



COLLECTIVE
IMPACT FORUM

FSG



Collective Impact Case Study: Alignment Nashville



The Collective Impact Forum, an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, is a resource for people and organizations using the collective impact approach to address large-scale social and environmental problems. We aim to increase the effectiveness and adoption of collective impact by providing practitioners with access to the tools, training opportunities, and peer networks they need to be successful in their work. The Collective Impact Forum includes communities of practice, in-person convenings, and an online community and resource center launched in early 2014.

Learn more at www.collectiveimpactforum.org



FSG is a mission-driven consulting firm supporting leaders in creating large-scale, lasting social change. Through strategy, evaluation, and research we help many types of actors—individually and collectively—make progress against the world’s toughest problems.

Our teams work across all sectors by partnering with leading foundations, businesses, nonprofits, and governments in every region of the globe. We seek to reimagine social change by identifying ways to maximize the impact of existing resources, amplifying the work of others to help advance knowledge and practice, and inspiring change agents around the world to achieve greater impact.

As part of our nonprofit mission, FSG also directly supports learning communities, such as the Collective Impact Forum, the Shared Value Initiative, and Talent Rewire to provide the tools and relationships that change agents need to be successful.

Learn more about FSG at www.fsg.org



The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions’ mission is to support community collaboration, including collective impact, that enables communities to effectively address their most pressing challenges.

The Aspen Forum seeks to serve as a platform for sharing best practices across community collaborations by documenting community success stories, mobilizing stakeholders, advocating for effective policies, and catalyzing investments.

Learn more at www.aspencommunitysolutions.org

This data from this study draws primarily on the research study “[When Collective Impact Has an Impact](#),” conducted through collaborative effort between Spark Policy Institute of Denver, CO and ORS Impact of Seattle, WA.

Spark Policy Institute is dedicated to helping companies focus on social impact and develop approaches to solve complex challenges. We help the public and social sectors do good, even better through research, consulting, and evaluation. For more information, visit sparkpolicy.com.

ORS Impact helps foundations, non-profits, and government agencies clarify, measure, and align around their social impact outcomes, stay accountable to success, and learn along the way. By making social change measurable, we help clients make meaningful social change possible. For more information, visit orsimpact.com.

Summary

Alignment Nashville is working to improve the education and health of the community’s youth by providing tools that bring the community together for more effective results than individuals could accomplish alone. What sets Alignment Nashville apart is their unique, integrated toolset: Principles, Structure, Process, and Technology.¹

Problem

Despite the work of more than 175 nonprofits working separately to improve Nashville’s public schools, by 2002, the system was near failure. High school graduation rates hovered around 58% and school attendance was dismal.² Before

Key Facts

Initiative/backbone name: Alignment Nashville

Year initiative was formed: 2004

Mission: Education is the key that opens the door to the future for youth and the community as a whole. That’s why Alignment Nashville exists—to find ways all of Nashville can work together to create innovative programs and game-changing initiatives that will build generations of thriving young Nashvillians. The collective work of Alignment Teams seeks to do this by impacting these areas.

Geographical scope: Nashville, citywide

¹ Impacting Generations. Accessed Nov. 2018.
<http://www.alignmentnashville.org/>

² The Bridgespan Group. *Needle Moving Community Collaboratives*. Accessed Nov. 2018.
<https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/needle-moving-community-collaboratives/profiles/community-collaboratives-case-study-nashville.pdf>

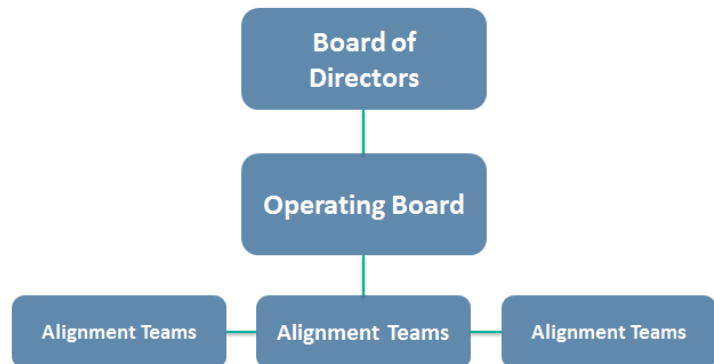
Alignment Nashville came together in 2004, one third of Nashville’s public schools were not in good standing and were rated as “Target,” “Improvement,” or “Corrective Action” under No Child Left Behind.³

Getting Started

The Nashville Chamber of Commerce and prominent, education-focused funders founded Alignment Nashville in 2004. This group worked with community stakeholders to establish guiding principles and strategically align existing resources and efforts to leverage and increase impact on Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). This led to the creation of Alignment Nashville as an independent 501(c3) organization in 2006 to serve as the coordinating backbone entity.

Structure

Alignment Nashville is governed by a **Board of Directors** that meets quarterly. The Board approves the budget and works to secure long-term funding for AN. The Board of Directors includes the mayor, the director of schools, university presidents, non-profit leaders, business leaders, philanthropists and other dedicated area leaders.



The Alignment Nashville **Operating Board** meets monthly to monitor and approve the progress of the Alignment Teams. The Operating Board consists of chairs and vice chairs of Alignment Teams, MNPS administrators, and other non-profit and community leaders supporting public education and children’s health. This group provides cross-pollination between Alignment Teams as well as peer accountability.

Alignment Nashville is made up of **Alignment Teams** (A-Teams) structured around academic grade levels, special populations, health issues, and emerging needs. The members of the teams bring diverse perspectives— small non-profit, public school, city government, public health, higher education, large non-profit, and the business community—to create the most aligned, strategic tactical plans. Current alignment teams include:

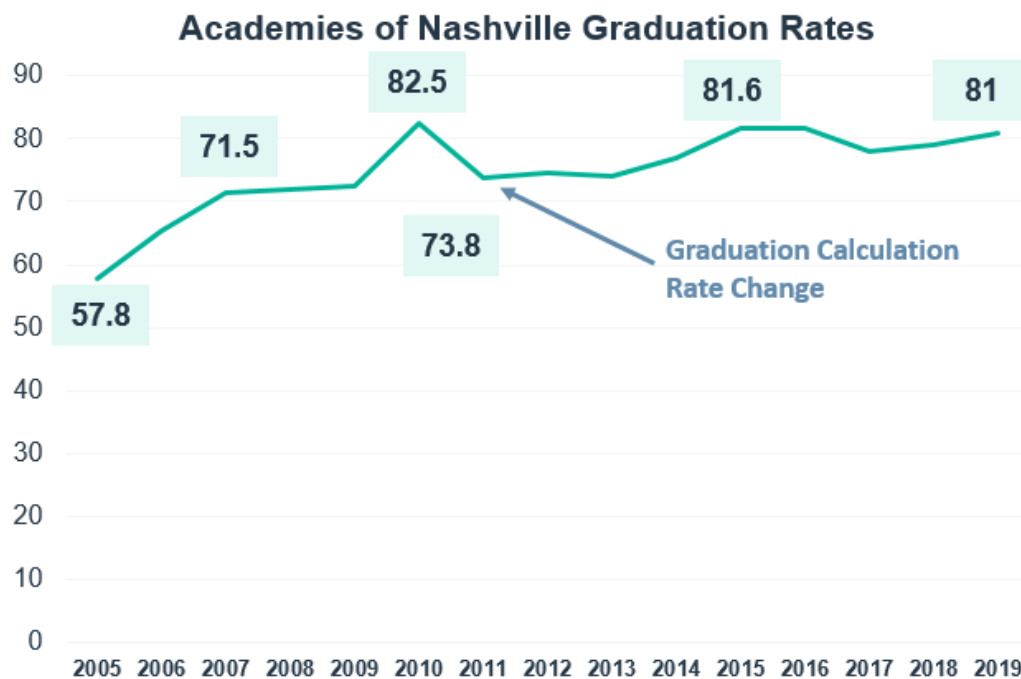
- [16-24 Year Olds Out of School, Out of Work](#)
- [Behavioral Health](#)
- [High School](#)

³ Conversations with Alignment Nashville staff. Dec. 2018.

- [Integration of International Families](#)
- [Learning Technology](#)
- [Middle School](#)
- [PreK-Elementary](#)
- [School Nutrition](#)
- [Teacher Recruitment & Retention](#)
- [Youth Equity and Sexuality](#)

Results

Alignment Nashville has fostered a range of early and systems changes, which have resulted in the **population level change** of increased high school graduation rates (see figure below). The most important **early changes** cited by the initiative include (1) increased collaboration, coordination, and networks and an increase in the number of collaborative peer learning structures and (2) new influential champions who support the initiative and increased engagement of community partners. The most important **systems changes** include the adoption of a new high school structure and supports across the district (Academies of Nashville); increased resources to support adoption and implementation of the Academy structure; and creation of new roles to support Academy implementation. For more details on changes achieved, please see the Snapshot of Change in Appendix 1.



Five Conditions of Collective Impact

Common Agenda

The initiative established a shared mission to support the implementation of the MNPS strategic plan.

In a 2014 strategic planning process, the initiative further refined its internal mission: to provide a forum for organizations to work collaboratively to impact students and their success. Overall, the initiative aims to produce systemic changes that will improve educational and health outcomes for Nashville students through a focus on four outward-facing outcomes: increasing graduation rates; increasing college and career readiness; improving children's health and wellness; and increasing community prosperity. As there are intricacies in underlying problem drivers, Alignment Nashville clarifies with partners how they can contribute to the common agenda on a continuing basis.

Shared Measurement

The initiative developed a shared measurement system to track long-term progress. Alignment Nashville identified six common indicators to use for tracking progress over time and disseminates those results in each annual report. The backbone manages the shared measurement system, which includes a spreadsheet to collect, store, analyze, and report data, as well as an online portal to record and display measures of success for each A-team. While long-term indicators are tracked annually and are used to inform overall strategy, Alignment Nashville continues to seek new opportunities to develop additional data collection that can be used on a more frequent and timelier basis.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

A strength of the initiative is that partners are working together on mutually reinforcing activities. The initiative has twelve workgroups (A-teams) in place. Each develops tactical plans with specific, differentiated, and coordinated actions and roles for partners to take in advancing strategies aligned with the shared action plan. A-teams are co-chaired by a school district representative and a community representative and focus on a specific grade level, topic, or sub-population depending on emerging district needs. To date, initiative partners have worked together to create pilot programs, events, and trainings aimed at restructuring the high school system, pursuing the commonalities between the mission of MNPS and the missions of community partners, and coordinating the invitation of community business partners to participate in the process and align resources. Partners have also provided professional development to teachers, staff, and community organizations to improve efficacy and skills. They've worked together to establish Alignment USA and The Nashville Ford Next Generation Learning Hub as funding sources and have worked to engage students, parents, and broader public entities by capturing data that tells Alignment Nashville's story. The initiative continues to align with MNPS to further initiative strategies and progress through transitions within the district.

Continuous Communication

The initiative developed a number of processes and structures to facilitate internal and external communication. The initiative's internal CI partners maintain consistent and open two-way communication, including semi-regular A-team and Operational Board meetings, informal conversations between partners, email communications, and a website. The initiative has several external communication

mechanisms and structures in place, including an Intent To Participate (ITP) process to engage with external organizations/individuals who want to participate in specific actions, a website, social media, newsletters, listservs, and a comprehensive annual report. However, the initiative noticed that the broader public lacked clarity around the initiative’s role and relationships with other similarly-focused initiatives in the area. The initiative identified external communication as a priority area in its 2014-2019 strategic plan and is taking steps to improve messaging and communication by developing a formal communications plan.

Backbone Support

The initiative’s backbone is a strength of their CI approach. The backbone organization has nine dedicated staff to support backbone functions including coordination, supporting implementation, managing the shared measurement system, securing funding, recruiting and outreach, and convening partners. The initiative established a well-functioning governance structure with clear decision-making and governance authority in two groups—the Board of Directors and the Operating Board.

Adoption of Principles of Collective Impact

Cross-Sector Collaboration

The initiative created strong relationships with a variety of sectors. It provided various methods for organizations to participate, including through its A-teams and operating board, as well as its ITP process that aims to engage business and community partners and align existing resources. The initiative leverages its existing networks for successful collaboration with the school district; for example, the Chamber of Commerce played a role in the initiative’s Academies support. Additionally, the initiative facilitates engagement through a variety of events and activities, including the Social-Emotional Learning Conference, Parent University, collaborative development of Pre-K online resources and tools for families, aligned partner funding on industry certifications, and scholars funding.

The Eight Principles of Collective Impact

- Design and implement the initiative with priority on equity
- Include community members in the collaborative
- Recruit and co-create with cross-sector partners
- Use data to continuously learn, adapt, and improve
- Cultivate leaders with unique system leadership skills
- Focus on program and system strategies
- Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants
- Customize for local context

Looking Ahead: Areas of Future Focus

Equity

The initiative's approach to equity is emerging and is an opportunity for continued development. Equity is a new focus for the initiative. Currently, its equity efforts include supporting students who need the most help (i.e. international families, opportunity youth) and ensuring that every student has equitable opportunities. The initiative is planning to develop a new A-team focused on equity and diversity that will work to create a shared framework with MNPS and help ensure other A-teams apply an equity lens to their work. The initiative already engaged in some equity-focused strategies, including forming the Integration of International Families A-Team, shifting the meeting time of an A-team to include students (as a key stakeholder group), and providing transportation to its Parent University conference for parents in need. The initiative is working to create clear pathways to engage beneficiaries more meaningfully – including parents, students, teachers, and other community members – to help shape equity-focused strategies, as well as an opportunity to increase diversity among its board. There is also an opportunity to think through how the initiative can collect and analyze disaggregated data to measure outcomes across subgroups, as well as assess certain areas of focus, such as college and career readiness.

Leadership

The initiative has strong leadership but faces challenges with turnover among partners and room for increased diversity. Initiative leaders have remained stable and committed to the initiative. The A-team co-chair model, with one district chair and one community chair, has helped to foster effective partnership across the initiative. However, they faced some challenges with leadership changes and turnover in the district. For example, the family engagement team lost its co-chair (a district representative), which stalled its work. Additionally, the initiative recognizes limited diversity at the board level in terms of race, gender, and breadth of perspectives. They are looking to continue to think through onboarding or transition plans in the event of turnover among partners to reduce impacts to implementation, as well as the opportunity to more intentionally recruit people with diverse perspectives to leadership positions.

Appendix 1: Snapshot of Change

Collective Impact Conditions	Strategies	Early Changes	Systems Changes	Population Changes
<p><i>Common Agenda</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overarching goal/vision is to support the district in achieving its strategic priorities - Common understanding of the problem is to improve education, health, and community outcomes for Nashville children - Collective approach is aimed at bringing together partnerships and leveraging existing resources in the Nashville community to support achievement of district priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support restructure of high school system through deep partnership with MNPS b. Identify and exploit commonalities between mission of MNPS and the missions of community partners to ensure alignment and create opportunities for cross-collaboration and community-driven approaches, including being strategic about the individuals involved in the initiative c. Coordinate Invitation to Participate (ITP) process to engage business and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased collaboration, coordination, networks, and number of collaborative peer learning structures to provide structure to support MNPS and improve teacher retention b. Increased collection and sharing of data around initiative goals and strategies c. Increased trust among initiative partners and stakeholders d. Increased knowledge of effective practices e. New influential champions who 	<p>High school redesign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adopted new high school structure and supports across the district—Academies of Nashville <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased pathways for students to access Career and Technical Education (CTE) dual-credit and dual-enrollment programs to achieve college credit and industry credentials while in high school - Adopted districtwide pilot programs for supporting students in becoming college and career ready (e.g., PACT) b. Increased resources to support adoption and implementation of Academy structure c. Created new roles to support Academy implementation through Academy Coaches and Partnership Councils 	<p>Early Changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased attendance rates ● Increased student exam scores ● Decreased discipline referrals <p>Population-level Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased high school graduation rates
<p><i>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - District strategic plan sets priorities and goals - 12 A-teams with individual tactical plans designed to support district strategic priorities - Partners work together to support the district’s strategic plan and to align work with the district’s priorities and approaches 				
<p><i>Continuous Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating board and A-teams meet 				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regularly to facilitate A-team collaborations - Online platform ComCoefficient stores meeting data and A-team tactical plans - Website, annual reports, and social media used for external engagement - Input and feedback on approach is solicited from parents, youth, and community, although not regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. partners and align existing resources d. Create tactical plans, pilot programs, events, and trainings prior to scaled implementation e. Provide professional development to improve efficacy and skills of teacher, staff, and community organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support the initiative and increased engagement of community partners f. Increased availability due to national recognition of model 		
<p><i>Shared Measurement System</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Five long-term indicators regularly collected from MNPS and other data sources - Data is used to define problem, determine solutions, and track progress/goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. Engage parents through a two-generation strategy g. Use Alignment USA and The Nashville Ford Next Generation Learning Hub as funding sources 			
<p><i>Backbone Infrastructure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alignment Nashville (501 c3) is backbone; nine dedicated FTEs - Backbone acts as an intermediary to the district, convenes stakeholders, facilitates community engagement, identifies and recruits partners, supports administrative functions of A-teams, and manages data - The Board of Directors serves as the leadership structure and has responsibility/authority for governance and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Align with MNPS to protect initiative strategies and progress from transitions within the district i. Communicate to broader public and other entities by 			



	maintaining public relations, including capturing data, to tell initiative's story			
--	--	--	--	--

*This snapshot of change represents the work of the coalition through 2018

Join the Collective Impact Forum

The Collective Impact Forum exists to meet the demands of those who are practicing collective impact in the field. While the rewards of collective impact can be great, the work is often demanding. Those who practice it must keep themselves and their teams motivated and moving forward.

The Collective Impact Forum is the place they can find the tools and training that can help them to be successful. It's an expanding network of like-minded individuals coming together from across sectors to share useful experience and knowledge and thereby accelerating the effectiveness, and further adoption, of the collective impact approach as a whole.

Join us at collectiveimpactforum.org