



Frequently Asked Questions About The Weiss Institute

What is the Weiss Institute?

The Weiss Institute, a partnership between Say Yes to Education and America's Promise Alliance, will expand the capacity of communities to make it possible for all young people to earn a college degree or other postsecondary credential. Inspired by philanthropist George Weiss, who founded the nonprofit organization Say Yes to Education 30 years ago, the Institute builds on the work of Say Yes and of America's Promise Alliance, the nation's largest network dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth. Collectively, these organizations have five decades of experience and knowledge in helping communities come together to best support young people, preschool to career, on the path to adult success.

What are the goals of the Institute?

Specifically, the Weiss Institute will provide tools and expertise to support communities in their efforts to:

- Identify and leverage community strengths
- Build trust and civic infrastructure, along with processes for collaborative governance
- Establish incentives to drive sustainable collaboration
- Eliminate or reduce predictable barriers to academic achievement
- Close the equity gap in education
- Break the cycles of intergenerational poverty
- Prepare young people for meaningful careers, lifelong learning and civic engagement
- Build a college-going culture and increase postsecondary degree attainment
- Improve community vitality and economic development.

What will the Institute do?

Often, communities take a short-term, single-issue approach to a challenge that requires nothing less than long-term, community-wide structural and cultural change. The Weiss Institute will bring together the best thinking, latest research and community-tested strategies for the benefit of communities seeking to help more students get on a path to adult success. An applied research and technical assistance center, the Institute will:

- Commission research to advance the understanding of how communities can most effectively support young people
- Organize and lead convenings around the country where participants can learn about best practices from partner organizations and each other
- Lead site visits to communities engaging in best practice
- Provide fee-for-service technical assistance to help communities create and implement strategies locally
- Increase awareness and encourage adoption of strategies that work.





Why was the Institute created?

Too many young people are not graduating from high school or are graduating unprepared for and unable to pay for college or other postsecondary education. And many communities, ready to solve this problem, are seeking fresh ways to make systemic change. Over the past 30 years, Say Yes to Education has gone from helping small groups of children raise their high school graduation and college matriculation rates to partnering with entire communities to achieve these goals. Say Yes leaders developed the vision for the Institute in response to rising demand for its expertise in expanding local capacity to drive toward the goal of college or other postsecondary completion for all public school students. Given its expertise in helping communities come together to create the conditions of success for all students, America's Promise Alliance and its research institute, the Center for Promise at Boston University, were eager to join in this mission.

What makes the Institute's approach unique?

There are dozens of communities that offer postsecondary scholarship programs, and others that enrich students' and families' lives with academic and non-academic supports. And there are research centers that study how communities can best work together, as well as organizations that offer communities guidance and technical assistance. But the Weiss Institute is the only entity that combines these elements and offers communities long-term technical assistance to integrate and scale them.

How did the Weiss Institute get its name?

The Weiss Institute is named for philanthropist George Weiss, who made a promise in 1987 to 112 sixth graders at a West Philadelphia public elementary school: If they graduated high school, he would pay to put them through college. Weiss, who had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania two decades earlier on a full scholarship, also promised those Philadelphia sixth graders that he would provide them with the support services – academic, social-emotional, medical and legal – to ensure they were ready to seize that scholarship opportunity. Over the next 30 years, the work of Say Yes to Education, the nonprofit organization Weiss founded, evolved. Today the group partners with entire communities to make it possible for all public school students to graduate high school with the preparation and the means to complete a college or other postsecondary education.

Who are the operating partners in the Institute and what role will each play?

Say Yes to Education will provide overall leadership and governance of the Institute – building field capacity through community partnerships and fee-for-service technical assistance. America's Promise will develop and manage the Institute's research efforts – conducting original research, convening researchers, and commissioning new research through its Center for Promise at Boston University. America's Promise will also help build awareness of, and interest in, the work of the Institute, while increasing the capacity of communities currently in America's Promise network through access to the Institute's resources.

What roles will the other implementation partners play?

The American Institutes for Research will serve as a critical research-and-development partner, helping to shape and implement the Weiss Institute's approach to data, pathway to postsecondary readiness and completion, and early childhood development initiative.





Other implementation partners and their roles include:

- Cross & Jofus -- governance and policy support; district, academic and operation audits
- Partnership for Deliberate Excellence – systemic school improvement
- National Equity Project -- racial equity analysis and engagement
- Schaffer Consulting -- change management support
- Schoolhouse Partners -- analytics of communities' finances and students' progression along the pathway to postsecondary completion.

What makes this a powerful partnership?

Say Yes brings deep on-the-ground experience and expertise in building systems and financial plans to scale. Working with an array of community and other partners, Say Yes has also developed strategies to sustain comprehensive and evidence-based programming around the communitywide goal of college or other postsecondary degree completion for all public school students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. America's Promise Alliance and its Center for Promise bring a network of more than 400 national organizations committed to achieving equal opportunity for all the nation's youth, a track record of influencing the national conversation about young people, and a reputation for groundbreaking research from a youth-centered perspective.

Who will the Institute serve?

The primary audience served by the Weiss Institute will be cities, counties and states that are interested in developing and implementing comprehensive approaches to transforming outcomes for young people. The programming of the Weiss Institute, and the research commissioned by it, will also be of interest to foundations, nonprofits, research organizations, think tanks, higher education institutions, policy organizations and advocacy groups.

What role will research play?

With leadership from the Center for Promise, the Weiss Institute will create, collect and analyze research and on-the-ground learning about how communities come together to help all young people achieve a college degree or other postsecondary credential – and will commission new research to fill gaps in knowledge. All of this research on community collaboration, high school graduation, college success and other topics will form an evidence-based platform for change.

What research questions do you hope the Institute will answer?

Some of the initial questions the Institute hopes to answer include:

- ☐ How do different players in a community work collaboratively toward a common goal?
- ☐ How is data used to inform the most effective strategy, policy and programs to put young people on a path to and through college?
- ☐ What are the supports needed to keep young people on that pathway?
- ☐ How can communities sustainably fund these supports at scale and over the long term?





- ☐ How do young people view these supports?
- ☐ How does having youth at the table change the dynamic and the decisions made?

Where will the Institute be located?

The Institute will have its headquarters at the main office of Say Yes to Education in New York City.

How do the mission and approach of the Weiss Institute differ from that of Say Yes to Education?

It is not possible to bring the Say Yes approach to every community, but the Weiss Institute can offer every community the knowledge and tools to implement their own initiative locally.

How will the Weiss Institute be funded?

The Institute will be funded through foundation and corporation partnerships, as well as fee-for-service arrangements with city, state and other government partners and non-government partners.

Will the Institute's research findings be public?

Yes. All research findings will be made public. People need the best evidence to make the most effective decisions.

Who will lead the Weiss Institute?

At the outset, the Weiss Institute will be led by the current President of Say Yes to Education, Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey. Over the past five years, Schmitt-Carey, along with key strategic advisors, built the vision, strategy and initial philanthropic support for this enterprise. Jonathan Zaff, executive director of the Center for Promise and a research associate professor in the School of Education at Boston University, will lead the Institute's research work. Say Yes and America's Promise will work together to recruit a larger team to bring to life the full potential of the Weiss Institute. For the foreseeable future, the Institute will be a formal division of Say Yes to Education, Inc.

Will the Institute have an advisory board?

The National Advisory Board of Say Yes to Education will serve as the official advisory board of the Weiss Institute. Budgets will be prepared for, and approved by, the National Board of Directors of Say Yes to Education. The CEO of America's Promise will take a voting position on the Say Yes to Education Board of Directors, and the CEO of Say Yes to Education will take a voting position on the America's Promise Board. The Center for Promise will also recruit a research advisory board.

Will the Institute do work beyond education?

The work of the Weiss Institute will enable communities to drive more efficient and effective use of resources by bulldozing the barriers that have long prevented one local agency from working with another, or local government from working hand-in-hand with the private sector. The partners of the Weiss Institute believe these cross-government and cross-sector strategies can be applied to other strategic priorities





beyond education and can also create the foundation for greater community harmony and capacity to achieve measurable and meaningful outcomes.

When did the Weiss Institute begin operations?

Say Yes and America's Promise officially launched at the America's Promise's 20th anniversary events on April 17-18, 2017.

What does the Weiss institute logo symbolize?

The logo of the new Weiss Institute includes many elements that speak to the nature of our work. The star is representative of the hopes and dreams of our children. That goal is our North Star. The circles showcase the power of coming together as a community; the lines that connect them build a greater system of support. Because the Institute works with communities to navigate together toward a better future, the design is intentionally incomplete. We look forward to working with you to connect the dots.

Where can I find more information about the Weiss Institute?

Visit WeissInstitute.org (as of April 18).

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