



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

February 26, 2021

**CONTACT:**

Jesse Buccolo  
jbuccolo@norwalkacts.org  
203-858-8820

**NORWALK ACTS RECEIVES SUPPORT FROM STRIVETOGETHER FOR AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY**

*Systemic racial inequities exposed by COVID-19 heighten the need for systems transformation*

**NORWALK, CONNECTICUT** — StriveTogether, a national network working to bring communities together around data to make decisions and improve results for kids, recently announced Norwalk ACTS as an awardee for the Challenge Fund. Norwalk ACTS joins fifty other communities across 26 states to deliver more equitable outcomes for children and families. These communities are part of the Cradle to Career Network, a national movement led by StriveTogether to ensure every child has every opportunity to succeed.

Norwalk ACTS will use the Challenge Fund grant to fulfill goals set by StriveTogether. Those include ensuring a stable recovery as the pandemic subsides by aiding its partners hit hard financially by the crisis; strengthening Norwalk ACTS systemic approach to problem-solving by providing resources and capacity-building to those partners engaged in policy and advocacy efforts organized around the pandemic; and assuring the momentum behind its work is sustained, especially in advancing equitable outcomes for Norwalk's children and families of color and in empowering Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian youth and their families.

Other top priorities—and successes--of Norwalk ACTS include:

- Building an early childhood system that increasingly is seen as a national model, one that includes a city-wide approach to developmental screenings of children Birth to 5 in preparation for kindergarten
- Partnering with the school district, city, and numerous community-based organizations to provide critically needed data and support such as:
  - Analyzing student data to optimize the distribution of food during COVID to ensure mobile food sites were within walking distance to low-income students
  - Developing a disaggregated school improvement plan dashboard to capture demographic, assessment, and testing data by school to inform decision making
  - Creating a disproportionality and equity dashboard highlighting under-and over-representation of subgroups in discipline, special education, and academically talented categories
  - Mapping resources and providing resource portals for families of children for out of school time and behavioral health services



“When the pandemic hit in early 2020, we made the strategic decision to shift cost savings from cancelled events and travel to expand grants we award to our network members,” said Jennifer Blatz, president and CEO, StriveTogether. “With the support of our board of directors, we pivoted and accelerated payment of previously awarded multi-year grants and extended new grants focused on COVID-19 recovery and resilience. The work underway in these communities is vital to the future of our children. We’re supporting the efforts of communities to transform systems so that they produce more equitable outcomes.”

Altogether, StriveTogether has provided \$20 million in grants since the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and will award another \$12 million by the end of 2021. Multi-year commitments from several long-time investors in StriveTogether helped make this possible.

“Our network members are helping their communities change the systems that fail so many families of color and families experiencing poverty. There is tremendous need and opportunity to redefine what’s possible,” Blatz added. “We’re creating a new normal where race, ethnicity and poverty do not determine opportunity or outcome.”

“Our collective impact approach has never been more important,” said Jennifer Barahona, CEO, Norwalk ACTS. “When the pandemic hit, we were fortunate to have existing structures in place that allowed us to hit the ground running. Our partnerships with the City of Norwalk’s public school system, health and housing departments, community-based organizations, philanthropic groups and more enabled us to answer needs created by the crisis. However, the pandemic has significantly worsened the disparities in educational and health outcomes for low-income families and children of color. Our ability to continue leveraging key partnerships and to build unified, effective strategies will be critical to the recovery as well as to addressing those inequalities that cause great hardship for so many families. At the same time, Norwalk ACTS will continue to do what it has always done--reduce redundancies, create efficiencies and use data to inform our decisions.”

These investments reflect StriveTogether’s ongoing commitment to support its network of cross-sector partnerships as they work to put children and families on a path toward economic mobility. Communities across the country are changing systems like education, housing, health care and more with a goal of eliminating disparities for millions of young people and their families.



Priority was given to network members serving significant populations of children and families of color who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The following have received funding:

- Achieve Brown County, Green Bay, WI
- Achieve Escambia, Pensacola, FL
- Alamance Achieves, Burlington, NC
- Aligned Impact Muscatine County, Muscatine, IA
- All Hands Raised, Portland, OR
- Baltimore's Promise, Baltimore, MD
- Better Together Central Oregon, Redmond, OR
- Boston Opportunity Agenda, Boston, MA
- Bridgeport Prospers, Bridgeport, CT
- Building Our Future, Kenosha, WI
- The Commit Partnership, Dallas, TX
- Cradle to Career, Rochester, MN
- Cradle to Career Alliance, Columbia, MO
- Cradle to Career Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH
- Cradle to Career Fresno County, Fresno, CA
- Cradle to Career Partnership, Tucson, AZ
- E3 Alliance, Austin, TX
- Eastside Pathways, Bellevue, WA
- The Forsyth Promise, Winston-Salem, NC
- Generation Next, Minneapolis, MN
- Graduate Strong, Bremerton, WA
- Graduate Tacoma/Foundation for Tacoma Students, Tacoma, WA
- Harlem Renaissance Education Pipeline, New York, NY
- Higher Expectations for Racine County, Racine, WI
- imPACT East Idaho, Pocatello, ID
- ImpactTulsa, Tulsa, OK
- Learn4Life, Atlanta, GA
- Learn to Earn Dayton, Dayton, OH
- Marin Promise Partnership, San Rafael, CA
- Milwaukee Succeeds, Milwaukee, WI
- Mission Promise Neighborhood, San Francisco, CA
- Northfield Promise, Northfield, MN
- Norwalk ACTS, Norwalk, CT
- OnTrack, Hagerstown, MD
- Partners for Education, Berea, KY
- Promise Partnership of Salt Lake, Salt Lake City, UT
- Raise DC, Washington, DC
- RISE: Treasure Valley's Education Partnership, Boise, ID
- The Road Map Project, Seattle, WA
- ROC the Future, Rochester, NY
- Rocky Mountain Partnership, Thornton, CO
- Seeding Success, Memphis, TN
- South Bronx Rising Together, New York, NY
- Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), Spartanburg, SC
- Stamford Cradle to Career, Stamford, CT
- Stanislaus Cradle to Career Partnership, Modesto, CA
- Summit Education Initiative, Akron, OH
- Thrive Chicago, Chicago, IL
- Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative, Charleston, SC
- UP Partnership, San Antonio, TX
- Waterbury Bridge to Success Community Partnership, Waterbury, CT

###



### **About Norwalk ACTS**

Norwalk ACTS is a not-for-profit, cross-sector cradle to career partnership. We are made up of over 150 community and civic leaders, educators, organizations, and individuals who are committed to building and sustaining a community infrastructure to support a safe, equitable, and successful pathway for each and every child in Norwalk.

### **About StriveTogether**

StriveTogether partners with nearly 70 communities across the country to advance equity so local success stories can become the reality for every child, everywhere. They work to transform failing systems using collaborative improvement and a proven framework for change. The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network is closing disparity gaps in education, housing and so much more. Together, they impacted the lives of more than 12 million youth — more than half are children of color — across 30 states and Washington, D.C. Learn more at [StriveTogether.org](https://www.StriveTogether.org).