



## **Overview of Neighborhood Transformation (NT) and Summary, Findings and Recommendations of Long Beach NT Hub Pilot Project**

### **Overview**

Digital Equity is achieved most effectively by incorporating Digital Inclusion into comprehensive strategies to tackle poverty, which is why the California Emerging Technology Funds (CETF) leads Neighborhood Transformation (NT) initiatives to align County and City services to support students and their families in schools that are implementing School2Home.<sup>1</sup> NT Partnership Agreements have been signed by County, City, and School Officials for West Contra Costa County and Long Beach with a collective commitment to overcome the “wall of poverty”—interrelated factors and forces that constitute a formidable barrier to families escaping poverty and distract children from succeeding in school.

Neighborhood Transformation is a comprehensive strategy to align existing public resources to achieve better futures for residents in low-income neighborhoods with accountability for 5 Big Outcomes: Education; Employment; Crime; Poverty; Health. Effective NT requires County, City, and School governments to coordinate actions that are: (a) people-focused; (b) place-based; and (c) linked to the regional economy. A key element of NT is Integrated Services Teams comprised of existing personnel with the following expertise: social services, public health, mental health, alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, probation, and workforce training services from the County; law enforcement, recreation services, and workforce training programs from the City; and education support services from the School. Further, the focus on people with accountability produces better outcomes for children and their families to move out of poverty and generates a higher return on public-sector investments.

School2Home is the “centerpiece” of NT and the School Attendance Areas are prime targets for Digital Inclusion to increase broadband adoption. The mission of School2Home is to close both the Achievement Gap and Digital Divide at low-performing Middle Schools in low-income communities by integrating the use of computing and broadband technologies into teaching and learning with deep parent engagement. School2Home Partners reach students who are statistically less likely to perform well academically than their peers in higher-income communities. Two priority areas have been selected for NT Pilot Projects: Lovonya DeJean Middle of School in the City of Richmond in Contra Costa County; and Stephens Middle School in the City of Long Beach in Los Angeles County. While the general program design is specified in the NT Partnership Agreement, implementation is customized to the unique strengths and characteristics of the community. This document summarizes the results of the Long Beach NT Hub Pilot Project conducted in partnership with the YMCA of Greater Long Beach.

## **Long Beach NT Hub Pilot Project Summary, Findings and Recommendations**

Stephens Middle School is the only 6-8 grades Middle School on the West Side of Long Beach with the some of the lowest test results in the Long Beach School District (LBUSD). The goal of the Pilot Project was to support families to improve their self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, and leadership skills by having a Family Navigator work closely with 8-10 families most in need of multiple services for the success of their students and charting a path out of poverty. It was implemented for the 4-month period of January-April 2021.

The process of identifying candidate students and recruiting families took time, flexibility, and consistent communication. The Family Navigator was able to build rapport and trust with the families, thus successfully engaging and retaining those who were recruited. During this brief period, the Family Navigator helped participating families develop a Family Plan that included goals and action steps. In coordination with Stephen Middle School staff, YMCA, and providers in the City and County, the Family Navigator convened 2 Family Engagement Conferences or Services Integration Team Meetings per participating family to agree on support and assistance to the participating families to accomplish their Family Plan goals.

### Pilot Project Successes

A common theme reported by participating families is that the Family Navigator working alongside them made a difference in the process of accomplishing their goals. They felt empowered by having support from others and feeling heard. Short-term results included:

- 6 families completed 50% or more of the goals identified in their Family Plans.
- Families were connected to services and assistance they otherwise would not receive.
- The NT Hub and Family Navigator strengthened relationships with School Administrators, the nearby Family Resource Center, and other existing partners and resources (such as Los Angeles County, World Relief Southern California, and Guidance Center).

### Pilot Project Challenges

- 2 families did not have their Family Engagement Team Meetings because of life changing events that made participation nearly impossible.
- It was often difficult to reach participants and providers and so it required multiple efforts and innovative approaches.
- Some families requested services that were not available due to the pandemic and high demand.

### Recommendations

- More time is needed to work with families and the Family Engagement Teams in order to achieve a higher percentage of family goals with positive outcomes.
- Networking and building strong rapport with other agencies is critical and requires ongoing communication and planning ahead to get everyone on the same page.
- Program policies and practices should be reviewed because they can become barriers to entry (such as shelter services that require clients with limited transportation to meet a case manager in person) and should be revised to focus on how best to serve clients instead compliance with rules for the convenience of bureaucracies.

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**Neighborhood Transformation Hub Pilot Project**  
**Final Report**

**June 2021**

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**Introduction**

Residents in low-income neighborhoods face an interrelated set of factors that constitute a “wall of poverty” and a major barrier to broadband adoption. These challenges often inhibit students from being able to concentrate on learning. Schools alone cannot address all of these factors and need support from Local Governments that have responsibilities for human services. That is why the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) developed and launched **Neighborhood Transformation Initiatives** in pacesetter communities to align County, City, and School resources to support community leaders and to achieve better outcomes for students and their families, and join forces to tackle poverty.

CETF funded the Community Development branch of YMCA of Greater Long Beach to implement the Neighborhood Transformation (NT) Hub Pilot Project at Stephens Middle School, on the Westside of Long Beach, California. During a 4-month period, from January to April 2021, a Family Navigator met with families periodically to develop a plan that included their identified goals and action steps. In addition, with the support of providers in the City of Long Beach and County of Los Angeles, Stephens Middle School staff, and the Family Navigator from the YMCA, 2 Family Engagement Conferences or Services Integration Team Meetings were planned for each family to accomplish their goals.

Stephens Middle School is the only 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade middle school in the Westside of Long Beach. According to the Education Data Partnership, Stephens Middle School ranks 13<sup>th</sup> out of 16 schools, based on the number of students that met the standard California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) English Language Arts/Literacy results and the math test in 2019. The education level in the area is low, the 2019 American Community Survey reported 59% of the residents have either no high school education or some high school education. Most families need a number of coordinated services and school programs to help improve their educational outcomes and job skills and increase the household income.

Initiatives such as the NT Hub Pilot Project can help link families to resources in a coordinated manner and teach them skills to advocate for themselves and become self-sufficient. The NT Hub Pilot Project aligns with national anti-poverty programs, such as Promise Neighborhoods and 2-generational approaches to tackling poverty such as Ascend, a program advanced by the Aspen Institute.

## **Recruitment**

Stephens Middle School principal and assistant principal, the Family Navigator, and the existing afterschool program staff of the YMCA identified 12 families as potential NT Hub Pilot Project participants. Out of these 12 families, 8 expressed interest and agreed to participate. The recruitment process took time, flexibility, and consistent communication. As a result, the Family Navigator was able to build rapport with families and engaged them successfully at the beginning of the implementation process.

Building a foundation of trust was a critical component of the recruitment phase. Based on the YMCA's experiences with the families with whom it had worked, the "Y" had a mix of positive and negative experiences with other providers and organizations. It was critical for the Family Navigator to dedicate sufficient time with each family so that they felt comfortable disclosing more about their needs and challenges as well as being vulnerable to someone new in their lives. As a result, families throughout the project added more goals to their Family Plans, asked the Family Navigator for additional support, and in some cases, asked for suggestions on how to reach their goals, all of which which led to the majority of recruited families being retained.

## **Project Implementation**

The Family Navigator met with each family virtually and in person and together identified goals each family wanted to achieve as the basis for the Family Plan. The goals were developed based on the needs families identified and the reason for the referral. For each goal, action steps were identified to accomplish the Family Plan.

An overarching goal for all families was to have the necessary digital tools to accomplish their other goals. In particular, parents needed digital literacy skills to help their children be successful in school. Due to COVID-19 and the school transitioning to online learning only, access to high-speed reliable affordable Internet and digital devices became a critical need for students to be able to have good attendance and good grades. In some cases, families shared that their existing Internet was slow and would constantly "kick their students out of class." The following action steps were taken: human-IT provided each family a free tablet, a hotspot, and digital literacy workshops for them to learn, for instance, how to access student portals to track student attendance, assignment completion, and grades).

## **Family Engagement Team Meetings**

In the process of developing Family Plans, the Family Navigator identified providers that were needed to help the families accomplish each of their goals and they were invited to participate in a Family Engagement or Integrated Services Team Meeting. The Pilot Project was designed to schedule 2 Family Engagement Team Meetings for each family to discuss its needs, share information and learn from other members of the Family Engagement Team, identify how Team members could work together, and hold each other accountable for results.

The “magic sauce” of the NT Hub was the relationships that were developed through these Family Engagement Team Meetings. One of the parents shared that they were thankful to have a group of professionals that were involved because it showed them that they cared. The idea of having a Team that was present and participating gave families the feeling of importance and support that would guide them through the process of reaching their goals. Providers reported that being part of the Family Engagement Team was helpful to them. They were invited to complete a short answer survey to reflect on their participation and one of the School providers stated, *"I got to know the parents of the selected students during a time (the pandemic) when connecting with people was very challenging."*

In general, the project model helped School personnel build stronger relationships with current parents and with new students and parents when it was needed most. Another provider said that being part of the Family Engagement Team was rewarding, *"Working with our students in another capacity besides academics is very rewarding for every party involved-especially the students."* Providers also felt that having these meetings with the Team and families had a direct impact. For example, one provider stated, *"We got some kids to attend in-person classes who were slated for all virtual. These were students who were struggling with online learning and now are attending in person and it's helping with their motivation and work completion."*

In addition, an important role of the Family Navigator was to be an advocate. This included asking questions that would help the participants and requesting additional information and support from providers. It was important to make sure all the support and steps that could be taken to help families occurred, “leaving no stone unturned.” For example, in one of the meetings, the Family Navigator requested a parent-teacher conference for a participant who has a student with a 504 plan to support the student academically.<sup>2</sup> At the second Family Engagement Team Meeting, the Team was asked to provide updates on what had been accomplished since the first meeting. This gathering was an opportunity for the Team to come together, evaluate the effectiveness of the steps that were taken, make changes, and add steps if needed.

Agencies that provided support and services to meet the needs of the NT Hub participants included, but were not limited to, staff and services from the Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn, the Family Resource Center located in Stephens Middle School, Guidance Center, World Relief Southern California, YMCA Afterschool EPIC Program, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, and Stephens Middle School staff.

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<sup>2</sup>The 504 Plan is a formal plan developed at Schools to provide students with disabilities the support needed and to provide them equal School access.

## **Survey Results**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the NT Hub Pilot Project, two surveys were administered; one was designed specifically for the participants that received assistance and one for the providers that gave assistance. It was important to get feedback from both parties to have an overall report from everyone who participated in the project. All 8 participants in the Pilot Project were given a Satisfaction Survey (Appendix A), which not only focused on their experience, but also assessed for the knowledge and skills they gained in securing services and in supporting their students academically (Appendix B).

Providers were invited and nearly all completed a short-answer survey, which asked them to reflect upon their experiences and perspectives, and to offer recommendations for project improvement (see Appendix C). Overall, the NT Hub Pilot Project was identified as a great resource to the community. The Family Navigator was described as being attentive, supportive, and resourceful to the families and was perceived as helping to build stronger relationships, especially between parents and School staff.

## **Lessons Learned and Challenges**

One of the lessons learned was recognition of major barriers families faced when they sought services and when meetings were scheduled with the Family Navigator. Often, low-income families have barriers when they seek resources and services because they do not have skills to advocate for themselves or do not ask for support from others. In some cases, parents are unable to seek services due to these barriers. J. L. Mendez, J.L. Carpenter, D. R. Laforett, & J.S. Cohen (2009), found in a study of approximately 200 low-income parents that the main barrier for parent participation in community-based intervention programs was work schedule conflicts. According to J.L. Mendez et al. (2009), low-income parents are less likely to have flexible schedules where they are able to leave work compared to economically-advantaged parents and 50% of the parents that participated in NT Hub were working parents. They often worked long hours or worked overtime to provide for their family.

To better assist, the Family Navigator was flexible with participants and would schedule in-person meetings, if needed, in late evenings which many organizations do not offer. Participants from NT Hub shared that they could not always attend the meetings because they had challenges with finding childcare or transportation. In some cases, there were alternatives such as meeting by phone, but in other cases, families postponed meetings because they were unable to focus on phone call meetings with their infants. It was important for the Family Navigator to appreciate that families are likely to have the aforementioned challenges and barriers and may become discouraged. Without having someone that understands them and is flexible, families can lose hope and disengage. The NT Hub Pilot Project is a reminder of the significant needs of the community and the barriers they face, especially during this pandemic. Some families were unable to complete their Family Plans because they experienced life-changing events that made it nearly impossible to participate or prioritize their goals. In order for families to have a higher goal completion rate, the Family Navigator needed more time to build stronger relationships and trust with both participants and community providers.

Recruiting families during a pandemic was another challenge. More time was needed to promote the NT Hub Pilot and to work with Stephens Middle School staff to identify the best way to share information. While the YMCA did not meet its goal of recruiting ten families and only recruited eight, it would likely have met its goal if there was more time for School staff and participants who had a positive experience to refer additional families. It was also difficult to reach families and School staff in April and May to schedule Family Engagement Team Meetings because of the focus on planning for School reopening. Because the Family Navigator tenaciously pursued multiple efforts and used innovative strategies, she eventually was successful in reaching participants and providers as the School staff did their best to support the NT Hub Pilot Project.

Lastly, there were challenges in linking families to services in high demand. For example, the project was unable to find affordable housing or family shelter for one of the participants despite the Family Navigator's efforts to work with Los Angeles County and the City of Long Beach to identify these resources. It was even more challenging when the participant left the State of California because she no longer qualified for services in Long Beach. In the process of trying to connect families to services, the Family Navigator encountered inherent limitations on availability due to the pandemic. Families also wanted in-person youth services (sport/youth programs) and services that were in high demand (low-income housing/transitional family shelters).

### **Neighborhood Transformation Hub Pilot Project Successes**

Although the NT Hub Pilot Project had challenges and was short-term, it also had successes with the support of Stephens Middle School Staff, Los Angeles County, and providers in the community. The successes include:

- 6 families were able to complete 50% or more of the goals identified in their family plan.
- 8 families were connected to services and received assistance.
- 6 families had their first Family Engagement Team Meeting.
- 5 families had their first and second Family Engagement Team Meeting.
- Strong new relationships were developed with School administrators, Family Resource Center West, and EPIC (School-based afterschool program) and relationships were strengthened with existing partners (Los Angeles County, World Relief Southern California, Guidance Center, and Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles).

Overall the NT Hub Pilot Project helped parents and caregivers to learn new skills that will help them to advocate for their families and they learned about new services to meet their needs. As was mentioned earlier, having a trusted advocate be with them in the process of accomplishing their goals made a significant difference. The families were empowered by having support from others and feeling heard.



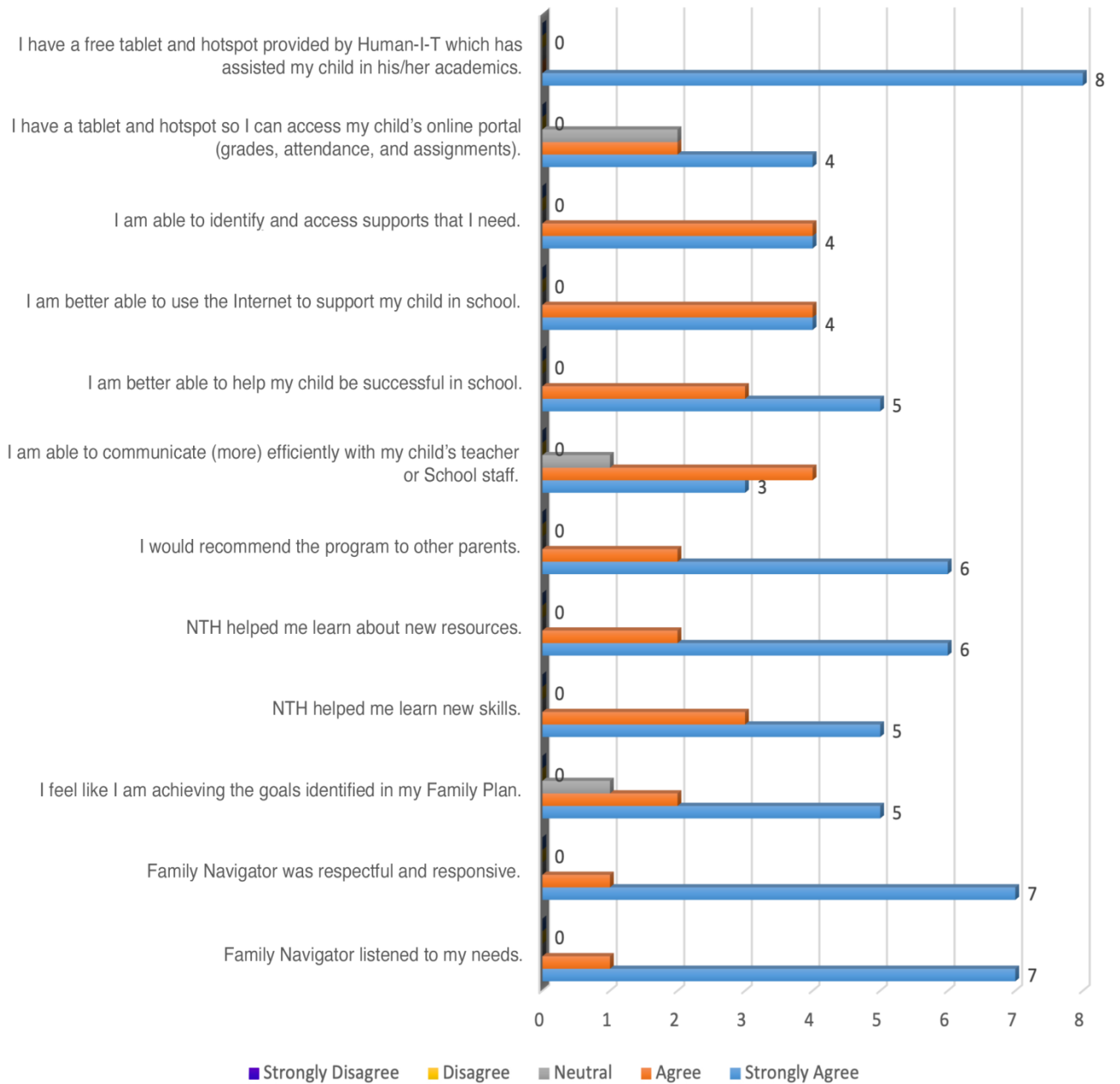
## Project Recommendations

- Extend the length of the project to increase the number of families recruited and to deepen the level of engagement with families already participating in the project to achieve a higher percentage of family goals with positive outcomes.
- Build a network and strong rapport with other agencies, which requires ongoing communication and planning ahead to get everyone on the same page.
- Review project policies and practices because they can become barriers to entry (such as shelter services that require clients with limited transportation to meet a case manager in person) and should be revised to focus on how best to serve clients instead on compliance with rules for the convenience of bureaucracies.
- Plan for unexpected obstacles that could delay meeting with families and scheduling Family Engagement Team Meetings. In order to increase the number of goals each family achieves, reach out to providers as soon as they are identified and schedule a meeting with as much advance notice as possible. This will increase the likelihood of all families having their two Family Engagement Team Meetings. It will also give providers more time to consider their schedules and increase the likelihood of them attending meetings.
- Seek a potential partnership with the California Integrated Core Practice Model for Children, Youth, and Families (ICPM) which, in Los Angeles County, is implemented through the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Mental Health. The NT Hub Pilot Project and ICPM each have a framework that invites the engagement of agencies and community providers to be part of ongoing engagement, assessment, coordination, delivery of action plans, and collaboration of services in the community. This model uses evidence-based practices and integrated services to better meet the needs of children and families, similar to the design of the YMCA NT Hub Pilot Project.
- Establish a support group of project participants. Many of the participating families shared they do not have people with whom they can vent and/or they feel that they are the only parents or caregivers having challenges with their children. Families may feel embarrassed or guilty that they are not being good parents and a support group would provide a safe environment for parents to share experiences, opinions, and recommendations about parenting skills and can increase their self-esteem and offers opportunities for them to learn from one another. In the past, support groups were part of the YMCA Community Schools programming and families found the support groups helpful and impactful.
- Host a kick-off event (such as a half-day retreat or if feasible, a family camp weekend) to build community as a strategy to establish stronger engagement and trust between the families and Family Navigator at the onset. The YMCA has a successful history of developing strong relationships with youth on retreats. Having a retreat with COVID-19 protocols in place would give families the opportunity to meet one another and build a strong relationship with the Family Navigator, thus accelerating the pace of developing Family Plans.

## Appendix A

### YMCA Neighborhood Transformation Hub Pilot Project Participant Survey Responses

#### 1. On a Scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, How Do You Rate the Following Statements?



**2. How Did the YMCA NT Hub Help You and Your Family?**

It helped me to communicate with my son's school staff.

It helped me by giving my daughter a tablet and access to Internet to be able to complete her homework.

It helped me a lot and I am very appreciative to everyone in the project.

It helped me obtain better assistance from the school, receive information on programs, and learn new ways to communicate communication.

It helped by providing me with technical assistance.

It helped my children a lot in school because I received a tablet and a hotspot.

It helped me a lot and I have accomplished my goals.

It helped me because my children have improved in school and I can help them by having home Internet access the project provided.

**3. Would You Recommend this Program to Other Families from the School?  
Please Explain Your Answer.**

Yes. It is greatly beneficial for our children to have extra support.

Yes.

Yes. I already recommended the program to other families.

Yes. It is a great resource for anyone that needs it.

Yes. I would, of course.

Yes. I would recommend it to others.

Yes. I would recommend it because this program is perfectly what we need and it is a good program.

Yes. The program helps parents when they do not understand how to use the Internet or need resources. It supports families so their children can be successful.

**4. How is the NT Hub Different from Other School Programs? Please Explain.**

It has more communication and outside school services.

The person that helped me was genuinely nice and looked for ideas to help me move forward with the plan.

Because they help me more, I feel I can trust them.

There was consistency, dedication, and discipline.

This is the first program I participated in, and I cannot compare but I really liked participating in the program.

Compared to other programs the NT Hub helped families who are in need.

It helped me achieve goals, they listened to me, they have helped me physically, morally, and the program has been attentive to me.

The NT Hub treated me well and they focused on me.

## Appendix B

### YMCA Neighborhood Transformation Hub Pilot Project Provider Survey Responses

#### 1. How Do You Feel the YMCA NT Hub Is Unique From Other Programs That Work With Students, Schools, and Families? Please Provide Examples.

I haven't worked with enough programs to know the difference, yet I appreciate that there is a Family Navigator to help clients better understand, remember, and follow up with case-related steps given at the consultation. It also helps building trust.

It feels very comprehensive and very personalized, which is a wonderful combination. It's comprehensive in that it is supporting kids and parents, academics and employment, supports the social and emotional well-being of the family, not just the economics, etc. It's personalized because each family has their own goals and the support they receive is tailored to those goals.

Having the Team Meetings was useful to work with some of our most challenging students.

The YMCA is unique regarding their work with families and students because the consistency that takes place when doing checking ins. If we know a student or family is struggling, we check in with them and help them. We want to make sure the families and children are okay.

I appreciate the variety of ways the program supports the families.

The YMCA NT Hub encourages its staff to really reach out to families and provide space for them to talk, ask questions, and get to know the staff at the school.

#### 2. How Did You Feel About Participating With Other Providers And Families? Why?

Due to the nature of the Legal Services we provide, we need to have the consent of the client. So long that the client agrees to having us talk about their case with others, I don't see any issues.

I loved it. I think a lot of good things came out of our meetings with Alma and the families in a short amount of time. I love being on a Team in support of families.

Working with our students in another capacity besides academics is very rewarding for every party involved, especially the students.

I loved working with them and listen to more perspectives from others. I have a good relationship with the school staff but it has been difficult with the pandemic. It was hard to reach out and check in with the students with the rest of the Team. The meeting was a perfect way to get perspectives and to check-in regarding the students.

I feel good. I just didn't realize when we signed on that we would be required to attend meetings as much as we have. I see the importance of it. I just didn't understand that requirement.

Participating with other providers and families allows the school to develop a more communicative relationship with its surrounding community.

<b>3. How Was Being Part Of The NT Hub Helpful To You As A Provider?</b>	
It helped my client with next steps.	
I got to know the parents of the selected students during a time (the pandemic) when connecting with people was very challenging.	
Knowing that there was a team to support our most challenging students.	
It has helped because the program has a broader reach out to participants, which can be challenging at times for EPIC. She gained more information about the families in the meetings then she can receive from sharing the flyers from EPIC.	
I'm glad families are getting additional support beyond the level of resources we have.	
I was able to see just how important it is to provide space for parents/guardians to voice their thoughts about their children and concerns about their education.	
<b>4. Did You Feel That You Were Able to Provide Information That Was Helpful to the Rest of the Team?</b>	
The YMCA case worker had an opportunity to ask questions about our services and I was happy to provide that information. I hope it was helpful.	
Yes, I had access to grades and attendance data and other resources that could be helpful to the families or students. I understand that some of our families are in crisis right now and don't necessarily have the time or energy to get information that I could readily provide, so I was glad to be of help.	
Yes, the relationships that we have formed with the students and parents have helped.	
Yes, with the communication with the Family Navigator and with the school. I would feel that I am able to provide details of what we provide in the afterschool program (homework assistance, etc.,) and the enrichments that the leaders provide.	
I think that it was the services that were provided that were the most helpful.	
Yes, for certain questions and concerns.	
<b>5. What Recommendations Do You Have to Improve the NT HUB Pilot Project? Please Explain Your Answer.</b>	<b>What is Your Title?</b>
None at this time.	Department of Justice Partially accredited representative
For the amount of time we had, and given the conditions of the pandemic, I think it's been a great start. Alma is a fantastic facilitator and communicator. I think we just need some more time to see the fruits of the labor.	Assistant Principal
I'm not sure at this time.	Learning Director
I would not make changes to the NT Hub right now. The only thing that I saw that could enhance the project could be the parents' communication with following through with the information and resources they were given.	Site Director of WRAP
Decrease the number of school staff needed to participate in the meetings. Instead ask for one school site staff member with a form that will keep all staff stakeholders informed of the progress.	Principal
N/A	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Learning Director