

Steps to Success, Inc.

Strategic Plan

Adopted November 28, 2018



STEPS TO SUCCESS

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Twenty-five years ago, Steps to Success began with a small grant in support of children attending the Lincoln School and living nearby in public housing. Over the next two decades, under the guidance of its founder, Janet Selcer, the program grew into a critical partnership in pursuit of educational equity for Brookline youth and their families. Dedicated program staff, the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB), and the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) joined in the work with support and funding from a broad network of community volunteers, donors, and partners.

At inception, the high school graduation rate for students in public housing was only 60% and college matriculation rate was only 50%.

The program has grown to serve any students living in public housing across four elementary schools and Brookline High School. Steps to Success now supports youth and families with a range of services including academic support; out-of-school enrichment; programming during the summer months and school vacations; and career readiness and internships. The program served youth from fourth grade into high school, until the first Steps students graduated Brookline High in 2007. By 2009, Steps to Success' *College Success Initiative* had been added. It now supports students into and throughout college with application and enrollment support, financial aid advising and access, and career exploration and counseling, until they reach the ultimate academic step to success: college graduation. Steps to Success now serves more than three hundred students across four K-8 Schools, Brookline High School, as well as after high school at their colleges, universities, and other post-secondary pursuits.

Throughout its journey, the focus of Steps to Success has remained the same: school achievement, college completion, and a path to financial independence for Brookline's students from low-income families, many of whom speak a language other than English at home.

The progress of Steps to Success to date has been remarkable. Today, our students graduate high school and matriculate to college at the same level as their higher income peers. 86% of our college students are on track to graduate within 4-6 years, as compared to 11% of low-income students nationwide. But much more remains to be done in order to deliver on the promise of educational equity in Brookline.

Over the past five years, Steps has undergone multiple transitions and encountered other challenges, beginning with Janet Selcer's retirement. In 2016, after decades as a program within the school department, Steps to Success, Inc. was formed as an independent not-for-profit organization, challenging it to re-think funding, staffing, and governance with its partners in the PSB and BHA.

Under the leadership of the current Board of Directors - now fully responsible, legally and fiduciarily – and a new, highly experienced and forward-looking Executive Director, Shoma Haque, Steps to Success, Inc. undertook this Strategic Plan. From the outset, the Board took a comprehensive approach to planning. They set aside time, focus, and funding to not only craft strategies, goals, and objectives, but also to revisit and explicitly articulate Step to Success' fundamental goals, assumptions, and programs and the measurable outcomes by which the organization will hold itself accountable.

Steps to Success, Inc. then led its core partners – the PSB and the BHA – into an extended and deliberate examination of their partnership, their respective roles, and their joint path to greater impact. **Through this work, the three partners hope to continue to engage and deepen the broader partnership among the Brookline institutions and individuals who have always been a critical part of the program’s success.**

In this Strategic Plan, we hope that those already involved with Steps will find the clarity and determination to redouble their efforts. And, we hope that those newer to Steps are motivated to join in and support an organization whose genesis, values, and strategy are at the core of what it means to live in a just and equitable community, to ensure that Brookline’s actions and future match our community’s intentions and aspirations.

Steps has benefited from the contributions of dedicated staff, volunteers, and donors, but, at its core, it has always been inspired and driven by the talent, passion, and drive of the students and families it serves.

With this Strategic Plan, Steps to Success, Inc. commits to an ambitious and focused plan to strengthen itself – its board, finances, and programming – in order to lead and energize the partnership on which its success depends, and to deepen and clearly demonstrate its impact on the students and families it serves.

First, we – the board, staff, and community of Steps to Success, Inc. – revisited and clearly articulated our most fundamental roots and intentions: the **Mission** (p. 4), our fundamental purpose.

Over the past year, the core partnership took the time to revisit, as part of this work, each of our respective roles. We engaged in a series of eight meetings and independent work to achieve this clarity. You will find, below, the following (p. 5):

- Our **Partnership Vision and Mission**; and
- Our **Roles as Core Partners**, how we collectively provide wraparound services to the youth and families we serve.

We then undertook a comprehensive examination of our program model, resulting in Steps to Success’ first **Theory of Change**. Below, one will find both a summary of it (p. 6) and a graphic presentation (p. 8). The Theory of Change is intended to articulate the following, clearly and concisely:

- Who do we serve?
- What Assumptions underlie our work and approach?
- What core Activities will we focus upon?
- What are the short- and long-term Outcomes we seek, and for whom? And, finally,
- What Measures will we use to gauge our success and continuously improve our programming?

We also created a more detailed Logic Model Table that underlies the Theory of Change, to guide our work internally.

Finally, we articulated Steps to Success, Inc.’s **Strategy** (p. 9) through 2022, including our priority **Goals** and the key **Tactics** that we will employ to accomplish them.

In addition, we have developed detailed Measurable Objectives by which each tactic's progress will be accomplished. These are compiled in a dynamic online planning tool accessible to Steps to Success, Inc.'s management, and to the Board of Directors and its committees. For each objective, we have specified a target completion date and who will drive its accomplishment and be accountable for it.

We are now deeply committed to turning to the hard work of executing this plan. We intend that it be used practically as a guide, tool, and reference. Therefore, the plan concludes with an **Annual Planning Process** (p. 11), a calendar of activities by which we collectively will balance our need to focus on the plan's implementation and execution against the need for periodic progress reporting and potential revision.

In the end, we expect the many hours invested in this plan by us and our partners will yield real results: a more secure organization, a stronger partnership, and a deeper impact on the youth and families we serve, and on the broader community. We hope that it will, in the end, form a strong base for the future creation of a seamless continuum of services that reach youth and their families from pre-K through adulthood, and that Brookline can truly fulfill its vision as an inclusive and equitable community.

Steps to Success, Inc.

Steps to Success, Inc. is the independent not-for-profit corporation that leads Brookline's Steps to Success Partnership, serving as the partnership's Managing Partner.

Our Mission

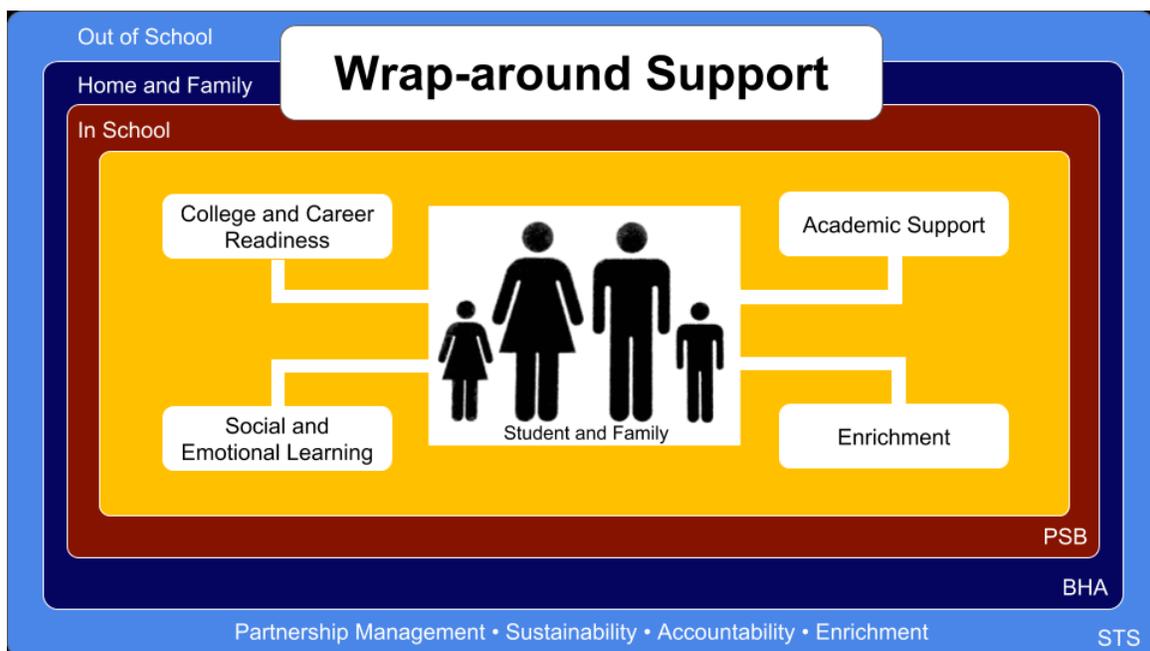
At Steps to Success, Inc., we promote equity for Brookline's students from low-income families by expanding their horizons, building upon their skills, and supporting their educational journey in order to maximize their life choices.

Steps to Success – A Partnership

Steps to Success is a partnership among the Public Schools of Brookline, the Brookline Housing Authority, and Steps to Success, Inc.



Together, Steps to Success, Inc. (STS), the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB), and the Brookline Housing Authority (BHA) offer wrap-around support for the youth they serve.



Steps to Success, Inc. Theory of Change Summary

In conjunction with 2017-2018 strategic planning, Steps to Success, Inc. (STS) program staff undertook a *Theory of Change* process which explored all elements of STS's programs and sought to clarify how the organization can refine its services in order to best serve the needs of its students. In conjunction with this planning process, the organization's leadership embarked on a partnership planning process to strengthen the partnership between Public Schools of Brookline (PSB), Brookline Housing Authority (BHA), and STS, Inc., clarify the various roles of the three partner organizations, and establish a common vision going forward. The resulting *Theory of Change* provides a detailed rationale for the refined program model and serves as a framework for the program-related goals and objectives in the strategic plan. **The following is a summary of key elements of STS's program rationale and its intentions for programming going forward.**

The mission of Steps to Success, Inc. is to promote equity for Brookline's students from low-income families by expanding their horizons, building upon their skills, and supporting their educational journey in order to maximize their life choices.

Target Population

Steps to Success serves students enrolled in Brookline's public schools from low-income families, first and foremost those who live in Brookline's Public Housing. Students are to be prioritized for enrollment based on the following, as space and funding allow:

- BHA residents;
- People living in subsidized housing;
- Students from low-income families living in Brookline ("economically disadvantaged");
- Low-income METCO students.

Assumptions that Drive Program Design

Research* has shown that quality out-of-school (OST) programs have a positive impact on the educational and future success of children from low-income families. By providing these children with a creative and fulfilling OST experience, they are more likely to remain and succeed in school and in their future lives as adults. STS's role is to focus on closing the "opportunity gap" by providing out-of-school time and enrichment, college and career readiness, and college success services for its students, and to lead and support a successful partnership.

Steps to Success is a 3-way partnership among the BHA, the PSB and Steps to Success, Inc., an independent nonprofit organization. The partnership is driven by a shared vision of Brookline as a community where all students can achieve their educational, economic and life potential into adulthood. The collaborative partnership focused on this target population of children in Brookline is powerful, innovative and potentially a national model. Its key characteristics include a holistic, individualized, comprehensive, creative, and multi-faceted approach to service delivery.

Program Strategies and Activities

- Steps to Success, Inc. focuses on closing the opportunity gap for its students by providing the following services: Enrichment activities, which includes the After Hours University and Teen Advantage after-

school programs, outdoor explorations, vacation programs and access to camps for students in grades 4-8, all of which include a particular focus on social and emotional learning and skill development.

- Career and College Readiness including middle and high school internships, college visits, post-secondary applications and enrollment, mentorship, and professional development.
- Post-Secondary and College Persistence (College Success Initiative) including college matriculation, enrollment, and persistence counseling and support, as well as professional development.
- In addition, STS, Inc. provides management and administrative functions to the partnership, such as outcome evaluation and program review; coordination of family programs and communications; fundraising; communications and marketing; partnership administration and governance; and volunteer management. STS, Inc. also supports all of the larger STS community events for the partnership.

Outcomes

STS, Inc. has articulated specific short- and long-term outcomes it expects to be demonstrated over time by students in the elementary and middle school years, during the summer, while in high school and finally when they attend college.

- Most immediately, as a result of participating in enrichment activities in After Hours University and Teen Advantage, students will demonstrate social emotional learning outcomes such as increased engagement in learning, better relations with their peers, better communication skills, and develop skills learned beyond the school day.
- In addition, as a result of participating in Outdoor Exploration and having access to camp, students will show social emotional learning outcomes such as growth in their ability to persevere, have better relations with their peers, and have improved communication skills.
- STS students participating in the Summer Connections and Work Connections for Youth programs will have improved relationships with adults, demonstrate mastery of basic financial literacy principles, and demonstrate increased perseverance by articulating a goal for themselves beyond high school.
- Ultimately STS graduating high-school seniors will matriculate to college or a post-secondary program, remain on track to graduate from a 2 or 4-year college in four to six years, and take on less than the national average of total college debt.

Long-term, as a result of participating in STS, graduates from Brookline High School will have a post-secondary plan of their choosing, and enroll in and complete that plan (whether it be college, other post-secondary education or another pathway). In addition, most students will graduate from college within 4-6 years, obtain a full-time job or attend graduate school within 6 months after graduation, and no longer live in public housing 1 year after graduation.

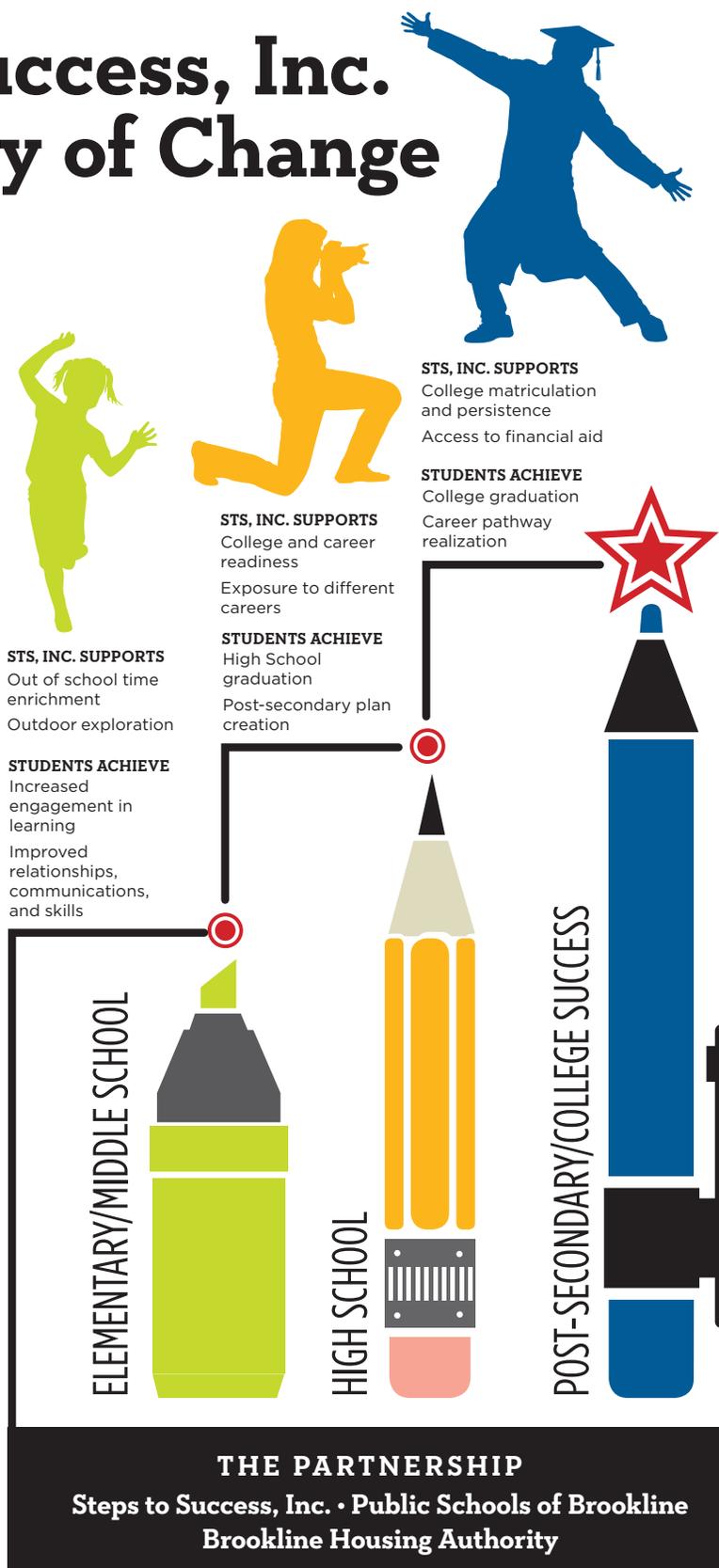
***Research**

- Afterschool Programs Make a Difference: Findings From the Harvard Family Research Project, Published in SEDL Letter Volume XX, Number 2, August 2008, Afterschool, Family, and Community.
- The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in Assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics: A Research Synthesis. Regional Educational Laboratory Contract #ED-01-CO-0006 Deliverable #2003-19. Prepared for Institute of Education Sciences Department of Education, Oct 2003.
- The Value of Out-of-School Time Programs, by Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Anamarie A. Whitaker, Paul Youngmin Yoo. Rand Corporation, 2017.
- After-school programs strongly benefit at-risk students, SI&A Cabinet Report, November 14, 2017

Steps to Success, Inc. Our Theory of Change

We promote equity for Brookline's students from low-income families by expanding their horizons, building upon their skills, and supporting their educational journey in order to maximize their life choices.

The Steps to Success Partnership shares a vision of Brookline as a community where all students can achieve their educational, economic, and life goals into adulthood.



Four-Year Strategic Goals & Tactics

1. Organizational & Fiscal Sustainability: To ensure adequate reserves and fundraising capacity necessary for Steps, Inc. to be sustainable and sufficiently resourced.

- 1.1. Get to balanced budget; Rebuild reserves to six months.
- 1.2. Grow revenue to support all the other goals through specific annual benchmark goals and a professionally written Development/Fundraising Plan.
- 1.3. Maintain grant funding and grow by 10% per year for three years.
- 1.4. Increase non-event based Individual Giving, with a focus on major gifts, by 10% per year for three years.
- 1.5. Grow event revenue by 38% by FY22.
- 1.6. Increase fundraising staff admin so ED and Board can focus on “higher level” tasks, including relationship-based fundraising.
- 1.7. Leverage and capitalize on relationships and development opportunities by networking with and through PSB, BHA, and other organizations.
- 1.8. Leverage and capitalize on other relationships/networks of like-minded organizations, donors, and networks in Brookline (e.g. PTOs, BEF, Innovation Fund, BRJE).
- 1.9. Upgrade fundraising software.
- 1.10. Increase communications and develop marketing plan for Steps, Inc. and for STS Partnership (including social media, e-marketing, and building a new website).

2. Program Focus & Impact: To further align Steps, Inc. resources and programming with our new Theory of Change in order to strategically impact the opportunity gap.

- 2.1. Prioritize/focus students to be served on target population articulated in Partnership Work.
- 2.2. Focus and invest in Out of School Time programming after-school/out-of-school, and play a resource/referral role on academics.
- 2.3. Prioritize/focus on agreed clear Outcomes and Measures (translated from TOC) for both STS Inc. and Partnership with review and endorsement of management, board, and Partnership.
- 2.4. Focus on College as the final pathway, and work w/BHA to focus on non-college alternatives; Coordinate with Partners to make seamless transition for high school seniors to post-secondary pathway.
- 2.5. Make Partnership program offerings seamless with one another and with Town programs that serve Steps students and families.
- 2.6. Study the feasibility of extended Steps service K-3 (while maintaining services thru college).
- 2.7. Articulate and implement clear program investment priorities based on new model: what is baseline priority, how will we spend available additional dollars?
- 2.8. Organize opportunities for parent/family engagement and input into program activities, through a variety of channels, during the year.

- 3. Investment in Program Management & Performance Measurement Capacity: To retain, invest in and build the capacity necessary to manage, support and evaluate high quality cost-effective programming.**
 - 3.1. Increase management: Make Program Director, CSI Advisor, and Work Connections Manager full-time employees.
 - 3.2. Use more cost-effective interns, AmeriCorps, volunteers, and partnership resources, in appropriate roles, to supplement staff capacity.
 - 3.3. Expand admin support so ED, managers, and board can focus on “higher level” tasks.
 - 3.4. Invest in staff and staff retention by improving HR management, benefits, and professional development.
 - 3.5. Implement program evaluation measurement system in order to gauge program impact.
 - 3.6. Use evaluation measurement system to gauge program impact, inform program improvement, and build organizational knowledge and learning.

- 4. Strong Steps to Success Partnership: To increase the impact of the Steps to Success partnership, leveraging the resources and expertise of STS, Inc., the Public Schools of Brookline, and the Brookline Housing Authority to meet the critical needs of the students and families we serve.**
 - 4.1. Engage Partners in advocating for more community funding through joint fundraising.
 - 4.2. Ensure strong partnership coordination including goal-setting, communications, management/coordination, etc.; lead a robust, active, healthy partnership.
 - 4.3. Ensure Steps, Inc. has a dedicated location and sufficient program space.
 - 4.4. Ensure codification of Partnership in MOU across all Partners prior to each school year.
 - 4.5. Engage other community partners to leverage other community resources and build town-wide investment in the Partnership's success.
 - 4.6. Ensure there is a communication plan and engagement with STS parents/families and Brookline community regarding partnership, strategic plan and theory of change.
 - 4.7. Complete data sharing agreement between Partners.
 - 4.8. Lead conversation to ensure clear program outcomes are articulated and agreed to by each Partner.
 - 4.9. Advocate/coordinate outcome measurement across Partnership through annual program review and refinement process.

- 5. To invest in Steps Inc. Board's expanded ability to govern and fundraise.**
 - 5.1. Create clearer job descriptions for directors, officers, and board members.
 - 5.2. Ensure all committees have leadership and structure to operate effectively; ensure strong board oversight/involvement while balancing staff participation.
 - 5.3. Develop clear wishlist for skills, perspectives and experience on board – including stakeholder representation, access to resources, diversity, equity, and inclusion – and proactively develop board membership accordingly.
 - 5.4. Implement explicit and transparent succession planning for officer positions.
 - 5.5. Articulate and “enforce” clear board giving (or getting) expectations.
 - 5.6. Ensure strong board satisfaction and retention.

Annual Planning Process

This annual planning process is intended to strike a balance between a necessary focus on the time-consuming work of *implementation and execution* of the strategic plan, and ensuring periodic review, as well as any necessary revision. It should also help ensure that organizational priorities remain aligned with the board’s expressed intent over the plan’s life.

While the primary accountability for ensuring completion of each planning activity rests with one individual, the strategic plan and responsibility for its successful strategy and execution rests with every member of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director.

Timing	Planning Activity	Primary Accountability
January	Annual review of Strategic Plan progress	Executive Director
March	Board discussion and approval of any major changes to strategic plan (Goals or Tactics)	Board Chair
April	Organizational planning for the next fiscal year begins	Executive Director
May/June	Annual budget development	Executive Director
June	Annual Meeting (Officers & Directors elected)	Board Chair
June	Board approves budget for new fiscal year.	Board Treasurer
June	Annual review of progress on Goals and Tactics by accountable “owner” of each board committee and staff lead	Committee Chair or Executive Director
Year-Round	Review progress on “their” Measurable Objectives at each committee meeting. Progress report at each Board Meeting.	Committee Chairs