

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE RENTON INNOVATION ZONE: A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

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Prepared by:
Heather Lewis-Charp
Jennifer Hogg
Savannah Rae

About the Renton Innovation Zone (RIZ) and RIZ Partnership

The Renton Innovation Zone (RIZ) is a Renton School District-initiated school reform effort at four elementary schools: Lakeridge, Bryn Mawr, Campbell Hill, and Highlands Elementary Schools. In 2018-2019, a fifth school, Sartori magnet school, will be added to the RIZ reform efforts. The *RIZ Partnership Steering Committee (RIZ PSC)* is a group of community stakeholders focused on improving opportunities and shared outcomes for students attending the RIZ schools. Finally, the *RIZ Partnership* is a joint effort of the Renton School District, RIZ schools, and the RIZ PSC and its Executive Committee to improve outcomes for children and families. More detail about each of these can be found in this case study.

About Social Policy Research Associates

Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) is a small, employee-owned research, evaluation, and technical assistance firm, founded in 1991 and based in Oakland, California. SPR works nationally with clients in federal, county and local government, foundations, non-profits, and the private sector. In the Fall of 2017, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) commissioned SPR to conduct a four-year, formative and summative evaluation of the Local Proof Points (LPP) Initiative to learn more about how school and community ecosystems can strengthen supports for students and families. The Foundation selected Renton School District as its first LPP site. This case study documents the building blocks for the RIZ, which were put in place prior to the Renton's involvement in the LPP Initiative.

Acknowledgements

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Cover images are of students in the Renton Innovation Zone schools, and were provided by Renton Public Schools.

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PART 1:

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE RIZ PARTNERSHIP

Section 1: Introduction

In the Skyway-West Hill and Sunset neighborhoods in Renton, located just south of Seattle, a diverse set of actors—the Renton School District (RSD), the City of Renton, King County, community groups, and community members—have come together with a shared goal to significantly improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. Both neighborhoods have a rich history and diverse residents who are committed to positive community change. They also share common challenges that include a lack of early learning and out-of-school-time opportunities. In August 2017, with help from RSD, efforts within each of these communities to address these challenges merged to form the Renton Innovation Zone (RIZ) Partnership.

This case study tells the story of the community-driven efforts that laid the foundation for the RIZ Partnership. It points to the diligence of key actors engaged in community improvement, the time-intensive work of trust and relationship building, and the fortuitous convergence of essential factors needed to move local community work to the next level. It lays out the expectations, hopes, and goals that stakeholders have for the RIZ Partnership’s work and for their communities moving forward while also highlighting their concerns about potential unintended negative consequences, such as the acceleration of gentrification.

In addition to the work of key stakeholders on the ground, there are important external factors that have influenced the work of the RIZ Partnership, such as the passage of a King County ballot measure approving Best Starts for Kids (BSK) funding for school- and community-based promotion, prevention, and early intervention programs. The goal of BSK—to put every child and youth in King County on a path to lifetime success—closely aligns with that of the RIZ Partnership. BSK has already provided vital funding for early childhood and youth programs. Similarly, long-term community development efforts in the Skyway-West Hill and Sunset neighborhoods have set the stage for the current collaboration.

This story is told, to the extent possible, through the voices of the community residents and engaged stakeholders who have worked tirelessly to influence change throughout the Renton community. The data highlighted in this case study were gathered in the spring of 2018 and include interviews with 53 individuals, including parents, nonprofit leaders, teachers, principals, school staff, and staff members at city and county agencies. We also drew on a variety of publicly available reports and data on these two communities. See Appendix A for a full list of respondents and data sources.



We all want the same thing. We want our kids to be healthy and happy and successful. [The] RIZ [Partnership] really got all those minds in the same room and got us all talking.
—Marci Asher, Urban Family

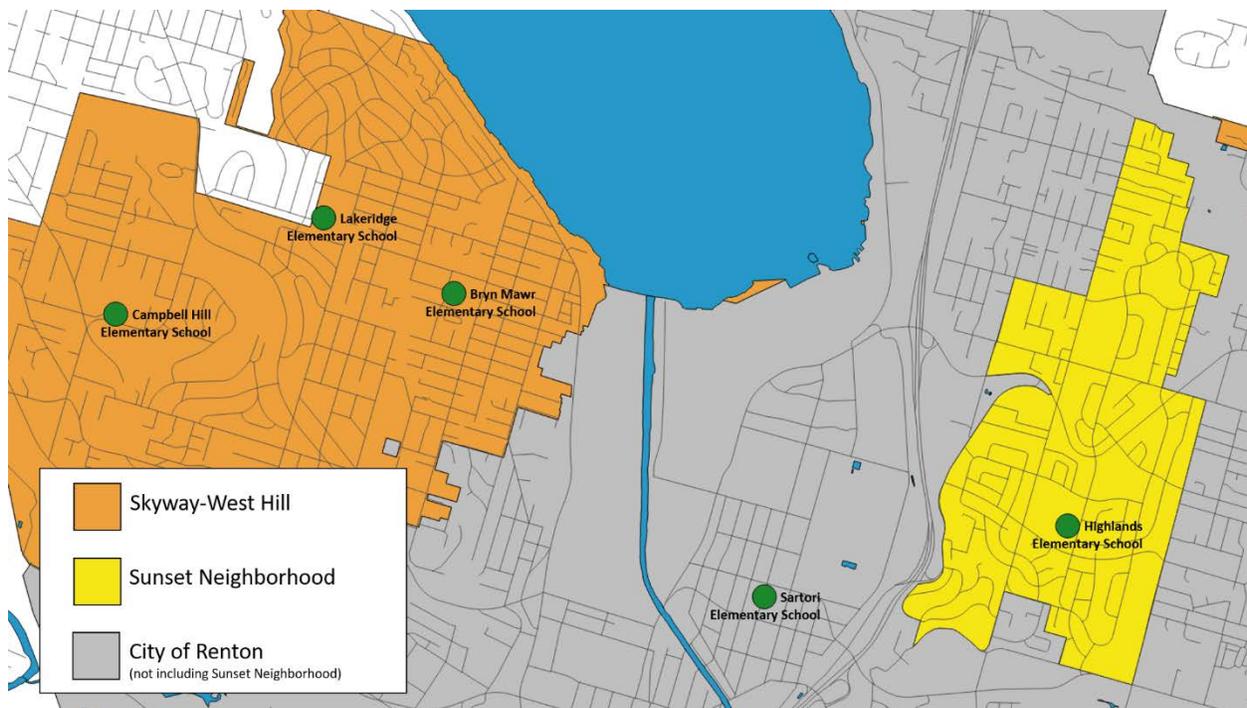
Section 2: Community Context

[The Skyway-West Hill and Renton Sunset neighborhoods are] both high-need areas in suburban markets, but they have very different histories....

—Mark Santos-Johnson, City of Renton Senior Economic Development Specialist

The Skyway-West Hill and Sunset neighborhoods are both served by the RSD. As illustrated in Figure 1, however, they are geographically distinct communities separated by the central business area of Renton. The Skyway-West Hill neighborhood (marked in orange on the map) is an unincorporated area bordered by Renton to the west, Seattle to the north, and Tukwila to the south. The Sunset neighborhood (marked in yellow on the map) is a historically working-class community on the northeast side of Renton.

Figure 1: Map of Skyway-West Hill, Sunset Neighborhood, and City of Renton



Green dots on the map identify the five elementary schools that are participating in the RIZ Partnership. Lakeridge, Bryn Mawr, and Campbell Hill elementary schools are located in the Skyway-West Hill neighborhood. These schools have been engaged in collaboration and joint reform efforts since 2016. With the launching of the RIZ in 2017, the school district engaged Highlands Elementary School, which is located in the Sunset neighborhood. Sartori Elementary, a new magnet STEM school located in the central area of Renton, is being added to the RIZ district initiative in the 2018–2019 school year, but not the RIZ Partnership efforts, as the students will come from across the district and not necessarily from the neighborhoods of focus.

As we describe in the following sections, the Skyway-West Hill and Sunset neighborhoods have very unique histories, levels of infrastructure, and demographic profiles. Yet, like other communities in and around Seattle, they are undergoing similar demographic transitions due to the dual forces of immigration and gentrification. Families that are being displaced from the Seattle area are moving south, resulting in rising housing costs that are, in turn, displacing low-income families and long-term residents of Skyway-West Hill and Renton. Dr. Damien Pattenau, the superintendent of RSD, described how this is influencing the characteristics of students and families in the district:

We're seeing our black, Hispanic, and low-SES students...leaving our district...being pushed out by housing. We've seen falling percentages in terms of our free [and] reduced lunch rates. It's not that our families are getting wealthier; they're being replaced....We had some great data [from our district data team]...where you could see increases in the number of white and Asian students coming into the district in certain sections. But then we're exiting black, Hispanic, and low-SES students who are moving south, out of the district.

The issue of displacement and gentrification is in the forefront of the minds of many RIZ partners; there is a fear that the process of school and community improvement, in which they are passionately engaged, might inadvertently accelerate broader demographic trends. Specifically, the concern is that improved schools and infrastructure will attract higher-income white families to move into the community, thus further displacing low-income families and families of color. Jody McVittie, whose organization Sound Discipline is working to strengthen the climate and culture of RIZ schools, said, "I am worried that all this well-intentioned investment in schools is going to hurt the community.... When schools get better, housing prices will go up and housing needs to be addressed now.....Renton or King County should create a pilot program to do that. It could be rent control or other measures to ensure affordable housing....Because, otherwise, in three years we're going to have displaced the kids who we're trying to serve."

Both communities have a severe shortage of early childhood education and out-of-school-time opportunities for youth. When compared to seven surrounding school districts, RSD has a significantly lower percentage of children attending some type of pre-K experience and a lower share of students demonstrating kindergarten readiness,¹ particularly among students who are not Asian or white. The Meadow Crest Early Learning Center, located in the Sunset neighborhood, serves roughly 14 percent of Renton's low-income population. It is RSD's only provider of early childhood education services, but it does not have enough slots for families and there is a long waiting list for the slots that are available. The call for more slots and higher quality early learning and out-of-school-time opportunities is a huge driving force behind the RIZ collaboration. Regina Elmi, a parent who is actively engaged in the RIZ effort, explained:

I think one of the biggest things is that Renton School District has only one early learning center. It's Meadow Crest. We have kids on a wait list. How are we

¹ As measured by the WaKIDS Whole-Child Assessment.

ever going to close the [achievement] gap...if we don't safeguard early learning?...We need facilities. We need facilities where we're also providing jobs to the communities themselves, where parents are co-teachers.

The next two sections provide more contextual details on the distinct characteristics of the Skyway-West Hill and Sunset communities.

Skyway-West Hill

I think a lot of people say that Skyway is the unwanted stepchild of the community. Seattle doesn't want us. Renton doesn't want us. I've heard that from people. And then I've heard the other side of it, where [people say], "What I love about it is that it's so diverse."

—Marci Asher, Urban Families

Skyway-West Hill is a 3.2-square-mile unincorporated area situated between Renton, Tukwila, and Seattle. It encompasses multiple neighborhoods including Skyway, Bryn Mawr, Campbell Hill, Earlington, Hilltop, Panorama View, Lakeridge, and Skycrest. The term West Hill is often used to describe the entire unincorporated area, though community members generally identify with a specific neighborhood. The central business district of West Hill, which includes a grocery store, a restaurant, a bowling alley, and a few storefront churches, is located on Renton Avenue in Skyway. Because it is unincorporated, Skyway-West Hill does not have its own police or fire department, and it has limited municipal, public transportation, recreational, and social services. Similarly, without the support structure of local city government, there has historically been limited support for local nonprofits.

Skyway-West Hill residents had an opportunity to be annexed by Renton in 2012. They voted down the initiative for a variety of different reasons including a fear of increased taxes and conflicting feelings among some residents about becoming part of Renton when they currently have a Seattle address (Radford, 2012). Given the unlikelihood that Skyway-West Hill will be incorporated in the near future, King County has renewed its dedication to the area and is working with local partners to strengthen community infrastructure and services.

[King] County, historically, has had a strong regional role. And its resources, particularly in the area of human services and public health, have been as a regional provider, and not necessarily as a focused, local service provider. It's particularly complex for urban unincorporated areas such as Skyway-West Hill because...for many years, the strong policy of the county has been to encourage the residents of unincorporated urban areas [to annex into surrounding cities].

—Alan Painter, Community Service Area Program of King County

In 2015, [Skyway Solutions](#), a nonprofit focused on strengthening the community, engaged in a comprehensive community engagement process to develop the [Skyway-West Hill Action Plan](#) (SWAP).² The SWAP lays out community members' priorities for building healthy connected neighborhoods, promoting sustainable growth, supporting educated and thriving youth, and developing economic prosperity and affordability. Skyway Solutions and its partners are steadily making progress toward this vision by winning campaigns to make capital improvements to Skyway Park and getting traction within the community for the development of a community center. Alan Painter, the manager of the Community Service Area Program of King County, described Skyway-West Hill as "an area that's just ripe for development." But, he added, it needs to be done "in a non-gentrification way."

At the time of the 2010 U.S. Census, the just over 16,000 residents of the Skyway-West Hill community were 33 percent white, 30 percent black, 30 percent Asian, 6 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent other. Overall, 27 percent of residents were foreign born.

Approximately 34.5 percent of residents spoke a language other than English at home. Asian languages, the most common of which was Vietnamese, were spoken by 41 percent of these residents, followed by Tagalog (16 percent), East African languages (15 percent), and Spanish (13 percent).

Community stakeholders we spoke with identified that the strongest asset of the Skyway-West Hill community is its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. In the 2000 U.S. Census, it was the only census-designated area in the Seattle metro area to have reported a "majority-minority" population; by the 2010 census, the community was fairly evenly balanced among white, black, and Asian community members (though more recent data suggest that the black population has decreased). Close to one-third of the population is foreign born and over one-third speak a language other than English at home. The [New Story Church website](#) identifies Skyway as one of the five most diverse neighborhoods in North America. Gail Thomas, who is an active RIZ member and grandmother of a student at Bryn Mawr Elementary School, described her community in the following way:

We're multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, multi-generational....We are multi. We have rich people, poor people, working people, people that are underemployed or unemployed. We have grandparents who are helping to raise grandkids. We have multiple faith traditions....We are just multi.

As Gail described in her quote, the Skyway-West Hill community is both ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. While the community has primarily single-family dwellings, it also has some affordable multi-family housing developments, the largest of which is the [Creston Point Apartments](#). Marci Asher, the director of [Urban Family](#) (a provider of services at Creston Point), described Skyway as "in a divide. Half of it is homeowners; half of it is like Creston

² The SWAP builds on generations of activism within the Skyway-West Hill communities to "create a community that is culturally vibrant, intellectually curious, innovative, and beautiful" ([SWAP](#), p. 10). Further, it builds on the [West Hill Community Plan](#), which was developed by King County in 1994; the [Skyway Park Community Vision](#), developed for King County Parks department in 2008; and the Community Center Visioning Process of 2012.

Point....You see the divide between primarily white people that own their homes and then the renters.”

The black community within Skyway-West Hill includes an African American community—some of whom have been displaced from the Central District, a historically black community in Seattle—and an African immigrant community, a high percentage of which is Somali. Although the characteristics of these communities are quite different, available demographic information does not distinguish between them. A high percentage of the Somali population, as well as a sizable African American population, live in the Creston Point Apartments. Most of the Somali children living at Creston Point are bused daily to Lakeridge Elementary, one of the RIZ schools described further in Section 3. Hamdi Abdulle—the director of [Somali Youth and Family Club](#)³, which also provides services at Creston Point—described how, although vulnerable, the Somali population has been very mobilized and vocal within the community and has played a key role in the RIZ:

*The Somalis are vulnerable in many ways. Being Muslims. Having these hijabs. Being single mothers....Coming from a war-torn country. Language barriers....So, all of these [factors] contribute to the need for help. It’s part of my vision to move from a needy community to a community that is self-sufficient. We see improvement in many ways. We don’t come here with businesses, with PhDs, or money. **But we are human beings, and we are intelligent....We have high hopes in our innate ability surfacing when the right moments come.***

Finally, as will be described further in Sections 3 and 4, in addition to Skyway Solutions, Skyway-West Hill has active community groups that are working to revitalize the neighborhood. For example, the [West Hill Community Association](#) hosts the popular Skyway Outdoor Cinema event that attracts a cross-section of residents; the [Skyway Youth Network Collaborative \(SYNC\)](#) is a group of youth-serving organizations and agencies (including RSD) that, since 2015, have met monthly, providing a space for collaboration and mutual support; Urban Families and

The Skyway Youth Network Collaborative (SYNC) “works collaboratively in Skyway/West Hill to create space and opportunities for all area youth to succeed academically, socially, and be prepared to be engaged and successful caring adults.” The SYNC has helped partners to collaborate and look for joint funding opportunities, but it also serves a social support function. Marci Asher of Urban Family said that it was developed to “serve youth workers for fatigue—give a two-hour meeting once a month to blow steam and also talk about things that are happening in the community. A lot of people that go to SYNC are part of RIZ, too. RIZ is just a lot bigger.”

SYNC members include [Renton Area Youth and Family Services](#) (RAYS), Urban Family, Skyway Solutions, West Hill Community Association, King County Library System—Skyway Library, RSD, King County Community Service Area Program, NewStory Communities, and Somali Youth and Family Club.

³ Since the time of this interview, Hamdi Abdulle has assumed a new role as the Executive Director of African Community & Housing Development.

Somali Youth and Family Club are long-term members of the SYNC, which has helped to facilitate their partnership under the RIZ.

Sunset Neighborhood

The Sunset neighborhood is a 269-acre area in northeast Renton, with a population of about 2,800 residents. The Sunset neighborhood grew rapidly in the 1940s, during World War II, as Boeing settled on Renton to build planes for the war effort. To accommodate the influx of workers, the war department partnered with the [Renton Housing Authority](#) to build temporary housing in the Sunset neighborhood for Boeing workers, many of which still stand today. For decades after the war, the Sunset neighborhood was stable. Over time, however, home ownership declined, housing maintenance was deferred, and social support systems decreased, while environmental problems and crime increased.⁴ As Renton has become more diverse (becoming a “majority-minority” city in 2011), the Sunset neighborhood has become home to many immigrants and others looking to find affordable housing. As a result, it has a higher Latino and Spanish-speaking population than does the rest of Renton.

Mark Santos-Johnson, a Community Development Project Manager at City of Renton, described the Sunset neighborhood as “high poverty” and a “high-need neighborhood that has not had a lot of private capital investment in recent years.” According to a [Renton Community Needs Assessment](#), in 2012 over one-quarter of households in the Sunset lived in poverty, the average income was \$17,000 less than the city as a whole, and the violent crime rate was 2.5 times higher than in Renton as a whole. Furthermore, 75 percent of students attending the elementary school in the Sunset neighborhood qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

As part of the City of Renton, however, the Sunset neighborhood has certain assets that the Skyway-West Hill area does not. The City has a stronger network of community-based organizations (CBOs), and the Sunset neighborhood is home to Meadow Crest, Renton’s only early learning center. The Renton Housing Authority has most of its public housing in the neighborhood, and the area has better access to public transportation. Finally, the Sunset neighborhood hosts two of the three Renton community centers. As will be described further in the next section, these unique characteristics have helped city stakeholders and their partners to drive forward an aggressive and ambitious redevelopment effort within the neighborhood.

⁴ See <https://www.rentonhousing.org/sunset-revitalization.html>

Section 3: History of Collaborative Efforts

In this section, we highlight the history of the two distinct reform efforts that have come together in the RIZ Partnership. The first involves school reform efforts within RSD. The second involves efforts to revitalize the Sunset neighborhood through enhanced public and low-cost housing and increased social services. The timeline in Figure 2 highlights some of the key milestones in these collaborative efforts over the last 10 years.

School Reform Within Renton School District

According to several community members and current district leaders, RSD has not always been seen as an authentic partner to the schools in the West Hill-Skyway neighborhood. Due to the many challenges outlined in the previous section, students and staff at these schools face additional challenges but have not always received additional resources or attention from the district. According to Superintendent Pattenau, “I would say that in relationship to the school district, that there has been a sense that the Skyway-West Hill community has been forgotten or not supported.” The school reform efforts described in this section are significantly changing the perception of RSD among community partners and restoring their trust in the educational system’s commitment to serving all youth.

Lakeridge Elementary School as a catalyst for change

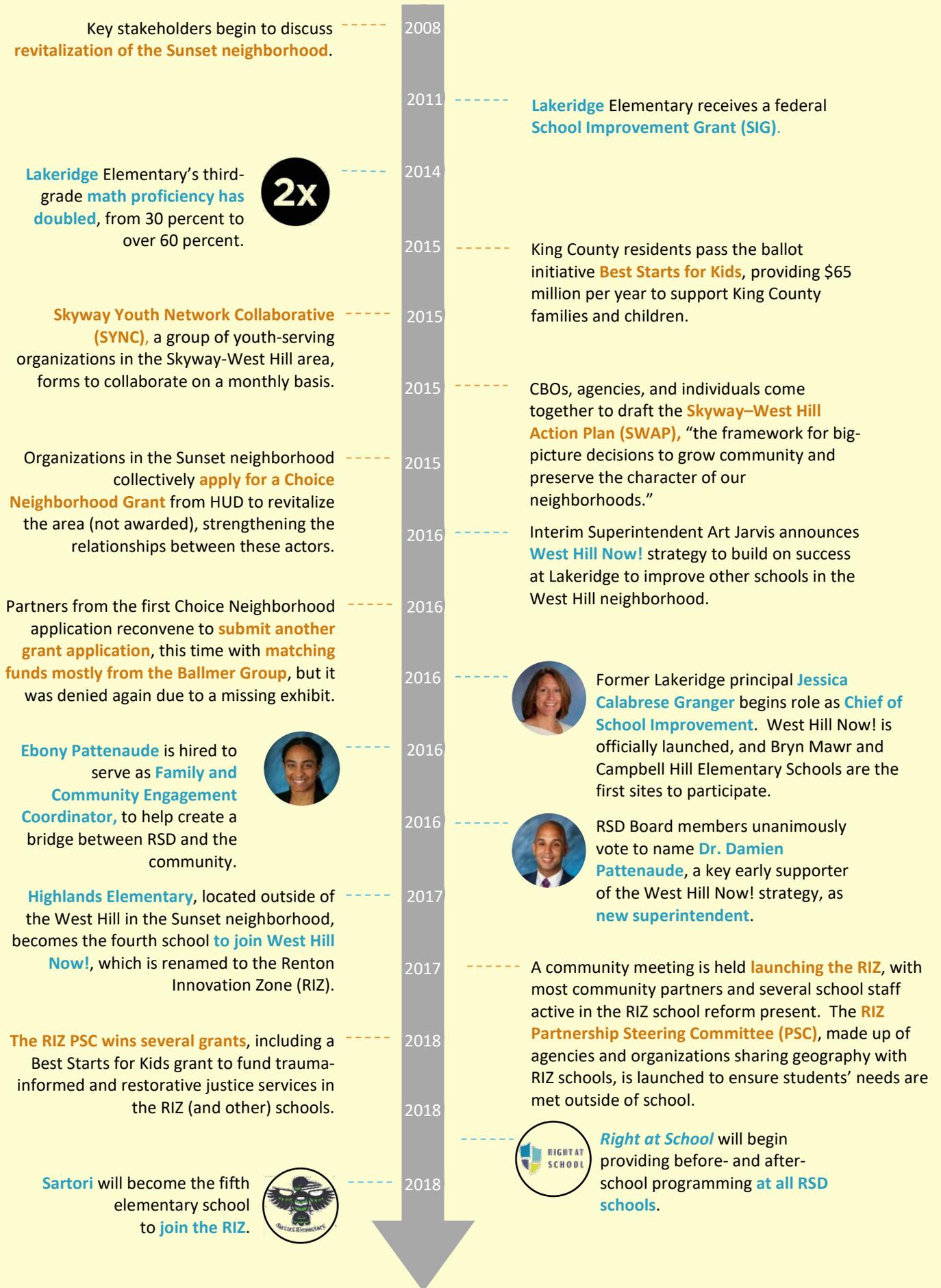
In 2011, Lakeridge Elementary School was the lowest performing school in RSD, ranking among the bottom 5 percent of schools in the state. It was labeled a “persistently low-performing school,” which meant it was one of the hundreds of schools across the country to receive a federal [School Improvement Grant](#) (SIG). As a SIG school, Lakeridge was required to select one of four improvement models: restart, transformation, turnaround, or closure. For a time, the district was strongly considering closure, but community members came together to prevent that from happening. Hamdi Abdulle of Somali Youth and Family Services⁵ explained:

So we stood up and said, “We don’t see why the school should close. We see why something has to change in the school system, in the administration.” It’s not the walls that are failing the kids. It is the work that is not being done or being done in a way that is adequate.

Ultimately, the district elected the transformation option, which meant it had to replace the principal and increase the length of the school day. Being a SIG school also meant it had operational flexibility from certain regulations, and teachers could receive a \$1,000 bonus if they met their student growth goals. The district hired Jessica Calabrese Granger as the new principal, who, along with her staff, decided to make improving math instruction the school’s core priority during the grant period.

⁵ Now Executive Director of African Community & Housing Development

Figure 2: Recent History of Local Collaborative Efforts



Ms. Calabrese Granger worked with researchers in the University of Washington’s College of Education to develop a theory of change and corresponding strategies. Improving math instruction and performance was the first major focus. As such, the school dedicated time to ongoing teacher professional development, working with the principal and instructional coaches to develop skills to teach math in a way that would increase conceptual understanding. Underpinning these efforts was what staff at Lakeridge call “taking a learner stance,” which means everyone is focused on learning and getting better at what they do, from the students to the principal, and a willingness to be vulnerable in the process.

We created a culture where you could say, “I don’t know that. I know I’ve been teaching it, but I don’t know why the denominator changes and the numerator doesn’t. I don’t know.”
—Jessica Calabrese Granger, RSD Chief of School Improvement & Former Lakeridge Principal

In 2011, 30 percent of Lakeridge third graders were proficient in math. By 2014, that share had more than doubled to over 60 percent, surpassing the Washington State average. The math coach at Lakeridge later expressed, “I expected it to be interesting work, but I didn’t expect it to be transformative.”

While most of the students at Lakeridge were thriving, Ms. Calabrese Granger⁶ recognized that many still struggled with social-emotional skills, making it difficult for them to “access that improvement.” Despite committing to her staff that they would focus on one priority for the grant period (improving math instruction), she introduced the idea of adding a focus on social-emotional learning at a staff meeting:

I had committed that I would vote on changes, that I would not make unilateral decisions. So I said, “Question number one: Do we think effective instruction will be enough to change outcomes for our kids?” One hundred percent [of staff said no]. “Okay, question number two: Should we take on the positive discipline, adverse childhood experiences philosophy and try to restructure around that?” Only one person voted no—and she said no, “not because I don’t want to, but I don’t know how we can do one more thing. I’m exhausted.” She said what everybody was thinking—like, have you lost your mind? How are we going to do this? But we had just talked about the kids. Like, “Picture a kid. Do you think what we’re doing is going to work for that kid?” People were like, “No, there’s no amount of good math that can accomplish that. You just can’t.” So we decided to do it.

Jessica was working super hard. She was on, head to toes. She did a lot. The school got better. There was serious effort.
—Hamdi Abdulle, Somali Youth and Family Services⁶

With this commitment from her staff, Ms. Calabrese Granger hired Sound Discipline, a positive behavior

⁶ Now Executive Director of African Community & Housing Development

and community-building organization, to work with the Lakeridge staff to build these positive behavior skills with their students.

Creation of West Hill Now!

While Lakeridge staff worked tirelessly to turn their school around, Ms. Calabrese Granger reported, “I used to joke, we were our own district....We just didn’t rely on anybody else.” Lakeridge Elementary was receiving support from the community—and a lot of attention at the state and national level for its turnaround story—but surprisingly little attention from district leadership. That changed in early 2016 when the previous RSD superintendent was replaced by Interim Superintendent Art Jarvis, and then-Assistant Superintendent Damien Pattenaude (now the superintendent). These two leaders recognized the potential to leverage Lakeridge’s success to improve the performance of other schools in West Hill.

In February 2016, Mr. Jarvis presented this vision to the board through a presentation entitled *West Hill Now: Creating a Vision and Plan for Student Success on the West Hill (and Beyond)*. Dr. Pattenaude, who himself grew up on the West Hill, then got to work putting this plan in motion. This included asking Ms. Calabrese Granger to leave her role as principal of Lakeridge and move into a district role created especially for her—Chief of School Improvement. In this role, she would work with the principals of Bryn Mawr and Campbell Hill Elementary Schools to lead the kind of improvement process she had led at Lakeridge.

During the 2016–2017 school year, Ms. Calabrese Granger started her work with Bryn Mawr and Campbell Hill, as well as Lakeridge, to establish (or continue) the philosophy and structures that made Lakeridge so successful. In addition, the district instituted a number of new policies and supports for these schools specifically. The additional support provided to these schools was referred to as West Hill Now! In 2017, Highlands Elementary School, located in the Sunset neighborhood, successfully lobbied to become the fourth school, prompting the district to rename the strategy the Renton Innovation Zone (RIZ). In fall of 2018, Sartori Elementary School, a brand-new STEM-focused magnet school, will open its doors as the fifth member school of the RIZ. Since the creation of this initiative, Lakeridge has remained the model for the change that is possible.

In September 2016, as the West Hill Now! strategy was being kicked off, the district also hired Ebony Pattenaude to serve as Family and Community Engagement Coordinator to build stronger relationships between RSD and the community. According to Ms. Pattenaude,

It’s a process, and healing, and rebuilding trust. I think the creation of this position that I serve in was very helpful to signal to the community that the Renton School District wants to be a better partner, wants to hear the ideas of the community, wants to see how we can work together.

So [Damien] started talking about “you guys have the only school in the state that is showing these gains. Everybody’s interested in them except [district leadership]. Why aren’t we learning from this? And look at these other two schools that are in the exact same place. How did that happen? And what are we going to do about it? How do we recreate?”
—Jessica Calabrese Granger, RSD Chief of School Improvement

Since joining the district in this role, Ms. Pattenaude has been engaged in a listening tour, meeting with parents about their hopes and dreams for their children’s school, and how the district can better support its families. This represents a significant shift in the way the district engages with parents. Many of these conversations have focused on increasing options for before- and after-school care, which prompted the district to issue an RFP for a school-based provider. Starting in the 2018–2019 school year, [Right at School](#) will provide before- and after-school care at every RSD elementary school.

The district also provides RIZ schools with additional resources such as dedicated counselors, substitute teachers for extra professional development time, and funding for Sound Discipline facilitators. This added support for the schools and students who need it most has not gone unnoticed by the community. Regina Elmi, a parent and community organizer, said this of the district’s efforts:

And I think having our new superintendent, Damien, I think for the first time in these four years I’ve been in the district, I am really seeing investment from the district lens. I’m really proud of the district right now.

The RIZ school strategy

So we were able to meet, talk to Lakeridge, see what their experience was, what they went through, what worked well, what they thought didn’t work well, and then adapt and make a plan, for each one of our schools, that made sense for us. So pulling in similar things that they were doing, but also making it work and fit for our particular school. So it was a really great experience, and we came up with a really great plan from it.

—Jonathan Perry, Bryn Mawr Fourth-Grade Teacher

The RIZ school strategy is rooted in seven core principles developed by Ms. Calabrese Granger in partnership with the University of Washington: **collaboration, professional learning, data usage, the principal as instructional leader, operational flexibility, building culture, and family and community engagement.** Ms. Calabrese Granger helps the RIZ schools think through how to integrate these principles in a way that makes sense for their unique history and context, and to formalize these ideas into an improvement plan.

- **Collaboration, professional learning, and data usage:** All RIZ teachers engage in bi-weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) and every-six-week learning labs with their grade-level peers. During PLCs, the principal and instructional coach review data, troubleshoot conceptual misunderstanding among students, review the pacing guide, and prepare for upcoming lessons. During



I think [labs and PLCs] changed how we see kids in general. They belong to all of us and it’s changed the way I perceive myself as a teacher. I’m always growing, I’m always learning. I haven’t reached the “it point,” whatever that “it point” is. So I can always improve. And the labs are the thing that allows me to do that. And I can learn from my colleagues.

—Lakeridge Fourth-Grade Teacher

learning labs, teachers have the entire day out of their classroom to focus on improving their instructional skills. The coaches and principals typically begin these days with a discussion of a particular approach, and teachers develop a lesson plan centered on that approach. Some teachers then “test” their lesson plans on a class of students, while other teachers observe and take notes. This model for professional development and collaboration is the primary driver of instructional excellence at the RIZ schools.

- **Principal as instructional leader:** Another defining characteristic of the RIZ approach is the division of labor between the principal and assistant principal. Ms. Calabrese Granger works with RIZ administrators to reorganize their respective responsibilities and to ensure that the principal is able to focus on being the instructional leader of the building (through PLCs, learning labs, staff meetings, and classroom observations), while the assistant principal is in charge of everything else (building management, student behavior, parent communication, etc.). Ms. Calabrese Granger works with her contacts at the University of Washington to develop strategies for developing instructional leaders: “Our work is to define what is instructional leadership that actually changes teacher practice.”
- **Operational flexibility:** RIZ schools are exempt from many district requirements, including districtwide curricula, assessments, and non-RIZ professional development. In addition, the PLC and learning lab structure required negotiating a contract waiver with the teachers’ union for each participating school, as it requires significantly more time spent in meetings.
- **Building culture:** All RIZ schools are tasked with “creating practices which maximize the social, emotional, and intellectual safety for all students....A culture for learning that includes effective student engagement and high expectations for all students.” Every RIZ school receives intensive support that includes professional development training from Sound Discipline to support students’ social-emotional skills. Support from Sound Discipline includes targeted training sessions for classroom teachers, specialist teachers, classified staff, and administrators; classroom observations; and behavior data meeting support. The Sound Discipline model focuses on building community as well as **shifting**

Collaboration with the University of Washington’s INSPIRE Center

As principal of Lakeridge during the SIG grant period, Ms. Calabrese Granger collaborated with researchers from the INSPIRE Center within the University of Washington College of Education to create her strategies for improvement. The INSPIRE Center works to “cultivate university–school–community collaborations,” bringing together research and practice in a supportive and genuine partnership. Members of the INSPIRE Center continue to support Ms. Calabrese Granger and the RIZ schools through remote and on-site coaching and advising.

“I believe that the collaboration between the university and the school, it’s an unusual relationship to have a group of university educators that invest themselves in the work at the ground level. They were here every week. It’s different than just teaching a class and leaving. They were invested for a number of years here, so there’s that partnership that made a difference.”

—Teresa Lind, Lakeridge Math Coach

mindsets pertaining to discipline, consequences, and student behavior. According to Sound Discipline co-founder Jody McVittie,

What we do is we gradually shape the process by working with the data team, by working with the school, by working with the administration to develop a discipline system that actually models the social learning we're talking about. It's about respect. It's about repair. It's about giving each other grace, and learning how to be helpful, not hurtful.

In addition, Sound Discipline provides school procedures, structures, and lesson plans to promote social-emotional learning. For example, all classrooms at Sound Discipline schools hold class meetings three times per week, during which students share compliments and brainstorm about how to solve social-emotional problems they have encountered. And teachers utilize Sound Discipline lesson plans focused on self-regulation strategies, which students can practice in the designated “chill out zone” in every classroom.

- **Family and community engagement:** Compared to the other RIZ school core principles, family and community engagement was not a central tenet of Lakeridge’s initial approach. However, the district signaled—in part through the hiring of Family and Community Engagement Coordinator Ebony Pattenau— that working with families and the community would have to become a core priority in the RIZ work. Each RIZ school is at a different level of development in this area, and each has taken a unique approach to engaging parents. For example, teachers at Lakeridge will conduct parent–teacher conferences at Creston Point, the apartment complex where the majority of their students live, or they will drop by to introduce themselves to students and families before the start of each school year. At Campbell Hill, many teachers have class websites that they update frequently to share information with parents. At Bryn Mawr, the PTA and family and community engagement team collaborate frequently with Ms. Pattenau around family listening sessions.

Highlands Elementary School is particularly far along in its family engagement strategies; three years ago, the school’s leadership committed to making family engagement a core priority, which resulted in several improvements and innovations. For example, simply “by making it a focus,” attendance at their monthly “Coffee and Conversation” parent meetings increased from three or four participants to 40–60. The family engagement

We need to be able to figure out a way to help them feel welcome and valued regardless of their level of education or their language.

—Angela Varela, Lakeridge Counselor

[Highlands Principal] Mr. DeBlasio really pushes, “It’s not just what the staff says, it’s what you say, too. The family voice matters and we want to hear what you want. Your voice matters too.” So I think that’s nice to hear from a leader in the school.

—Jackie Connell, Highlands Family Liaison

leadership team also created the Renton Parent University to increase engagement with Spanish-speaking parents (see “Renton Parent University” text box). Highlands has also shifted planning responsibilities for school celebrations and events to parents, increasing their sense of ownership and genuine partnership. The school will be sending three parents (representing different ethnic groups) to a three-day training to become leaders of the parent–school partnership, with an aim of “building structures that make sense for the community.”

Renton Parent University

The Highlands Elementary Family Engagement Leadership Team created Renton Parent University (RPU), a 10-week English as a second language course for its Spanish-speaking parents. Highlands Principal Alfred DeBlasio said that this “immediately tore down barriers,” opening the opportunity for deeper partnerships. In addition to teaching English, the courses focus on informing parents how to navigate the school system through emails to teachers, tools to advocate for their students, and strategies to support students as learners at home. These courses also focus on topics like dealing with social media, personal financial management, and navigating relationships with the police department. One of the RPU parents is a “natural leader” and has become the unofficial liaison between the school and the local Spanish-speaking community. The principal noted that this parent’s child is now noticeably more engaged in school. Highlands is now starting to recruit parents from the Asian community to join RPU. Mr. DeBlasio describes family engagement as “not an add-on to what we do, but...a priority, a foundational part of our work.”

Sunset Neighborhood Revitalization

The Sunset neighborhood revitalization began in 2006, when the City of Renton first created a plan for revitalizing through the development of a set of new mixed-income, mixed-use housing into a compact and walkable neighborhood. By 2008, the plan had expanded to include parks, recreational facilities, a library, commercial housing, and a trail system. The Planned Action for the Sunset Area was adopted in 2011. The effort has engaged 28 partners in all, but the most central have been the City of Renton, RSD, Renton Housing Authority, along with King County Housing Authority, [Neighborhood House](#), and [Community Center for Education Results \(CCER\)](#).

The city and its partners have made steady progress toward its goals. Since 2011, approximately \$100 million has been invested in completed and current projects in the Sunset area. They have built affordable low-income housing, the Meadow Crest Early Childhood Learning Center, an accessible playground, and a new library. Adjacent to the library is the Sunset Neighborhood Park, which has been considerably upgraded; together, the library and park will serve as the centerpiece of much of the planned future development. Mark Santos-Johnson from the City of Renton noted that, “it represents probably the highest capital investment by the public sector in any neighborhood in the city in the last decade.”

In 2015–2016, the partners applied for a [Choice Neighborhood Grant](#) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This grant program leverages significant public and

private dollars to support locally driven strategies that address struggling neighborhoods through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation. The funds would have been significant, dwarfing the city's existing budget for revitalization, and would have funded \$800,000 in human resources over a five-year period. The application made it to the final round but was ultimately denied, in part due to the lack of sufficient matching funds.

Energized by making it the final round, the partners, with substantial support from CCER, worked to secure \$180 million in leveraged funds for a \$30 million proposal, and re-submitted the Choice Neighborhood grant the following year (2016–2017). The second Neighborhood Choice proposal included a plan for a “Sunset Children’s Zone,” for which the [Ballmer Group](#) committed to providing \$5.5 million in matching funds over the five-year project. It also included new housing, community improvements, and substantial human services based in the community. Due to the accidental omission of one page in a 465-page application, their application was disqualified and never reviewed.

When they did not get the Choice Neighborhood grant, the city immediately started working with RSD, CCER, and the Ballmer Group to see what they could do to maintain momentum. In 2017, RSD added Highlands Elementary to the West Hill Now! reform effort. Because Highlands Elementary is located in Renton, some distance from the West Hill, the name of the school reform effort became the Renton Improvement Zone (RIZ). This occurred in conjunction with the effort, launched at the community meeting in August 2017, to engage broader community stakeholders in the creation of the RIZ Partnership.

In 2017, the Ballmer Group provided \$100,000 in start-up funding to support a full-time grant writer and facilitator to help coordinate the RIZ Partnership meetings. Thus, in many ways, the RIZ Partnership was born through the marriage of the Sunset revitalization and West Hill Now! school reform and community engagement work, which until that point had been quite independent. Mark Santos-Johnson, of the City of Renton, sees the merging of these as a great opportunity to understand how these types of networks operate in different settings. He said it is a great opportunity to “do a demonstration project that involves both the county and the city, a project that involves both an unincorporated suburban area and an incorporated suburban area.”

Key Supports for Collaboration and Services

As evidenced in the previous two sections, the two primary forces leading to the development of the RIZ Partnership were the RSD school reform effort and the Sunset revitalization effort. There were other relevant factors as well, and we describe them in this section. These efforts include Best Starts for Kids funding, the Road Map Project and the Local Proof Points Initiative, and the [StriveTogether](#) Cradle to Career Accelerator Fund.

Best Starts for Kids

King County residents passed a ballot initiative in 2015 called Best Starts for Kids (BSK). BSK provides an average of \$65 million per year to support King County families and children so that babies are born healthy, children thrive, and young people grow into happy, healthy adults.

Because BSK is a county initiative, rather than city initiative, community organizations in unincorporated West Hill are eligible to receive funding.

BSK funding has already made a huge difference for the small CBOs in Skyway-West Hill and for providers throughout Renton. The grant writer, funded with the Ballmer Group's RIZ start-up funding, has helped to write at least four successful BSK grant proposals. These include grants to: (1) the Somali Youth and Family Club and Urban Families to provide services to youth at Creston Point Apartments; (2) the Somali Doula Network to provide doula and home visiting services to the Somali population; (3) the City of Renton to provide out-of-school-time activities to youth at the Highlands Neighborhood Center; and (4) RSD and several partner agencies to provide trauma-informed and restorative services at four of the RIZ schools and their feeder middle school.⁷ In all, the community has received almost \$2.9 million in BSK funding.

Overall, the private funding from the Ballmer Group has helped Renton and its community-based organization to access the public funds from BSK in a way that is highly strategic. These early "wins" for the RIZ partners have also helped to strengthen the Partnership and provided increased capacity for organizations to engage more fully.

Road Map Project and Local Proof Points Initiative

In 2010, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) began investing in the [Road Map Project](#), a 10-year effort to dramatically improve student achievement in seven school districts in South King County, with a particular focus on closing the achievement gap. CCER is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting the Road Map Project. They have built a [comprehensive data center](#) for districts and schools in the region and have engaged regional stakeholders in how to strengthen the P–16 pipeline through a series of workgroups (e.g., on high school to college completion or birth to third grade). Through the Road Map Project, an infrastructure and set of relationships have been built that have allowed CCER to be integrally involved in West Hill Now! and the Sunset neighborhood transformation, and to play a key role in helping to bring resources to the local community.

In 2015, CCER and the Road Map community network took a hard look at the data coming out of the region and realized that they were not on track to meet their goal of doubling the number of students earning postsecondary credentials and closing the achievement gap for students of color and low-income children. They decided it was essential that they (1) increase their focus on racial equity, (2) increase parent and youth voice in the project, (3) better organize advocacy at the state and local level for greater impact, and (4) offer stronger support to key implementers.

In parallel, BMGF was considering how to have a greater impact on teaching and learning within the Road Map region, as well as how to strengthen partnerships among schools, pre-K, and providers of Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) supports. They developed a Local Proof Points initiative, which invests in the development of local improvement networks that look at student data and test research-supported strategies to deepen student learning.

⁷ This also includes resources for Sound Discipline, SYFC, Thrive Yoga, and Kaleidoscope Play and Learn.

In the fall of 2017, BMGF started having conversations with CCER about which local community would make sense to engage first in the Local Proof Points work. RSD immediately stood out because of the groundwork that had already been laid in the schools and in developing school–community partnerships. In February 2018, RSD leadership met with BMGF to discuss their interest in serving as a pilot site for the Local Proof Points work; in March 2018, BMGF leadership visited Lakeridge Elementary. RSD then worked closely with BMGF and CCER to submit a planning grant (May 2018, with funding to start as early as August 2018) and a Year 1 full proposal (June 2018).

StriveTogether Cradle to Career Accelerator Fund

As this work was unfolding, the Road Map Project was selected to participate in the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Accelerator Fund in April 2017. StriveTogether is a nonprofit focused on building the capacity of communities to increase education outcomes for children through the provision of strategic assistance and resources. CCER was invited to send a cross-section of leaders to attend a one-year leadership program. The StriveTogether Leaders Team (STLT) that participated included Mary Jean Ryan (CCER Director), Ted Dezember (King County Housing Authority), Sheila Capestany (BSK), Jessica Calabrese Granger (RSD Chief of School Improvement), and Ebony Pattenaude (RSD Family and Community Engagement Coordinator). As part of their project, STLT members select a project to focus on. The Renton leaders selected the RIZ as their project, with a focus on third-grade reading, to understand the factors that influence literacy outcomes.

I had to do a lot of learning. We had to do a lot of research. That’s part of the process that we had go through with StriveTogether, too, is essentially this factor validation work of, “Is there really a shortage of early learning opportunities in Skyway? We should test that and find out and do a landscape analysis and talk to people. What do we already know from families?”

—Ted Dezember, King County Housing Authority

The STLT opportunity helped to strengthen relationships and a sense of shared understanding among team members at the beginning. Likewise, it provided a clear data-driven framework for understanding the broader issues related to the RIZ. All of the STLT members also helped to plan the August 2017 RIZ kick-off meeting at Renton Technical College. Ms. Pattenaude said that the experience helped them to zero in on their theory of change—that is, if they are going to close the achievement gap, they need to reach beyond the school day and engage pre-K and ELO partners. She said,

Out of us struggling together, and the readings that we did, the trainings that we received, we really dug deep on, “Okay, the schools are doing great things to get kids academically prepared. There’s only so much that a school can do, though. What are other major factors that can impact a child’s success around third-grade reading?”...We got to the hypothesis that the more quality opportunities that families have to access early learning and out of school time programming, the better the kids will be off in their academic careers.

The StriveTogether team of five eventually, over a number of months, came to the conclusion that the school district can't do this alone. King County Housing Authority can't do this alone. CCER can't do this by themselves....Out of that work was born the Partnership Committee.

Conclusion

The building blocks for the RIZ partnership developed over many years and were driven by a diverse cross-section of community stakeholders. Central building blocks for the RIZ included the RSD school reform efforts, the effort to revitalize the Sunset neighborhood, the timely arrival of BSK funding, the Road Map Project, and the StriveTogether leadership work. Other key factors included the ongoing work of Skyway Solutions, SYNC, and other community agencies and organizations that have been working tirelessly to engage community members and promote positive community change. A fortuitous convergence of essential factors, including the right kind of leadership and philanthropic and public investment, have helped to connect and lend focus to what could have been disparate and disconnected efforts. Yet, even with these things in place, the RIZ Partnership is just developing. Part 2 of the case study lays out the expectations, hopes, and goals that stakeholders have for the RIZ Partnership's work and for their communities moving forward.



PART 2:

RIZ PARTNERSHIP AND EXPECTATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Section 4: RIZ Partnership

As articulated in Part 1 of this case study, the RIZ Partnership did not manifest itself out of thin air. A broad assortment of factors converged to result in its formation, including the merging of two previously independent reform efforts (West Hills Now! and the Sunset neighborhood revitalization), the availability of private and public funding, access to Road Map region data, and opportunities for cross-sector leaders to collaborate and think deeply about the complex issues contributing to the achievement gap within individual schools and neighborhoods. Despite this long and winding “backstory,” the RIZ Partnership itself is still relatively nascent. In this section we provide an overview of the RIZ committee structure and highlight key milestones in its development thus far.

RIZ Partnership Steering Committee

The RIZ Partnership grew out of a desire to build upon the success of the West Hill Now!/RIZ school improvement strategy and to leverage community resources to surround the students who attend RIZ schools with supportive out-of-school environments so that they can thrive in and out of school. In August 2017, leaders from RSD, CCER, King County, and the King County Housing Authority convened community stakeholders to communicate this vision for collective action, launching the RIZ Partnership Steering Committee (PSC).

Structure

An estimated 80 individuals attended this initial meeting in August 2017. They were presented with the broad vision for a RIZ Partnership to build upon the existing West Hill Now!/RIZ school strategy (see text box). The meeting included a break-out session, based on areas of interest, to allow smaller groups to discuss their ideas; it concluded with a call to join the PSC, a group that would meet monthly to turn these ideas into action.

Since its initial meeting in August 2017, the PSC has been a voluntary, open-to-all

Terminology

- **West Hill Now!:** the district-initiated effort to apply lessons learned from Lakeridge Elementary to other schools on the West Hill (Bryn Mawr and Campbell Hill). This name was used during the 2016-17 school year.
- **Renton Innovation Zone (RIZ):** the new name for West Hill Now! beginning in 2017, with the addition of Highlands Elementary, located in the Sunset neighborhood (not on the West Hill).
- **RIZ Partnership Steering Committee (RIZ PSC):** a group of community stakeholders focused on improving opportunities and outcomes for students attending the RIZ schools.
- **RIZ Partnership:** the joint effort of the RIZ schools (backed by RSD) and the RIZ PSC to improve outcomes for these students. The Partnership is currently engaged in a renaming process to avoid confusion with the school district initiative and convey connection to neighborhoods.

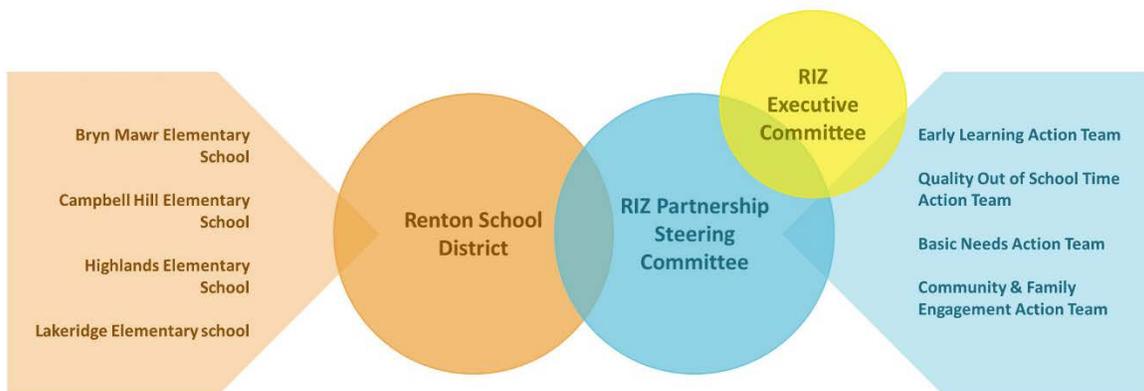
monthly meeting of CBO leaders, city and county officials, and family and community members. While membership is informally defined, approximately 84 individuals representing 33 different agencies or constituencies have participated in PSC meetings over the past year.⁸

After the first few meetings, members of the PSC identified the need for subcommittees in order to organize different focus areas of interest and expertise. This led to the creation of four Action Teams: (1) Early Learning, (2) Quality Out-of-School Time, (3) Basic Needs, and (4) Community and Family Engagement. Most PSC members belong to one or more of these Action Teams, which meet separately from the PSC and are responsible for gathering data and driving the strategy for that particular area of focus. Figure 3 below provides an overview of the PSC and action team structure.



Every nonprofit I’ve ever worked for, it’s, “We could do this if....” That’s the big thing about RIZ that I like, is that it’s, “Dream big. What would be the best scenario for all of our kids?”
—Marci Asher, Urban Family

Figure 3: Partnership Steering Committee and Action Team Structure



Since January 2018, the PSC’s work has been led by an interim Executive Committee made up of community leaders representing various perspectives: Gail Thomas (Bryn Mawr grandparent and representative of Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church), Kris Raftis (Renton Area Youth Family Services), Michael Majeed (Skyway Solutions), Mirya Munoz (St. Vincent de Paul), and Mark Santos (City of Renton), as well as RSD’s Jessica Calabrese Granger. The Executive Committee is also entirely voluntary, and all members of the PSC were initially invited to join. Since January, this smaller group has been in charge of writing a mission statement, making high-level decisions, and handling the logistics associated with organizing a large group and its ideas.

Throughout its first year, CCER has served as an “incubator” for the PSC, Executive Committee, and all Action Teams providing resources and staffing to support its activities. CCER contracted Catherine Verrenti to facilitate the first year of meetings and activities and Sylvie McGee to

⁸ From the June 2018 *RIZ Partnership Improvement Plan*.

provide grant-writing support. CCER also hired a permanent employee, Gretchen Stahr Breunig, to support this initiative through partnership-building in her role as Director of Early Learning & Elementary Success. In addition, RSD staff Ebony Pattenaude and Jessica Calabrese Granger have provided crucial leadership and support and serve as a bridge between the RIZ school strategy and the RIZ PSC.

Forthcoming Transition

As the RIZ PSC approaches one year of existence, it will undergo a number of organizational changes. First, CCER will scale down its role upon the hire of a permanent RIZ Partnership Director (this funding is pending). This will be accompanied by a reorganization of the Executive Committee into a more permanent leadership group. In addition, the RIZ PSC must decide on a permanent structure. Options include: (1) establishing itself as a new nonprofit; (2) becoming a permanent program under an existing nonprofit; or (3) operating as an independent agency with a fiscal sponsor. Most of these changes are expected to occur by the end of 2018 or beginning of 2019.

The RIZ district-level efforts will also undergo staffing and organizational changes in the 2018–2019 school year. The district will hire a Partnership and Early Learning Network Director. This individual will serve as a liaison between early learning and other providers in the area and the RIZ schools. He or she will also oversee the newly-formed cross-RIZ school networks, which initially will include: (1) Family and Community Engagement (FACE), (2) Social-Emotional Learning, and (3) Math Coaching. These networks will allow for the sharing of best practices and collective action to improve these core elements of the RIZ school strategy at each RIZ school.

Progress

Throughout its first year, the PSC has focused on using data to identify trends and to set priorities; creating the structures and processes that will give the group longevity; forming relationships and engaging the community to direct its work moving forward; and creating action plans. In addition to this important groundwork, the PSC has already experienced some early wins. As mentioned earlier, the PSC was able to secure \$2.88 million in new funding from King County BSK to support several aligned programs. These programs include teaching trauma-informed and restorative justice practices in the RIZ schools and Dimmitt Middle School (which most RIZ schools feed into), a robust expansion of several out-of-school-time opportunities, and investment in a new doula home visiting model to support maternal health.

Planned activities

In the next year, the PSC plans to continue to clarify its organization and communication structures, analyze data, and engage the community to refine its approach to tackling root problems. Specifically, the PSC will launch four initial “Community Cafes,” where families and community members will be invited to discuss their desires for their children and what they think the PSC should prioritize. In addition, the Renton School District is exploring the

possibility of replicating a program implemented by the Bellingham School District called Promise K. The Promise K model offers free, early-entrance kindergarten to students who have not participated and are not currently participating in another pre-K program. This would help address the dearth of high-quality early learning programs in the RIZ area.⁹

Coordination between RIZ PSC and RIZ school reform efforts

As noted, the district’s RIZ staff, Jessica Calabrese Granger and Ebony Pattenaude, are active members of the PSC, creating a bridge between the two efforts. Their involvement ensures that the PSC is fully informed of the school-based RIZ strategies underway, so that PSC efforts complement what is happening in the schools. As the PSC moves into its second year, collaboration between the two entities will increase through stronger data sharing agreements and the creation of cross-school networks that work in partnership with their corresponding PSC Action Teams. RSD is also planning to hire additional RIZ staff, including a Partnership and Early Learning Network Director, who will oversee much of the cross-school networks’ work and its collaboration with the PSC. Moving forward, the vision is that as these efforts become increasingly integrated, they will become two parts of one truly aligned partnership.

In Spring 2018, SPR interviewed 13 RIZ PSC members, including both CBO and public sector representatives, 23 RIZ school staff, and five RIZ district/PSC leaders. The goal was to better understand what different stakeholders in this Partnership see as the core vision of this work, and their hopes and anticipated outcomes moving forward.

Vision

RIZ Partnership Steering Committee perspectives

When asked, “What is your vision for the RIZ?” (Figure 4), most PSC members explained it as **coordination and collaboration** across entities that work with children and families. Interviewees described this vision from slightly different angles, however. PSC interviewees most commonly described this vision as CBOs and public institutions **supporting and coordinating with schools**, breaking down silos of care between education and human service providers to provide children and families

To have something that is not of today, but longevity and sustainability. I think before anything else, to really have the honest investment long term. How are we going to build systems and structures that, yes, we’re doing the heavy lifting work, but this is work that the community itself can sustain. Even when the funders leave 10 years from now, how are we going to make sure RIZ is something that is sustained by the community?

—Regina Elmi, Somali Parents Education Board

It’s clear that of course, schools can’t do it alone. They are doing the very best they can and they’re amazing but we’ve gotta better support these kids. The parents, the families, the extended families, the community-based organizations, King County, City of Renton, the more that we can be coming together and strategizing together and finding real and tangible ways to remove barriers for kids and for families the better. That is the goal.

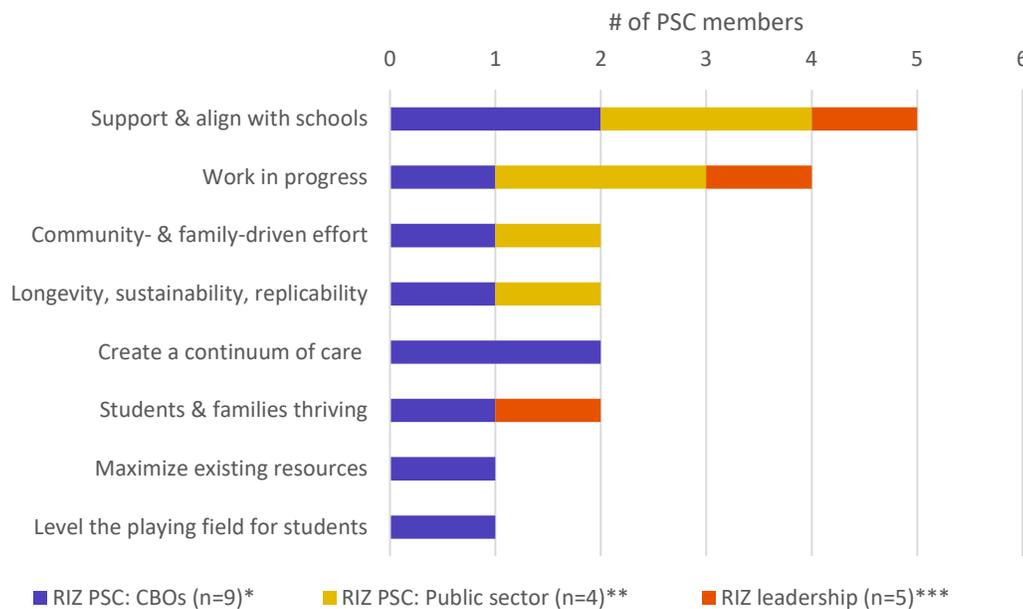
—Ebony Pattenaude, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator

⁹ See <http://bellingshamschools.org/programs/early-childhood-education/>

with the support and resources they need to be successful. These PSC members envisioned the Partnership as a network in which adults caring for children across the school and human service systems communicate and work together to meet each child’s needs. This conception is closely aligned with one individual’s vision of **maximizing existing resources** through better coordination across human service organizations, as opposed to “creating something new.” Two respondents described their vision as **empowering families and the community** to drive improvement for their children through this partnership.

My understanding of the vision is that...it goes back to that it takes a village to raise a child—that in order for schools to be able to reach, to meet the academic needs of students, the other needs of the families and students need to be met, need to be supported along the way.
—Gail Thomas, Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church

Figure 4: What is your vision for the RIZ? (PSC Members)



*CBOs represented include advocacy organizations and service providers
 **Public sector interviewees work for the City of Renton or King County
 ***RIZ leadership includes CCER and RSD staff

Other interviewees focused on creating a **continuum of care** for children in the RIZ, surrounding them with high-quality environments and strong relationships with caring adults both inside and outside of school. Some talked generally about providing a supportive environment in which families and students “get the opportunities that they deserve to level the playing field” and are “given the proper support [so] they can thrive.” Other respondents focused on their vision for the Partnership itself. These individuals explained their vision as the PSC building **structures that have longevity** and that can sustain themselves long term, beyond influxes of

funding and resources. They believed the PSC could be a model to be piloted across the country.

Four respondents simply said that identifying a clear vision was **still a work in progress**.

RIZ school staff perspectives

We also spoke with school staff at the RIZ schools—including administrators, instructional coaches, counselors, behavior specialists, teachers, and family liaisons—about their perspectives on the RIZ. They were asked to identify, “What does the RIZ mean to you?” (Figure 5). None mentioned the PSC, making it clear that they see the RIZ as a school-based strategy. There were, however, natural overlaps between the visions of the PSC members we interviewed and some school staff members. For example, an administrator explained that a core feature of the RIZ is identifying when students’ basic needs are not being met and **connecting them to resources**. This was a commonly expressed desire among PSC interviewees. Relatedly, some school staff members described the RIZ as something that focuses on the **whole child**, rather than solely on academic needs. One behavior interventionist explained that being a part of the RIZ means **“being a part of something bigger,”** which has a motivating effect on school personnel.

The vast majority of respondents explained that the RIZ means **an approach to teaching and learning that works for all students** and having the structures in place to support that work. Essentially, these are the policies and practices that were put in place by Jessica Calabrese Granger and that are unique to the RIZ schools. They include additional time for teacher collaboration and instructional coaching, and a focus on conceptual and collaborative student learning that puts students at the center. Relatedly, a large share of respondents said that being a part of the RIZ meant getting **additional resources from the district** to provide a quality education, given the unique needs of their student population. Interviewees described this as a real commitment to equity on the part of district leadership.

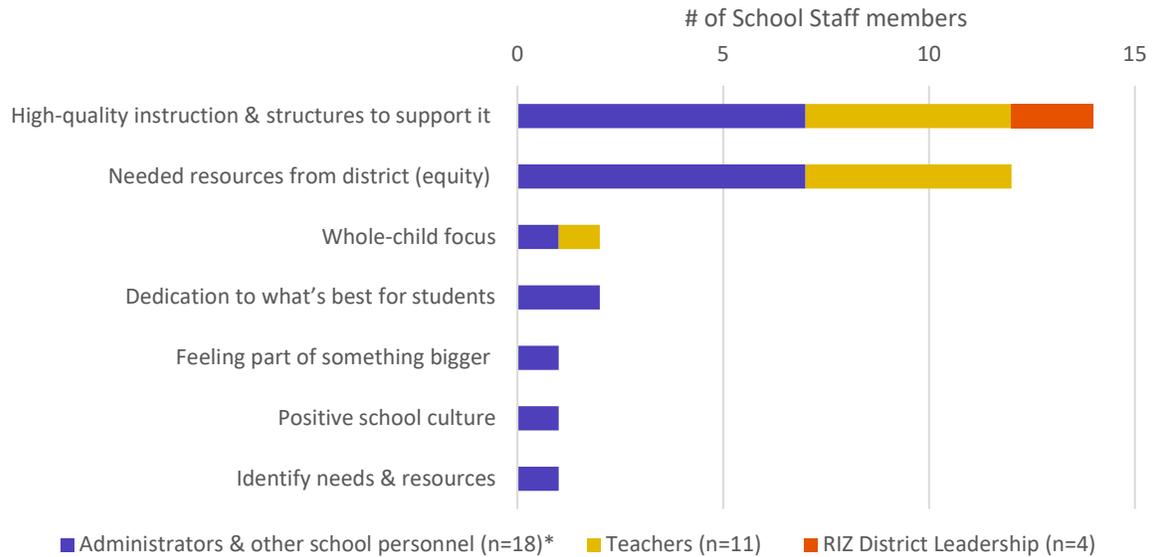
I think it’s how we should be teaching. It’s just whatever is working, and it’s proven to work. Why wouldn’t we try it? Again, 15 years [of teaching], math in particular, I have seen the most change in my classroom in their attitudes and in their willingness to try new things [in the past year]. The joy that they have in math...

—Andrea Gollob, Highlands Fifth-Grade Teacher

Honestly, I feel so privileged to be part of the work....We actually have a full-time counselor. We actually have extra help in our health room....I mean, these are things that have come with RIZ, and it really has instilled a lot of confidence in people. And it gave people a little flag. It’s like “Oh, okay, the district is recognizing that our job is a little bit harder than it is in other places.”

—Jaime Maxie, Bryn Mawr Principal

Figure 5: What does the RIZ mean to you? (School Staff)



*Includes principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, counselors, and family liaisons

Relationship between RIZ school-based initiative & RIZ PSC

While a core element of the PSC’s vision, as articulated by interviewed members, is to break down the silos between the school and other organizations and community members, there was little acknowledgement of the PSC’s work from RIZ school staff members, and vice-versa. In fact, when asked directly, most RIZ school staff expressed limited knowledge of the PSC.

However, when school staff were asked what advice they would give to the RIZ PSC (and when those unfamiliar were given context), they enthusiastically offered suggestions for how the PSC could support students in their schools. They most commonly recommended that the committee focus on **pre-K readiness** (n=4) and **afterschool programming** (n=2). School interviewees would also like for the committee to **engage families as stakeholders** in the work (n=2) and **ensure they have the resources** they need to provide a supportive environment for their children (n=2). Echoing the stated vision of several PSC members, a counselor and two administrators suggested that the committee focus on **forging a strong relationship with the school and stakeholders as a first step** (n=3). One teacher emphasized that the PSC should pursue its work with a sense of pride in the community rather than focusing on its deficits.



I think the biggest advice is for us to just work together. The school reaching out and vice versa....Because I feel like whatever their area is, I think they’re experts in that area, and I feel like they have the tools that they need. It’s just us coming together and working together to benefit our families.

—Lucero Alegre, Bryn Mawr Counselor

Desired outcomes

RIZ Partnership Steering Committee perspectives

Interviewed PSC members detailed a range of desired outcomes of the RIZ Partnership work, which we have categorized into short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. We classified outcomes as “short-term” if the interviewee described it as such or if it related to the groundwork activities of the PSC itself. We considered outcomes to be “medium-term” if they would take place in the next five years (which we provided as a prompt when interviewees asked for a time frame). Lastly, we categorized responses as “long term” if they referenced students as adults or related to systemic change in the community.

- *Short-term outcomes:* In the short term, the most commonly expressed desired result was that the Partnership be a genuine reflection of “the goals and the dreams of the community itself,” and form stronger relationships with parents in the region (see Figure 6). Respondents emphasized that **relationship building across systems and the community** will indicate that the PSC is poised to make a true impact in future years. On the other hand, some respondents characterized short-term success as coalescing around a shared vision or strategic plan, a process that can be slowed by providing time and space for community voice. (See more discussion on page 30.) Three respondents also emphasized their desire for access to **strong data systems** to identify student and parent needs and to guide the decisions and actions of the committee. Two noted that an orientation toward **continuous improvement** is a signal of a successful network.
- *Medium-term outcomes:* Most PSC members felt that the primary desired outcome of the PSC’s work is **gains in student academic performance**. While academic performance was mentioned most frequently, most respondents also commented that the committee needed to “**break it down**” in terms of what is keeping students from **achieving academically**. This includes students having their basic needs met and learning social-emotional skills, providing culturally relevant environments so that kids feel like equal members of their learning communities, increased access to high-quality pre-K and expanded learning opportunities, and support for families so that they are, in turn, able to provide students the support they need, both in and out of school. These

I think the first year of RIZ really needs to be community engagement-focused. If we can get some buy-in from some people with money who understand, that needs to be our priority before we even have the answers to everything else. That, I think, would be the most successful piece.

—Kelsey Dale, Somali Youth and Family Club

If the kids feel valued and understood, they’re going to go to school. If they go to school, their grades are going to improve. If they come to afterschool care, they’re going to get the help that they need for the things that they’re struggling with.

—Marci Asher, Urban Families

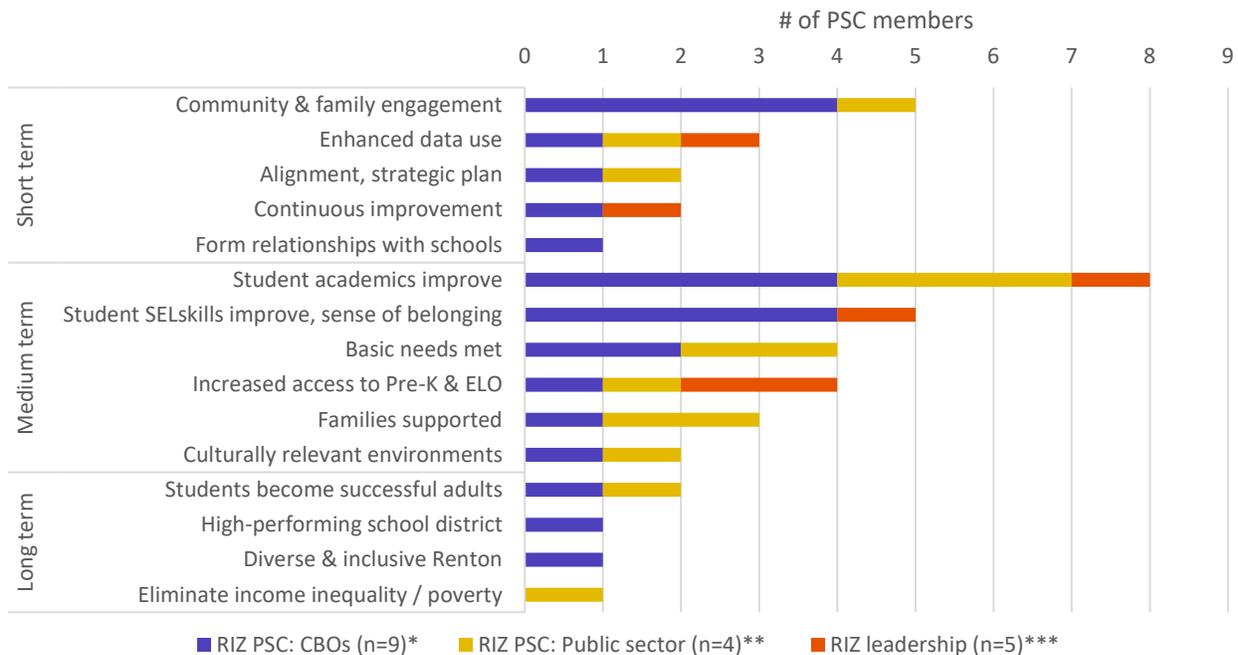
Our goal in family engagement is that families have the skills and tools and knowledge necessary to best help their kids.

—Ted Dezember, King County Housing Authority

interim outcomes map loosely to the four PSC Action Team content areas,¹⁰ demonstrating alignment between PSC member goals and the PSC’s organization.

- *Long-term outcomes:* Several interviewees also detailed what they would like to see in the long run as a result of this work. One public sector interviewee explained that he would like all RIZ students to graduate high school and go on to college or a career. Others described their goals for the community more broadly, including a public school system that is no longer characterized in a negative light, and a thriving, diverse, and inclusive community with less income inequality.

Figure 6: What are the desired outcomes or results of the RIZ Partnership? (PSC Members)



*CBOs represented include advocacy organizations and service providers
 **Public sector interviewees work for the City of Renton or King County
 ***RIZ leadership includes CCER and RSD staff

Tension between desire for quick action and ensuring community voices are heard

Since the RIZ Partnership’s inaugural meeting, its mission has been to create an opportunity for individuals from the community to drive change for children in the RIZ. PSC meetings are open for all to join, and its current membership is made up largely of representatives of CBOs. There is a shortage of certain types of stakeholders, however, and this threatens the representativeness of the voices



I think we’re trying to get clear, if you’re on the steering committee, whose voice do you truly bring here?
 —Catherine Verennti, RIZ PSC Facilitator

¹⁰ The four Action Teams include: (1) Early Learning, (2) Quality Out-of-School Time, (3) Basic Needs, and (4) Community and Family Engagement.

present at meetings. For example, two interviewees highlighted the paucity of parents or family members whose children attend the RIZ, and one mentioned the need to integrate youth voices. Furthermore, many individuals, especially parents, have real barriers to attending PSC meetings, such as a lack of transportation, conflicting work schedules, and child care constraints.

This desire to ensure the RIZ is a community-driven effort led to the creation of the Community and Family Engagement Action Team, which is focused on ensuring the priorities of the PSC reflect the priorities of families and the community.

The PSC members we interviewed had strong opinions about this matter. Four interviewees (all representing CBOs) felt strongly that more time needs to be spent on community and family engagement before this committee takes action. Five felt that the issues at hand are urgent, and that the committee is poised to make positive changes “now.” Several other interviewees said they were torn between the importance of community involvement and the desire to move toward action.

We have to be careful not to do listening forever, because the community gets exhausted about the process. The community’s like, “Well, you know what I need. Just get it done, and let me know so I can show up.”

—Mirya Munoz, St. Vincent de Paul

What we’re trying to do is not be top-down directed, but engage the community from the start...as opposed to that fake engagement where the decisions are already made and then we bring you in and say, “Now don’t you like what we’ve come up with for you?” To be able to sit as a community....”Tell us what you want. What are your dreams for your children? What are your needs for your family? How do we pull it all together?”

—Gail Thomas, Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church

The more voices, the more perspectives. There is value in that, and it also results in us slowing down. We have to slow down the process, which can be frustrating at times. But I think that really, it’s going to result in better long-term results.

—Ebony Pattenaude, RSD Family and Community Engagement Coordinator

If we are honest about closing gaps, I want to know, how are we elevating and building the capacity of the community itself, so that they close the gap for themselves? I don’t believe in services. I really don’t. I tell people, “Don’t give me a handout. But stand with me, support me, so that you’re giving me access to a system that is not set for me, and you’re a true ally. Dismantle that system with me, and break it with me. Because it’s not about me. There’s generations that are coming after me.”

—Regina Elmi, Somali Parents Education Board

RIZ school staff perspectives

As laid out above, PSC staff articulated desired outcomes that align with their spheres of influence; as service providers and public service workers, these individuals envision success as removing the barriers outside of school that prevent students from succeeding academically, by supporting families, meeting students' basic needs, increasing access to pre-K and ELO, and helping children feel a sense of connection to their communities. RIZ school staff similarly articulated their desired outcomes for students from their sphere of influence—within the classroom and within the school—offering a similar but complementary vision for student success (see Figure 7).

Interestingly, not a single interviewed school staff member focused on academic achievement measured by test scores as a desired outcome for their students. In fact, several explicitly said that success for students is *not* a good score on the Smarter Balanced assessment. Rather, staff overwhelmingly articulated student success as **developing the underlying skills necessary for academic and non-academic achievement**, such as self-confidence, perseverance, a sense of control, and a positive outlook toward learning. Relatedly, staff explained that students feeling part of a community, with a deep **sense of belonging and connection** to the school, is the most important indicator of success. Two interviewees expressed their desire for students to develop the underlying social-emotional skills to be successful in school and in life, such as the ability to self-regulate and be in touch with one's emotions. In addition, two staff defined student success as *all* students being able to access the curriculum and engage meaningfully in lessons.

We asked RIZ staff what success would look like for teachers in the RIZ schools. The most common response was related to high-quality pedagogy, **mastering new strategies and growing in their craft**, and feeling comfortable making mistakes, which is an emphasized aspect of the RIZ school strategy. Similarly, two staff defined success for teachers as

We're raising kids, not test scores.
--Alfred DeBlasio, Highlands Principal

I would much rather you be perseverant than know all your multiplication facts. Your perseverance is going to help you more, in school and in math, than those multiplication facts ever will. Because if you've got perseverance, you're going to be able to do anything that's laid out in front of you, and you're not going to give up on it, and you're going to be successful in life. So I feel like success is teaching students those qualities of being a lifelong learner, and then having that confidence in themselves, and knowing that they can be successful.
—Jonathan Perry, Bryn Mawr Fourth-Grade Teacher

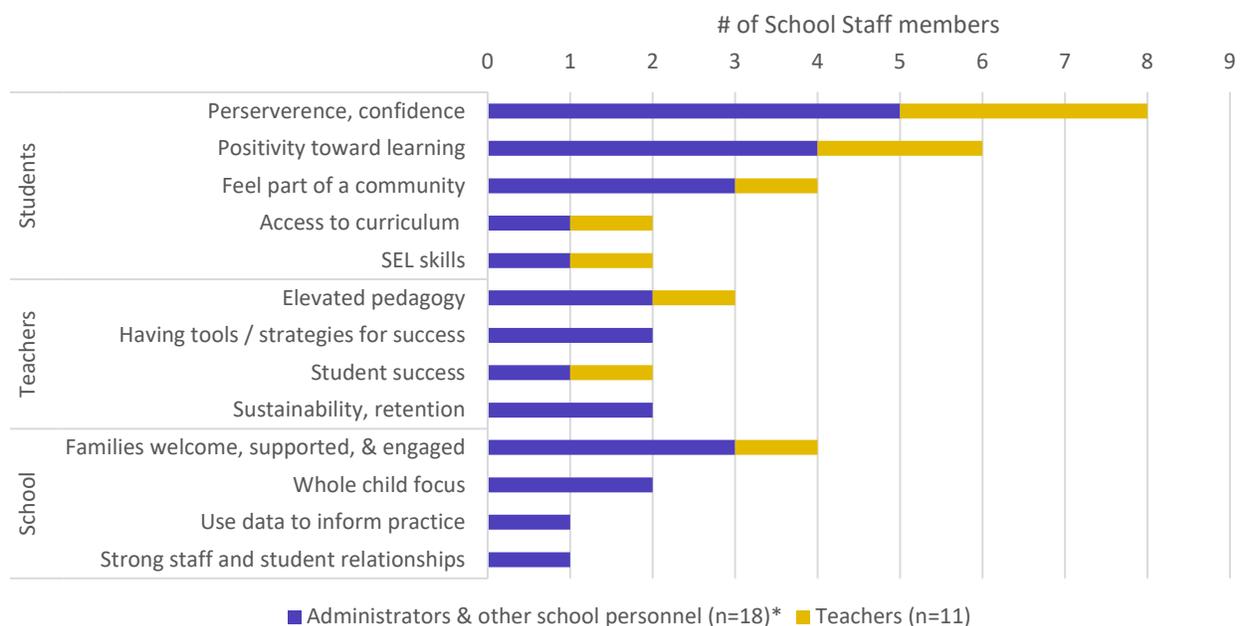
Success [also] means that we have the same teachers, year after year. So that we [can] build community amongst teachers so that we can build community amongst students.
—DeeAnn Wells, Campbell Hill Principal

I think it goes back to [families] feeling comfortable and confident coming into the school. Being able to talk directly with their teachers if there's anything going on and knowing how to advocate for their students and knowing the educational system. I think just having that is so powerful and not having to feel like we're gatekeepers.
—Lucero Alegre, Bryn Mawr Counselor

having access to support and strategies to help students be successful. Other interviewed staff emphasized that student success directly translates into teachers feeling successful, so the two are one and the same. One administrator and one counselor described success as teacher retention. They viewed **reduced teacher turnover** as an indicator that teachers feel supported and successful, noting it would also help the school build community more broadly.

Lastly, some interviewed staff offered their vision for success for the broader school, which included a schoolwide shift to **a whole child focus**, and development of the skills necessary to **translate data into improved practice**. Four school staff said that schoolwide success means increased **family empowerment** and involvement—that parents feel welcome in the school building, as equal members of the school community.

Figure 7: What does success look like? (School Staff)



*Includes principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, counselors, and family liaisons

Conclusion

The RIZ Partnership is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders. As such, each individual views this strategy from a unique vantage point based on sector, organizational membership, and lived experience. Therefore, it is unsurprising that every interview revealed a unique perspective on what the RIZ means and on what it can mean for the communities it represents. The overlaps in high-level themes, identified needs, and core desires reveals, however, that the RIZ Partnership, still in its infancy, has the capacity to create lasting improvement for the families of the West Hill and Sunset neighborhoods. Moving forward, the challenge will be to preserve the community-driven nature of the work within Renton, even as new players come to the table and the focus of the work becomes broader.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Full List of Interviewees

CCER

- ▶ **Gretchen Stahr Breunig**, Early Learning and Elementary Success Director
- ▶ **Mary Jean Ryan**, Executive and Founding Director

Renton School District

- ▶ **Damien Pattenau**, Superintendent
- ▶ **Ebony Pattenau**, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator
- ▶ **Jessica Granger**, Chief of School Improvement
- ▶ **Shannon Harvey**, Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching

Community Leaders

- ▶ **Alan Painter**, Unincorporated Community Service Area Program
- ▶ **Elham Kazemi**, University of Washington
- ▶ **Gail Thomas**, Bryn Mawr United Methodist Church
- ▶ **Hamdi Abdulle**, Somali Youth and Family Club¹¹
- ▶ **Jaime Greene**, Communities in Schools (CIS)
- ▶ **Jhana Williams**, Somali Youth and Family Club
- ▶ **Kelsey Dale**, Somali Youth and Family Club
- ▶ **Ken Nsimbi**, King County Housing Authority
- ▶ **Kris Raftis**, Renton Area Youth and Family Services (RAYS)
- ▶ **Marci Asher**, Urban Family Center
- ▶ **Mark Okazaki**, Neighborhood House
- ▶ **Mark Santos-Johnson**, City of Renton
- ▶ **Mirya Munoz-Roach**, St. Vincent de Paul
- ▶ **Regina Elmi**, Somali Parents Education Board

¹¹ Now Executive Director of African Community & Housing Development

- ▶ **Ted Dezember**, King County Housing Authority

School Sites

Bryn Mawr:

- ▶ **Gina Muto**, 5th Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Jaime Maxie**, Principal
- ▶ **Jonathan Perry**, 4th Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Lucero Alegre**, Counselor
- ▶ **Robin Martin**, Assistant Principal
- ▶ **Stacy Lappin**, Sound Discipline Facilitator
- ▶ **Stephanie Latimer**, Math Coach

Campbell Hill:

- ▶ **DeeAnn Wells**, Principal
- ▶ **Ginny Fulmer**, Communities in Schools Liaison
- ▶ **Judy Namkung**, 4th Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Mandy Hubbard**, Instructional Coach
- ▶ **Monica Herley**, ELL Coordinator
- ▶ **Shawnez Graham**, Sound Discipline Facilitator
- ▶ **Kristin Shimizu**, 3rd Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Kathryn Smith**, 5th Grade Teacher

Highlands:

- ▶ **Alfred Deblasio**, Principal
- ▶ **Andrea Gollob**, 5th Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Becca Lewis**, Math Coach
- ▶ **Deneen Frazier Bowen**, Sound Discipline Facilitator
- ▶ **Jackie Connell**, Parent Liaison
- ▶ **Mindy Krisel**, Literacy Coach
- ▶ **Sharon Skillon**, 3rd Grade Teacher

- ▶ **Steve Myers**, 4th Grade Teacher

Lakeridge:

- ▶ **Angela Varela**, Counselor
- ▶ **Carolyn Hahn**, Assistant Principal
- ▶ **Erika Klein**, 3rd Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Holly Megan Thompson**, Principal
- ▶ **Kathryn Mitchell**, 3rd Grade Teacher
- ▶ **Teresa Lind**, Math Coach
- ▶ **Theresa Tse**, 4th Grade Teacher

Sartori:

- **Angela Bogan**, Principal

Sound Discipline:

- **Jody McVittie** M.D

Appendix B: Monthly Attendance of Steering Committee, Executive Committee, and Action Team Meetings¹²

The table below displays the 65 community members who have participated in the RIZ Partnership Steering Committee, Executive Team, and/or Action Teams January – July, 2018.

| | Partnership Steering Committee | Executive Team | Basic Needs Action Team | Community and Family Engagement Action Team | Joint Quality Out of School Time & Early Learning Action Team ¹³ | Early Learning Action Team | Quality Out of School Time Action Team |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| Alan Painter | X | | X | | | | |
| Anna Arias | | | | | X | | X |
| Anna Kitchen | X | | | | X | | |
| Bianca Davis-Lovelace | | | X | | | | |
| Caitlin Brooks | | | | | X | | |
| Cara Inai | | | | | X | X | |
| Carlina Brown Banks | | | | | X | | |
| Carolyn Sopher | | | | | X | | |
| Carrie Nass | X | | | | | | |
| Chanel Hall | | | | | | | X |
| Cindy Farnsworth | X | | | | X | X | |
| Cipio Dunn | | | | | X | | |
| Courtney Cariveau | | | | | X | | |
| Cyprus Richardson | X | | | | | | |

¹² While CCER staff and consultants attend many of the committee and team meetings, they are not included here because they are not considered acting / voting members.

¹³ In May 2018, the Quality Out of School Time & Early Learning Action Team separated into two Action Teams.

| | Partnership Steering Committee | Executive Team | Basic Needs Action Team | Community and Family Engagement Action Team | Joint Quality Out of School Time & Early Learning Action Team ¹³ | Early Learning Action Team | Quality Out of School Time Action Team |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| Debra Sullivan | | | | X | X | | |
| Devon Love | | | | | X | | |
| Diana Ivanova | | | X | | | | |
| Ebony Pattenau | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| Gail Thomas | X | X | | X | X | | X |
| Hamdi Abdulle | X | | X | | | | |
| Hannah Bahn Miller | X | | | | X | | |
| Jackie Connell | X | | | | | | |
| Jackie Lloyd Evans | X | | | | | | |
| Jaime Greene | X | | | | | | |
| Jaime Maie | X | | | | | | |
| Jeremy Adams | | | | | | | X |
| Jessica Gilmore English | X | | | | | | |
| Jessica Granger | X | X | | | | | |
| Jhana Williams | | X | | | X | | X |
| Joan Thordarson | | | X | | | | |
| Katherine Gudgel | X | | X | | | | |
| Kelsey Dale | X | | | X | X | | |
| Ken Nsimbi | | | | | X | | X |
| Kimberly Dunn | | | | | X | | |

| | Partnership Steering Committee | Executive Team | Basic Needs Action Team | Community and Family Engagement Action Team | Joint Quality Out of School Time & Early Learning Action Team ¹³ | Early Learning Action Team | Quality Out of School Time Action Team |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| Kimberly Walker | | | | X | X | | |
| Kristen Raftis | X | X | | | | | |
| Leah Bui | | | | | X | | |
| Mara Fiksdal | | | X | | | | |
| Marci Asher | X | | | | X | | |
| Mark Santos-Johnson | X | X | X | | | | |
| Mark Okazaki | X | | X | | | | |
| Mary Jean Ryan | X | X | | | | | |
| Maryjane Vanc Clease | X | | | | | | |
| Michael Majeed | X | X | | | | | |
| Michele Starkey | X | | | X | | | |
| Millie Phung | X | | X | | | | |
| Mirya Munoz-Roach | X | X | | | | | X |
| Myka'la Alexander | X | X | X | | X | X | X |
| Mylisa Twohey | | | | | | | X |
| Omana Imani | | | | | X | X | X |
| Paula Steinke | | | | | X | X | |
| Rachel Butler | X | | | | | | |
| Rachel Ramirez | X | | | | X | | |
| Rebecca Berry | | | | X | | | |
| Regina Elmi | X | | | X | X | | |

| | Partnership Steering Committee | Executive Team | Basic Needs Action Team | Community and Family Engagement Action Team | Joint Quality Out of School Time & Early Learning Action Team ¹³ | Early Learning Action Team | Quality Out of School Time Action Team |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| Reverend Maynard Sopher | | | | | X | | |
| Robin Higa | | | | X | X | | |
| Samantha Yeun | X | | | X | X | | |
| Sheila Capestany | X | | | | | | |
| Simone Hamilton | X | | | | | | |
| Stephanie Snyder | X | | | | | | |
| Suzette Espinoza-Cruz | | | | | | X | |
| Tom Puthoff | | | | | X | | X |
| Vicki Arcuri | | | | | X | | X |
| Vicki Warren | X | | | | | | |
| Wendy Olsen | | | | | | X | |
| TOTAL number of participants | 37 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 32 | 9 | 14 |