Moving Forward Together

Opening Plenary Remarks, Condensed
Ready by 21® National Meeting, April 2012
Karen Pittman, President and CEO, The Forum for Youth Investment

DURING THE 1950'S, AS SMALLER AND MORE PREMATURE BABIES WERE SAVED WITH INCREASINGLY TECHNOLOGICAL TREATMENTS AND THE INTENSIVE CARE OF THESE INFANTS EXPANDED ACROSS THE COUNTRY, SEVERAL PROBLEMS SURFACED. OXYGEN...SAVED MANY LIVES. HOWEVER, ITS UNREGULATED USE ...APPEARED TO BE DETRIMENTAL TO SOME BABIES...

1952

I was born one month premature, in 1952. At four pounds, I was considered a high-risk baby. My parents were told that they were lucky that I came home healthy. Two months ago yesterday, Thaddeus Ferber (our VP for Policy) and his wife, Heather, became the proud parents of twins who were born two months early, weighing in together at not much more than five pounds. These tiny little girls are now at home and doing fine. They would have, at a minimum, experienced developmental challenges if they were born when I was.
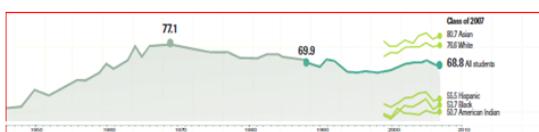
Fast forward 17 years. I graduated from the D.C. public school system in 1969. At that time, 77 percent of the 17- year-old population obtained high school diplomas. This was a peak year, according to Jim Heckman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist. That percentage then went into slow decline until about 2002. It's now on its way back to where it was when I was 17.

Thaddeus' Daughters

2012

www.readyby21.org | Ready by 21 National Meeting | all youth ready for college work & life

How can we manage to improve exponentially the life chances of babies coming into the world early, but make no headway in improving graduation rates? Is the difference in progress related to data quality? Technology? The discipline of the hard sciences?

Probably. But the difference also reflects a more fundamental distinction. Improving outcomes for premature babies required *complicated* advancements in science and technology. Improving outcomes for teens requires management of *complex* unpredictable realities.

"Recent History Shows Setback"
Education Week, 2010

The U.S. graduation rate reached its historical high point at the end of the 1960s, with the graduation rate peaking at 77 percent in 1969.

All of us in the room today share a common belief. The belief that we, as individuals, professionals and members of communities can and must do better to improve the odds for all young people in this country and to close the gaps between those at the bottom and those at the top of the readiness curve. We know we have to improve the return on investments already being made in order to hold on to those investments. We know we have to demonstrate not only success but cost effectiveness. We know that the only way to do this is to work together better and to work differently. What we don't know is exactly what better and differently looks like and what it takes to get there.

The Road to Doing Business Differently

Harvard Business School professors figured out that they [ ] could predict the success of company-wide change efforts by looking at three variables: 1) the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, 2) the clarity of the vision of where they were going and 3) the specificity of the plans to get there. When all three of these conditions were met, change happened. When even one was not met, change efforts stalled. The deciding factor was neither the complexity of the change desired nor the complexity of the businesses. It was the presence of the conditions for change throughout the organization, from the board room to the lunch room.

$$C = D ^{x} V ^{x} P$$

Change = Dissatisfaction x Vision x Plan

www.readyby21.org | Ready by 21 National Meeting | all youth ready for college work & life

Orchestrating change in a complex, international business is difficult. But it's a cake walk compared with the challenge of orchestrating change in a neighborhood, community or state. Why? Because the relationships between the moving parts in these contexts are either not clear, not formal or not complete. The moving parts don't move together and no one is in charge. Individual programs relate to multiple funders. Coalitions have overlapping members and goals. You know the story. It's clear that we have to work together. But it's also clear that we are not organized to achieve collective impact.

Conditions for Collective Impact
Kania & Kramer
- *Common Agenda*
- *Shared Measurement Systems*
- *Mutually Reinforcing Activities*
- *Continuous Communication*
- *Backbone Supports*

www.readyby21.org | Ready by 21 National Meeting | all youth ready for college work & life

We're delighted that John Kania from FSG will join us to explain what it takes to achieve collective impact. We won't wait a year to reengage to share his wisdom and hear our stories. Kania and Kramer have affirmed that in our business, strong partnerships are essential but difficult to create. They've cautioned that most partnerships are ineffective. They've outlined the five conditions needed to make them effective.
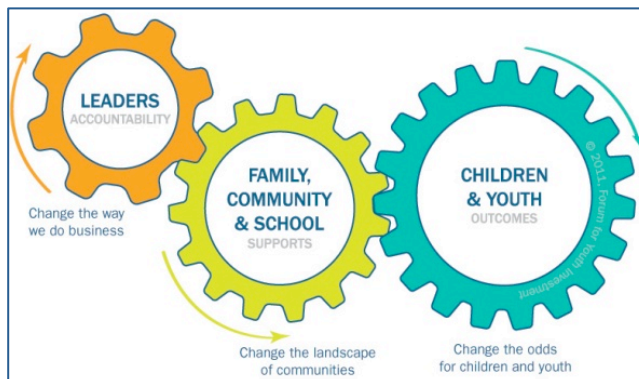
The $64,000 question is, "How"? No one starts out trying to create a weak partnership. Why are the five conditions so difficult to achieve? We're going to spend the next two and a half days sharing stories, exploring successes and failures.

I want to take a few minutes to share three big updates to how we're approaching the work, then tell you a few of the things we're planning to do this year.

Insight #1: Leadership Infrastructure Matters
The three gears are the visualization of our theory of change. If you know them, you know that we're convinced that moving the small gear makes the biggest difference. The only way to achieve population-level improvements in child and youth outcomes is to change the condition of the settings and systems in which kids spend their time. The only way to do that is to change the way we do business together as leaders.

the forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

CHILDREN'S CABINET NETWORK
Managed by the Forum for Youth Investment

spark action
For children. For youth. For change.

READY BY 21
All youth ready for college, work & life.
National Partnership

all youth ready for college work & life

Represented in this room are single-issue coalitions, state and local provider networks and OST systems, "cradle to career" partnerships, state coordinating bodies. The charge to do better together differently applies to all of you whether you consider yourself the leaders, [funders] or members of these groups. Here's why:

We call this [image on the right] the slot slide. It shows the fragmentation that occurs [machine when we] bring leaders together one problem at a time.

A mid-sized community or state can easily have [50 to 75] coalitions, networks, partnerships, initiatives [and] interagency task forces working with overlapping sets of partners to implement overlapping strategies to achieve overlapping [goals.]

Leadership Groups	Family, School & Community Supports	Child and Youth Outcomes
Neighborhood Councils	Increase after-school participation	Reduce Teen Pregnancies
Youth Network		Reduce Youth Violence
Workforce Investment Board	Improve OST program quality	Improve Third Grade Reading
P-20 Council	Expand learning opportunities	Reduce Abuse & Neglect
College Access Network	Reform juvenile justice programs	Reduce Obesity
Substance Abuse Coalition		Reduce Bullying
	Increase mentoring	Increase On-Time Graduation
Mayor's Office on Children, Youth, Families	Increase child health coverage	Improve Job Skills
Afterschool Alliance	Reduce child welfare caseloads	Increase Civic Engagement
		Reduce Substance Use
Health and Wellness Coalition	Expand life skills education	Decrease Youth Idleness

COLLABORATIONS

This relational map [left] is a bold staffer's attempt to think through potential ways to connect the groups in his county. It begs to be transformed into some type of virtual organizational chart that explains how these leadership groups are connected to a management infrastructure charged with moving these groups forward together.

To be clear, each of these entities – the Violence Prevention Task Force, the Youth Services Quality Coalition or the Early Childhood Development Initiative, for example – could become stronger by following Kania and Kramer's five-step plan. Proceeding alone, however, they would miss the opportunity to be so much more effective by becoming stronger together. One clear lesson we've learned from our work with state and local leaders is that building the capacity to define and manage this infrastructure is some of the most important, politically charged and logistically difficult work imaginable. This is about so much more than getting the right individuals around the table.

Insight #2. Community-Level Objectives Matter

Moving forward together toward what end? *Ready youth? Ready Communities? Ready Leadership?* How should communities assess capacity and track progress? The insulated education pipeline and the readiness target graphics have helped many communities generate broad consensus on their goals for children and youth and their expectations for the systems and settings where kids spend their time. They are surefire ways to literally demonstrate the high-level connection between the outcomes and strategies in the slot machine slide. But while these are easy ways to start the conversation, we found that they weren't powerful enough to consistently guide assessment and action.

We need to bring to life this idea of defining, measuring and improving readiness across the gears.

the forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

CHILDREN'S CABINET
NETWORK
Managed by the Forum for Youth Investment

spark action
For children. For youth. For change.

READY BY 21
All youth ready for college, work & life.
National Partnership

all youth ready for college work & life

Ready by 21 Leadership Capacity Standards

Broader Partnerships
- Build an overarching leadership council
- Align and strengthen coalitions, commissions and intermediaries
- Engage key stakeholders in setting priorities and solving problems

Bigger Goals
- Establish a balanced set of goals and indicators for all children, youth and young adults
- Define supports that the full community must provide
- Create a big picture, goal-oriented action plan
- Define common terms and communicate core messages

Better Data
- Collect complete data about youth outcomes, community supports and leadership actions
- Align and connect data for decision making
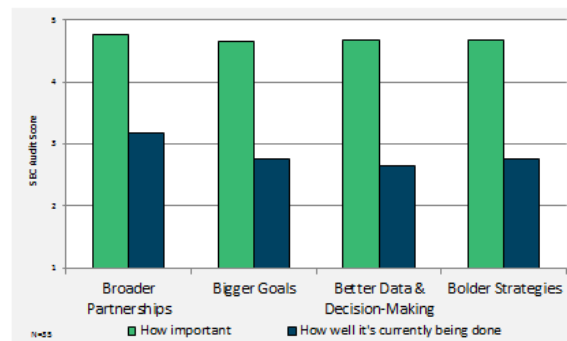- Use the best information about what works

Bolder Actions
- Improve systems and settings
- Align policies and resources
- Increase demand
- Engage youth, families and community members in solutions

all youth ready for college, work & life | Copyright the Forum for Youth Investment. Ready by 21 and the Ready by 21 logo are registered trademarks of the Forum for Youth Investment.

Three years ago, before the idea of collective impact went viral. We codified our observations about the capacities that leadership groups need into 14 Leadership Capacity Standards and a Leadership Capacity Audit. We organized the standards under four familiar headings that describe the work of these groups: build partnerships, set goals, find and use data, take action to effect policy, resources, practice and demand. We developed the audit as a way to encourage busy leaders to pause to reflect their community's leadership capacity and proactively address gaps.

We hoped that the audit would lead to a capacity-building plan that allows us to provide better support. We also hoped it would help leaders develop a shared vocabulary about what they do and affirm their commitment to doing these things well. The standards and the assessment turned out to be game-changing for us and a catalyst for the communities.

When asked if the capacities described were essential to the community's ability to improve outcomes for children and youth, the average score was 4.5 on a scale of five. When asked if the community had these capacities, the average score was 2.7. And the voluntary annotations made it clear that leaders had opinions about why the gaps exist and what needed to be done. The findings and recommendations from the survey kicked off more than a year's worth of capacity-building efforts.
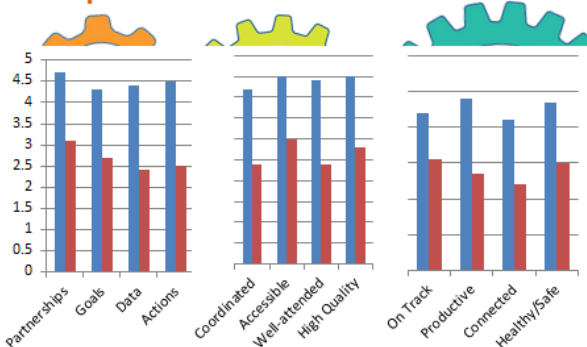

Leadership Capacity Gaps

Legend: ■ How important ■ How well it's currently being done
(Broader Partnerships, Bigger Goals, Better Data & Decision-Making, Bolder Strategies)

The catalytic power of this exercise led us to ask what would happen if we broadened the exercise to provide communities with a simple but potentially powerful way to summarize their perceptions of how well they are doing under each of the three gears.
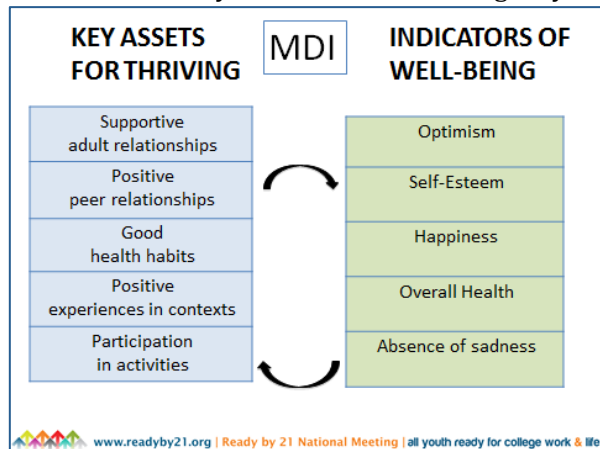
What discussion happens when you have not one but three bar graphs showing the gap between expectations and reality?

Importance vs Performance
(Partnerships, Goals, Data, Actions | Coordinated, Accessible, Well-attended, High Quality | On Track, Productive, Connected, Healthy/Safe)

The objectives under the three gears represent the 12 community-level objectives that have consistently resonated with a broad spectrum of community leaders, have a respectable evidence base, and are quantifiable.
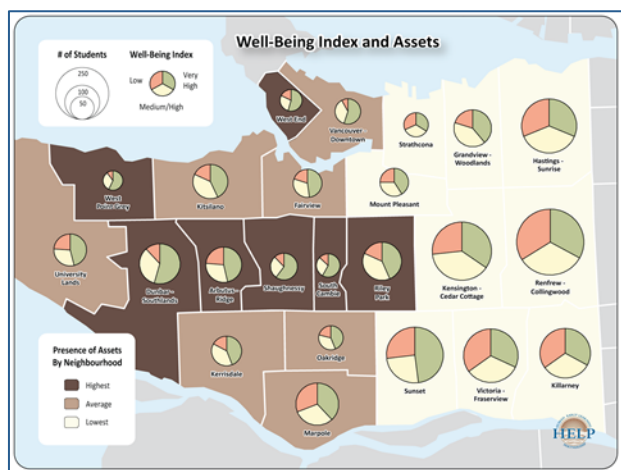
Getting and presenting community-level data is critical for jumpstarting and sustaining community-wide accountability and community-level change.

Our hope is that this kind of information will generate more questions than answers and drive a desire for more refined community dashboards. Let me give you a glimpse of what could be done.

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) was developed by researchers in Vancouver, Canada. It builds on the success of the EDI (Early Years Instrument), which used by some United Ways. It shows the power of combining community-level data about child and youth outcomes with information on available supports or assets. Fourth-graders complete a survey administered by their teachers.

The MDI definitions of Assets for Thriving and Indicators of Well-Being describe fundamental conditions and competencies that resonate with every coalition, program and family. The power of the data, however, comes from the fact that it is used not to compare students, but neighborhoods.

This simple but powerful map shows the strong correlation between the assets a young person reports and their well-being. It also identifies the outliers – neighborhoods with high assets but relatively low well-being scores and those with the opposite profile. Any good facilitator should be able to use maps like these to spark deep discussions about the reasons for the variations and the anomalies, and generate questions that need to be answered *before* blanket improvement strategies are adopted.

The MDI data on neighborhood assets is from students' self-reports. We, like many of you, are exploring ways to help communities generate maps like these based on data that relate to the eight objectives under the youth outcomes and community supports gears.

Insight #3. We're in the Continuous Improvement Business

What is Ready by 21? I can't tell you how many times we've been asked this question. It's more than a goal. It's more than a framework. It's more than a useful set of seasoned tools and tips. It's more than the pilot projects we run to test out new products and methods. It's an adaptation of continuous improvement approaches. Hugely wonky words, I know. But that's what it is.

The Ready by 21 Field Services team takes pride in the fact that we meeting leaders where they are. No cookie cutter approaches for us!

But we take equal pride in the fact that our explicit goal is to challenge them to do more, help them own and achieve against standards, and then ask them to help others.

Meet. Challenge. Help. Ask. This is the folksy version of the continuous improvement approach. Having the teams at Weikart Center and Community Systems Group get more deeply involved Ready by 21 field services and evaluation over the past year has helped us recognize the need to go formal and call this what it is: continuous improvement management.

Having SAS and Lloyds Register Quality Assurance join us as partners has given us the confidence that we can live up to the name. SAS brings us the software and analytic capacities usually only available to large companies. LRQA brings us the continuous improvement certification opportunities usually available to for-profit industries.

What is continuous improvement? A commitment to steady progress towards high standards made by all those involved in achieving them. The continuous improvement approach assumes that people – policy and resource managers, frontline practitioners, young people themselves – want to do their best but don't have the tools and that training (or professional development) alone is not the answer.
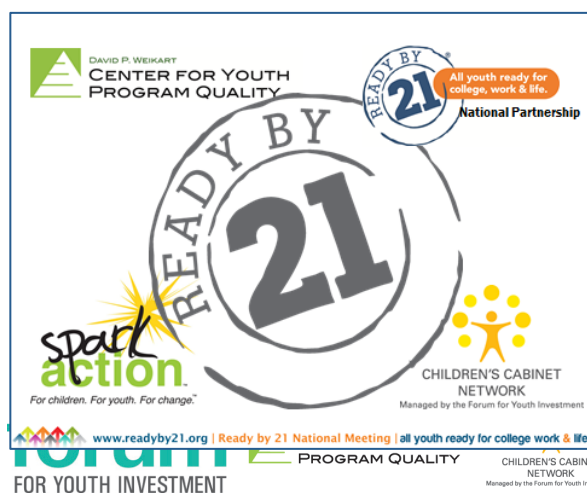
The hallmarks of the YPQI continuous improvement process: standards (knowing what's expected), assessment (knowing where we stand), training (helping to improve in identified weak areas) and coaching (ongoing guidance and encouragement). Data (success measures) drive the whole process.

We've taken a page from business and introduced the idea of certification. Certification can come in many forms, from individual certificates of completion for staff or programs to certification of the quality improvement management system. LRQA knows that voluntary certification programs work only when there is a clear organizational or industry advantage (e.g., consumer demand for sustainability practices or product safety). We know that high stakes accountability (linking your job or your funding to your scores) is not only unnecessary, it is counter-productive.

I mentioned the YPQI technical evaluation results. Bottom line: We've proven the effectiveness of a continuous improvement approach with networks of out-of-school program providers related only by common standards, solutions and success measures. We're ready to formally demonstrate that continuous improvement is an equally effective approach for community leadership groups working to increase their collective impact. This means that we – the Forum and the Ready by 21 Partners – have to do business differently.

Moving Ideas to Impact. Moving Forward Together
So we've had some big ah-hahs that will change the way we do business at the Forum. What are the implications of these insights for how we move forward together next year and the years beyond?
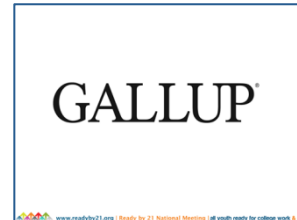
We've refocused the Forum buckets. We're all about the hedgehog now. I've talked a lot about how the exciting efforts underway to align the Weikart Center and Ready by 21 Field Services.

I've talked less about the exciting efforts underway in the Policy Division. We're redoubling our efforts to bring the continuous

improvement/collective impact approach not only to these critical state coordinating bodies, but to local teams within their states, and to strengthen the alignment between federal, state and local efforts.

I've talked even less about the equally exciting efforts underway in SparkAction. This small team has developed crowd sourcing capacity that has earned us a leading role in managing SparkOpportunity, a campaign that helps sustain the work of the White House Council on Disconnected Youth by providing young people with an opportunity to offer solutions to the problems they face.

We've prioritized our products and projects. We're doubling down to models, tools and trainings that communities need to commitment to the infrastructure needed to manage and make change. We're pushing out a catalyst packages that spark discussions of the gaps in each gear by bringing communities pictures of how well their kids and neighborhoods are doing. build the creating new set of You'll hear more about Ready Youth, a challenge to get at least 50 communities leveraging access to a version of the Gallup Student Poll especially designed for communities.

We're deepening our Ready by 21 Partnerships with UWW and AASA. All of our Ready by 21 partners are important; many are here with you today. These two, however, are critical to our capacity to strengthen partnerships and deliver services on the ground.

We're renewing our partnership with Altria. We would not have made the progress you feel today without Altria's strategic investment in the early development of the Ready by 21National Partnership, the evaluation and capacity building tools and services and, most importantly, the cohort of cities that have been our learning partners for the past two years. We're delighted that we've been able to inform their grant-making strategy in some small ways and look forward to continued work with them.

We're committing to work with all of you. If you're in this room, you're here for a reason. You've used and hopefully benefited from one aspect of the Forum's work. We hope you will use your time here to talk with leaders who have come in through a different door.

We have an exciting two days ahead of us and an ambitious goal to achieve when we return to our respective communities. Remember: Achieving collective impact through continuous improvement is the only way we will be able to change conditions and change lives *at scale.*

the forum
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

DAVID P. WEIKART
CENTER FOR YOUTH
PROGRAM QUALITY

CHILDREN'S CABINET
NETWORK
Managed by the Forum for Youth Investment

spark action
For children. For youth. For change.

READY BY 21
All youth ready for college, work & life.
National Partnership

all youth ready for college work & life