

Theory of Change

ABOUT THE THEORY OF CHANGE

This Theory of Change (ToC) was developed in the fall of 2024 through an in-depth review of Breakthrough Miami's (BTM) evaluative and strategic documents and a series of visioning sessions with key personnel. It shows BTM's mission, vision, assumptions, core values, and core strategy as well as a table articulating the organization's purposes, tactics, and intended outcomes. From left to right, the table headers read "Our Pillars...Guide Our Purpose To... By Providing... To Develop, Strengthen, or Improve..." The headers can be used to read the statements in the corresponding columns.

In the table, BTM's work is organized into five pillars. This allows for a high-level view of its work, a durable articulation of its mission and strategy, and programmatic flexibility in the long-term. It forms the basis of other evaluation instruments BTM may develop, conceptually linking all programs to a single theory of change.

THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

Every child, regardless of background or zip code, deserves access to high quality education and learning opportunities. However, research shows that students from low-income, minority, and under-resourced environments are at a critical academic and social disadvantage due to inequitable in-school and out-of-school-time learning opportunities. South Florida is also a region of sharp and growing inequality.

The Out-of-School Opportunity Gap

Enrichment activities help develop key skills, beliefs, and behaviors associated with college readiness (Richmond & Sibthorp, 2019). Family socioeconomic status is the single greatest determining factor for educational opportunities beyond those provided by schools (McCombs et. al, 2017). Research shows that the highest-earner families spend seven times more on enriching activities than lower income families (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). This means that students from affluent families reach middle school with up to 6,000 more hours of out-of-school learning (Afterschool Alliance, 2010).

The In-School Opportunity Gap

The nature of educational tracking within schools, resource differences between schools, and limited support resources lead to in-school opportunity gaps for students (Darling Hammond, 2013). Students miss access to opportunities for deeper learning, including learning critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and communication skills.

Summer Slide

Skill loss that occurs during the summer is known as "summer slide," and M-DCPS reports that it is the single most important factor in the achievement gap (Blazer, 2011). Summer slide is more prevalent in lower-resourced communities and it has cumulative effects, meaning that gaps widen as time goes on (Quinn and Polikoff, 2017).

BTM PILLARS AND PURPOSE

BTM seeks to address these opportunity gaps through its five pillars:

- **Whole Scholars:** Support Scholars' social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development.
- **Thriving Minds:** Offer Scholars academic rigor, a community of academically motivated peers and address in-school and out-of-school opportunity gaps.
- **Opportunity Leaders:** Inspire and build leaders who aspire to advocate for others, give back to their communities, and leave a lasting legacy.
- **Career & College Pathways:** Scholars and Scholar Alumni have post-graduation opportunities in higher education and the workforce.
- **Strong Village:** Build a thriving and actively engaged ecosystem of supportive stakeholders.

The pillars can be read as a statement of BTM's theory of change: **"A Strong Village supports Whole Scholars to develop Thriving Minds and become Opportunity Leaders on Career and College Pathways who give back to a Strong Village."**

Theory of Change

MISSION

Create a vibrant learning community where motivated and traditionally underrepresented students in 5th-12th grade achieve post-secondary success and emerging leaders are inspired to become the next generation of educators and advocates.

VISION

Every academically motivated child in South Florida, regardless of background or zip code, has access to high quality education, learning, and leadership opportunities.

ASSUMPTIONS

By providing students access to the right resources, support systems, and educational environments, Breakthrough Miami believes that students will become thriving young adults.

CORE VALUES

Grit

We foster a mindset of unyielding tenacity and resilience in pursuit of excellence for our Scholars and across our stakeholder community to seize opportunity and realize their full potential.

Equity

We exemplify inclusion, fairness and reciprocity by opening doors to opportunity otherwise unavailable and leveling the playing field.

Self-Actualization

We empower our Scholars and our stakeholder community to live with purpose as the architects of our own futures.

CORE STRATEGY

Close Opportunity Gaps

Generate high quality educational opportunities to close opportunity gaps in and out of school for academically motivated and under-resourced 5th-12th grade students.

Students-Teaching-Students

Use our research-backed near peer mentorship model, positioning and supporting older students to lead instruction, advising, and mentorship with younger students.

Long-Term Engagement

Breakthrough is an eight-year commitment for Scholars, families, and the Breakthrough Village supporting Scholars and families through the critical transitions between elementary, middle, high school, and college.

Our Pillars	Guide Our Purpose to...	By Providing...	To Develop, Strengthen, or Improve...
Whole Scholars	Support Scholars' social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programming to strengthen well-being and resiliency Out-of-school opportunities, extracurricular experiences, and exploration Opportunities for mentorship from near-peers Multilingual environment to support ESL Scholars Nutrition and meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholars' mental, emotional, and social health and resilience Scholars' social networks and support systems Scholars' physical health such as food security and physical activity participation Scholar engagement in electives and career pathway exploration Scholars' demonstrated agency and self-advocacy
Thriving Minds	Offer Scholars academic rigor, a community of academically motivated peers, and address in-school and out-of-school opportunity gaps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Institute activities to prevent summer learning loss Saturday School Year Program at partner school sites with curricular themes by grade School options advising, academic support, and goal setting Engaging educational programming through community partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Scholars benefitting from school options, selecting and completing rigorous courses and academic tracks Scholars' Grade Point Averages (GPA) Scholar scores on district and state tests On-time high school graduation for all Scholars BTM relationships with schools and community partners
Opportunity Leaders	Inspire and build leaders who aspire to advocate for others, give back to their communities, and leave a lasting legacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for student agency, voice, and choice throughout engagement Opportunities to give back to the community and learn job and life skills like self-advocacy, confidence, and public speaking Opportunities to mentor near-peers Training for Teaching Fellows, Teaching Assistants, and volunteers Leadership development opportunities like leadership curricula and opportunities for student volunteers through Breakthrough Student Clubs Exposure to new ideas, places, people, and things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholars' skills like self-advocacy, confidence, public speaking, and problem-solving local and global issues Scholars' positive attitudes toward mentoring others so Scholars willingly mentor and create opportunities for others Scholars' positive attitudes toward new ideas, places, people, and things Scholars' leadership in their communities
Career & College Pathways	Alumni have post-graduation opportunities in higher education and the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT/SAT and SSAT/ISEE test preparation College tours Goal setting College application, financial aid, and scholarship advising and support Alumni transition support such as Alumni Network, Alumni care packages, and Alumni socials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Scholars and families embracing higher education as a possibility and expectation Scholars and families develop relationships with higher education admissions offices and scholarship-granting organizations Scholars score competitively on ACT and SAT tests More Scholars successfully transition to higher education, earn degrees, and start careers that enable upward economic mobility Number of Scholars and families completing applications for and being awarded financial aid and scholarships
Strong Village	Build a thriving and actively engaged ecosystem of supportive stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language accessible parent engagement through parent liaison meetings, orientations, advising, and events Board and advisory network engagement Community engagement, community partnerships, community events Recruitment and selection of Scholars and Teaching Fellows (TFs) Marketing, outreach, volunteer recruitment Core organizational functions like strategy, fundraising, grant management, organizational development, and monitoring and evaluation Educational advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents' knowledge, skills, and confidence in navigating their Scholars' educational options BTM's fiscal and organizational resilience and sustainability BTM's Brand Equity, Awareness, and Affinity "reach" Candidate pools for BTM programs Volunteer leadership Capacity of Breakthrough Village members to be agents of change

Theory of Change

STAKEHOLDER DEFINITIONS

Breakthrough Scholar (Scholar): High-potential rising 5th - 12th graders who commit to an 8-year cost-free journey including six-week Summer Institutes and school year programs.

Teaching Assistant (TA): 15 and 16-year-olds serving in a summer leadership experience to gain an introduction to lesson planning and instruction, shadowing a Teaching Fellow for the 8-week summer experience. TAs earn a small stipend.

Teaching Fellow (TF): Outstanding high school seniors and college students (17-24 year olds) who serve as AmeriCorps members in a competitive 8-week summer fellowship leading instruction and mentorship. Fellows earn a \$4250 stipend and an education award of \$1600 to support college expenses.

Student Volunteer: High school students (including current Breakthrough Scholars), who support program coordination, data, Scholar and family engagement, and school-year instruction.

Adult Volunteer: Various community members and professionals who dedicate their time and talents to support the enhancement of the program and the Scholar, Volunteer, and Teaching Fellow experience, including programmatic volunteers and guests, Advisory, Parent Liaisons and Board of Directors.

Teaching Fellow Alumni: Upon completion of the 8-week summer experience, Teaching Fellows are inducted into the Alumni Network.

Scholar Alumni: Breakthrough Scholars who have completed the 8-year program and graduated high school are inducted as Breakthrough Alumni.