

Co-Designing GPRA Data Stories

North Hartford Ascend



NORTH HARTFORD ASCEND

[North Hartford Ascend](#) is a prenatal-to-career initiative designed to ensure children and families living in the North Hartford Promise Zone, which includes Clay Arsenal, Northeast, and Upper Albany neighborhoods, have the support they need to reach their full potential. Facilitated by Connecticut Children's and its Office for Community Child Health, Ascend's affiliated organizations are working to create a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated network of programs, services, and other resources that are universally available to children and families. Funded by a U.S. Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods Grant, Ascend promotes systems transformation by focusing on six core components, as outlined in Figure 1.

Data Collection and Analysis is a core component of Ascend. Ascend, as an initiative, collects and analyzes data to conduct process and outcome evaluations, identify system gaps, support advocacy efforts, and inform quality improvement. University of Hartford's [Center for Social Research \(CSR\)](#) is located within the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, and is known for its interdisciplinary social research expertise. CSR and the Hartford Data Collaborative (HDC) are co-leads of data and evaluation for Ascend. HDC, an initiative within [CTData Collaborative](#), works with nonprofits across the city to collect, link, and analyze data to improve programs and services for all Hartford residents.

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Author: Annika Anderson

Contributors: Wes Younts & Franchesca Aguilar

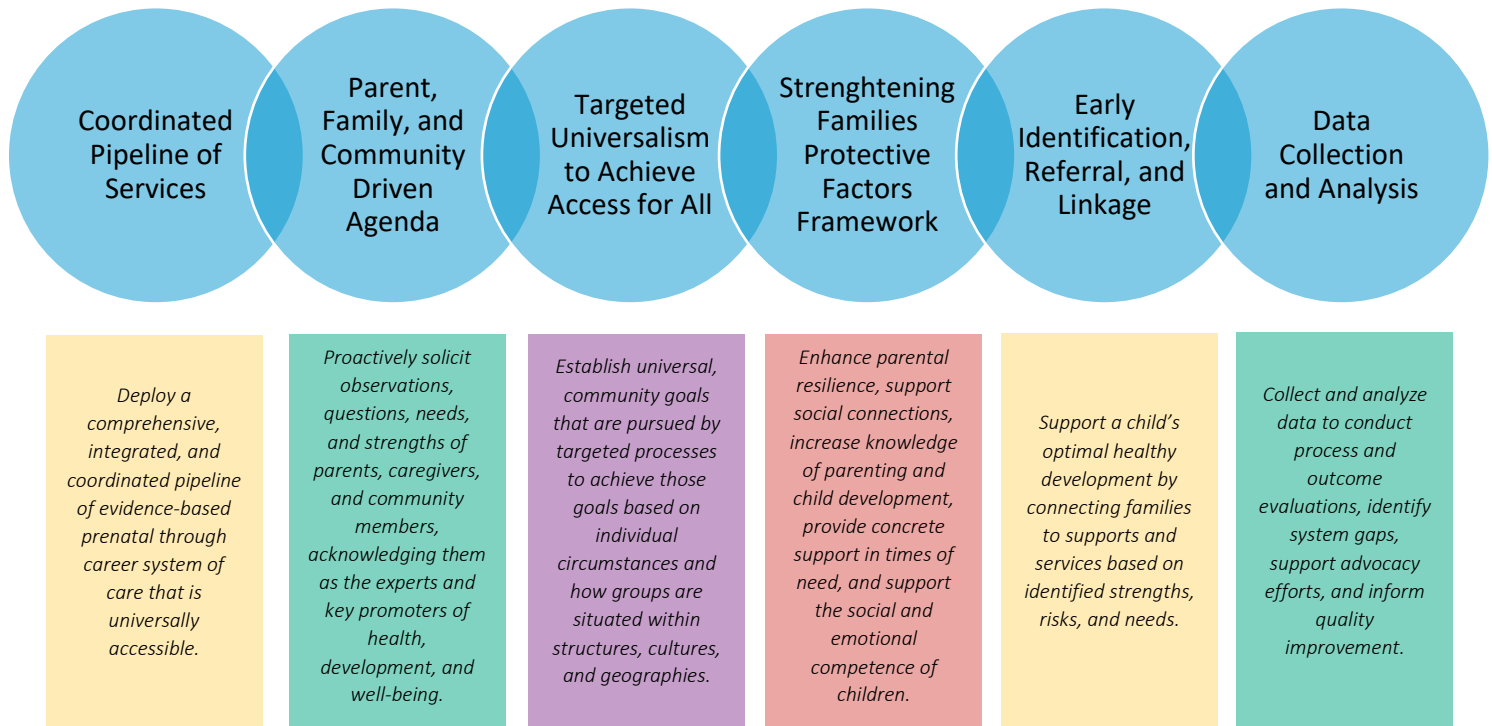


Childhood
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Figure 1: Ascend Core Components



CHILDHOOD PROSPERITY LAB

[Childhood Prosperity Lab](#) (the Lab) advances social innovations that support the optimal health, development, and well-being of children, families, and communities where they live, learn, work, play and pray. Collaboration is key to our work. We partner with practitioners, service providers, families and changemakers across Connecticut and beyond to improve child health outcomes. Our multidisciplinary team at Connecticut Children's brings expertise in family sciences, child development, public health and more to drive impactful change. The Lab has three core components that are unique to our approach:

- Co-designing solutions in partnership with children, families and communities using human-centered design approaches and methodologies;
- Strengthening family and community protective factors; and
- Advancing systems change to help children and families thrive in all areas of life.

PROJECT OVERVIEW & SCOPE OF PARTNERSHIP

In May of 2025, CSR submitted an inquiry to Childhood Prosperity Lab to explore how Human-Centered Design (HCD) approaches and methodologies might be applied to eliciting insights and perspectives from both residents in the community and service providers.

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Promise Neighborhood Grantees are required to report on Government Performance and Results Act indicators (GPRAs), which represent key population-level results that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of grant programs. The GPRAs require agencies like Connecticut Children's to set goals, measure results, and report progress, ensuring accountability and transparency in federal programs. As part of Ascend, CSR tracks, analyzes, and reports results for ten GPRAs. CSR and North Hartford Ascend collectively value sharing data with residents and providers in the community to 1) understand and elevate community voice and priorities; 2) strengthen the relationship and trust between providers and residents; 3) collaboratively understand and make meaning of the data; and 4) in partnership, determine how to put the data into action.

In April, CSR presented a sample "GPRA Data Story" to their colleagues in the Data and Evaluation Work Group to elicit feedback on the content and presentation of the data. In addition to eliciting feedback from their peers, CSR expressed the value of gathering insights from residents in the North Hartford Promise Zone as well as service providers working in the community. Through co-design, CSR is working towards packaging publicly available data stories that will be accessible, understandable, and representative of what is currently known about the outcomes related to Ascend. In an intake meeting with Childhood Prosperity Lab, CSR expressed the following as goals for the co-design sessions:

1. Articulate the value
 - Why does the data matter?
 - What does the data mean?
 - Now what?
2. Assess the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for understanding the data
3. Generate the space for inquisitiveness and curiosity

While the data story presented in the co-design sessions focuses on the *Student Mobility GPRA*, the feedback and recommendations provided will be applied to **all** ten GPRA data stories. For these reasons, the structure, language, visuals, and framing of the sample data story were the selected focus areas of discussion and reflection in co-design sessions.

OUR APPROACH: METHODOLOGIES & FACILITATION

Childhood Prosperity Lab (the Lab) team members are Human-Centered Design (HCD) practitioners. The Lab defines HCD as a methodological framework for centering the needs, goals, priorities, and perspectives of children, families, communities and other key stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of social innovations.

The Lab originally proposed a two-pronged approach to co-designing the GPRA data stories: engaging members of the Ascend Resident and Community Work Group (RCAG) and engaging service providers at the May Service Provider Meeting, a recurring activity of the Partner Engagement Work Group.

The Resident and Community Advisory Group helps to ensure that community voices are heard and brought to Ascend partners and leadership. By sharing questions and feedback from the community and promoting the Community Conversations, RCAG directly informs the development of Ascend. The Partner Engagement Work Group exists to build stronger connections, collaboration, and capacity building among Ascend workgroups, partner organizations and North Hartford residents.

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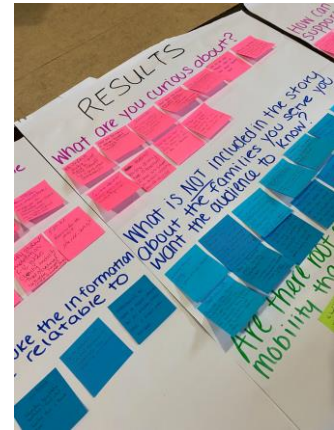


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Co-Designing with the Resident and Community Advisory (RCAG) Work Group

A team member from the Lab and CSR joined the monthly RCAG meeting on May 19th to present the GPRA data story and facilitate semi-structured discussion. To guide the discussion, the Lab leveraged *Rose, Thorn, Bud*, and *Creative Matrix* – two HCD methodologies. *Rose, Thorn, Bud* is a structured frame for understanding the strengths (rose), challenges (thorn), and opportunities (bud) of something (LUMA Institute, 2025). It is a helpful methodology to guide iterative brainstorming and well-rounded feedback. *Creative matrix* is a methodology that promotes brainstorming, known as a frame to “generate many wide-ranging ideas in a short amount of time,” according to the LUMA Institute (LUMA Institute, 2025).



In the monthly RCAG meeting, a team member from CSR presented the data story, which was focused on Student Mobility. The presenter highlighted each subheading (e.g., “What is student mobility?”) and key information within the six-page document. After answering clarifying questions, the group transitioned to a semi-structured discussion guided by the following questions:

- Based on the data story sample presented, what are you curious about?
- One thing I clearly understood about the data story was:
- One thing that I found challenging to understand about the data story was:
- One recommendation I have for strengthening how the data story is structured is:

To support notetaking, an internal team member shared their screen in presentation mode and documented feedback from residents in real time on the respective discussion slides. In a round robin style, residents shared their feedback and asked clarifying questions of the team.

Co-Designing with Providers at the Ascend Monthly Service Provider Meeting

On May 29th, 23 service providers attended the Ascend Service Provider Monthly Meeting. After a level set from the CSR team, physical copies of the GPRA Student Mobility Data Story were distributed to the attendees. Each service provider was given pink, blue, and green sticky notes and pens to document their reflections, questions, and semi-structured feedback.

The activity was structured by the three sections of the data story: Introduction, Results, and Ascend Related Programs. Service providers were given 3-5 minutes to read each section independently, were prompted to use their sticky notes to document feedback in response to pre-determined discussion questions, and then the group engaged in discussion to socialize key insights, ideas, considerations, and recommendations. Two methodologies were leveraged to guide the activities: *Creative Matrix* and *Round Robin*. Round Robin is a methodology for gathering collective input, as it “allows for the generation of fresh ideas by providing a format for group authorship,” according to the LUMA Institute (LUMA Institute, 2025). The Lab regularly leverages this methodology because it creates space for everyone’s voice to be heard.

KEY LEARNINGS & FINDINGS

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Resident and Community Advisory Work Group

The following key themes capture areas of group consensus and action-oriented recommendations for the CSR team as they continue to iterate the GPRA data story templates. Qualitative feedback from the session is documented in Appendix A.

Key Themes:

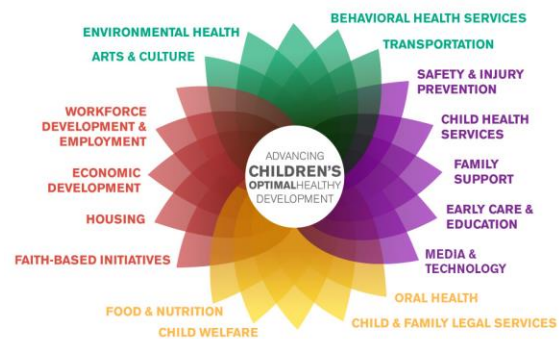
- Residents are curious about the root causes and social drivers contributing to the GPRA results, especially how the shift/s in local and societal contexts play a role.
- It is helpful that the data story identifies the data sources and explains how the data is collected and calculated.
- Consider engaging youth and families as another partner in the co-design of the GPRA data story template so that their lived experiences are represented as context.
- Clearly define the year/s the data stories represent and who the data is specifically representative of.
- Include a more comprehensive program and resource list that may support each GPRA at the bottom of each GPRA data story.
- Apply a strength-based approach to the data stories. What are successful examples of what is being done within each GPRA to showcase impact and positive community efforts?

Service Providers

The following key themes capture recommendations and key considerations that emerged from the Service Provider Meeting that the CSR team should consider as they continue to iterate the GPRA data story templates. Qualitative feedback and specific areas of inquiry from the session are documented in Appendix B.

Key Themes:

- Service providers are curious about the root causes contributing to the GPRA results, especially how transportation barriers, community violence, and housing stability are playing a role.
- Service providers are curious about how student mobility data from the Promise Zone compares to Hartford mobility, state mobility, and national mobility data.
- Explore ways to meaningfully incorporate stories directly from youth and families about the student mobility trends.
- Focus on how strengthening families' protective factors, like concrete support in times of need and community connection, can address the root causes of student mobility.



OUR IMPACT

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Resident and Community Advisory (RCAG) Work Group

During the session, 19 unique ideas and reflections were documented as a result of the conversation. After the meeting, a post-session survey was sent to participants to understand their quality and satisfaction with the discussion and activities, which were informed by Human-Centered Design. The following value and satisfaction data is reflective of five respondents:

- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were structured so that participants could meaningfully provide input;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of community, a protective factor of social connection; and
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that their voice and perspectives were heard and respected.

Service Providers

During the session, more than 68 unique ideas and inputs were generated as a result of brainstorming and discussion. At the conclusion of each Service Provider Monthly Meeting, a post-session survey is administered to evaluate participant satisfaction. The following value and satisfaction data are reflective of eight respondents:

- 87.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were engaging and facilitated effectively;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the information was clear;
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the topic was relevant; and
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend attending the meeting with others and would likely attend future meetings themselves.

NEXT STEPS

The following steps are informed by a compilation of feedback from the Resident and Community Advisory work group members and service providers from the May Service Provider Meeting. While the initial goal of the co-design sessions was to understand the strengths and opportunities for data story template structure and orientation, which is documented throughout the report, the team collected extensive feedback on the content that will continue to be explored within the Data & Evaluation Work Group. The recommendations listed below are high-level next steps for the CSR team as the GPRA data story template and content evolves:

- Leverage the feedback documented in Appendices A and B to update the GPRA data story before submitting the deliverable to the State Department of Education (SDE) for approval.
- Consider engaging youth residing in the North Hartford Promise Zone in a co-design session to understand the “content” of the GPRA data stories. Both residents and service providers highlighted the opportunity to incorporate youth perspectives and lived experiences into the GPRA data stories to tell a more accurate story “behind” the numbers.
- At the end of each GPRA data story, consider including a more comprehensive program and resource list that may support each GPRA. This might also be an opportunity to link and drive people to the Community Resource Map, an innovative resource that visually

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presents North Hartford Ascend providers by service category and developmental stage using a geospatial information system.

STAY CONNECTED

- **Email:** childhoodprosperitylab@connecticutchildrens.org
- **Facebook:** Connecticut Children’s Community Child Health
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APPENDECIES

Appendix A: Resident and Community Advisory Group Feedback

Based on the data story sample presented, what are you curious about?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the most pressing community needs that are impacting student mobility?• To what degree is community violence, specifically, impacting student mobility?• Are exit interviews being facilitated as students are leaving schools or starting at new schools to understand, from the student/family perspective, why student mobility is occurring?• How are we going to do something different? What are programs going to do differently in response to the data?• To what degree is the role of home ownership vs. renting impacting student mobility?• To what degree is school construction impacting student mobility?• Are students and families receiving the level of support they need to stay in their schools?• How are changes in the local community and in society more broadly impacting student mobility? For example: To what degree is social media impacting student mobility? Social media can tend to spark social comparison, and, residents have observed a “shift” in “moral code” across generations. Might this be a contributing factor?
One thing I clearly understood about the data story was:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is helpful to understand where the data comes from (i.e., the sources)• It is helpful to understand some of the root causes and variables• “I had an opportunity to read the data story this morning and it was excellent.” – RCAG member• The visual representations of the data are helpful.
One thing that I found challenging to understand about the data story was:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It would be helpful to have a better understanding of who is included in the data story (i.e., between which year/s is the data reflective of? What is the catchment of the student/s it represents?)• It would be helpful to see a deeper analysis of root causes, and, specifically, how partners of Ascend are working to address these root causes.

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- For visual feedback, it would be helpful to see the data resemble an infographic with a “snapshot” and colorful context that complements the numbers.
- Consider adding considerations for the future, such as what supports are available in the community to address the focus of the GPRA and how it might change outcomes (e.g., the Hartford Promise scholarship increase will certainly have an impact on student mobility)
- To enhance the “storytelling” piece of the GPRA, include youth and family voice to ensure that the data is trustworthy and/or provide further insight into the aforementioned “community context”.

One recommendation I have for strengthening how the data story is structured is:

- Include and explore a list of other resources that exist in the community that support each GPRA.
- What are successful examples of what communities are doing? Examples of how residents, community, and providers are actively addressing GPRA’s will ignite optimism.

Appendix B: Service Provider Feedback

What is one thing that could make the information about student mobility more understandable?

- Collected data on where students/families are moving to
- The reason/s for moving
- Specify student mobility in K-12 grades and clarify mobility that is natural between schools
- How stable students are
- How change can impact the overall outcome
- The explanation of how it is calculated was helpful
- Is it voluntary or involuntary movement?
- Provide examples of normal /baseline development
- Student-teacher ratio
- Highlight the difficulties that student mobility can cause (i.e., keeping up with school work)
- Adding examples of what the equation would look like for a visual representation
- What is that “support” from whom, from what?

What is one thing that could make the information about student mobility more relatable to parents, students, and residents?

- Provide examples of why a student may switch schools
- Under the “how it is calculated” section, explain that all schools and districts collect this
- The impact student mobility is having on all of them
- Understanding the impact on student learning and post-secondary success
- Give examples of “normal development,” specifically how mobility can impact it
- Quantitative and qualitative information about what families experience in the Promise Zone
- Examples of real situations
- A graphic to explain the calculation and example of how student mobility is calculated

What is one thing you are curious about or would want to know about student mobility?

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- Is it related to health and safety?
- What are the top reasons why families move during the school year?
- Where are families moving in-state, the town over?
- How about families that are serving in the military? How is this impacting them/represented in the data?
- For students who are switching schools, is the home address changing as well? If so, maybe this can better indicate root causes.
- How does student mobility impact property values and taxes?
- How does student mobility affect child development and literacy?
- Is the measure being done standard or a normal measurement process?
- How do grades or individual schools compare? Is there a grade/school that is noticeably more mobile?
- Are unemployed folks being given assistance to help with housing?
- How did COVID-19 impact the data?
- Why is there such a difference in HPS and the Promise Zone specifically?
- How does the Hartford data compare against other cities, states, and national student mobility data?
- Is there a time of year when students are more mobile?
- Why is October 1st the point of data collection versus September?
- How are students and families being supported throughout student mobility, if at all?
- Is information being collected from CREC or other magnet schools?
- Why is this happening from a student and family perspective?

What is not included in the story about the families you serve that you would want the (very broad) audience to know about them and student mobility?

- Involve parents to understand what they are going through, to keep moving the students
- Whether transitions are voluntary or involuntary
- A breakdown in percent of the reasons why students are changing schools. Consider a pie chart for visual representation
- Share school report cards with parents and students before changing schools
- When families move, are they moving OUT or WITHIN the Promise Zone schools?
- Does any mobility occur in a specific school?
- Some parents use the regional school choice list to move their children to schools that have more resources and higher literacy rates.
- The significant role of transportation as a barrier
- A comparison of student mobility within the Promise Zone to HPS, the state, and other cities in the state
- Focus on social drivers of health and why this is happening

Are there other root causes of student mobility that are not mentioned in the story?

- Transportation to and from schools
- Literacy rates
- Assets within schools that are appealing to parents and families, like extracurricular activities after school
- Diversity of teaching staff

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- Parents and families usually don't move because they want to; they move because of an unavoidable challenge that moving will resolve or lessen the burden of
- Cost of living
- Determinants of health
- Homelessness and affordable housing
- Public safety

How does or can your program improve student mobility?

- Connections to community
- Making referrals to school staff and/or community resources if we discover a hardship or factor that could be addressed, like Hartford Promise
- Might school report cards help families make a more informed choice?
- Teach for America CT aims to fill teaching vacancies in HPS
- Catholic Charities drives scholar success. Providing short-term transportation support could help families
- Student support groups
- Providing assessment, referral, and linkage to the appropriate community-based organizations
- McKinney-Vento is a support for students and families experiencing homelessness

Are there any other ways that Ascend could improve student mobility?

- Explore ways to incorporate stories directly from families

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