

# SchoolTalk

## Strategic Plan 2023-25



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# Executive Summary

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# SchoolTalk Positioned for Impact

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- SchoolTalk is in a unique position to **help students, schools and city systems recover and build back better from the Covid-19 pandemic**, along with addressing long-standing, continuing pressing needs in D.C. and other select communities.
- SchoolTalk understands that to create dramatic, sustained change, **intentional work is needed at three levels: students, schools, and systems**. Through this approach, SchoolTalk brings greater coherence and improved collaboration within the education sector—a unique differentiator.
- Even for an effective, trusted organization, executing this strategy well will require **dedicated leadership** and a **sustainable organization**.



# Our Strategic Direction

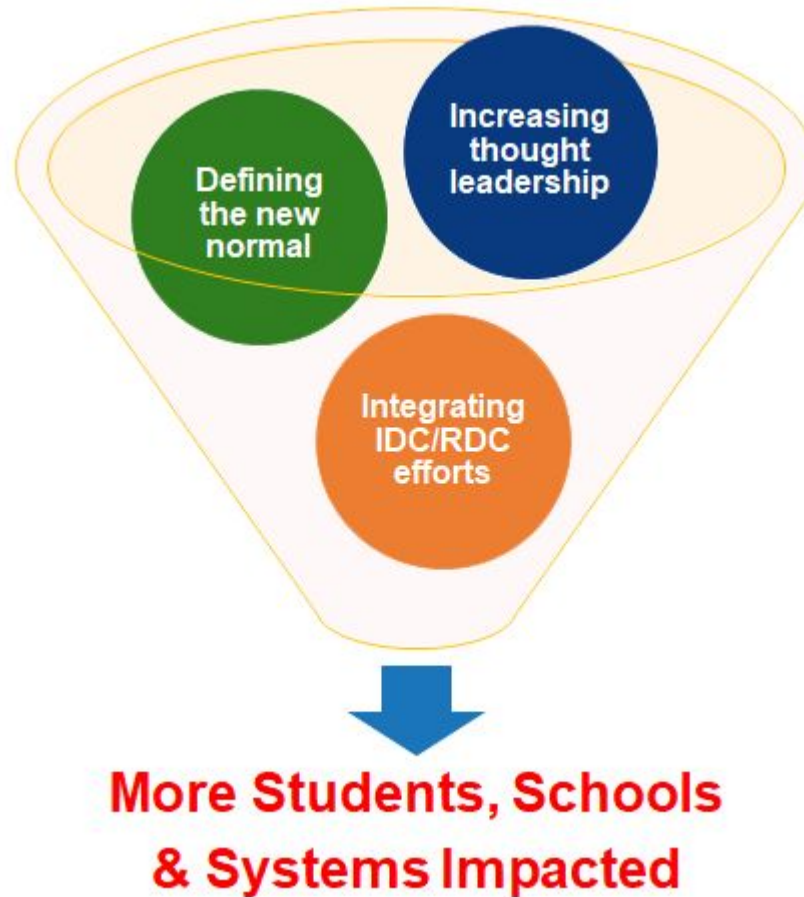
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- The three-year strategic plan lays out a path to support **students**, **schools**, and **systems** recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and “build back better.”
- The plan leverages SchoolTalk’s core competencies, track record of success, and reputation as a trusted partner and aligns with the fundamentally changed education landscape as a result of Covid.
- SchoolTalk’s theory of change: Direct service to students and schools informs systems changes, and an understanding of the systems informs needed, immediate direct service.
- The **RestorativeDC** and **InclusiveDC** initiatives, foster thought leadership and cross-sector collaborator, enabling delivery on our theory of change.



# **Take Away #1: SchoolTalk will increase impact in the short term with minor changes to current staff & funding**

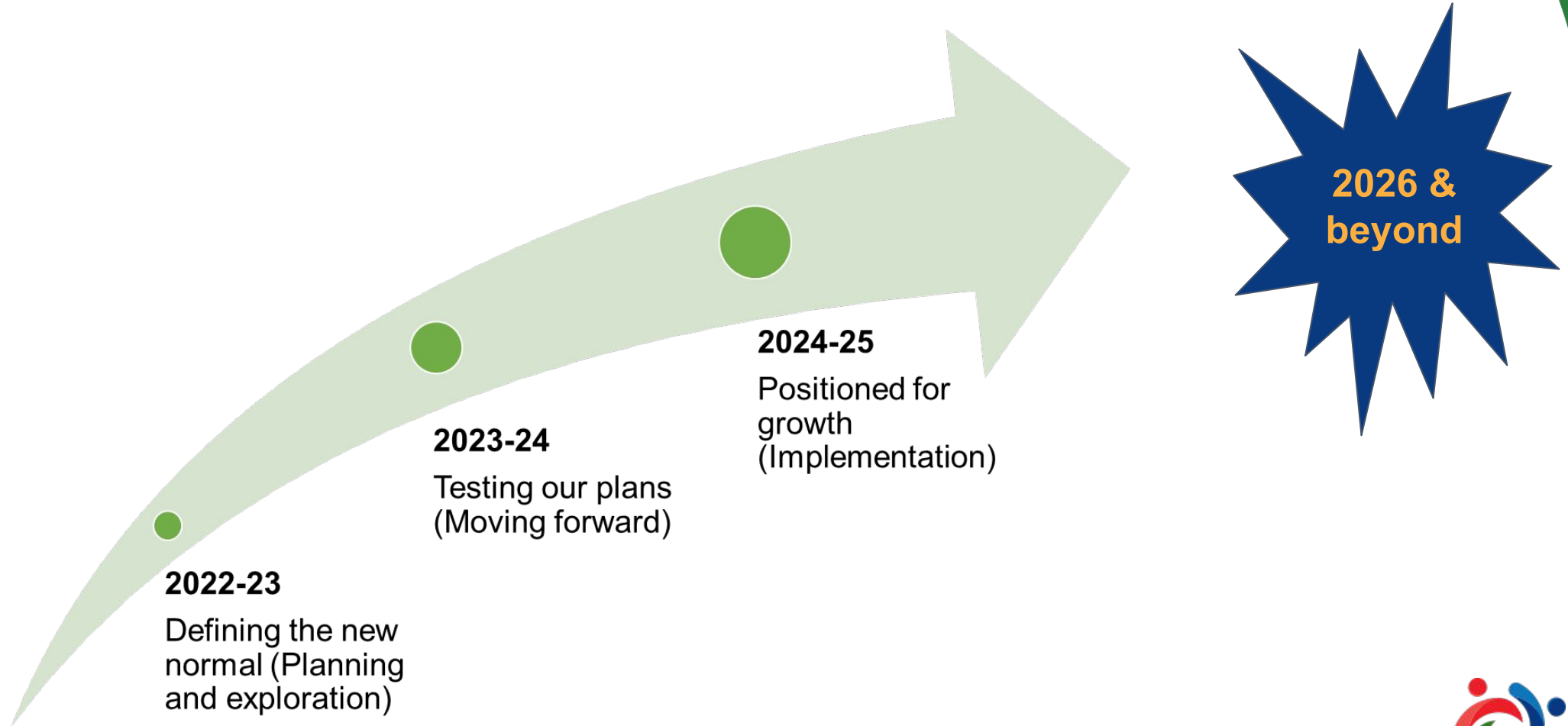
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# Take Away #2: Look out 2026...

## SchoolTalk will be positioned for growth

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# Educational Needs & Problems to Tackle

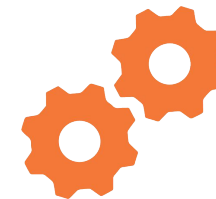
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STUDENTS



SCHOOLS



SYSTEMS







# Pandemic's Impact on Marginalized Students

**Data shows that students of color and students with disabilities continue to be disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic.**

- **Heightened mental health needs**
  - Increased anxiety, depression, no sense of a positive future
- **Poorer attendance & behavior, less engagement & connection**
  - Lack mindset, behaviors needed for engagement with learning and schooling
- **Limited postsecondary plans**
  - Increased “graduating to the couch” among students; students with learning disabilities and differences continue to be shut out of meaningful workforce development opportunities
- **Feeling unsafe emotionally & physically at school and traveling to and from school.**

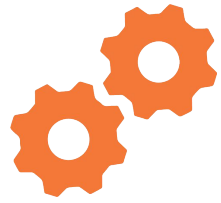




# Schools are Struggling

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- Burnout and mental health concerns among staff  
*Recent research shows school staff have suffered more work-related stress due to the pandemic than other adults.*
- Attrition of leaders, teachers & overall staff
- Erosion of trust among staff, students & families
- Slow restoration of school culture & relationships
- Behavioral concerns & violence among students
- Challenge of addressing critical learning loss while attending to social emotional factors



# Our Systems are Broken

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**In the systems that support and interact with these schools and students...**

- Limited citywide alignment and cross-sector collaboration
- Lack of educators and structures to support them to understand Intersectionality of race, inclusion and diversity, only worsened by the pandemic
- Weakened school accountability and data
- Shifted nature of the workplace, impacting both schools and workplaces, and workforce development needs of students

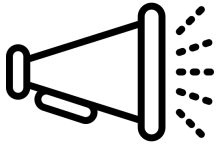
# Market Landscape & SchoolTalk's Unique Role

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# SchoolTalk's Work and How it Creates Impact is Differentiated in the Landscape

Organizations in DC offer many types of supports for schools and students...

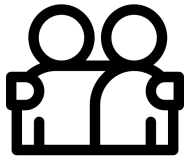
*Not exhaustive*



Advocacy for youth with disabilities



Secondary transition



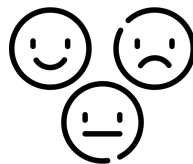
Restorative justice



School-based mental health



Diversity, equity, and inclusion



Social-emotional learning

...but what SchoolTalk does and how it does it makes SchoolTalk stand out

**SchoolTalk's work supports all students** (Tier 1 supports), with an emphasis on practices to support students with disabilities...

...and also provides **conflict resolution crisis management** (Tier 3 supports)

**SchoolTalk takes its commitment to youth voice seriously**—often brings youth directly into the conversation in a way that many organizations serving youth do not

SchoolTalk's work spans the sector (students, schools, systems/ agencies, etc.) and SchoolTalk uniquely **brings this broad set of stakeholders together to discuss and solve challenges** related to school marginalized students, especially those with disabilities



# SchoolTalk has Strong Capabilities to Improve Students' Lives

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**In the direct student-facing work, SchoolTalk immediately improves trajectory for success**

- Designing targeted, effective programs for all students, and especially those with learning differences/disabilities
- Engaging with disconnected and most poorly served students
- Building trusted connections and relationships with and across students to mitigate alienation and isolation, and often mental health issues
- Developing and amplifying student voice by strengthening their skills and sense of self

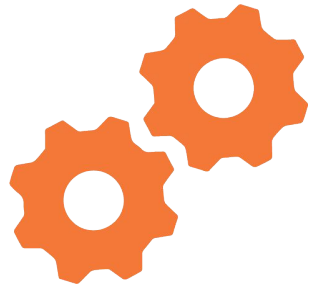


# SchoolTalk has Specialized Capabilities & Track Record of Impact with Schools

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**In the school-based work, SchoolTalk is changing practice and outcomes for students**

- Building educator capacity across the school for changed practice with all students, and especially those with learning differences/disabilities
- Changing procedures and protocols, especially to foster constructive behavior management
- Creating a sense of belonging and shared practice, overcoming isolation.
- Reducing suspensions and discipline referrals



# SchoolTalk is Highly Effective at Improving Systems for Impact

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**In the systems effort, SchoolTalk knows how to catalyze change and is a trusted partner with a track record of success**

- Building deep and effective partnerships across agencies and organizations as well as within agencies
- Bringing together multiple players to collaborate and create synergy to shift practices and policies
- Strengthening school accountability and data
- Providing thought leadership, elevating best practice models, and sharing insights by disseminating findings and learnings



# What Others Say about **InclusiveDC**'s Impact

Across students, schools and system leaders, SchoolTalk is highly valued and respected

"I learned not to let anyone get you down. If it doesn't go right the first time, keep at it and don't get discouraged. Keep your light shining bright. Maybe you will hear the songs I learned to write on the radio someday."

—**Student**

"Thanks for all you do with our kids. You teach them content, skills and how to be independent adults. You make high school more fun/memorable and build confidence. This gets overlooked for those with learning disabilities."

—**Educator**

"SchoolTalk has helped me overcome my sense of limits and shyness." —**Student**

"SchoolTalk has commitment, dedication, patience and awesome service to each student."

—**Educator**

"This program has been nothing but a blessing. It's nice to find people that are willing to unite other people from different places." —**Student**

"SchoolTalk organized a conference of significant undertaking and brought partners, agencies, students and professional artists and industry experts together. Student with disabilities became models, MCs, stage managers, stylists, and artists. I was shocked at how professional everything was, especially the students." —**Agency**

"SchoolTalk supported some of our most disconnected students, and helped them find their passion in the fashion and self-advocacy fields."

—**Educator**

"Most importantly, SchoolTalk provides opportunities for youth to demonstrate success and be celebrated."

—**Partner**



# What Others Say about RestorativeDC's Impact

Across students, schools and system leaders, SchoolTalk is highly valued and respected

"SchoolTalk understands students & schools. It's not another framework, but implementation support that changes practice." —**Principal**

"I now have a classroom culture where students know they can make mistakes, hold each other accountable and support each other." —**Teacher**

"Now, I have so many more strategies to use in my classroom to shift student behavior, and we are all less frustrated." —**Teacher**

"We felt isolated - with the networking opportunities, we felt more connected, knowing that everyone is struggling with similar issues and we are not alone." —**Head Coach**

"The work SchoolTalk did with our staff made a big difference in referrals and student behavior- teachers are now more equipped with restorative practices & nonverbal cues instead of jumping into discipline. Rather than suspensions, we are working to keep children in school." —**Principal**

"SchoolTalk changes the way students & teachers feel; our whole school climate has changed since we started." —**Principal**

"I am usually the facilitator so seeing other models really helped me improve my skills." —**Dean of Students**

"Discipline referrals are down to 1/10 and suspensions down to 1/13 of what they were. Before, we were zero tolerance - and now we are about respect." —**Principal**

# Vision, Mission & Theory of Change

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# Vision & Mission

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**Vision:** School communities where every youth is honored and self-determined.

**Mission:** We tackle critical and complex problems that impact marginalized youth and the schools and systems that support them.

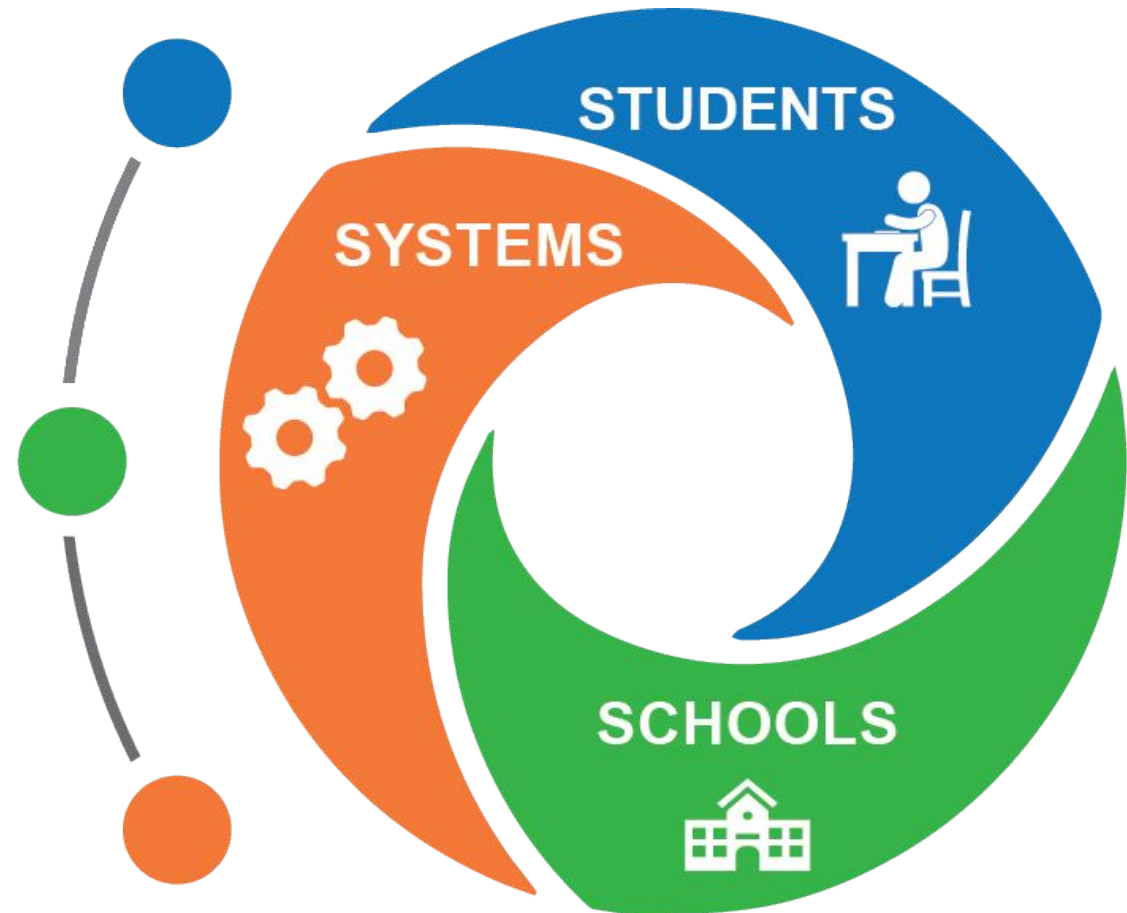


# Theory of Change: SchoolTalk Works at 3 Levels to Create a Cycle of Learning

**PROVIDE** youth-centered **PROGRAMMING** to equip every youth with the knowledge and skills to be successful after high school.

Help adults **IMPROVE SCHOOL CULTURE** through restorative and inclusive mindsets, tools, and processes.

**CONNECT & ALIGN** schools, agencies, and other organizations through leadership, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving.



# Operationalizing Our Theory of Change

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STUDENTS



SCHOOLS



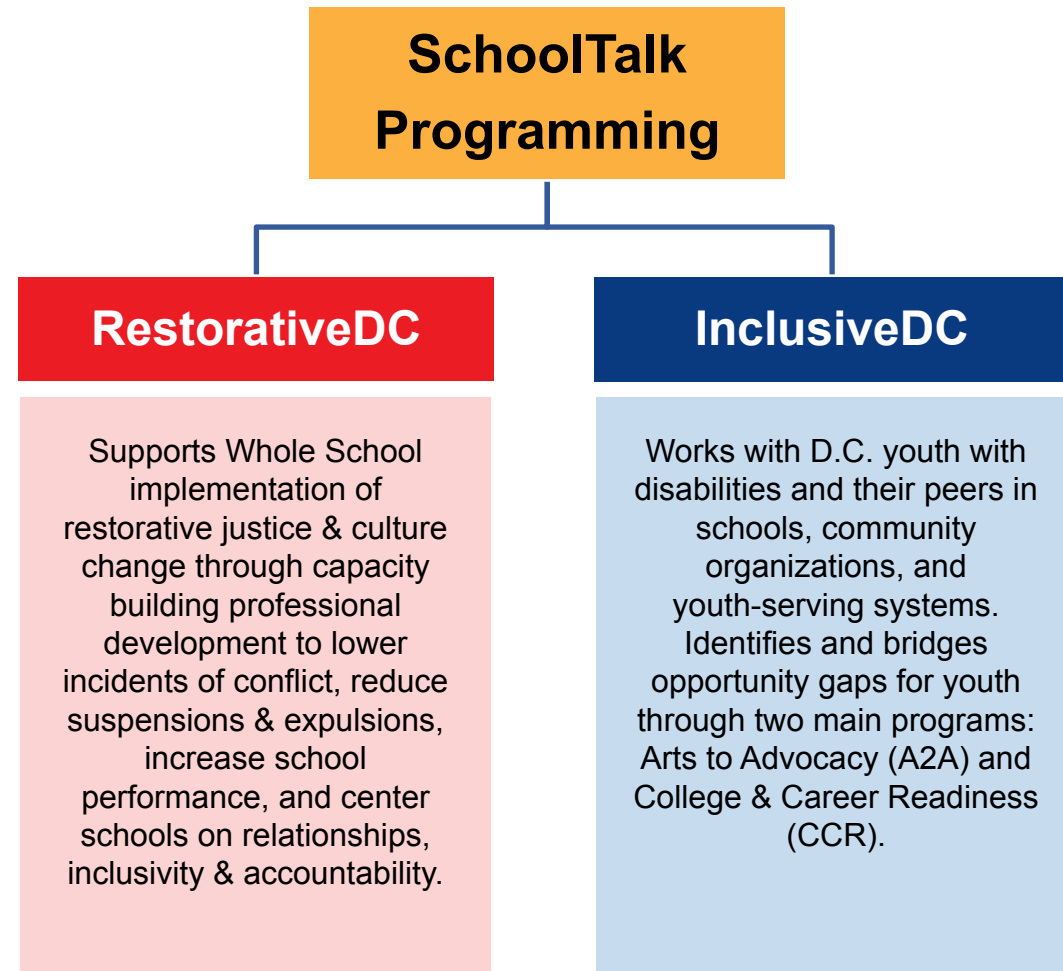
SYSTEMS

# SchoolTalk Core Programming:

## Our key initiatives work across three levels

SchoolTalk puts its theory of change into practice through its two major programmatic initiatives: RestorativeDC and InclusiveDC. Both initiatives work at the student, school, and system levels:

- Direct programming for **youth**
- Support for **school-level** organizational change
- **System-level work** to increase cross-sector collaboration and coherence across schools, youth-serving organizations and public agencies.



# SchoolTalk's Programmatic Goals

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**Goal 1 (*Students*):** Improve youth outcomes through programming that supports students to feel like they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about their futures.



**Goal 2 (*Schools*):** Equip schools with the mindsets, tools, and processes to better support every marginalized student, including students with disabilities.



**Goal 3 (*Systems - Thought Leadership & Convener*):** Engage as active thought-leader to share learning and insights, codify models and recommendations, and convene disparate actors to build relationships, problem solve and find ways to collaborate for systems change.



# SchoolTalk's Organizational Goals

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**Goal 4 (*Organizational - Partnerships*):** Actively engage partners in all of our work: Schools, students, their families, and the organizations that support them.



**Goal 5 (*Organizational - Financial Sustainability*):** Maintain a minimum of 80% earned revenue (ie, fee-for- service and contracts with city agencies) to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization.



**Goal 6 (*Organizational - Organization Health*):** Strengthen the SchoolTalk organization to meet the needs and challenges of the strategic plan.

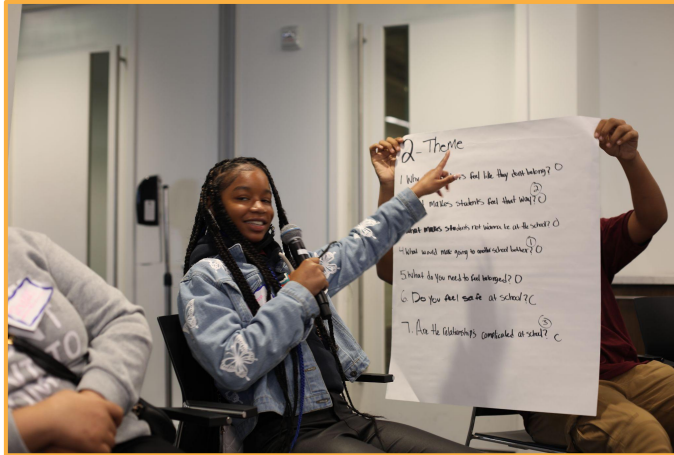
# Overview of SchoolTalk Programmatic Tactics

Goal	Tactics	Examples
<p><b>Goal 1 (Students):</b> Improve youth outcomes through programming that supports students to feel like they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about their futures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School based-workshops for youth</li> <li>• Community--based Learning Experiences</li> <li>• Youth-led Conferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall and Spring Workshop Series</li> <li>• Creative Careers Program</li> <li>• Jumpstart Summer Program</li> <li>• Our School Our Voice, Our City Our Voice (RJ)</li> <li>• Voices for Change Conference</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal 2 (Schools):</b> Equip schools with the mindsets, tools, and processes to better support every marginalized student, including students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical assistance for organizational learning, change, and conflict resolution</li> <li>• Professional development sessions (Training)</li> <li>• Modeling and coaching</li> <li>• Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RJ Whole School Cohort</li> <li>• RJ Targeted TA</li> <li>• RJ Citywide PD</li> <li>• Secondary Transition Institute</li> <li>• Best Me I Can Be Video Series</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal 3 (Systems):</b> Engage as active thought-leader and convenor to share learning and insights, codify models and collaborate for systems change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webinar &amp; Podcasts</li> <li>• Presentations &amp; Panels</li> <li>• Dialogues &amp; working groups</li> <li>• Community of Practice (CoP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RJ Community of Practice (CoP)</li> <li>• College and Career Readiness CoP</li> <li>• CircleUp Podcast</li> </ul>



# More D.C. students will feel that they belong, are self-determined, and hopeful about the future

## Workshops



## Community-Based Learning



## Youth Conferences & Councils



## We Are Here!





# DC Schools (& beyond) will improve school cultures through inclusive and restorative practices

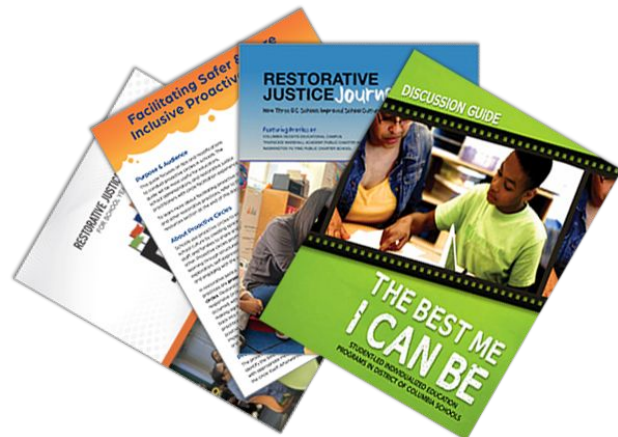
## Technical Assistance for Organizational Change



## Training, Modeling & Coaching



## Resources



## We Are Here!



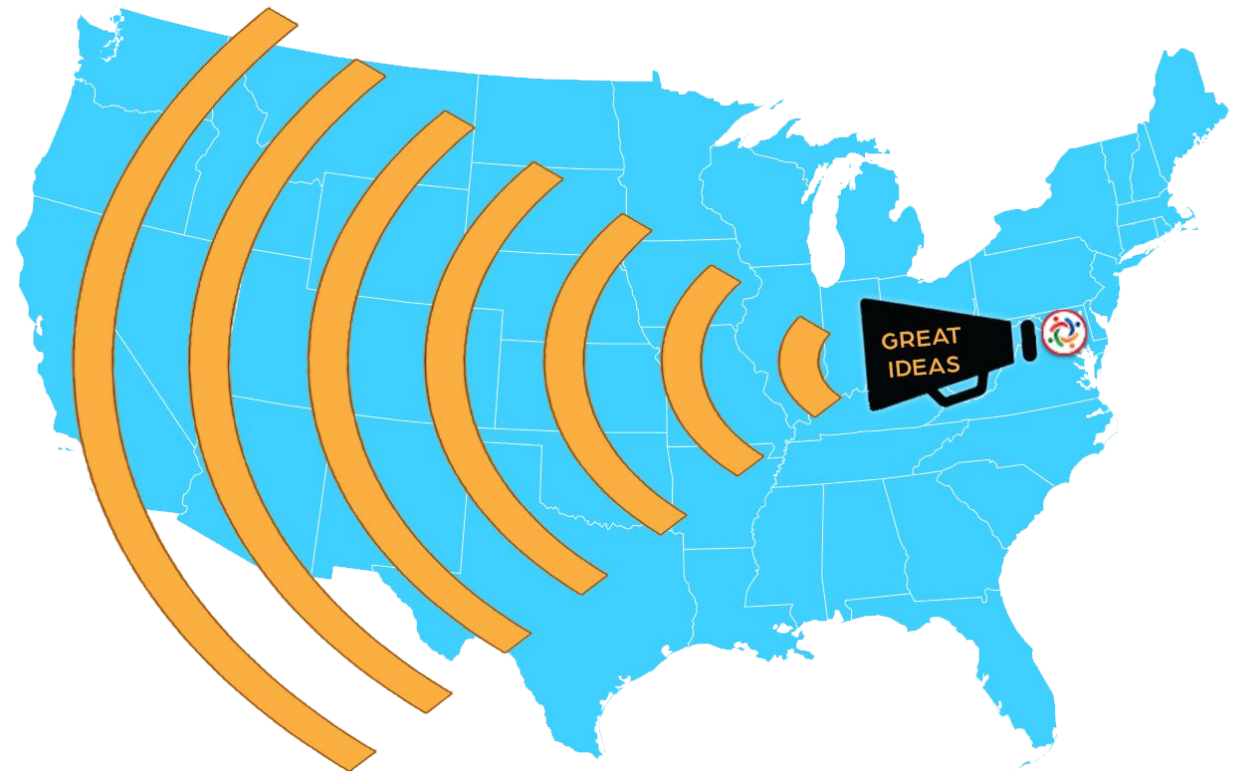


# SchoolTalk will be a driver of change in D.C. & beyond as nationally recognized experts in improving education for marginalized students

## Thought Leadership



## We Are Here!






## Convening for Change



# SchoolTalk Reach Metrics

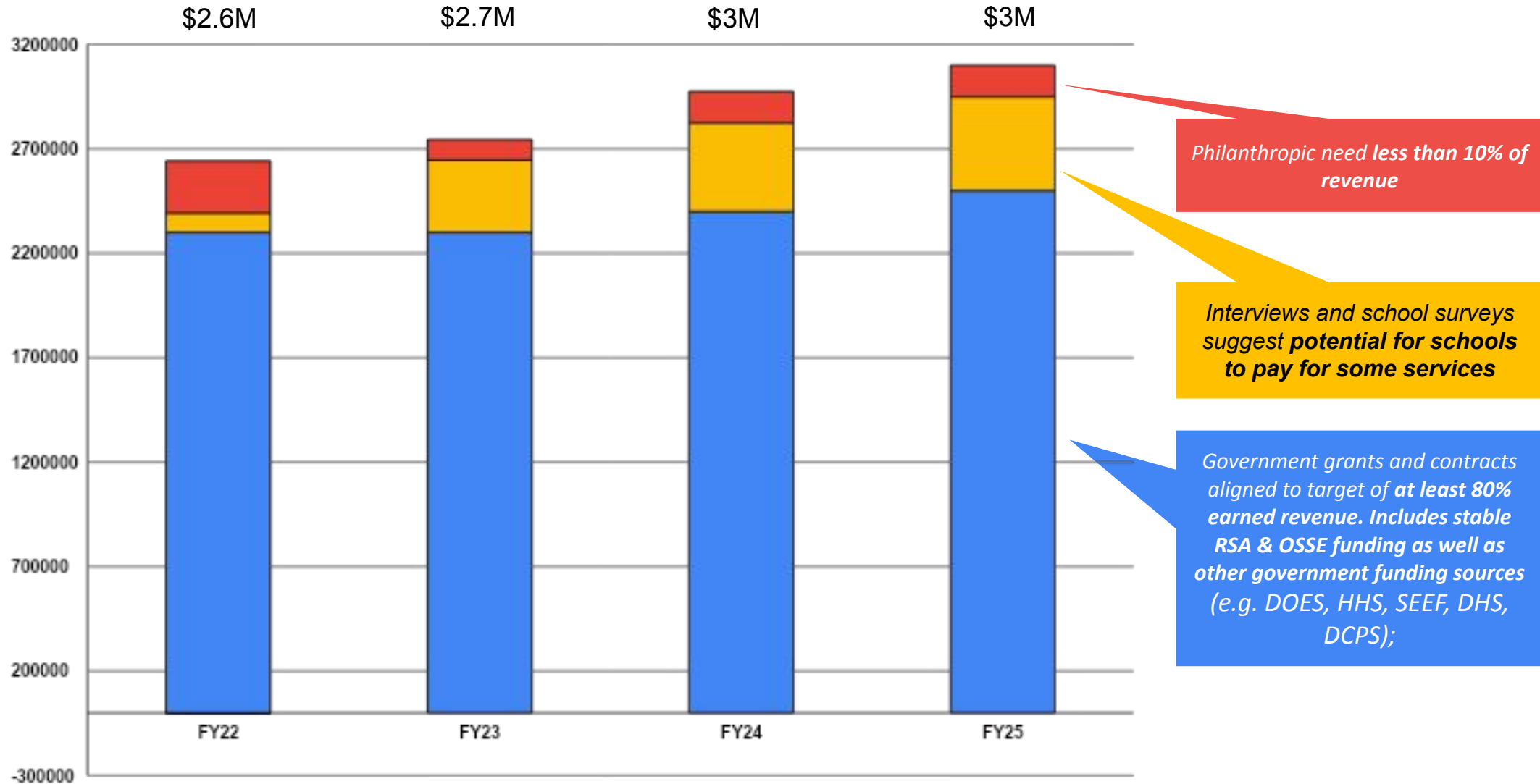
(See Appendix for comprehensive list of metrics)

Level of Work	Metric	Baseline (2021-22)	2023-25
<b>Students</b> 	# of D.C. youth involved in direct SchoolTalk programming	223+	↑
	# of hours of programming SchoolTalk youth have participated in	7859	↑
<b>Schools</b> 	# of schools that SchoolTalk works with	75	Little or no change
	# of school/organizational staff who participate in SchoolTalk programming	1200+	Little or no change
<b>Systems</b> 	# of organizations that SchoolTalk partners with	28+	↑
	# of conference presentations, webinars, and other thought leadership opportunities	<i>Not tracked</i>	↑

# Resources & Capacity

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# Multiple Sources Of Funding Are Expected To Support SchoolTalk Over the Next 3 Years (Updated April 2023)



<b>Target days cash on hand</b>	<b>90*</b>	<b>90*</b>	<b>90*</b>	<b>90*</b>
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\*TBD w/ Finance Committee



# Appendix

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# Glossary of Terms

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**Self-Determination:** Self determination is believing you can control your own destiny. Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities that lead people to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach these goals. It is about being in charge, but is not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. It means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one's life. Practicing self-determination also means one experiences the consequences of making choices. ([PACER](#))

**Restorative Justice:** Restorative justice is a philosophy and set of supporting practices that center a community on equitable and inclusive relationships of trust, understanding, and collaboration. It has its roots in indigenous approaches to living in relationship with others, including traditions of storytelling in circle and reintegration of those who have harmed others within the community. These practices are trauma-informed and provide opportunities for social-emotional learning for students, school staff, and families. Restorative practices seek to address the root causes of student behavior issues and give students and staff the tools and strategies they need to repair and improve relationships and communication, thus providing the foundation for learning to occur for all students.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is a critical response to existing physical and societal structures that make engagement, interaction and participation limited or exclusive. Structures created mostly from the perspectives of able-bodied and neurotypical individuals. Inclusion requires us to consider the space we create to allow our layered, intelligent, witty, thoughtful and creative students with disabilities to fully contribute within any setting. Inclusion takes constant and consistent reflection of how our school buildings, classrooms and activities potentially exclude students with disabilities. In addition to reflection, inclusion also requires action through partnerships, both within and outside of the school community.

**Disability:** Disability is used to describe a person's diagnosed cognitive and/or physical inability to engage, interact, or participate in daily activities.

# SchoolTalk has begun taking a more targeted approach to data tracking to show progress towards impact/outcomes demonstrating theory of change

## Immediate



## Near-term



## Medium-term



## Longer-term

Focus on easier-to-gather data that shows **SchoolTalk's current reach**

Focus on additional data that expands on SchoolTalk's reach and (where feasible) puts that data into context

Demonstrate emerging **success of Theory of Change outcomes** by incorporating **stakeholder perceptions and retrospectives\***  
*(typically gathered through surveys)*

Consider potential for **causational** (quasi-experimental) **research to prove success of Theory of Change outcomes and impact**

### **Current Metrics** *(Tracking since 20-21)*

### **Example Metrics**

### **Example Metrics**

### **Example Metrics**

# of DC transition-aged youth with disabilities supported through SchoolTalk programs (and overall # of youth served)

% of DC transition-aged youth supported through SchoolTalk programs

% of youth with disabilities who reflect they are more confident using their voices [TBD]

Students who participated in SchoolTalk work-based learning experiences were more likely to transition to competitive, integrated employment and/or post-secondary education

# of agencies/ organizations serving marginalized DC youth engaged regularly (through communities of practice, etc.)

% of DC students served directly in schools implementing restorative practices

% of students who participate in direct programming who report feeling a sense of belonging at ST activities/school

Students with disabilities at schools implementing SchoolTalk's whole school model achieve higher scores in math

# of schools served by SchoolTalk

# of events/leadership opportunities SchoolTalk youth have participated in (Youth Advisory Council, etc.)

% staff at schools implementing RJ whole school model who reflect they have changed their behavior due to the supports received

# of hours of programming SchoolTalk youth have participated in (including work-based learning, OSOV, pre-transition, etc.)

# of conference presentations, webinars, and other thought leadership opportunities

% of sector-level contacts that believe SchoolTalk is driving increased collaboration across agencies/ organizations

# of DC school staff who participate in SchoolTalk activities each year