

The Emergence of the Advocate Network

As we launched the “Learning Opportunities” prototype, we were working from the assumption that an advocate could serve to meet the needs of the learner and their family. However, when reflecting on key lessons, we recognized that a network of support clearly emerged over the course of the project. This network met core functions to ensure the advocate was positioned to help build family and learner agency, understand the opportunities within the community, and assist families in making choices that matched their child’s interests.

The Prototype’s Network reflects the distributed roles that project partners fulfilled over the course of the project to ensure families could participate in new opportunities.

Boulder Housing Partners (BHP) was instrumental in connecting us with families, recruiting the advocate team, and providing financial support for the advocate role. With strong community connections and relationships characterized by high levels of trust, they served a central role in building a cohort of families. Additionally, they had the capacity on their team to scan learning opportunities in the community that could be of interest to the families.

In addition to defining the core design questions and tracking the project as a whole, our team at **Donnell-Kay** fulfilled the role of supporting the advocate. This included developing core tools such as the interest inventory and the opportunities booklet. Both tools helped advocates set parents up as the expert of their children and invite participation in new learning opportunities. Our team also built out documentation templates to manage the work on the ground. This enabled us to target training support and help advocates problem solve on an ongoing basis.

Our design partners at **Greater Good Studio** were foundational in shaping the prototype and coaching us through the process. After meeting challenges of allocating money to the families due to regulations at both BHP and Donnell-Kay, they also provided access to a bank account and the debit cards we gave to families. They shared weekly financial updates that we used to monitor the types of experiences and materials families were choosing to purchase.

Finally, the advocate team served the most important role: the liaison to the families. Their focus was to empower families to engage in opportunities that matched the interests of their children by removing barriers. By first taking the time to learn about the child and the family’s context, the advocates previewed possible opportunities, positioned families as key decision-makers, and supported the logistics to ensure participation. They also reflected with families at the project’s end, highlighting successes and challenges that has helped inform the next stages for design.

A Network For a Larger System

The emergence of this network aligns to other ReSchool design efforts in our modeling of new governance structures, finance and the implementation of a learning framework. Ultimately, we see the advocate network as characterized by a simple, flat organizational structure with high levels of autonomy. As such, the model outlined below builds on the prototype by including lessons learned from in-depth interviews with our advocates, strategies we think will support building family and learner agency, and the functions necessary for serving a learner’s needs over a longer period of time. We recognized that to serve a learner well, the family needs support. Their readiness and willingness to navigate a larger landscape of learning significantly impacts the work of the advocate network. This second model

does not assume which individuals meet each role and/or responsibility. We trust that advocate networks will best organize themselves in service of the learners and their families.

Core Function	Capacity (Skill, Content, Disposition)
Recruit, enroll families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strong community connection and high levels of trust ○ Commitment towards diversity ○ An ability to create community of, and for, family and learner cohorts
Build family and learner agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gauge and respond to family readiness, adjusting levels of support over time ○ Collaboratively build, modify learner(s) profile(s) ○ Support goal-setting ○ Support logistics, use of technology, learning needs and requirements ○ Connect to additional resources (health, food, transportation, etc) ○ Preview appropriate learning opportunities
Serve learners' needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attend to and align to child development needs ○ Identify, coach to appropriate learning progressions, such as co-constructing learning pathways ○ Connect to additional supports (psychology, health, trauma, substance abuse)
Utilize appropriate management and information tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learner inventory/assessment ○ Dynamic learner profile tool ○ Learner opportunity recommendations/matches ○ Virtual community of other advocate networks ○ Dashboard of network team effectiveness and efficiency
Manage data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish, monitor and adjust pathway of learning and support ○ Learning competencies ○ Finances ○ Key assessment milestones (on track progress) ○ Alignment to system-wide framework of learning ○ Manage community, family, student feedback on quality and value of learning providers
Cultivate ecology of learning support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scan and organize current opportunities (learning, health, technology, transportation, etc.) ○ Identify, communicate gaps and needs in meeting family/learner's needs

References

- Buurtzorg, general overview
- Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments
- Exploring Future Education Workforce: New Roles for an Expanded Ecosystem
- Getting Smart's 7 Roles of a Next-Gen Learning Ecosystem