Lawrence Working Families Initiative

- **Lawrence**: a largely immigrant and Latino City with great strengths and challenges
- **Historic Opportunity**: Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) receivership and Turn-Around
- **Our Problem**: High levels of poverty and unemployment among families of LPS students, coupled with low levels of student graduation and achievement (chicken and egg...)
- **Two-Generation Approach**: Employment and income generation for families of LPS students
- **10 Year Goal**: 15% Increase in real Household Income for LPS families, with related student gains due to increased family stability
Partners

- **Public:** Lawrence Public Schools, City of Lawrence, ValleyWorks Career Center, Workforce Investment Board, Greater Lawrence Technical School, Northern Essex Community College

- **Private / For-Profit Employer:** Solectria Renewables, GemLine, 99 Degrees Custom, Associated Home Care, TD Bank, Enterprise Bank, Eastern Bank, Merrimack Valley Federal Credit Union, Metro Credit Union, Citizens Bank, Mary Immaculate Nursing Home, Haffner’s, Asahi America, TJ Maxx, Lupoli Companies, Little Sprouts, Imajine That, Everett Mills, Pentucket Medical

- **Nonprofit (Service or Employer):** Lawrence CommunityWorks (backbone); Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Lawrence General Hospital, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Adult Learning Center, The Community Group, EforAll, Family Services Inc., Groundwork Lawrence, Notre Dame Education Center, Lawrence YMCA, Lawrence YWCA, Lawrence Partnership
Key Drivers

▶ Lack of Connectivity
  ▶ Lawrence parents lack access to information, resources, and networks for employment opportunities and income generation

▶ Skills Gap
  ▶ Limited English proficiency constrains job options and/or existing skill transfer; soft skills gap; hard skills/training/higher skills gap

▶ Employer Culture / Cultural Competency
  ▶ Many employers lack bilingual/bicultural HR staff, internal training resources, or shop floor supervisors
Strategies

▶ Supply Side (Workforce):
  ▶ An integrated system of parent engagement and peer support, employment and financial coaching, job search and resume support, warm referral to services and training/education, and expanded ESOL classes

▶ Demand Side (Employer):
  ▶ Employer engagement through panels, individual relationship cultivation, and teaming up with Lawrence Partnership to operationalize local hiring Pledge and create employer-driven community of practice around effective local hiring and other business practices
Learning About the System

- Backbone Role: crucial and must be adequately, steadily resourced over time
- Change is Iterative, Incremental, & Opportunistic... be tenacious and patient, recognize strategic windows, approach from multiple angles
- Governance and Communication are key for sustained cross-sector buy-in and ownership
- Trust and Relationships are central at every level and must be constantly nurtured
- Incentives can be crucial tool for all sectors/constituents
Progress Toward Systems Change

- Shift in School Culture around both understanding and practice of family engagement (CECs, Design Teams), and focus of family support (from deficit solutions to employment aspirations)

- Employer Engagement in and ownership of demand-side economic development and local hiring strategies (LP Hiring Pledge & Training Consortium)

- Culture of collaboration growing, spilling over into joint funding applications, shared services, employer cultivation, LP & Venture Fund
Accelerating Change

▶ Ramp up ESOL funding, align referrals and curricula: Economic opportunities for immigrants are indivisible from language acquisition. This is a central policy concern for MA’s long-term social health and economic competitiveness.

▶ Incentivize business cluster/sector development and business-to-business learning

▶ Resource coaching and asset-based, high-touch programs with peer support element: more expensive, but also more effective when goal-oriented and well-executed

▶ Keep investing in success to build momentum and deeper impact!

▶ Undocumented Families: The whole framework needs to shift from punishment and constraint to integration and opportunity.