



2023

state of network schools

BIG
PICTURE
LEARNING

What we consider BPL's 10 Distinguishers

One Student at a Time
Advisory
Learning Through Interests
Leadership Development
School Culture
School Organization
Professional Development
Post Secondary Planning
Family Involvement
Authentic Assessment

Check out the 10
Distinguishers
Playlist



Big Picture Learning, co-founded in 1995 by Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor, supports a network of schools dedicated to putting students at the center of their own learning. In Big Picture schools, young people spend considerable time in the community under the tutelage of mentors and are not evaluated solely on the basis of standardized tests. Instead, students are assessed on exhibitions of learning and demonstrations of achievement.

Big Picture schools are dedicated to serving young people in diverse settings, including urban, suburban and rural settings. However, it is important to note that our student demographics do not align with the national average. Big Picture Learning schools exist to provide needed opportunities for young people who have not been successfully served by traditional schools. Indeed, a significant portion of our network schools are classified as alternative, specifically designed for students who have experienced academic setbacks and are genuinely seeking the types of extraordinary educational environments that can offer them a path to success.

As schools - and our organization - turn toward a post-COVID future, we take this opportunity to look at **who we are**, **where we are** and **how we're doing**.

This report was produced from school data from the 2021-2022 school year, in partnership with our network schools.

It's no secret that the pandemic wrought chaos on our nation's school communities, and has a continuing impact. Staff, students, leaders, families – all have suffered lasting trauma. Across the country, schools are under enrolled and [understaffed](#); and teachers, administrators and students report [increased stress and dissatisfaction](#). In fact [reports](#) suggest that, nationally, high school students are struggling to feel a sense of belonging at school, with only 49% saying that they feel as though they are part of their school community.

Big Picture Learning's personalized approach to relationship- and community-building bolsters our schools and – as a result – we've seen our network grow in new, powerful ways.

BPL's short film – All In – explores the collective journeys of a handful of schools from Northern California as they discover the need to change something about their approach to teaching and learning, discover Big Picture Learning, center students in new ways, and realize there's no going back. Featuring students and educators from: North Bay Met Academy, Big Picture Ukiah, Ft. Bragg Big Picture and Marce Becerra Academy.

[The Upstream Collaborative](#) is a BPL initiative (supported by the generosity of the Stuart Foundation) to redesign alternative schools in California for equity and student success. As a community of practice, Upstream works with schools to support and assess instructional strategies and school practices to offer students equitable access to deep and sustained learning. BPL provides education, training and support to school leaders and their staffs to create new forms of high quality, student-centered and asset-based schools.

As a partner in this work, the [BPL Native American Initiative](#) prepares schools to meet the unique cultural and linguistic needs of Native American, Alaska Native and First Nations students; as guaranteed in their treaties. This work goes further in ensure that *all* students benefit from Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world.

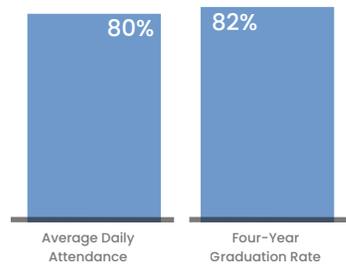
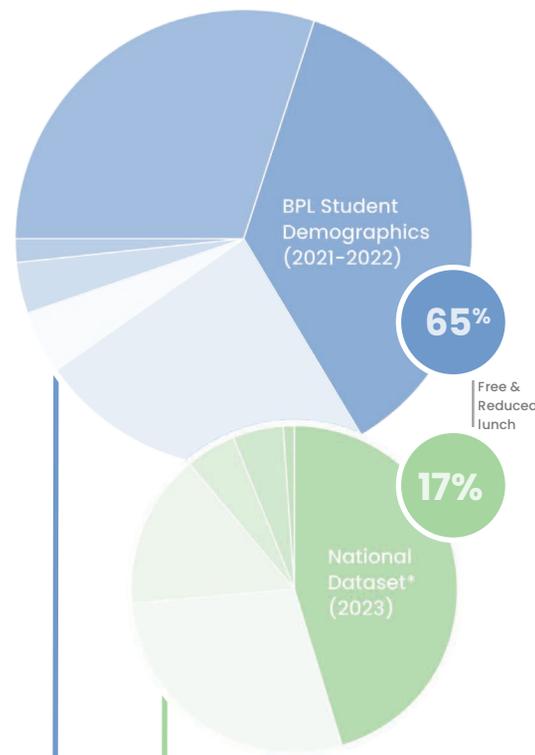
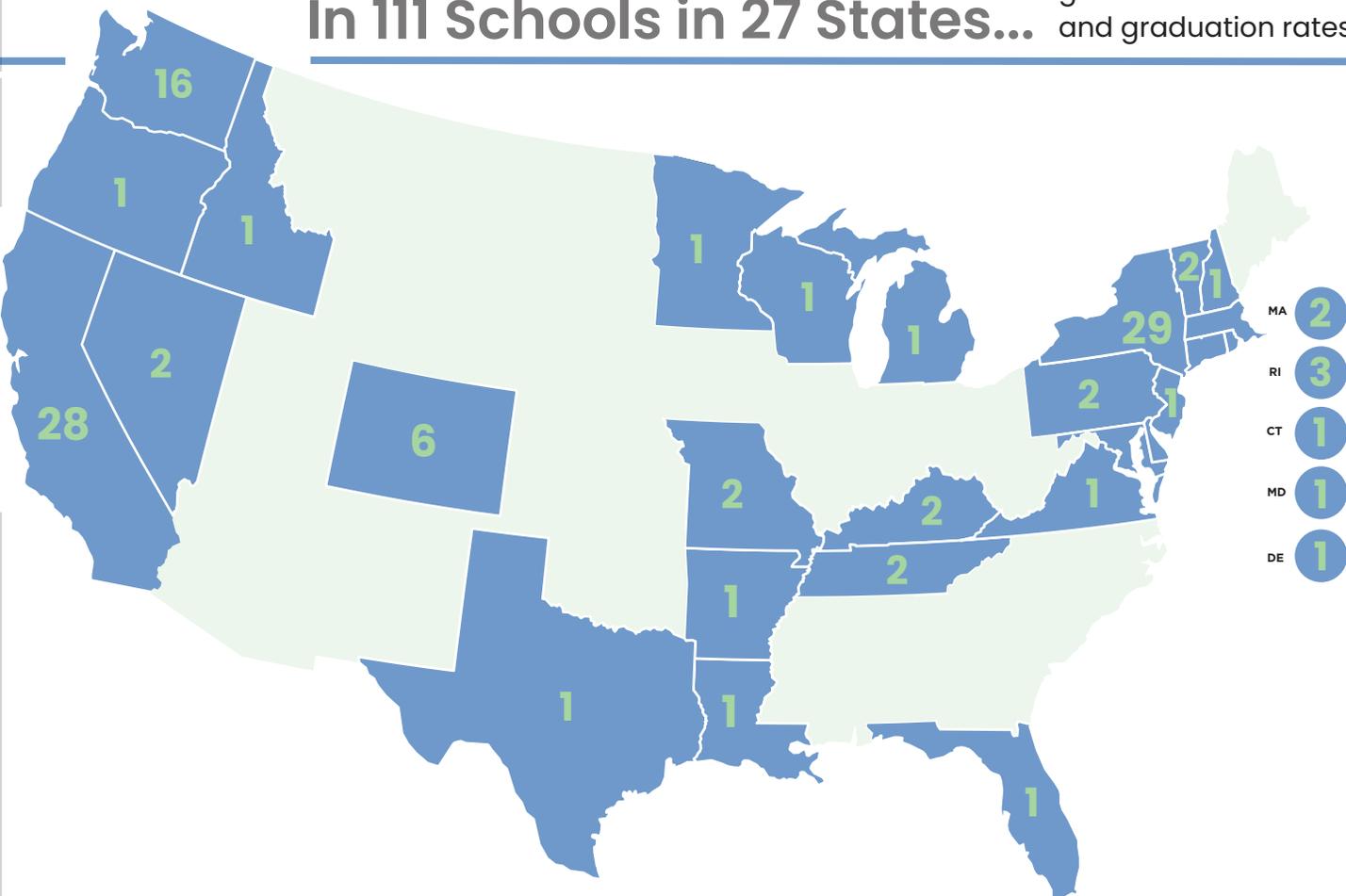
When the Upstream Collaborative started in 2017, we launched with 11 alternative schools, mostly situated in four Northern California counties. Today we partner with 40 schools in 17 counties across the state. Further, this work has helped inspire Communities of Practice in New York (28 schools statewide through the support of the Carnegie Corporation), Texas (serving 10 schools through work funded by the Fossil and Addy Foundations), an initial cohort in Arkansas and a collaborative of leaders from 8 different communities across the country preparing for what we call TYBO – The Year Before Opening.



Big Picture Learning students are succeeding.

Despite the fact that our schools enroll a majority of students who are over-aged and under-credited and who often face a greater share of life challenges, we see student attendance and graduation rates that are close to the national average.

In 111 Schools in 27 States...



36.2%
30.1%
23.5%
4.4%
3.7%
1.5%

28% Latino
45% White
15% Black
5% Two or More
5% Asian & Pacific Islander
1% American Indian

*Source: "Report on the Condition of Education 2023". National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at Institute of Education Sciences. May 2023



Data tells an important story, to be sure.

But it is the up-close
stories of our schools and students
which show the true impact of the
care and personalization of the
Big Picture school design.





New Village Girls Academy (Los Angeles, CA) was founded in 2006 and serves young women in grades 9-12. From the school's website: *Our students are inspiring and resilient - they push themselves to succeed and they welcome new students to the community. Because of their positive attitude, most visitors would not guess that many of our students deal with daunting challenges in their lives, such as: pregnancy, parenting, violence, foster care, poverty and juvenile justice involvement. Many struggle with mental health issues, learning disabilities, recent immigration, or lack English language skills.*

Schools in California are required to survey students for climate data. New Village's students overwhelmingly celebrate the school:

The majority of students strongly agree that school staff believe that they can succeed in class and that teachers connect classwork to life outside of the classroom.

The majority of students either strongly agree or agree that school challenges them academically and gives them a chance to learn about subjects that interest them.

Most students agree that they feel safe in school and that the school provides a positive and supportive learning environment.



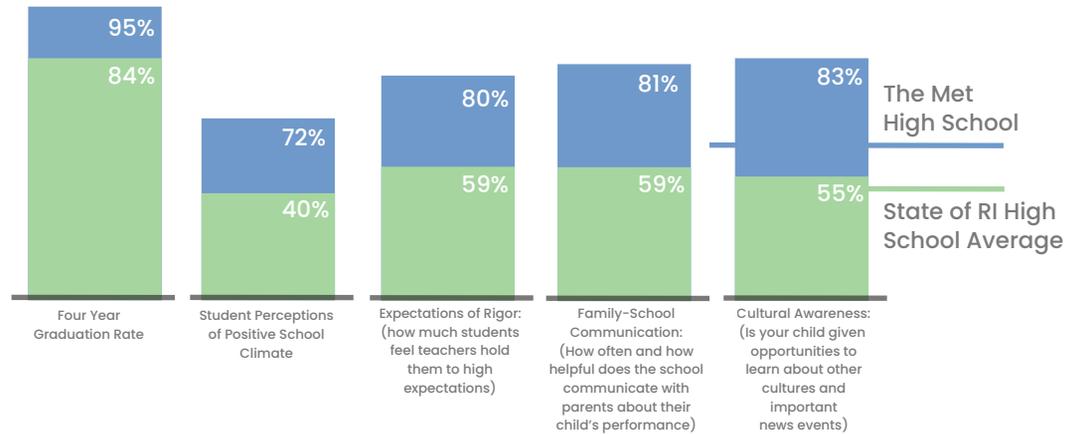
Featured on *The Today Show*: "How one L.A. high school uses meditation to help at-risk teens succeed."



See also: [New Village Girls Academy Annual Celebration 2023: Together We Shine.](#)



We love data as much as the next person, and we also invite you to read the inspiring success stories of the individual young people who make up The Met's 2023 graduating senior class (yes, all of them!)



The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (Providence, RI) recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The founding and flagship school in our network, The Met continues to graduate young people who are entrepreneurs, college-ready, and ready to step into what's next. A large part of this is the welcoming, supportive and loving community which has personified the school since it's inception.



Featured on *Morning in America*: "Are young people looking for alternatives to get to their dream life."

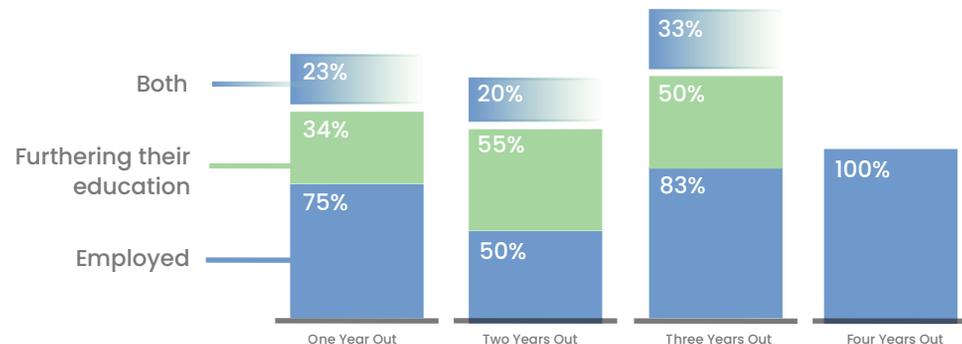


The Met School @MetSchool · Apr 20

Congratulations to Met senior Angel Feliz on being awarded the 2023 Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship! We're proud of your hard work and determination in pursuing computer science and engineering.

[#AmazonFutureEngineer](#) [#HigherEducation](#) [#STEM](#)





the Net tracks outcomes for students long after graduation and the school helps graduates and alumni remain gainfully engaged by helping them find success through both furthering their education and employment

The Net Schools (New Orleans, LA) include four re-engagement campuses for middle and high school students – the first of which launched in 2011. Students describe The Net community as *family*, and travel from all over the city to attend. The Net offers flexible options for students and a supportive environment that both encourages and challenges. This is particularly important given that one-fifth of The Net’s students are parenting. To accomodate and assist, Net schools provide on-campus childcare through their “Nest” program.



Featured in *Education Week*: “How This New Orleans School is Getting Teen Moms to Graduation.”



Featured in *Ed Surge*: “Teen Mothers Need a Lot of Support. This New Orleans School Actually Provides It.”



real-world learning impact

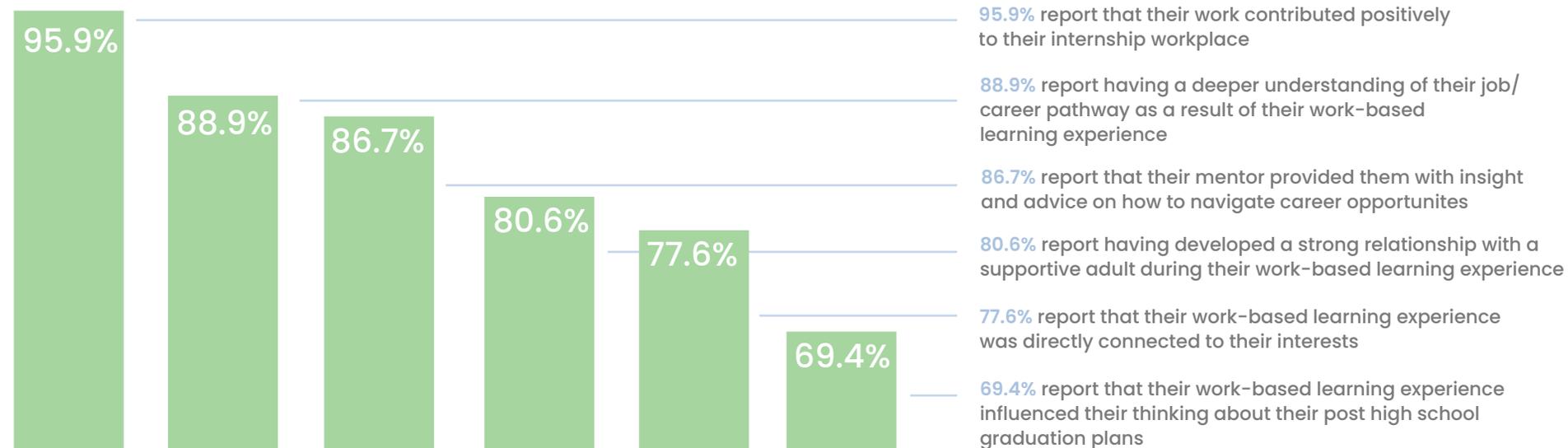
One cornerstone of our work at Big Picture Learning is learning outside of the classroom - what we call Leaving to Learn - through hands-on, real-world learning experiences such as internships and mentorships. To measure the impact of these real-world learning experiences, Big Picture has partnered with Dr. Maureen Kenny of the Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development to dig into a number of outcome measures. Early findings suggest that students:

Develop career readiness skills essential for navigating in school and beyond, such as: self-awareness, inter- and intra- personal communications, social networking, and self management.

Learn about future work and **explore, discover and refine their interests and passions** in ways which feed directly into their career aspirations.

Have opportunities to **build relationships** that help them make meaning of their experiences and **cultivate a sense of purpose and consciousness.**

Find that their experiences and relationships (both in school and through internships) **help them move from critical awareness to action.**



In a statewide survey of students attending Big Picture Learning schools in New York state (asking them to evaluate their internship experiences), we found that:

”

I guess I never got close with someone in the way that I did with my mentor. To be able to see her as a teacher was really, really valuable. She's my very first mentor, someone I could look up to and ask questions of. I don't think you find that from a lot of people.

My internships allowed me to kind of look through topics I was interested in and really say: *Okay, I like this topic. This is interesting.* And because of that, it's almost helped me choose some university courses for next year. So it's allowed me to make decisions for what I want to do with my life.

I feel like at some point if I keep going towards what I want to go towards, if there's an obstacle I don't really look at it like an obstacle. It's more of a stepping stone.

Source: Interviews with Big Picture Learning students as part of "Research on the Impact of Internships". Dr. Maureen Kenny (et.al), Boston College. Report forthcoming.

it all comes down to...

youth voice



All students can and should live lives of their own design. Lives supported by caring mentors and equitable opportunities to achieve their greatest potential. At Big Picture Learning, we activate opportunities through our global school community and suite of initiatives to make this so.

Our focus and emphasis on personalized relationships and community building – which has served as the foundation for our success for three decades – that has enabled our network to flourish, even in the face of a pandemic.

Our prioritization is students and, by extension, student-centered learning. In an educational world in which data rules the day, we lean into student exhibitions as the standard when it comes to demonstrations of proficiency. **We learn by doing. Why not then exhibit what we've learned, also by doing?**

We evaluate success through exhibition, care, relationships and respect; Big Picture Learning, its schools and its students routinely show that they're a cut above.



bigpicture.org

