

## 2020 VIRTUAL CONVENING EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### APRIL 27 – MAY 1

The goal of the second annual Measuring What Matters Learning Partnership Convening (MWM-LP) was to support dialogue, learning, and collaboration among Porticus partners working in whole child development (WCD) at different levels of the wider education system. This executive summary highlights takeaways from each session along with key themes and discussion topics from the week of learning.

### Session Takeaways

**Community Systems and COVID-19 Responses** | Neil Boothby, Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, University of Notre Dame

Practices born out of COVID-19 responses are important opportunities to hold onto what is learned from this experience in order to improve education systems in the medium and long term. As practitioners strive to cultivate more resilient education systems in the regions where they work, families, schools, and other social entities are the day-to-day mechanisms that can be activated and aligned to meet the multiplicity of WCD capacities and needs in extreme adversity. Additionally, donor flexibility and complementary partnerships are crucial to moving from school-based to school-community approaches for children in extreme adversity.

**Practical Measurement: Practitioner-focused best practices in measuring children's learning and development outcomes** | Nikhit D'Sa, Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, University of Notre Dame

Practitioners with limited time and resources need fit-for-purpose guidance on how to measure the learning and development of children in their programs. This guidance should focus on the appropriateness, feasibility, utility, and rigor of measurement. Practical measurement allows practitioners to design studies and work with local researchers to assess the effect of their programs so that they can make data-driven decisions.

**National Systems: Global Trends and WCD** | Eileen O'Malley & Ryan Burgess, Porticus  
Although there is increasing momentum globally around education systems adopting WCD approaches, a prioritization of academic skills remains a key reason that those at a policy level invest in WCD. This points to the importance of considering how to communicate and develop effective messaging at a policy level around what is known about the long term impact of WCD skills – including their impact on academic skills but also their long term benefits to those in extreme adversity. Funders are increasingly looking for opportunities built around co-creation with implementers and concrete partnerships in order to improve collective impact. Given these insights, there is an opportunity to encourage and support innovation by linking and framing WCD to education outcomes and through building relationships with those in policy in order to “meet them where they are.”

**Framing WCD: The Power of How** | Moira O'Neil, FrameWorks Institute

Mental models are the frames or predispositions with which people enter a conversation, and they have a powerful influence over how someone will assign responsibility for a given issue. Common mental models when discussing WCD include 1) Family Bubble, 2) Passive Model of Development, 3) Compartmentalization, and 4) Age Up. Anticipating the mental models a person brings to a conversation allows advocates to tailor their communications accordingly.

# Themes

## Partnership

Within the field of WCD, partnership is the key to developing successful and effective programs at both the local and policy level. Partnerships allow practitioners to not only do more for the communities in which they work but to also learn from how peers in a diversity of contexts approach adversity. This year, the convening also emphasized the importance of partnerships at the donor and policy maker levels.

## Research Translation

Adapting research findings so they are relevant and usable in specific contexts is a universal difficulty, and given that from a policy perspective what gets assessed garners attention, the question of what data to generate and how to effectively translate it for increased shareability was salient throughout the week. Partners agreed that a good initial step in approaching this challenge was the generation of more evidence that addresses the impact of WCD, acknowledging that evidence is at the core of creating system wide changes.

## Context

The role of understanding one's context whether it be while designing research and programs, conducting research and implementing programs, or communicating research and the impact of programs is crucial to creating programs and assessments that are effective; ensure inclusion of the most marginalized learners; and are understood and operationalized at the policy level

## Key Discussions

### Prioritization of Academic Skills

Throughout the convening, partners discussed the challenges they face when framing the importance and value of WCD, especially in relationship to academic skills. Although many learning partners would personally prioritize SEL and other elements of WCD in policy, particularly for those children and youth facing the greatest adversity, partners articulated two important reasons why academic skills tend to carry more weight in discussions at the systems and policy level:

1. There is momentum and buy-in around academic education.
2. Academic skills are valued in national narratives and thus dictate policy.

### Evidence of Impact and Assessment

Throughout the week, partners delineated how evidence of assessment is at the core of creating system wide changes. Assessment creates powerful advocacy, and partners expressed how one cannot have an either-or mentality when championing the WCD cause.

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**“SEL is not possible in a vacuum. Community, identity, and rights are key to understanding SEL in different contexts.”**

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**“We’ve seen how long it’s taken to even get an agenda around education as a global need. If we suddenly restructure and focus on something else, we will lose a lot of that momentum that we’ve built up.”**

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## Communicating WCD at the Policy Level

Within the sessions, a recurring challenge was how to effectively communicate WCD at the policy level. Throughout discussions and presentations several concrete ideas emerged in response to this challenge:

- Find the “pain points.”
- Powerful assessment = powerful policy
- Anticipate the common mental models with which people will enter a discussion.
- Describe less, explain more. Be concrete in your examples.
- Identify political champions.
- Attribute responsibility for an issue.
- Develop clear, explanatory chains when presenting a problem and a solution.

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**“If college admissions and employment start looking for the SEL skills explicitly, the systems will have a different priority...it is currently the tail wagging the dog, so we need to change the tail.”**

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## A Way Forward

There was enthusiastic consensus around the continuation of the partnership as well as a unanimous desire for the partnership to embrace a multi-pronged approach that focuses on both assessment and advocacy moving forward. Common ideas for potential collaborations moving forward include a multi-group system with small groups that focus on REALM and creating evidence-based reports, and a larger group that focuses on advocacy at the national and global level while leveraging work from the smaller groups.

## Summary

As the MWM-LP continues to evolve, the 2020 Virtual Convening identified the importance of the partnership continuing in a manner such that partners have the space to engage in opportunities to shift national narratives to strategically include WCD. However, doing so will not be possible without effective assessment and powerful communication. Although shifting national narratives is a long term and challenging goal, the convening displayed how recognizing the value of partnerships, context, and research translation are more immediate and achievable goals that partners can set to strengthen their day-to-day work, which can eventually be leveraged to impact policy.

## 2020 Participating Organizations

Asia Society

Centre for Science of Student Learning, India

Dream a Dream, India

Educapaz, Colombia

FrameWorks Institute, United States

Kaivalya Education Foundation, India

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UNESCO Lima, Peru

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

Zizi Afrique Foundation, Kenya

Alliance for Catholic Education, Haiti, University of Notre Dame (UND)

Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, UND

Porticus