Letter of Intent Framework
Students at the Center Challenge

A Joint Initiative of the Coalition for Community Schools, Communities In Schools, and StriveTogether

Devon wakes up in the morning and is not feeling well. Devon's mom, Janice, just got home from her second job and Devon is aware their family is struggling to afford food. Yet, Devon's mother helps her get ready for the day. Neither of them has to worry whether Devon will be able to find out if she is sick or whether she will be fed. In fact, Devon is excited about a full day of interesting activities. This, in spite of the fact that her mom and other relatives who live with them are juggling jobs and caring for their elders all day before they can come together at home in the evening for reading and homework. Everyone feels confident as the day unfolds that Devon will be well taken care of and enriched, not only academically, but in every aspect of her development that is critical for success throughout her life. This is because Devon's family, her school, and a host of community partners have embraced a new approach — student-centered learning.

An Emerging Vision for Student-Centered Learning

The Collaborating Partners — the Coalition for Community Schools, Communities In Schools, and StriveTogether — have been working to craft a vision for student-centered learning.

Every student will have at their fingertips the high-quality opportunities and supports they need to learn and thrive — from a robust engaging curriculum to health and wellness services; from strong family support to high-quality mentoring and enrichment opportunities; from work-based learning experiences to college readiness activities; and from decent housing and safe communities to transportation and employment. With public schools as the focal point, families, educators, and community partners work together to ensure that the situation of every individual student is carefully considered and addressed.

Student-centered learning has the following characteristics:

- The voices of students and families are present, and their hopes, aspirations, and needs are fully incorporated in the design and oversight of schools.
- Students and families are fully informed about what they can and should expect from the school and all the partners that will be involved in providing learning and developmental opportunities and supports.
- Motivating and engaging learning experiences are in place — in school and in workplace and community settings — that are responsive to student voice; connect students with their history, their community, and their world; and prepare them for college, careers, and citizenship.
- All aspects of a student's learning and development are addressed, including growing social and emotional competencies and addressing physical, mental, and emotional challenges, in a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful.
- Community partners and educators align their assets and expertise into a student-centered learning system.
- Technology is used to support each student and is embedded in a web of personal relationships that support the whole child.

Our vision and key characteristics confront the false dichotomy between addressing academic or non-academics needs that has driven much of education reform until recently. Improving student academic performance and creating the opportunities and supports young people deserve are inextricably linked; both are essential if we are to create an ecosystem in which our young people can learn and thrive. In that ecosystem, the ideas behind the whole child, personalized learning, youth and family voice, and related strategies live together, reinforcing and strengthening one another.

Creating a student-centered learning system requires that we permanently break down historic silos, and build much stronger bridges between public schools and other agencies and organizations concerned with the well-being and development of children and youth. In addition, multiple local initiatives intended to improve results for children and youth — sometimes competing and colliding — must align their efforts and work toward common goals, especially when they are working in the same public schools. And that includes the local affiliates and members of the Collaborating Partner networks.

Equally, if not more important, we must be willing to address the equity, resource allocation, and structural racism issues that affect the lives and opportunities of so many of our young people.

The Collaborating Partners are confident that our vision of student-centered learning can come alive when we all focus our energy on understanding and meeting the needs of each and every child. Making this happen entails adherence to a set of Core Operating Principles that our joint experience tells us are particularly important. The Collaborating Partners are fully committed to refining these principles in full partnership with communities that have the courage to test their actual implementation on the ground. Exhibit 1 describes the Core Operating Principles at the system and school levels (see the Appendix).

Student-Centered Learning Goals and Opportunities
The Students at the Center Challenge (Challenge) has two long-term goals:

- To improve population-level outcomes and eliminate disparities across the cradle-to-career continuum and break years of stagnation in student performance measures that are undermining our ability to realize our full potential as a nation.
- To generate a well-defined strategy for building student-centered learning systems based on emerging lessons from the field, and to develop tools & resources to help other communities make a similar shift.

To move toward these goals, the Collaborating Partners intend to work closely with our local networks.

- First, six-month planning grants of up to $150,000 are anticipated to be made to approximately 10 communities that demonstrate the potential to move toward a student-centered learning system and comply with the terms and conditions of the Challenge.
- Second, based on their proposed plans, approximately three communities may be chosen to receive implementation grants and technical assistance; several other communities may receive capacity-building grants and support to enhance their readiness to implement the proposed system. A limited local match (cash or in-kind) would be expected in connection with these grants.
- Finally, the Collaborating Partners will create a learning network among the grantee communities and share the lessons from their work with our broader networks at our national convenings and through stories, newsletters, and other learning opportunities.

Implementing the Challenge
Here's what you need to know to apply for the Challenge.

Eligibility: Any community where there is at least one affiliate or member of one of the Collaborating Partner's networks is eligible to submit a letter of intent for consideration in the Challenge.

The Coalition for Community Schools, Communities In Schools, or StriveTogether local network affiliate or member does not have to be the Lead Partner (Fiscal Agent) for the planning proposal. For example, a school district, local government, or other similar institution with broad community reach could serve as the Lead Partner and play a collaborative leadership role so long as it demonstrates the visibility, credibility, and capacity to move a student-centered learning agenda forward and includes local affiliates of the Collaborating Partners. Sub-grants to other organizations are allowed.

Only one proposal will be accepted from each community. Where there are multiple affiliates or members of a Collaborating Partner's network, these groups will need to collaborate on the LOI and proposal. See complete list here.

All applicants must be able to demonstrate support from their local school district(s).

Webinar: Please join this webinar to learn more about the Students at the Center Challenge. The webinar will be held from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. EST on Wednesday, November 1, 2017.

Local Dialogue: The Collaborating Partners encourage leaders from your community — leaders from local initiatives connected to the Collaborating Partners, local school systems, and other allies — to discuss the potential for aligning assets to explore moving a student-centered learning strategy forward. Then, if interested in this opportunity, a community may submit the LOI.

Letter of Intent (LOI): Communities interested in pursuing the challenge need to follow this link and enter contact information for the Lead Organization. On November 1, the web-based LOI will be released on this site. LOIs are due Friday, December 8, 2017. Every community submitting a LOI will be invited to participate in the initial Students at the Center convening in January 2018 to learn more about the opportunity that the Challenge offers and how to apply for a planning grant. See Exhibit #2.

Students at the Center Convening: In January 2018, the Collaborating Partners will convene interested communities to explore the possibilities inherent in the Challenge in greater depth. All communities in our networks that submit LOIs will be invited to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to explore the ideas behind

student-centered learning in greater depth, learn the specific requirements for submission of planning grants, and hear about potential implementation support. Invited communities may bring teams of up to five people. Subject to certain terms and conditions, the Collaborating Partners will cover hotel and meals during the convening. Local leaders will be responsible for their own travel; however, travel scholarships will be available to support participants representing grassroots youth and parent/family organizations.

Preparing Planning Grant Proposals (February-March 15, 2018): The Students at the Center Challenge anticipates awarding planning grants to approximately 10 communities for up to $150,000 each. Proposals will be expected to lay out how a community will plan for the creation of a sustainable student-centered learning system consistent with the vision and principles laid out previously and identify the organization from the community that will receive the grant. More detailed expectations for planning grant proposals will be set forth during the January convening.

Supporting Planning Grantees: The Collaborating Partners may provide technical assistance and support to planning grantees. This could include on-site assistance, access to specialists in fields of importance to local grantees, consultation on possible uses of technology, and coaching support in the field and electronically.

Grant Making Timeline: Planning grant proposals are due on Thursday, March 15, 2018, approximately six weeks after the Students at the Center Convening. Planning grants are slated to be announced by Tuesday, May 1, 2018.

Implementation Grants: The Collaborating Partners estimate that implementation plans will be due by the end of October 2018, with a final decision on implementation and capacity-building grants to be made before the end of 2018. Decisions about implementation grants and availability rest with the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and the Ford Foundation. More information regarding the terms and conditions of implementation grants will be announced.

Questions: If you have specific questions about the Students at the Center Challenge, please email them to Dana Mong at mongd@cisconsultant.org. You can also visit the Challenge web page at: https://www.communitiesinschools.org/specials/sclc/

Informational Webinar November 1, 2017	Letters of Intent Due December 8, 2017	Convening Planning Communities January 2018	Planning Grant Proposals Due March 15, 2018	Planning Grant Awards May 1, 2018	Implementation Grant Proposals Due October 2018

Appendix

Exhibit 1: Student-Centered Learning Operating Principles

These five principles, operating at the system and school levels, are fundamental to realizing the vision of a student-centered learning system. The principles are not written in stone; they are our best hypotheses based on research and our joint experience.

Principle One – Trusting Relationships: Educators and staff of community partners have the trusting relationships and core competencies to work together to implement student-centered learning.

- School Level: Leadership and professional development opportunities ensure that principals, teachers, and other school staff, as well as personnel from community partners, have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to work together in teams to create opportunities for and meet the unique needs of an increasingly diverse student population. They have the capacity to align their strategies, resources, and experience to achieve results in schools and communities facing deep inequity.
- System Level: A leadership and professional development strategy is in place to build the competencies and skills of families, educators, and community partners at all levels and across all relevant sectors to function effectively together in schools and communities. They have the know-how to address equity challenges, use data for improvement, manage complex change, and achieve results.

Principle Two – Cross Sector Partnership: Intermediary leadership and organizational support are in place to nurture new vision.

- School Level: A representative site-based leadership team guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight. To determine what should happen in the school, a dedicated coordinator facilitates alignment of school, family, and community resources by conducting a community assessment focused on assets and needs, incorporating district resources, community providers, and natural community assets. School staff, personnel from community partners, and volunteers provide support across multiple domains, including, for example: academics, basic needs, behavioral interventions, college and career preparation, community/service learning, enrichment, family engagement, life skills, mental and physical health, and mentoring.
- System Level: A representative leadership group governs the entity and is responsible for overall vision, policy, and resource alignment. It addresses issues of equity and resources allocation across the community and uses data to identify racial disparities. A sustainable entity is identified with the credibility, capacity, and financing to support the leadership group and help guide educators and the community toward shared community goals. It supports data analytics to understand what is leading to better results, change management to act on what is being learned, and communication with the larger community. A community assessment is conducted to inventory community assets and resources, identify needs/gaps/duplication of services, and involve and inform others.

Principle Three – Purposeful Engagement: Youth and families have voice in growing a student-centered learning system; ownership is shared by students, their families, educators, and community partners.

- School Level: Youth and families have a voice in school decision-making. Each and every student has an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) developed with the student and their families with the support of educators and community partners. The plan is student-owned, accessible (potentially through technology), and regularly updated to ensure each student is on track to develop necessary academic, social, emotional, physical, and civic competencies. Opportunities and supports are provided to students in tiers — schoolwide services geared toward specific school needs for the general student body and targeted and/or individualized interventions based on identified needs.
- System Level: Youth and families are represented on local leadership and governance groups, and have clear defined pathways to inform and influence the policy decision and the allocation of resources to create a student-centered system. Leadership development opportunities and technical assistance enhance the capacity of youth and families to participate in systems-level decisions.

Principle Four – Shared Accountability: A mutually agreed-upon results framework cuts across multiple domains (academic, social, emotional, physical, and civic) and drives the work of educators and community partners. Mechanisms are in place to ensure the partners follow through on commitments, including necessary changes in policy and resource allocation.

- School Level: School and community partners monitor progress against the school's results framework. They communicate the value of their relationship to students and families. These communications reflect a clear and coherent set of practices and policies that guides both school staff and community partners and fosters integration between in-school and out-of-school activities.
- Systems Level: A communications strategy builds awareness of the shift to "learning ecosystem" from "education system." This reinforces a shift from the traditional school day and emphasizes how educators, families, and partners are fully engaged in supporting the individual needs of students, as well as the implementation of governance/policies that support the alignment of resources around individual student needs.

Principle Five – Actionable Data: Data are readily accessible to measure progress and feedback loops are in place for all aspects of student learning.

- School Level: A dashboard of key results/indicators related to all aspects of student learning and development (e.g., academic, social, emotional, and civic) is in place, regularly updated, and constantly reviewed to promote continuous improvement and inform practice consistent with individual student needs.
- System Level: School systems, local government, and other community partners have agreed on a results framework. Data-sharing agreements are in place that facilitate access to data at the school level and enable ongoing data analytics to assess the impact of specific interventions and actions to inform decision-making about strategy and equitable resource allocation.

Exhibit 2: Letter of Intent Criteria

The information in Exhibit 2 will be reflected in the web-based Letter of Intent which is forthcoming.

1. Only one application from each community will be considered.

2. Include the Community Name and Participating School District(s).

3. Signatures from participating school districts and partners are required.

4. Youth and/or Family serving organization partner required.

5. Highlights of Ongoing Activity: In no more than 300 words, please provide a brief overview of what is happening in your community that relates to student-centered learning using the characteristics described earlier. This information is for background purposes only and to assist with the design of the Student-Centered Learning Convening.

6. Uses of Technology: Describe what technology is now being used in your ongoing work and what, if any, new technology you have been exploring or would like to explore. Technology may include: student data systems, individual career planning tools, case management systems, or classroom-based learning resources.

7. Issues for Consideration at Convening: Please list any questions you may have about the Students at the Center Challenge or topics you want to hear about at the convening to help you develop your proposal (e.g., partnerships, youth voice in learning).