

New Bridgespan Publication Reveals Successful Approaches to Helping Teachers Support “Whole Learners” and Foster Student Success

BOSTON—September 25, 2019—[The Bridgespan Group](#), today published “[Helping Teachers Support ‘Whole Learners’: Going Beyond Academics to Foster Student Success](#).” The paper reveals the shared characteristics amongst three nonprofits’ successful approaches to helping teachers foster students’ social, emotional, and academic development.

According to Lija Farnham, a Bridgespan partner and coauthor of the paper, “The need for effective teaching has never been greater.” Across the United States, only 34 percent of eighth graders are proficient in math, as measured by the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), and 36 percent in reading. For African American students, these numbers are even more troubling—13 percent and 18 percent, respectively.

“Research and results make it clear that the most promising intervention for addressing outcome gaps is right in front of our noses: it’s the teacher. Specifically, it’s teachers creating equitable learning environments informed by the science of learning and development. Unfortunately, we don’t prepare teachers to do this well,” she added.

Farnham’s coauthor, Bridgespan Manager Aviva Altmann said, “The challenge that confronts every district and school is how to take something that is human and unique in nature—a supportive relationship between a teacher and a student—and make it happen across every school and classroom.”

The authors studied leading education organizations (including [Building Assets, Reducing Risks \(BARR\)](#), [EL Education](#), and [Equal Opportunity Schools](#)) that have successfully taken on this challenge—with dramatic results. Said Altmann, “We are excited by what we’ve observed not because it’s revolutionary, but because it’s practical, daily interactions and practices that are leading to breakthrough results.”

The paper identifies three common characteristics that have been critical to success, illustrating each characteristic with detailed examples (and companion case studies) of the efforts in action:

- 1. Creating a positive disruption that leads to change:** The nonprofits profiled have been successful because they have introduced an approach that disrupts traditional ways of working in schools.
- 2. Anchoring on the “whole learner”:** Teachers build supportive relationships with their students when they take into consideration both their holistic performance in school and their lives outside the classroom. This is especially important for building relationships across lines of difference.
- 3. Fostering the development of supportive relationships among educators:** When teachers collaborate in service of student outcomes, results show.

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About The Bridgespan Group

The Bridgespan Group (www.bridgespan.org) is a global nonprofit organization that collaborates with mission-driven organizations, philanthropists and investors to break cycles of poverty and dramatically improve the quality of life for those in need. With offices in Boston, Mumbai, New York, and San Francisco, Bridgespan’s services include strategy consulting, leadership development, philanthropy and nonprofit advising, and developing and sharing practical insights.