



Summit Education Initiative 2024–2026 Strategic Plan



Equity and Achievement for All Students

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Dear Summit Education Initiative Stakeholders:

As we navigate through the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to a new educational landscape, the board of directors and staff determined the time is ripe to launch a new strategic plan for Summit Education Initiative (SEI) that focuses our efforts, resources, and energy on activities that will equip every student in Summit County with the tools for success in their chosen endeavors. We have a unique opportunity to redefine the trajectory of education for our community's youth, and this plan will help us do that.

This new three-year strategic plan builds on SEI's strong foundation to drive innovation and impact while positioning SEI for long-term success and sustainability. Much of the plan will be familiar to SEI partners and stakeholders: Our commitment to data and research remains a priority, as does SEI's role as a convener and thought leader. With this plan, SEI seeks to return to its roots as a Collective Impact organization, by prioritizing its role as the cradle-to-career "glue" in Summit County that drives lasting impact on educational attainment for our students. Looking ahead, SEI will increasingly explore how students' academic journeys are supported—or undermined—by their lives outside the classroom, partnering broadly to enhance students' physical and mental health, economic mobility, and safety. SEI also will continue to engage students and families and ensure they have a voice at decision-making tables about the future of education in the county.

We are pleased to share SEI's new plan with you, and most importantly, to collaborate with you to implement this work and chart a course towards a brighter future for our youth and our community.

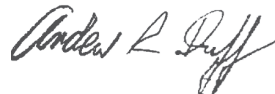
Thank you for your ongoing dedication to SEI and Summit County youth. Let's get to work!

David W. James, Ed.D.



Executive Director,
Summit Education Initiative

Andrew R. Duff



Chairman,
Summit Education Initiative Board of Directors

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Introduction

SEI’s longstanding vision is to create a future in which all Summit County students are prepared for success on their chosen path. At SEI, we are committed to increasing personal and regional prosperity through educational attainment. Our values serve as the cornerstone of our organization, guiding our actions and decisions as we work towards achieving our mission:

Vision:

A future in which all Summit County students are prepared for success on a chosen path.

Mission:

Increase personal and regional prosperity through educational attainment.

- **We are student centered.** We align resources to support all students.
- **We are collaborative.** We engage with partners to achieve a shared vision.
- **We are evidence-based.** We rely on expertise, evidence, and local context to inform actions.
- **We are inclusive.** We honor the experiences and diverse perspectives of students, families, staff, and partners.
- **We are trustworthy.** We keep our promises and honor our commitments.

To measure progress towards our vision, SEI has identified six “Leading Indicators of Success” at key transition points across a student’s journey from early childhood to adulthood. Research shows that students who are thriving at these transition points have greater educational attainment, are more likely to be successful on their chosen path, are more likely to achieve personal prosperity, and are more able to contribute to regional economic prosperity. SEI reports progress annually on each of the transition points for Summit County students as a core part of its work. Moving forward, this will remain a priority function of the organization, as detailed in Goal 1 on the pages that follow. (Visit seisummit.org/our-evidence-2/ on up-to-date data and target values for each transition point.)



Leading Indicators of Success



What is a “backbone organization”?

The backbone organization in a Collective Impact effort both helps maintain overall strategic coherence and coordinates and manages the day-to-day operations and implementation of work, including stakeholder engagement, communications, data collection and analysis, and other responsibilities. Here are some examples of activities a backbone organization does:

- Develop outcome indicators and performance measures to evaluate progress.
- Engage with and/or facilitate community engagement with a broader audience, as appropriate, to build buy-in from additional stakeholders.
- Develop external communications materials and a comprehensive community engagement and communications plan.
- Develop a list of priority Working Group members and co-chairs; invite members; manage meeting logistics.

In the Collective Impact model, equity is defined as, “Fairness and justice achieved through systematically assessing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and redressing [those] disparities through targeted actions.”

SEI: A Collective Impact Effort

A model first laid out in a 2011 [Stanford Social Innovation Review paper](#), Collective Impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change. [Collective Impact](#) is “a network of community members, organizations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change.”

[Research](#) shows that successful Collective Impact initiatives have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results:

- 1 Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.
- 2 Shared Measurement:** Agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used across all participating organizations for learning and improvement.
- 3 Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- 4 Continuous Communication:** Frequent and structured open communication across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- 5 Backbone Support:** Ongoing support by independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative, including guiding the initiative’s vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing funding.

Founded as a Collective Impact effort, SEI meets the five conditions of success and serves as the backbone support for the countywide shared vision. The new strategic plan is an opportunity for SEI to re-evaluate where it dedicates its resources and return to a true backbone role rather than administering programs. The 2024–2026 strategic plan closely aligns to the five Collective Impact conditions of success.

The Collective Impact model prioritizes equity in both the design and implementation of the work. Collective Impact efforts should address the systemic structures and practices that create barriers to equitable outcomes for all populations, particularly along the lines of race and class. SEI’s work demonstrably aligns with this concept: The organization consistently identifies inequities and achievement gaps across the county. **SEI is especially concerned with improving systems and eliminating inequitable outcomes for students experiencing poverty and members of other marginalized or underrepresented communities.**

SEI will continue to bring this commitment to its work across the goals and strategies laid out in this Strategic Plan.

About this Plan

Stakeholder Engagement

From November 2023 through March 2024, SEI partnered with Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) to speak with various stakeholders about SEI’s past, current, and future work. ACS conducted five focus groups with 38 individuals and seven one-on-one interviews with individuals representing diverse SEI stakeholders across the county, including from the business, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. ACS also fielded an online survey using SurveyMonkey to stakeholders across the county to assess perceptions of SEI’s current/recent work, role, and future opportunities for the organization; 193 individuals answered most questions on the survey. Based on the findings, ACS created the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats table below, which informed the goals and strategies outlined in this plan.

<h3>Strengths</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Data: assessment, reports, tracking; memoranda of understanding with districts; milestones tracking■ Positive reputation■ Cross-sector partnerships■ Current SEI leadership and staff■ Collaboration with families and students■ Experienced and diverse board■ Mission	<h3>Weaknesses</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Fundraising challenges■ Lack of communication about SEI’s work and value■ Lack of focus in the work/mission creep■ Interruptions in communication/continuity because of COVID■ Staff turnover
<h3>Opportunities</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Collaborative culture of the county■ New elected officials/community leaders■ Policy advocacy■ Business sector engagement■ Available funding streams associated with priority work areas (e.g., early care and education)	<h3>Threats</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Insufficient fundraising/funding■ Attacks on public education at statehouse■ Changing educational landscape (more online learning, harder to reach students)■ Trouble recruiting and retaining staff

Plan Implementation and Monitoring

The Strategic Plan includes goals and strategies for the next three years of SEI’s work. SEI’s leadership and staff will take ownership for translating the goals and strategies into work plans that include tactics, timeline, metrics, and roles. The work plans will be “living” documents, updated in real time as work progresses. The SEI Board will ensure the plan is implemented as designed, dedicating time to review metrics and progress during each meeting. These regular touchpoints will provide an opportunity for SEI to pivot and try other approaches if specific tactics and strategies are not achieving desired results.

2024–2026 Strategic Plan

SEI's new strategic plan has four goals that will work together to drive progress toward SEI's mission and vision:

- 1 Empower partner organizations with valuable data-driven insights, so they can improve the effectiveness of their educational interventions.
- 2 Convene and collaborate with partner organizations to align efforts and achieve better, more equitable educational outcomes for Summit County youth.
- 3 Be the lead advocate for cradle-to-career education that leads to better outcomes for Summit County students, families, and the economy.
- 4 Strengthen and sustain Summit Education Initiative.

The pages that follow review each goal in detail and describe strategies that will be implemented to support progress on that goal.

SEI is a long-time member of StriveTogether, a national network of local communities striving to achieve racial equity and economic mobility. The StriveTogether Theory of Action™ has four pillars, which align to SEI's strategic plan:

- 1 **Shared community vision:** A diverse group of people in a geographic area agree on what shifts to policies, practices, resources, and power structures produce equitable cradle-to-career outcomes.
- 2 **Evidence-based decision making:** The process of rigorously collecting, analyzing, sharing, and taking action with data (both outcomes and systems data), including youth and family perspectives and narratives, to make shifts in policies, practices, resources, and power structures that produce equitable cradle-to-career outcomes.
- 3 **Collaborative action:** Members of a partnership collectively adopt the tools and processes and build the necessary knowledge and skills to make powerful contributions that shift policies, practices, resources, and power structures leading to equitable cradle-to-career outcomes.
- 4 **Investment and sustainability:** A partnership has cultural, financial, and social assets to support the collaboration necessary for producing and maintaining shifts in policies, practices, resources, and power structures that will lead to equitable cradle-to-career outcomes.

Learn more at strivetogether.org/what-we-do/theory-of-action/

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1:

Empower partner organizations with valuable data-driven insights, so they can improve the effectiveness of their educational interventions.

SEI has a long history of inspiring action with evidence and research and will prioritize this work over the next three years. SEI's role will continue to range from data collection (in partnership with school districts) to management to analysis. SEI will retain the capacity to conduct program evaluations to understand the impact of various efforts, a service it provides for a cost.

Strategies:

- 1** *Collect, analyze, interpret, and share academic and demographic data in collaboration with school and organizational partners to identify educational attainment trends, inequities, and promising practices.* SEI maintains and will grow more partnerships with county school districts, charter schools, and private schools to collect data on as many students as possible. It will be increasingly important for SEI to use its widespread access to student data to lift up gaps in educational attainment and help partners find solutions to address those specific gaps.
- 2** *Update Leading Indicators of Success to align with evidence and community priorities.* As more evidence on the drivers of educational attainment becomes available, so too must SEI's seminal tool, the Leading Indicators of Success, change to reflect new evidence and the priorities of Summit County. Now is the time for SEI and its stakeholders to revisit the milestones and targets featured in the Leading Indicators of Success and revise it accordingly.
- 3** *Provide training and technical assistance to build the capacity of SEI partners to manage, analyze, and interpret student data, based on partners' needs and priorities.* Schools and school districts in Summit County have varying capacity when it comes to crunching numbers, and SEI will help those partners build their internal capacity to use the data they collect from students to make decisions about what happens at the classroom and district levels.
- 4** *Forge partnerships with other data-focused organizations to maximize each organization's strengths and avoid duplicating data collection and analysis efforts.* Dozens of Summit County organizations collect data from and about students and families. As a Collective Impact effort, SEI will help coordinate and align those efforts to maximize resources, limit redundant data collection and analysis, and ensure all available data is feeding into a consistent narrative about educational attainment in the county.
- 5** *Conduct program evaluations to understand the impact of specific interventions on educational inequities, educational attainment, and academic outcomes.* SEI will continue to meet requests to conduct program evaluations, a function that both fulfills staff and supports SEI's bottom line.

Goal 2:

Convene and collaborate with partner organizations to align efforts and achieve better, more equitable educational outcomes for Summit County youth.

As a backbone organization, SEI builds commitment to increased equity, achievement, and educational attainment. It will continue to do so by sometimes leading and often contributing to cross-sector, multi-stakeholder conversations about the best way to solve complex problems that result in measurable action.

Strategies:

1 Facilitate or participate in Community Action Networks (CANs) to improve specific cradle-to-career indicators of success. SEI plays both leadership and supporting roles in the CANs, a longstanding set of cross-sectors groups that work to solve specific community problems, often aligned to the transition points in the Leading Indicators of Success model. CANs meet regularly to share ideas and use data to make an impact. SEI staff will facilitate some CANs and serve as members of others. This distinction is important: As a backbone organization, SEI must know when it should be the convener when it should step back and contribute.

In addition, SEI will continue to include students and families in the CANs as well as convene them separately to ensure work across the cradle-to-career continuum reflects student and family needs and lived experiences. SEI's belief that there should be "nothing about us without us" will continue to undergird its student and family engagement efforts.

2 Join and contribute to committees and coalitions working on the social determinants of learning (including economic security, health, safety, housing, and food security). SEI will bring its expertise to the table to ensure the county takes a holistic approach to youth success that encompasses academics **and** the social determinants that shape educational attainment beyond the confines of school walls.

Goal 3:

Be the lead advocate for cradle-to-career education that leads to better outcomes for Summit County students, families, and the economy.

SEI's hard-earned reputation as a trusted expert in education positions it well to elevate the conversation about what it will really take to improve educational outcomes for Summit County youth—with policymakers, the media, and the public. SEI has and will continue to lead tough conversations about the status of education in the county including outlining educational inequities, the implications of such inequities, and what can be done to address them, while consistently amplifying the voices of those most impacted: students.

Strategies:

- 1** *Serve as a proactive thought partner with community organizations and schools as they devise and implement strategies to increase student success from cradle to career.* Dozens of community partners seek SEI's guidance as they work to understand the data in front of them and make wise choices about how to spend their time and money. SEI's role as a trusted partner with whom to process complex ideas and strategize is a large part of its strong brand and a driver of long-term systems change. SEI will continue to offer its unique perspective to organizations tackling complex issues in the education space.
- 2** *Ensure that students, parents/caregivers, and families can share their perspectives and needs with decisionmakers and thought leaders.* Giving students and families—especially those from historically underrepresented and disengaged communities—a seat at the table is a critical first step in shifting power to those who should be informing decision-making from the start. SEI will also ensure students and families have a platform to advocate for themselves to the people making decisions, whether that is city council, a school board, or the Ohio State Legislature.
- 3** *Advocate for local, state, and federal policies that will facilitate progress on cradle-to-career indicators of success within Summit County.* In partnership with local, state, and national education policy advocates, SEI will leverage its expertise and reputation to support policies that prioritize Summit County youth.
- 4** *Proactively and publicly communicate county progress on cradle-to-career indicators of success with an emphasis on ensuring all students have a fair chance to succeed.* In today's fractured media environment, it is more important than ever for SEI to deploy multiple communication tactics using many channels—from newspapers to social media—to a wide variety of audiences to share updates about educational attainment in the county and audience-specific information about what people can do to support this critical work.
- 5** *Lead or participate in local and statewide conversations about educational equity, achievement, and attainment in Summit County.* SEI's unique strength lies in its ability to bring diverse stakeholders together to have hard conversations about how to achieve a shared vision for a better future; this is thought leadership at its finest. SEI will continue to model the sustained focus and commitment necessary from all sectors and leaders to produce lasting systems change.

Goal 4:

Strengthen and sustain Summit Education Initiative.

In addition to serving as a backbone organization, SEI is a standalone nonprofit organization. To successfully drive cradle-to-career Collective Impact efforts in the community, SEI must be financially viable, recruit and retain talented staff, and make strategic decisions about how it uses its own resources. The strategies in Goal 4 reflect this mandate and will help ensure the organization remains a vital part of the Summit County ecosystem for decades to come.

Strategies:

- 1** *Build staff knowledge and capacity to fulfill key functions of a backbone organization as described in the Collective Impact model, including policy advocacy, community engagement, and equity.* The staff doing the work day in and day out are at the heart of SEI's success. SEI is fortunate to have talented, committed leadership and staff and will continue to provide the training and support needed to maintain a strong team.
- 2** *Maintain robust financial and human resource management practices, including promoting a culture of inclusivity and equity within the organization.* SEI will keep an intentional focus on ensuring its internal operations align to its values and to industry best practices.
- 3** *Develop and implement a strategic fundraising plan to secure public and private funds to support SEI's work over time.* SEI will review existing and potential new and diverse funding streams to devise a short- and long-term plan to ensure its financial stability over time.
- 4** *Consistently and strategically communicate about SEI's work to partners, policymakers, the media, and the public.* In addition to communicating about educational attainment in the county overall, SEI will create and implement a strategic communication plan to build upon its strong reputation among key audiences in the community. This will support SEI's long-term sustainability by ensuring the organization itself is front and center in the minds of funders and donors and will also build collective buy-in for the mission. The more people know SEI and understand its value, the more they will support its work with their time, talent, and treasure.
- 5** *Review direct service programs led by SEI and identify which programs SEI will continue to manage, which it will end, and which it will transition to partner organizations to maintain.* SEI historically has stepped in to implement direct service programs for Summit County students, families, and educators. Now is the time for SEI to revisit its role in various programs and determine the best way to leverage its resources to drive sustainable change.

Strategy Decision Tool

SEI's reputation as a trusted partner and data expert means the organization is asked to take on many projects and tasks. The set of questions below will support the SEI leadership, staff, and board in assessing which opportunities it should pursue and which would be better fulfilled by other partners. This tool will help the organization stay focused on its mission and maximize its ability to make an impact on the projects it does pursue.

Mission and Values	Does this align with and help us advance our mission?
	Does this align with our values?
	Does this fit into our strategic plan?
Community	Are we the best organization to take this on? If not, who could?
	Are potential partners mutually invested in this activity/strategy?
	Which communities might this activity/strategy engage? Which might it isolate?
	What assumptions will this activity/strategy reinforce? Which might it disrupt?
Impact	Does this reflect youth and community voice?
	How will we measure the short- and long-term impact?
Team	Who will be responsible for this work?
	What responsibilities would staff need to adjust to do this well?
	Are there subcontractors who could help/lead this work?
	Will this contribute to fulfilling work—individually and collectively?
Resources	Do we have the current and future resources (staff capacity, funding, etc.) to do this work well and in the time requested?
	Does our commitment to the work extend beyond the initial funding source, if there is one?
	How will this impact our overall financial sustainability (if we take this opportunity <i>and</i> if we do not)?
Other	Are there other reasons we would decide to pursue this opportunity (e.g., politics, marketing/branding potential)?

Conclusion

Over the next three years, SEI will be guided by the strategic goals and strategies laid out in this plan, ensuring that we are not only responsive to the immediate needs of students in the community but also proactive in creating sustainable and impactful change. Focusing our efforts on this plan will allow SEI to build on our past successes while proactively tackling the challenges ahead with innovation, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. The journey ahead will require dedication, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt to evolving circumstances. The implementation of this Strategic Plan will be a dynamic process, informed by ongoing evaluation and feedback, ensuring that we remain aligned with our mission and responsive to an ever-changing educational ecosystem. SEI is enthusiastic to partner with all stakeholders as our collective work continues. Together, we can amplify our impact and create lasting positive change.



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