

# Networks for Education Equity

Overview of a community of practice for mobilizing knowledge through the education field

**Education networks (e.g., professional associations of education professionals) have long been a source of knowledge and support for education professionals, but for many networks, it has been difficult to keep up with the pace of change in the field and ensure their knowledge and resources are reaching those who need it most.**

To address this challenge, eight education networks came together from January 2022–March 2024 to form a community of practice focused on supporting better outcomes for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty. They identified two common questions to focus their time: *How might we build resilient networks for knowledge mobilization? How might practitioner networks adapt and transform to meet future challenges?*

## Vision:

**Education networks adapt in a dramatically changing world — effectively facilitating knowledge sharing among practitioners to support better outcomes for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty.**

The community of practice's power was that it created a mechanism to facilitate knowledge sharing across organizations that had not collaborated before. It provided a space for networks to learn from peers, pilot new approaches, inspire further learning and collective action, and share insights with the field.

The community of practice was designed with an intentional theory of change that aimed to create impact in three areas:

- Relationship and network building
- Using new approaches, tools, and resources
- Collaboration and field building

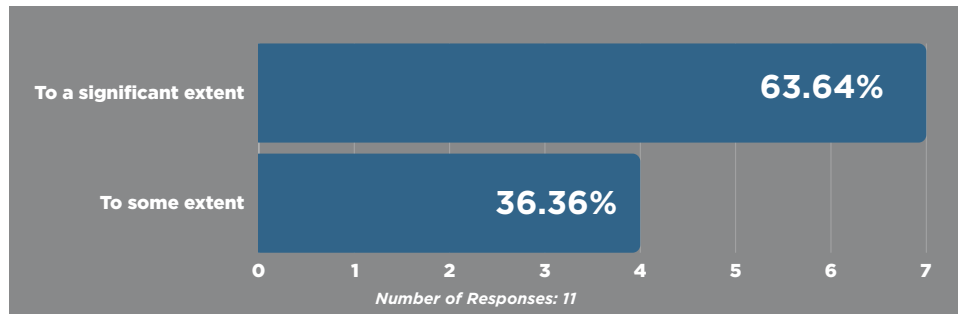
Values that were central to the design and facilitation were co-creation and prioritizing racial equity. Community of practice members played a vocal role in designing the cadence and content of community of practice offerings. The community of practice prioritized racial equity in different ways — participants focused on supporting practitioners of color in their work through their individual projects, some content offerings helped build community members' racial equity knowledge and competency, and the ultimate goal for the community of practice named a focus on the success of Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty.

After two years of working together, the community of practice yielded outcomes in each of the areas outlined in the theory of change.

# Relationship and Network Building

The theory of success for communities of practice is grounded in having genuine, trusting relationships between the individual members, which we saw develop during the two years of this effort. The community of practice provided space for participants to break down silos, learn from each other, and build upon one another's work. This allowed participants to learn from different perspectives and experiment alongside one another. Participants say they now better understand the work and expertise of one another's organizations and have a deeper roster of colleagues to call on in the future for problem-solving and innovative ideas. This supports connection and continued sharing and learning beyond the end of the formal community of practice.

To what extent do you have a new or deeper relationships with other individuals in the community of practice, as compared to the start of the initiative?



“I didn’t even know that National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS), and Black Principals Network (BPN) existed, much less the people involved in them. However, I have come to know all the individuals on a first name basis and look forward to continued collaboration.”

— Pamela Seda, president-elect, Benjamin Banneker Association

## Activities to support Relationship and Network Building

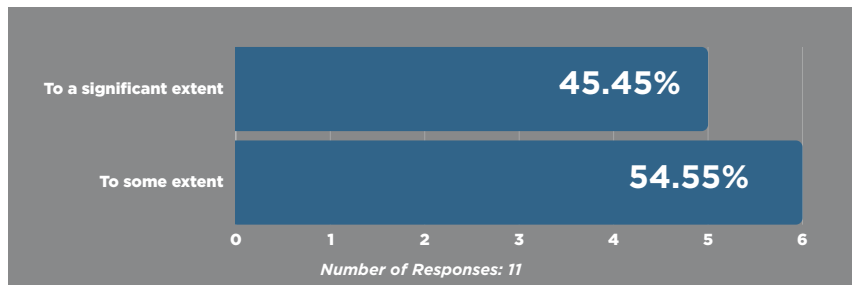
Key activities that fostered relationship and network building include the following:

- **Intentional relationship & trust-building activities** — *In each interaction and gathering, facilitators designed moments to deepen the connections between participants. In the final year of the program, participants received stipends for a “lunch buddy” initiative to arrange virtual meals together.*
- **Topic-specific pod meetings** — *Monthly meetings enabled participants to go deeper on particular aspects of educational equity.*
- **Learning from peers** — *Learning between peers happened throughout the community of practice in pod meetings, convenings, and through specific peer learning spotlights that featured individual organizations sharing their experiences and knowledge.*
- **Convenings** — *Quarterly convenings, most virtual and some in-person, provided extended opportunities for building connections and learning together.*

# Using New Approaches, Tools, and Resources

Through peer learning and access to outside speakers, resources, and coaching support, participants gained access to new ideas, perspectives, tools, and frameworks. While these resources covered a range of topics, the overarching focus was tactics, tools, and frameworks to support networks in strengthening member connection and engagement. This supported the ultimate vision of helping education networks find new ways to share knowledge with practitioners, so they can support better outcomes for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty. Examples include working to diversify membership and leadership, creating opportunities for reciprocal engagement among members, and using new approaches and tools for member feedback to get more member input on the design of offerings.

**To what extent have you applied any new knowledge through your involvement in the community of practice?**



“The community of practice made me aware of the many MathEd organizations that are working toward similar goals. I have developed new relationships and plan to find ways to be mutually engaged in a common/similar project where we can continue to learn from each other.”

— Brent Jackson, lesson study project director, California Mathematics Project

“At BPN, we’ve begun to use [Converge Impact Networks] ideas around levels of engagement and decided to split our members into different categories based on the data report that Constant Contact generates (which another outside speaker provided). We’ve now put in more effort to tend to those who only prefer low level of engagement, by making our emails robust with resources, job/grant/program opportunities, and highlights instead of just pushing out an email that advocates only to get people to come to an event. Looking at levels of engagement also inspired us to also have a way to collect resources from the community that we can share with the network.”

— Angia Kincey, program manager, Black Principals Network

“When we started in the community of practice, NCSM had recently held Board of Directors elections, and we were disappointed to find that, despite our aspiration to be more racially diverse, the ballot presented an all-white slate of candidates and therefore all of our newly elected members were white. Through the community of practice, we explored centering equity more deeply and were supported in conducting focus groups to learn from our members of color and potential members of color about how we can create spaces that are more inclusive. We began making changes, and though we know we still have more work to do, we’re proud to report that 60% of the candidates elected in 2024 are Latinx or Black.”

— Katey Arrington, president, NCSM

## Activities to Support Using New Approaches, Tools, and Resources

Key activities that helped participants apply learning included the following:

- **Organization-specific projects** — *Each participating organization identified a project that was relevant to the community of practice’s vision and received technical assistance to support their project goals.*
- **Topic-specific pod meetings** — *Monthly meetings enabled participants to go deeper on particular aspects of educational equity.*
- **Learning from peers** — *Learning between peers happened throughout the community of practice in pod meetings, convenings, and through specific peer learning spotlights that featured individual organizations sharing their experiences and knowledge.*
- **Learning from experts** — *Participants had the opportunity to learn from a range of experts on topics they identified as critical to their success. This included group workshops and 1:1 advising on topics including embedding equity, network approaches for impact, diversifying membership and leadership pipelines, and strategies for digital engagement of network members.*
- **Convenings** — *Quarterly convenings, most virtual and some in-person, provided extended opportunities for building connections and learning together.*

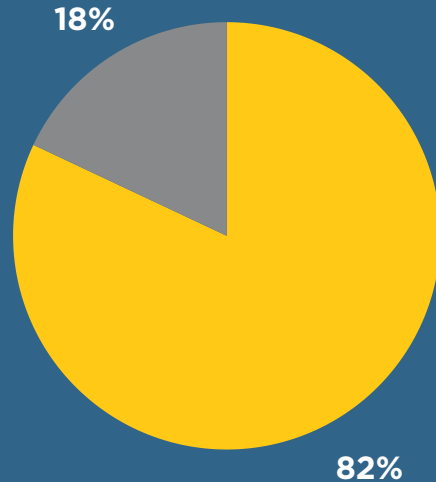


# Collaboration and Field Building

Extending the ripples of impact beyond participating individuals and organizations, the community of practice has also inspired collaboration between participating organizations, strengthening the field of education networks more broadly. These collaborations have taken the form of participating in one another's organizational offerings, writing for one another's publications, and jointly presenting at prominent education conferences. In addition, community of practice participants shared their learning through contributing to 17 blog posts, case studies, and in-depth thought leadership. Knowledge products created for education networks on topics such as network theory and principles, movement-building strategies, and supporting different levels of engagement within a network can continue to influence the field.

**82%**

of survey respondents say they have established partnerships or collaborations with other organizations in the community of practice



“I've developed a personal friendship and professional alliance with **Katey Arrington** from NCSM. We teamed up to present at SXSW EDU and have plans to continue working together. I'm working with the ladies from Benjamin Banneker Association to build our content for NAESP about culturally competent math leadership. They've signed on to write a three-part series for NAESP's *Principal* magazine. **Brent Jackson** from California Math Project also contributed an article about math talk to *Principal* magazine.”

— **Kaylen Tucker**, associate executive director, communications, National Association of Elementary School Principals

“The connections we made with other organizations working in this space have been valuable to our work. I collaborated with **Brent Jackson** (California Math Project) on a presentation at the NCSM annual meeting. **Katey Arrington** (NCSM), **Shelly Jones** (Benjamin Banneker Association), and **Kyndall Brown** (California Math Project) participated in a workshop we organized on positive math identities for students and teachers from historically underrepresented communities. We anticipate that some of these connections may develop into longer-term collaborations.”

— **Brianna Donaldson**, director, Math Circle Network



## Activities to Support Collaboration & Field Building

Key ways participants collaborated and shared knowledge with the field were as follows:

- **Presenting at conferences** — *In addition to presenting at conferences hosted by other community of practice organizations, participants had two sessions accepted for SXSW EDU: “Centering Diverse Perspectives in Professional Orgs” (presented by NCSM and National Association of Elementary School Principals) and “Why Do Principals of Color Need Affinity Spaces” (presented by Black Principals Network).*
- **Documenting organizations’ learning in case studies** — *Participants sat for in-depth interviews to inform case studies about their organization’s work through the community of practice.*
- **Developing blog posts and reports** — *Community of practice participants contributed to nine additional blog posts as well as “A Network Approach to Educator Support.”*



# Advancing the Vision for the Field of Education Networks

While the community of practice engaged only a subset of the field of education networks, the experience led to changes in approach for participating organizations, stronger relationships that are likely to endure beyond the community of practice, and knowledge and insights that can benefit the broader field seeking to advance equity in education. Together these outcomes contribute to the vision of education networks evolving how they share knowledge with practitioners so that they are better equipped to support education outcomes for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty.

“The community of practice has been the highlight of my work over the past year and a half. I appreciated the professional learning and time/resources to dive into equity-centered networks. Ultimately, we were able to launch a Principals of Color Network that is helping NAESP to center diverse voices and work toward our equity goals, and strengthening the principal pipeline. I'm using the learnings on digital engagement, belonging, measurement, etc. to strengthen all of NAESP's networks as well as the member experience for all NAESP members.”

— **Kaylen Tucker, associate executive director, communications, National Association of Elementary School Principals**

“CMP is better off for having participated in the community of practice.”

— **Kyndall Brown, executive director, California Mathematics Project**



# Why this Community of Practice?

**Vision:** Education networks are able to adapt in a dramatically changing world to effectively facilitate knowledge sharing with practitioners to support better outcomes for priority students (particularly Black, Latino and/or students experiencing poverty).

## Theory of Change

Build relationships, break down silos, and create a network of networks

Leverage those relationships to pilot, learn, and share

Create strong, resilient, and relevant networks (content and methods)

Create strong practitioners (content and methods)



**Priority Students Succeed**

## Participating Organizations

- Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
- Benjamin Banneker Association
- Beyond100K
- Black Principals Network, powered by Surge Institute
- California Mathematics Project
- Math Circle Network
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- NCSM: Leadership in Mathematics Education

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