Action Plan

Our efforts this year have increased our resolve to move the Portrait ideas forward. We seek to actualize and operationalize ideas we’ve captured on paper...in our schools and for our students. While this year afforded extensive opportunities to explore innovative approaches, engage with our community, and develop aspirational competencies for our graduates - our team (and many of our stakeholders) maintain a bias towards action. A plan is just that, and we hope to bring our plan to life, into practice. Moreover, we have made that promise to our stakeholders, that this is more than just a visioning process and it will yield in tangible ways.

We recognize that our plan is still a prototype, and that revision and refinement will be ongoing. Competencies and indicators need additional definition and clarification. And while we feel very satisfied with the level of community engagement and participation, this year was a starting point and we expect to advance the intensity of community participation along a progressive continuum that moves from informing, to involving, to empowering.

Our hope for the coming year is to maintain our momentum by increasing opportunities to engage with and refine our Portrait...for people to get their hands a little dirty, and for our Portrait to get cycled through the wash a few times. We feel this will allow us to build increased consensus towards the Portrait’s aims via discussion, debate, application, trial...and error. We want the Portrait to move beyond the pair of dress shoes that are pulled out of the closet once or twice a year, and feel more like that favorite pair of sneakers - natural, comfortable, a part of who we are.

Priorities, overview:
With this as our (metaphorical) backdrop, we will focus on three key projects as part of our Phase II work that will build upon each other including asset mapping, alignment within our partner schools, and a pilot Signature Experience. Asset mapping will help us to better understand and catalogue existing resources, practices, and partners that can be leveraged in building Portrait opportunities. School alignment will allow each site to unpack the parts of the Portrait against existing improvement efforts, strategies, policies, and cultures. Both will lead towards a pilot Signature Experience that is developed across schools to form activities that are jointly developed and delivered as a means to learn, revise, and build excitement through practiced success. In order for this to occur, our community must become our partner, in a structural way. Thus, we will continue ongoing community outreach/engagement/partnership and develop evaluation and measures simultaneously. The simple graphic below illustrates these priorities.

Figure 36: Action Plan Schematic
Core Priorities, described:
Below, the three core priorities intended in Phase II are described.

1. **Additional Asset Mapping:** Throughout 2020 we were able to engage in research including school exchanges and intersections with many community partners. Throughout, we were reminded that there are many interesting and impactful activities occurring both in our individual schools and across many community organizations and agencies. The challenge, in a region with shrinking resources and no regional advocacy entity (a county education office or collaborative) is that much of this work happens in isolation and is not consistently shared. While there have been efforts to build region-wide communication structures (such as the Compact for Education and the Berkshire United Way Positive Youth Development Council), they have not been sustained.

We propose, as a Phase II project, to conduct comprehensive in-depth research and analysis on strengths and gaps in actualizing the Berkshire Portrait of a Graduate for all high school students in Berkshire County, including a full understanding of community resources, initiatives, and shared opportunities. In doing so, we will better assess current efforts and activities, pockets of excellence, resources, parallel initiatives, and potential ways to leverage community and cross-school resources in a more efficient and consistent manner. Through this mapping process, we believe we'll be able to consider more easily how to build on these assets to address the aims of our Portrait. Moreover, we believe that this asset map will help to promote community involvement, ownership, and empowerment, so that they become integrated partners - recognizing the unique efforts, talents and capacity we have in our region. It is expected that this asset map will include information, for example, programs (school-wide and one-off) in our high schools that dovetail with our proposed competencies, current efforts of regional and state organizations, cross-sector initiatives that have and are currently ongoing, and capacities and abilities of community members. We must also consider the impact and identification of the political, human resource, social, and economic barriers that have obstructed similar change efforts in the past. We anticipate we will develop processes (reviews, surveys and interviews) to collect, tools to catalogue and organize, and expertise and staffing to deliver, manage, and analyze.

**Resources needed:** Administrative management and oversight, researchers to collect/compile/analyze data collected, PoG leadership team (Core Facilitators and Site team members) to serve as the review and vetting team, committed time from community leadership and agencies, resources for convenings, resources needed to develop and maintain a mapping database (website or equivalent tools) are the resources needed to continue the work.

**Owned by:** We see the PoG Leadership team and project manager as owning the development of the asset maps that are widely shared and treated by school-based teams.

2. **Alignment within the school and community:** We entered the PoG project recognizing the unique advantages and challenges associated with a multi-school (5) effort. While our Portrait was designed to advance cross-school collaboration through the development of a shared vision, we also recognized (at the onset) that each of our five schools existed as distinct entities, with unique school cultures, structures, and pressures. They also exist in unique communities, and any success will require full integration of each community into its school. When we
launched this project, we expected that our Portrait would result in common ingredients that would be part of each school’s recipe, however we also asserted that schools would customize this recipe by adding unique spices and varying proportions of the shared ingredients.

The good news - it turns out – is that our final Portrait resulted in a more highly universal set of common aspirations (competencies and indicators) than we expected a year ago, serving as a compelling foundation for the work of our schools and communities. In addition, we were very pleased to have a strong level of school personnel participation in the development of the Portrait, including school leaders, site team members, design team members, and wide participation in open meetings and convenings. These participants are a strong set of advocates who can carry this project back to each school and the broader community.

That said, we offer that additional work must occur within each community and at each school. As such, we are including alignment at the school level as a critical priority in Phase II. We expect this work will involve a number of important activities that include:

- **Awareness.** Opportunities to share the PoG development process, competencies, and aims. Sharing the lexicon of our Portrait will be important to elevating understanding and commitment.
- **Empowerment.** Opportunities for local stakeholders to manipulate the Portrait in highlighting likes and dislikes, elements that resonate (or don’t), while refining definitions of competencies and indicators.
- **Integration.** The Portrait will need to be cross-walked and critiqued against existing improvement, strategic, and external plans (accreditation and state), and local priorities. The goal is that competencies (the Portrait) are not viewed as add-on, but as part of how the school approaches systems, experiences, and outcomes.
- **Local agency.** While our Portrait is a regionally held set of aspirations, there are likely elements that will resonate and better align with school-level priorities than others. We expect schools will develop unique perspectives and strategies that can be shared and applied across the region.
- **Force field analysis.** School and community teams could dive into the political, social, and economic opportunities and barriers that exist.

We anticipate that full network convenings (all five teams) will guide this effort and establish common understanding and shared expectations, while affording ample break-out time so that each team can plan for and launch their local context and alignment work. This work will be led by local site leads (and design) with facilitation support. This will be followed by a series (throughout the 2021-22) of school-community based workshops and gatherings.

We expect that as site-based teams tackle this work, they’ll evaluate the degree to which the Portrait is integrated, and/or provides a framework for more holistic school reform. Questions may include:

- What is our vision for the Portrait in our school?
- How will we grow into it and use it to advance school improvement, change, reform?
- What should our school be doing more of?
- What should our school stop doing?
- What are the roadblocks that we’ll likely face? How do we address them?
How does our Community embrace the Portrait with a sense of shared ownership?

Our intention is that the Portrait serves as a basis for professional learning in our schools and across our network. The net result will be integration and implementation of community-based plans that crosswalk the Portrait competencies with historical and future improvement/strategic plans; lead to deeper buy-in, common understanding, and shared ownership across local stakeholders; result in a full commitment to the Portrait; and, establish priority/action steps that each school-community will develop to reinforce Portrait aims and competencies.

Resources needed: Site leads at each school. PoG leadership team (Core Facilitators, Project Manager, and Design Team members). Resources that support team planning and work time, faculty/staff meetings and professional training events, print materials, exchanges with other schools, and (potentially) outside facilitators to support the school-based teams. Finally, it may be that teams want additional data in digging deeper into student patterns/trends.

Owned by: We anticipate that Alignment will be owned by Site Leads in concert with school-based Site and Design teams, school leadership and community leaders/stakeholders. Efforts will be supported and monitored by the Core Facilitators and Project Manager.

3. Signature Experience pilot: As suggested and briefly outlined in an earlier section, the Berkshire PoG team envisions the pilot Signature Experience effort as an important element of our work in Phase II. The potential for this idea was raised early (during our summer community convening) and interest has grown as we considered ways to operationalize ideas, to build connections across our schools, and to test drive opportunities to reinforce and exercise the various Portrait competencies. Ultimately, our commitment to this idea was cemented as we learned more via various network webinars highlighting case studies such as Blackstone Charter (portfolio and external learning) and Springpoint (Transformative Learning Experiences), engaged our stakeholders in thinking deeply about a Signature Experience during our November convening, and considered strategic ways to advance our project in Phase II.

We believe that the Signature Experience is an important next step for us for several reasons:

- **Bias towards action.** Our team (and to some degree our community) has expressed an impatience for ongoing (somewhat perpetual) planning processes. Many would like to see a tangible effect of our work, without compromising long-term deep integration. The Signature Experience could serve as an early win to demonstrate the transition from idea to action.

- **Collaborative spirit.** We have gained great momentum this year and (as will be outlined in our reflection questions) feel this is one of our most significant outcomes of 2020. We’d like to maintain this momentum and believe that a cross-school learning community (set of teams) could continue (and grow) these bonds by tackling a common project. By bringing teams together to explore the development of the project and pilot, to implement on a realistic scale, to integrate with community partners, to develop systems and measures, and to engage in a reflective state of continuous improvement - we will strengthen our relationships and trust through common/shared purposes, maturing the conditions that increase a collective willingness to scale and advance future collaborative efforts.
• **Pressure test.** We realize that our Portrait is a set of ideals that still needs to be field and pressure tested. There is additional work needed to unpack the competencies and indicators and define/describe them, to consider ways that they are or can be reinforced through experiences for our students, to explore ways to deliver across the districts, and to formulate (see below) methods to measure and evaluate progress.

As was outlined in the Signature Experience (VIII) section, we have already started the process of identifying potential ideas. There are a number of themes prioritized that, as one participant summed up, “we want this to be an awesome experience for our students.” Thus, we anticipate these will be interdisciplinary, require critical/problem solving, be based on a real world community problem, expose students to regional assets and potential future trajectories, link students with invested adults, and reinforce and build skills.

In the next 18 months, we imagine a team of educators from each school working to develop this project in concert with peer schools, external expertise (Barr, TLA, partner schools), and community partners. We imagine a spring/summer set of exercises that allows schools to:

- Learn more about project/problem and context-based education
- Dig into the practices and literature on mentoring
- Apply asset maps, leveraging key community partners
- Develop a pilot effort that will involve one cohort of students at each school, to participate during the second half of the 21-22 school year
- Learn from (visit) exemplar schools to witness and/or hear more about these unique delivery models (Note: We have a connection with William Smith High School forming to discuss how they are approaching senior expeditions - among other practices)
- Coordinate resources, with backbone administrative and management support
- Engage in monthly reflection and ongoing continuous improvement
- Partner with consultants to consider the development and piloting of measurement tools and processes
- Share results (evangelize) with faculty and the community through presentations, media releases, and celebrations

The result of this work, we expect, will be a greater understanding and commitment to the Portrait, further refinement of Portrait elements, identification of key activities that support competencies and indicators, strong connections across our schools....all leading to the potential to increase capacity and scale the Signature Experience based on what we’ve learned. While we see this targeted at a grade-level cohort, we imagine, long-term, a set of scaffolded experiences beginning in earlier grades and carrying through the high school, as aspirational.

**Resources needed:** Administrative management and oversight, PoG leadership team (Core Facilitators, Site team) and Signature Experience project teams at each school and across each community. Resources will support team planning and work time, cross-school-community gatherings and training events, materials, potential (physical) exchanges with other schools, outside consultants who can offer guidance and facilitation, data and evaluation support. Transportation and coordination.
Owned by: Cross-school planning team and the school leadership team, with support of Core Facilitators and the Project Manager. Additionally, we anticipate that additional faculty from each school (such as Site, Design, and others) will be engaging in the feedback and pilot process.

The remaining two projects are best described as integrated, complementary, and ongoing (as described earlier) in support of the priority projects. We see these as happening simultaneously with the Asset Mapping, School Alignment, and Signature Experience priorities. They are briefly described below.

4. **Community outreach and change effort partners:** As foundational to our project, community outreach and engagement will be embedded into our Phase II plans and ongoing. The Portrait cannot be realized without the active involvement, commitment, and partnership with our Community. While we had wide participation across many schools, organizations, and role types, there is still a great deal of community participation that is needed to build awareness and a solid foundation about our Portrait, solicit ongoing insights and feedback, and link arms with community members as we advance activities, experiences, and expectations that reinforce the competencies and indicators. We envision engagement in several ways such as:

   - **Additional underrepresented voices.** We intend to reach out to additional stakeholder groups, such as school dropouts, disenfranchised and less engaged students, ELL parent groups, who were less active in the Phase I work. We are committed to capturing and including their perspectives as we advance the Portrait.
   - **Community sharing:** Early efforts to share across our community through presentations, press, video, written summaries, and distribution of the Portrait will occur through formal mechanisms such as school committee meetings, faculty meetings, and network meetings, as well as drop-in sessions delivered via Zoom/virtual webinar style presentation and question/answer sharing sessions. A tool will be developed to collect participant feedback pertaining to the Portrait elements, as well as ideas for activities and experiences that support competencies and indicators.
   - **Convenings.** As has been the case, we anticipate including community stakeholders and partners in meetings. We anticipate representation in the process of asset mapping, alignment at the school level, as well as training and facilitated sessions.
   - **Design Team.** Each school will host a design team composed of alignment and signature experience members, as well as students, parent, staff, community partners, and community members. These teams will meet quarterly to engage in overall design, review progress, and evaluate through a continuous improvement model.
   - **Members of Signature Experience:** In that we expect the Signature Experience will have significant community intersections, stakeholders and community partners will be invited into the planning, development, and pilot process to shape this project, participate in project delivery (as is possible), evaluate progress, and consider ways to scale. For example, we see employers, our colleges, and agencies such as the Berkshire Workforce Board, the United Way, and various community coalitions, among others, as critical to this project.

We anticipate that the net result, and our commitment, is that outreach and engagement will be ongoing and will include a cycle of continuous intelligence and regular opportunities to share information and elevate awareness and for stakeholders to participate in various meetings and feedback mechanisms and to become an empowered part of our project through a seat (and voice) at the table. The success of this project will be built largely upon the buy-in and
commitment made and sustained, thus mechanisms for engagement will be key to achieving that aim.

**Resources needed:** Administrative management and oversight, coordinators to maintain connections to community stakeholders, PoG leadership team (Core Facilitators, Site and Design team members), resources for convenings, resources needed to develop community accessible resources (website, video, presentations, print materials).

**Owned by:** We see the PoG Leadership team, primarily the Core Facilitators and Project Manager, as owning this project, with close partnership with project administrative staff and school-based liaisons (Site and Design team) members.

5. **Measurement:** Throughout our project, we have recognized the challenges associated with the definition, and thus measurement, of various competencies. To define competencies such as citizenship and resiliency has been a difficult part of our Portrait development process. While we might know it when we see it...can we measure it and evaluate whether our students are progressing and responding to the various experiences and interventions we offer? We assert that measurement will be important in several ways:

- It will help to refine and build a common understanding of what the competencies mean and how they (ideally) manifest in students.
- It will allow us to determine to what degree students are, or are not, making progress towards the target goals and can serve to inform whether various activities, curriculum, instructional approaches, and experiences are effective.
- It will serve as a means to report project progress to our community, as a demonstration of (if all goes according to plan) success. Through success, ongoing commitment can be strengthened and scaled.
- It will evaluated the strength of our community partnerships, and to what degree they embody the PoG aims.

It is our intention, thus, to work on measurements as a complementary and simultaneous project in Phase II. We believe this work will occur in concert with school-based alignment efforts and the Signature Experience pilot. Both will require that common definitions, rubrics, and evaluation tools/processes are developed. Moreover, we see measurement at the community levels as understanding resources, priorities, and experiences that are delivered, in partnership, with our community. This is critically important given that it will help us to refine what we are looking for, what we hope to see in our students, and what progress points (along the developmental continuum) would reflect target growth.

While we have limited evaluation expertise on our core team, we envision that the measurement work will likely require external consultant support (content, coaching, facilitation, development of tools and processes). We do not expect that experts will drop-in solutions, but rather work with our teams to focus on target competencies and co-develop measures that represent local perspectives and priorities. We envision the developmental process will address questions such as:

- What does the particular competency mean (to us)?
- If a student has “mastered” a competency, what does that look like?
○ How might we pre-assess where students are currently, including assets they may bring with them?
○ What are possible developmental milestones that can be used to mark progress from a beginning stage through mastery?
○ What tools will help us to monitor and track progress, to empower student agency, and to communicate with various stakeholders?
○ How can we offer professional development and training to support use and application of tools?
○ How is our community a partner, and in what ways are they sharing and owning PoG aspirations such as field experiences, internships, community-service learning, etc.

**Resources needed:** Consultancy expertise to support and lead the development of evaluation/measurement knowledge, processes and tools. PoG leadership team, school-based teams, Signature Experience teams.

**Owned by:** PoG Leadership team with support of consultant, with input and pilot at the school level through site-personnel and Signature Experience leads.

**Timeline:**
We expect to develop a more refined timeline and work plan in our Phase II proposal, if invited. Below is a brief outline of how various activities might be tackled over the next 18 months:

**January:** Completed Plan, submitted to Barr

**February:** Invitation by Barr into Phase II, Preparation for Proposal
Ongoing sharing of the Berkshire Portrait across user groups

**March:** Submission of Proposal
Grant Awarded
Drop-in community sessions to share and gain additional feedback on the Portrait
Phase I is officially closed
Public outreach via school committee and BCETF presentations

**April:** Phase II Grant Launch
Organization of Lead team and Administrative structure (Site Leads)
Refinement of work plan
Recruiting of Signature Experience cohort team
Recruitment of school-based teams in preparation to lead alignment work

**May:** Securing of project staff, consultants and facilitators
Convening of School Based teams (Site and Design), by Site leads
Additional interactive & open (community) working sessions on Portrait

**Summer 21:** Summer convenings (Network Convening #1)
  A: School based teams focus on alignment work
  B: Signature experience cohort
Asset mapping started by PoG Lead Team and staff
Site-based plan development for 21-22 school year (tasks, responsibilities, deliverables)

**Sept-Dec 21:**
- School-based teams conduct facilitated school alignment work
- Asset maps are initial drafted for review and vetting
- Workshops and consulting on measurement and evaluation tools
- Signature Experience Team produces draft of pilot effort
  - Trips and exchanges with exemplar schools and models
  - Study of models and approaches (such as Springpoint TLE)
- Potential Springpoint site visits
- Winter convening (Network Convening #2)
- Quarterly meetings of Design Teams

**Jan. - June 22:**
- Winter convening (January 2022)
- School Alignment Documents completed with improvement plan
- Asset maps completed
- Integration and documented work plan that reinforces competencies and indicators
- Signature Experience Pilot launched with a cohort at each site
- Draft measures and evaluation tools are completed, shared, and piloted
- (Potentially) Summer convening (Network Convening #3)
- Evaluation of asset maps, school-plans, Signature Experience
- Quarterly meetings of Design Teams

**Summer 22:**
- Planning for Phase III, further integration and scaling of Portrait

**Reflection Prompts:**
The last section of this Action Plan responds to a variety of prompts and feedback shared during the action planning workshop. We suspect Phase II is not without challenge, yet we intend to creatively consider ways to offset and work through each. Several are outlined below:

- **Leadership buy-in.** We have been fortunate to have three of our five principals actively involved in the PoG Phase I work. Phase II will need added inclusion of the two additional principals and members of their leadership teams. Principals hold significant sway over school focus areas pertaining to school improvement and strategic efforts, as well as how professional and common planning time is used. Their investment and commitment to this project is of high importance.

- **Policies, Systems, Practices:** Our five high schools operate under different governance systems, calendars, daily schedules, and local policies. Moreover, they may have unique expectations/pressures (for example, Taconic is working currently with the ESE Assistance team) that complicate the addition of new projects and initiatives. The alignment effort will be critical to affording schools the necessary time needed to integrate and customize the Portrait based on their unique school context, pressures, and conditions.

- **Fitting it into the school day.** We have heard from participants that schools are squeezed with full schedules based on graduation requirements, and limited resources - which vary across school site. Our team suggests that the Signature Experience (or Portrait for that matter) not be treated as an extra activity, but as embedded into the schedule (and experience) for all students. Coordinating this across schools will be an ongoing challenge.

- **Time.** Time is always a constraint, and will be needed for professional development, training, and collaboration - both inside the school and within the community. Carving out time in
creative ways that ensure PoG teams can invest in and thoughtfully approach this work is necessary.

- **High Stakes.** Many participants shared concerns about accountability demands and balancing these against innovative and progressive (different) ways of approaching the high school experience. Demonstrating that new approaches can accelerate student outcomes (engagement), while aligning Portrait competencies with curriculum standards will be an important element of our work.

- **Resources.** Schools will need funding and resources to ensure the Signature Experience, for example, can occur. Management of students in community-based projects and transportation can serve as implementation barriers. Our efforts will need to address and reduce or eliminate these obstacles.

- **Buy-in.** A common theme is the importance of broad community investment in the Portrait - across all role types from school board, to staff, to students. Using champions (site leads) and providing voice to students will be important strategies to lean into this challenge and elevate broad commitment. Consensus building is part of our Phase II work as foundational and ongoing.

- **Taking on too much.** We have, at times, been overly ambitious in our efforts and we will need to temper the pacing and intensity of this work. **Take bite sizes steps**, we’ve been reminded. While maintaining a focus on the project aims, we hope to use existing assets (building on what we have), increase awareness of the Portrait, focus on a subset (not all) competencies, and use the Signature Experience to launch the process on a reasonable (smaller) scale.

- **Incremental change or full redesign?** We have been asked if the intended Portrait will be transformational or more of an incremental process? We imagine this will vary at each school site, depending on their readiness for change, their perspective of how closely the Portrait aligns with work already in motion, and to what degree other pressures will constrain or accelerate their need for whole-school redesign/reform.

- **Longevity.** Like our peer groups who offered this feedback, we also consistently think about the longevity and staying power of this PoG effort. Too many school reform efforts have come and gone during our tenures. However, we see the unique benefit of a regional approach and the formation of a cohesive network, supported by an organizational structure that helps to keep it all glued together. We believe that our successes, and proof-of-concept, will only strengthen and widen possibilities as our region faces ongoing enrollment and resource pressures. Still, the need to have a supported network and the necessary resources to support it will be key to long-term sustainability. What is critical is that the Portrait is jointly owned by both school and community. Whether incremental or redesign, this is about community level change and if this vision is not shared broadly, it will likely not sustain.

We expect to offer additional detail and work plans to our Phase II proposal, if invited, and truly look forward to a continued partnership with Barr as we move our Portrait from paper to practice. We are, of course, glad to offer any additional information as requested.