



Every child. Cradle to career.

## Community commitment leads to impact in Northfield, Minn.

In Northfield, Minn., the community is reaching goals for kids and families by working better together as individuals, organizations and systems. StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network member Northfield Promise supports the community to collaborate to improve milestones like kindergarten readiness and third-grade reading. With a focus on a shared vision and results, Northfield Promise has earned the Proof Point designation, an important measure of progress along the [StriveTogether Theory of Action™](#).

Here are a few examples of how Northfield Promise is changing systems to support kids and families:

### **Aligning the community**

When the partnership was formed, Northfield Promise engaged over 500 community members to choose [10 shared benchmarks](#) to improve for students. Northfield Promise partners aligned their goals, structures and funding to support this work. Three of the largest local funding entities in Northfield — Northfield Area United Way, Northfield Shares and Women in Northfield Giving Support — have aligned their youth and education funding to directly support Northfield Promise. The partnership also has a close relationship with Northfield Public Schools, which provides space within school buildings for staff and key initiatives, shares student data to help partners make better decisions and participates in each Northfield Promise action team.

Collaboration for change has become the way of life in Northfield. “Before Northfield Promise, lots of great things were happening independently, but there was no intentional overlap. The shared community vision coordinates resources and creates intentionality for efforts to move in the same direction,” shared Matt Hillmann, superintendent of Northfield Public Schools.

### **Using data to inform action**

Through its relationship with Northfield Public Schools, Northfield Promise has access to the district’s student information system and data reporting system, allowing partners to make data-driven decisions. To increase data support, Northfield Promise tested a one-year pilot program to increase the district’s director of assessment services role from part-time to full-time. Now, that position is a permanent full-time role funded through the district’s general fund. In addition to serving district staff, the director also provides community partners with data analysis and evaluation to help them test new strategies and work more effectively.

The district and local organizations have created a culture of data use, which can reveal gaps that aren’t immediately apparent. When the Northfield Promise Reading Team looked at schools’ average reading scores, it seemed like students were on track. But after breaking down the data by different demographics, the team learned that low-income students and students



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of color were reading below proficiency. This realization prompted the school district to adopt a common reading curriculum to support all students in combination with the [Move 5 Kids](#) campaign, which focuses targeted reading supports for third-grade students who need them the most.

### **Empowering youth to make decisions**

Local high school students are using their voice and building their leadership capability by serving as active board members through Northfield Promise's Youth on Boards initiative. More than 85 seats are open on city, school district and nonprofit boards. On these boards, high school students are given an equal voice, votes and decision-making status to positively impact their community.

Youth voice is critical to creating solutions. Students in Northfield Public Schools shared that after-school and before school tutoring or activities were hard to attend, especially for students with responsibilities like caring for younger siblings or working. To address this barrier, the school district adopted a flex period in the middle of the day that provides time for students to meet with teachers, attend clubs and serve on boards.

"Listening to students and what they need for their own well-being allowed us to make changes that have an impact and have shifted the conversation from adults to students," shares Mark Ensrud, guidance counselor at Northfield High School and co-chair of Northfield Promise's Career & College Readiness Action Team.

StriveTogether congratulates Northfield Promise for reaching the Proof Point milestone. With strong community commitment and a focus on shared results, the Cradle to Career Network member is ready to meet more goals as it changes systems to better serve kids and families.