2: At Williston Central School, youth and adults have been working on equity visioning and action since the beginning of the school year. They have worked to define equity for their community, to learn about the foundations of restorative practices, and to create action projects that range from curriculum audits to carving out more time for connecting with peers, to student-led Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion workshops. This team exemplifies shared power as school leadership is deeply involved and engaged in the whole process and shared responsibility as they take on different roles in bringing the community together and aligning with projects.

“UP For Learning’s Youth Leadership Module . . . gives youth the tools needed to make the change they want to see in their communities. It gives them the confidence to speak up for themselves and others, realizing that they can be empowered members of their community. As youth step into the role of a leader within their schools, it creates a sense of belonging.”

—Adrianna, 8th grade

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH ON YOUTH AND THEIR COMMUNITY?

*“The work at UP is **supporting schools in making schools a great place to be** — something that is good for the individual as well as good for the community, and ultimately good for democracy as a whole.”*

—Emily Rossier, UP for Learning Program Director

The right to an active role in learning speaks to a foundational premise of our nation’s public school system — the goal of developing an informed citizenry equipped to participate in civic life. Engaging in participatory action research affirms young people’s rightful role as valued and responsible citizens while positioning them as active contributors. How do teams collect and use data?

accomplishments — toward building an inclusive and productive culture at the Career Center.

SNAPSHOT #2: In their second year of Getting to ‘Y’, the **Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma** expanded their program to include youth and adults in four schools. The youth-adult team who piloted GTY last year took the lead in training the new teams, modeling youth



leadership, youth-adult partnership, and how to use data to create important conversations with their community about change. Adult partners contributed organizational skills and access to resources within schools and Cherokee Nation Public Health. Youth partners contributed leadership and lived experience applied to data.

SNAPSHOT #1: The

Student Voice Team at **North Country Career Center**, in Newport, VT, co-created and co-facilitated the outreach and engagement program for all students at the sending schools and a work session with staff that generated an important exchange identifying strengths and areas needing improvement. Next, the Student Voice Team will reach out to the whole Career Center community with a survey – co-created by students and staff members — then organize the data to bring to the ongoing work with the staff. These sessions have been characterized by their honest and caring character, their hopeful and dedicated efforts, and their focused and specific work plans — and

*“This process has greatly impacted my students . . . It really opened their eyes to some of the weaknesses and strengths within our school. By deciding to focus on mental health, my students have had in-depth conversations about their own mental health and how they can help others. **This entire process has really allowed our students to reflect not only on themselves but also their community.**”*

—Cherokee Nation GTY Advisor

HOW DOES YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT YOUTH IN ENGAGING IN POSITIVE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE?

“I think of this as a place where we can come together and connect on a different level. A place where I can be heard and other students can be heard by adults in our district, because that does not happen very often.”

—Binti, 9th grade

UP’s work depends on strong relationships leading to strong communities that youth and adults want to make better through democratic activities. UP’s work taps into the human desire to be known and heard, be valued and included, and to act with purpose and shared intention.

SNAPSHOT #1: The **Lamoille South Unified Union School Board’s Equity Sub-Committee**, a youth-adult partnership team supported by UP for Learning, received grant funding from the Vermont Community Health Equity Partnership to co-create and co-facilitate a health curriculum that addresses issues of equity. Together with community health organizations, the school district will improve inclusivity and equitable school culture and elevate the voices of young people in making curricular changes.

SNAPSHOT #2: UP’s second-year work with the **Brandywine School District**

(BSD) in Wilmington, DE, expands on the commitment to centering student voice to ensure equitable access to education by growing the team to include three district high schools and their adult partners. This group will conduct research into school climate and issues of

student voice and equity before developing BSD’s vision for Student Voice and an action plan to implement this vision. This project grew out of the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE)’s Equity Education Framework: Strategic Intent 1.0 Elevate and Empower Student Voice, and UP’s work will serve as a model for all Delaware schools on enacting state directives.

SNAPSHOT #3: In the ‘21-22 school year, youth and adults from the Equity Team at **Milton High School** looked at an early draft of Milton School District’s equity policy, providing suggestions and feedback on its content

and language. They then helped present the policy to the School Board. This year, they took part in roundtable discussions with community members about the policy and its implementation.



“Working closely with students has been a two-fold experience: on one hand, it adds legitimacy to the process as there should be no decisions made about students without students. On the other hand, what a waste of time it would have been to draft a comprehensive policy without the brilliant ideas coming from young people. The quality of the content in itself could not have been this precise and impactful without student input.”

—Wilmer Chavarria, Director of Equity and Education Support Systems, Milton School District

Empowering youth and adults to reimagine & transform education together

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