



BIG THOUGHT

2021 PRESS BRIEFING

EMPOWERING YOUTH.
CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP.



THE CHALLENGE



Far too many young people grow up in environments that do not empower them to discover their own greatness.

Income, community resources, race and English language proficiency can largely determine opportunities for success.

While Dallas-Fort Worth is the second fastest growing Metroplex in the United States and demonstrates a growing economy overall, significant disparities exist across neighborhoods. In fact, Dallas has one of the highest child poverty rates of all large metropolitan U.S. cities, and Dallas ranks last out of 274 other U.S. urban areas on inclusive opportunities for low-income families and workers. Nearly 19 percent of the Dallas County population lives below the poverty line, residing in marginalized communities where they face significant barriers to high-quality learning, technology, transportation, and food.

Youth in marginalized communities, in Dallas and beyond, are often enrolled in schools that are under-resourced, leading to barriers in quality instruction, lab experiences, field trips and advanced placement opportunities. Additionally, youth in marginalized communities often lack access to high-quality out of school time enrichment programs and opportunities. Coupled with complications in transportation, technology, family work schedules and lack of family resources, youth in marginalized communities have far fewer opportunities to learn and develop outside of school as compared to their more affluent peers.

**More than one in
five Dallas children
live in poverty.**

— State of Texas Children Report from
the Center for Public Policy Priorities

By the time they reach sixth grade, youth from middle class and more affluent families have likely benefited from 6,000 more hours of learning than youth who were born into working class families.

THIS IS CALLED THE OPPORTUNITY GAP.

The Opportunity Gap widens when considering the rapid pace of change in the workforce. The Institute for the Future estimates that 85 percent of the jobs our youth will hold in 2030 have not yet been invented. Experts predict Creativity will become a top three most desirable skill amongst employers globally by 2020, with Emotional Intelligence and Cognitive Flexibility entering the top 10 by then as well. In this rapidly changing workforce market, we must forge a concerted effort to close the opportunity gaps that stymie equitable progress for all youth in order for us to compete in the global market.

The researchers, futurists, and workforce experts all agree -- the skills needed to thrive in a 21st century world are the ability to (1) channel creativity into productivity and (2) build complex human relationships.



TOP 10 HIGHLY DESIRED JOB SKILLS IN 2015



- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Complex problem solving | 6. Quality control |
| 2. Coordinating with others | 7. Service orientation |
| 3. People management | 8. Judgement and decision making |
| 4. Critical thinking | 9. Active listening |
| 5. Negotiation | 10. CREATIVITY |

Creativity and social-emotional skills dominate the list of most desired job skills.¹

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Complex problem solving | 6. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE |
| 2. Critical thinking | 7. Judgement and decision making |
| 3. CREATIVITY | 8. Service orientation |
| 4. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT | 9. Negotiation |
| 5. COORDINATING WITH OTHERS | 10. Cognitive flexibility |

TOP 10 HIGHLY DESIRED JOB SKILLS IN 2020



1. Future of Jobs Report, 2018. World Economic Forum

Who is Big Thought?


Big Thought equips youth in marginalized communities to imagine and create their best lives and world. The secret sauce that makes our work uniquely effective is the powerful combination of our social and emotional focus, experiential learning, community-centered partnerships, equity lens and future focus.

AT OUR CORE, WE EMPOWER YOUTH TO:

BUILD THEIR CREATIVE MUSCLE

**DEVELOP SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
SKILLS AND WELLBEING**

CREATE THEIR AUTHENTIC VOICE



Driven by our mission to make imagination a part of everyday learning, Big Thought is an impact education nonprofit dedicated to closing the opportunity gap for youth in Dallas and beyond.

Big Thought was founded in 1987 by Dallas civic leaders, Edith O'Donnell and Mitch Jericho, as an affiliate of Young Audiences. The organization began innovating education from its inception, by bringing arts and cultural performances into classrooms at a time when the arts had been marginalized or even eliminated from public school curricula. The organization soon grew to serve children, educators, and families in more ways than its founders ever imagined. In 2004, the name Big Thought was adopted to reflect the broadened scope and vision.

Throughout our 30+ year history of innovation, Big Thought has become a national model in arts education, out of school time systems, summer learning and juvenile justice intervention.

Now we're one of six community partnerships in the U.S. helping scale national best practices in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).



BIG THOUGHT IMPLEMENTS THREE APPROACHES TO DELIVER THIS WORK:

Direct to Youth Programs

We develop and deliver high-quality curriculum and programs to serve communities with the greatest need. Big Thought Programs reach over 16,000 students for more than 321,000 learning hours each year.

Learning Systems

We do this by strategically connecting partners and resources across the city to create learning systems that address these themes. Big Thought Learning Systems reach over 137,000 students for more than 3.7million learning hours each year.

Big Thought Institute

We obsess over design, ensuring that our work is research based, our staff is well trained, and that we are evaluating and enhancing our work year after year. We take our evidence-based best practices and share them with other nonprofits and organizations through a suite of consultation services including professional development, curriculum design and technical assistance.



How we implement these programs is what makes us uniquely effective. The Big Thought team and partners are able to achieve success in our community through our social and emotional focus, experiential learning, community-centered partnerships, equity lens and future focus.

Big Thought's unique approach comes alive in the following implementations

- We've positioned youth as equal partners in geographic/local expansion of Big Thought direct to youth programs so that these systems are more effective, and programs are established with a racial equity lens.
- We advocate on issues and policy changes related to racial and economic equity.
- We raise awareness of creativity as workplace skill and advocate to embed in human capital development institutions.
- We scale best practices to key institutions and systems through consulting, technical assistance, professional development and curriculum design.
- We have redesigned the Big Thought Headquarters into a site where youth are welcome and inspired to create.
- We design and implement school models with creativity and youth agency at the core to help more youth have a growth mindset and be empowered to affect positive change in their lives and communities.






BIG THOUGHT

*Direct to Youth
Programs*

DIRECT TO YOUTH PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

We develop and deliver high-quality curriculum and programs to serve communities with the greatest need. Big Thought direct to youth programs reach over 16,000 students for more than 321,000 learning hours each year.



Artivism

Creative projects connected to social justice advocacy

Creative Solutions


An arts intervention program for adjudicated youth

The Fellowship Initiative

Leadership development through mentorship for young men of color

Thriving Minds

After school and summer programs that encourage exploration and creative expression



ARTIVISM

Artivism is where social justice activism meets art. This program allows teens to curate and create productions consisting of multi-media art forms such as acrylic, charcoal, photography, videography and spoken word.

36 youth served annually ¹

1,139 hours of student learning annually ¹

61.5% of youth said that “As a result of this program, I take creative risks with my own personal expression” ³

68% of youth said that “As a result of this program, I confidently take on challenges” ³

84% of youth said that “This program has helped me build confidence” ³

83% of youth said that “Because of this program, I can better express my ideas and feelings” ³



CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Creative Solutions is an arts-as-workforce intervention program for adjudicated youth, ages 10-17. The program uses visual, performing and digital arts to help young people tap into their inherent greatness by improving job skills, promoting a positive self-image and increasing social and emotional development.

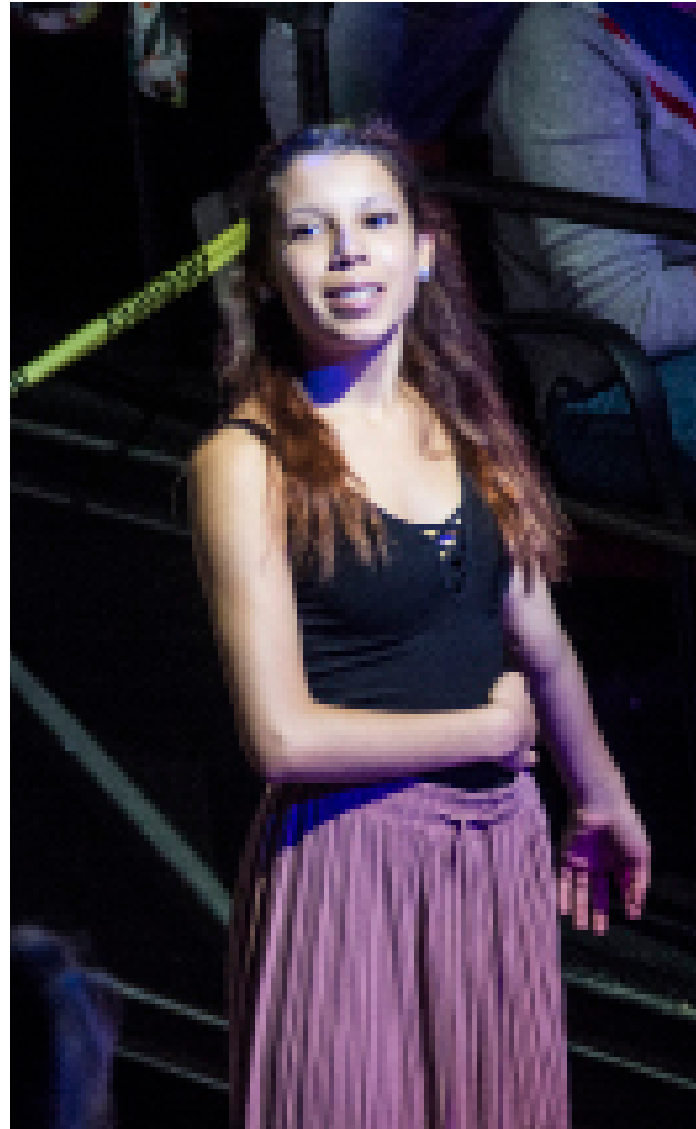
1,244 youth served annually ²

34,348 hours of student learning hours annually

9% recidivism rate over 8 years, as compared to average of 38% for other intervention programs ¹

On average, individual social skills improved by ⁴:

- Engagement: 19.28%
- Assertion: 15.75%
- Responsibility: 16.31%
- Cooperation: 14.26%



THE FELLOWSHIP INITIATIVE

The Fellowship Initiative is a leadership and college-readiness program for young men of color designed to help fellows acquire the skills, knowledge, experience, networks, and other resources they need to succeed academically and professionally through a three year-long mentorship program.

46 youth served annually ¹

13,860 hours of student learning annually ¹



THRIVING MINDS

Thriving Minds is after school and summer programming for elementary and middle school aged youth that focuses on social and emotional learning, creative exploration and expression, and an inclusive learning environment, all tied to academic outcomes.

1,625 youth served annually ²

237,530 hours of student learning annually ²

48% of students improved their math grade ⁶

49% of students improved their reading grade ⁶

87% of students demonstrate teacher reported improvements in behavior ⁶

48% of students showed positive gains on overall social and emotional learning ⁷






BIG THOUGHT

Learning Systems

LEARNING SYSTEMS OVERVIEW

We strategically connect partners and resources across the city to create learning systems that can effect change on a wider scale. Big Thought Learning Systems reach over 139,276 students for more than 3.7 million learning hours each year.



Dallas City of Learning (DCOL)


A citywide initiative to ensure all students have access to high-quality summer learning programs

Learning Partners

A digital resource that provides educators access to thousands of high-quality enrichment programs and field trips that are easy to plan and offered at minimal cost to schools

Library Out Loud

Cultural and creative experiences hosted for free at Dallas Public Library branches



DALLAS CITY OF LEARNING (DCOL)



Dallas City of Learning is a citywide initiative to ensure all students have access to high-quality summer learning programs. In partnership with more than 700 community partners, the program connects

students to the city's most valuable out-of-school time resources. Students choose from an array of digital and in-person enrichment activities throughout the city that spark their interests and feed their curiosity.

68,303 youth served annually

2,735 programs were offered

95% of programs offered were free for participants

2,993,300 cumulative hours of programming were provided

30+ days of student participation delivers the greatest impact

With every 10 days of Dallas City of Learning programming, elementary school students are:

25% more likely to pass STAAR Math Exam

35% more likely to pass STARR Reading Exam



LEARNING PARTNERS

Learning Partners is a digital resource that provides Educators access to thousands of high-quality field trips that are easy to plan and offered at minimal cost to schools. These enrichment opportunities are provided to public educators for elementary youth.

70,489 youth served annually ²

264,340 hours of student learning annually ²

91% of educators rate Learning Partners as meeting or exceeding expectations ⁸

94% of Learning Partners programs successfully align to Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills Standards (TEKS) ⁸



LIBRARY OUT LOUD

Library Out Loud is a learning system that offers after school programming at Dallas Public Library branches to engage students' creativity through stimulating cultural experiences that are free of charge.

484 youth served annually ²

2,871 hours of student learning annually ²



MOBILE TECH EXPERIENCE (MXP)

The Mobile Tech eXPerience transcends access barriers to high-quality STEM learning and technology by deploying STEM programming to neighborhoods throughout North Texas, serving students directly in their communities.

2,500 youth served annually



SEL DALLAS



With partners including Big Thought, Dallas ISD, Dallas Afterschool and Dallas Park & Recreation, SEL Dallas is a coalition focused on aligning and implementing in school and out of school social and emotional learning practices. SEL Dallas is

a six-year initiative from the Wallace Foundation that focuses on specialized professional development and evaluation of in school and out of school time.





BIG THOUGHT

Media Leads

BYRON SANDERS

President and CEO



Byron Sanders is a committed advocate for education, economic development and creating equitable communities throughout Dallas, Texas. As the President and CEO of Big Thought, he works each day to explore innovative ways to narrow the opportunity gap for children. Big Thought connects people and organizations to prepare youth and children in under-resourced communities for tomorrow's creative economy through quality in-school, after-school and community-partnership experiences. Byron has worked with Big Thought in various capacities since 2008, as a supporter, volunteer, advisor, partner and board member.

Byron is a recipient of the 2014 Dallas Business Journal's Minority Business Leaders and its 2012 40 Under 40 awards. He has been recognized as a recipient of Dallas Foundation Good Works Under 40, Parkland Foundation's Community First Award, NAACP Juanita Craft Award, Innovator in Education from the Alcuin School and as a TEDx speaker. He's the 2020 and first person of color recipient of the CASEL O'Brien Award for Excellence in Expanding the Evidence-Based Practice of Social and Emotional Learning. And in 2017, he was named a Presidential Leadership Scholar by the program led by the presidential centers of George W. Bush, William J.

Clinton, George H.W. Bush and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Byron's professional expertise spans the fields of banking, education, philanthropy and entrepreneurship. Prior to Big Thought, Byron served as Vice President for U.S. Trust, the private bank of Bank of America, where he connected high net worth individuals and institutions to solutions that accomplished their financial goals. He is the former Executive Director of the Dallas Education Foundation, where he built and cultivated philanthropic, corporate and community relationships to support initiatives benefiting the students of Dallas Independent School District. He also served as Vice President of Group Excellence, a mentoring and tutoring organization serving at-risk K-12 public school students. During his tenure, Group Excellence was named the country's fifth fastest growing education company in Inc. Magazine's 2011 Inc. 500 list.

Byron believes that one's purpose and mission cannot be fulfilled without being actively engaged in the community. He actively serves as a board member with For Oak Cliff, CitySquare, ChildCareGroup, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Mavericks Advisory



Council, Trinity Park Conservancy, the Mayor's Star Council, the Getting Smart Advisory Board and on the United Way's Community Impact Council. He is a member of Dallas Assembly, Leadership Dallas '13, Leadership ISD '12, Latino Center for Leadership Development Fellows and several other service engagements.

A graduate of the University of Tulsa with a BSBA in Marketing, Byron's first love is spending time with his wife Celeste and his two young children.

"Closing the opportunity gap means that in addition to high-quality education programs that unlock creativity, we also must provide our children with social and emotional learning skills that will prepare them for careers that are yet to be created."

— Byron Sanders



ERIN OFFORD

Chief Programs & Systems Officer

Erin provides leadership in developing and implementing strategies that connect community resources and quality programs for children and parents, including parent-education strategies and community collaborations, which further Big Thought's mission and goals. Erin has been with Big Thought for more than 11 years, and she has more than 15 years of experience in community service and organizing. She holds a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where she also helped establish the inaugural National Service AmeriCorps program. Her work has been shared nationally, including the Access, Equity and Quality in Arts Learning conference hosted by The Wallace Foundation, Arts Educations Partnership, and the Heinz and Hewlett

foundations, as well as the 71st annual Conference for Community Arts Education. She has also been recognized by the Dallas Business Journal as Top Minority Business Leader in 2020. Erin serves on several community event committees throughout Dallas, and she received a "Turner 12 Summer of Choice" honor for mentoring local high school students. She is an alumni member of the 2013 Community Art Education Leadership Institute along with 24 other members representing 15 states. She was recognized by the Female Success Factor 2014 as one of the top 25 African American and Latina female leaders in Dallas.



GREG MACPHERSON

Chief Big Thought Institute Officer

Greg oversees the development of high-quality in school and out of school time enrichment programs for students throughout the city of Dallas. He works closely with parents, schools, community groups and partner organizations to ensure creative learning opportunities are available to children and families. Greg also oversees the Big Thought Institute, which provides professional learning, curriculum design and consultation services to help other nonprofits and organizations teach, develop and create.

Greg joined Big Thought in 2010 after spending three years with the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs

(OCA), where he worked with the Thriving Minds initiative and other community programs. Greg was also the director of performing arts and marketing for the Classics Theater & Art for Children. He is a founding ensemble member of Second Thought Theatre, and served two seasons as an executive ensemble member, co-producing the company's shows. Greg holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts and theater performance from Baylor University.

RECENT AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

Big Thought named finalist in the Innovator in Education Award by D CEO and Dallas Innovates (2020)

Erin Offord is recognized by the Dallas Business Journal as a Top Minority Business Leader (2020)

Dallas Bar Association presented Big Thought with the prestigious Jack Lowe Sr. Award for Community Leadership. (2019)

Byron Sanders, Big Thought's CEO, is named to the Dallas Business Journal Leadership Trust. (2019)

Melora Leiser, Big Thought Chairwoman of the Board of Directors, is named as a finalist for Volunteer of the Year from DCEO, Dallas Magazine and Communities Foundation of Texas. (2019)

Driven by our mission to make imagination a part of everyday learning, Big Thought is dedicated to closing the opportunity gap for youth in Dallas and beyond. We have become a national model in arts education, out of school time systems, summer learning and juvenile justice intervention.

We're extremely proud of our talented team and the impact we've been able to make together. Some of our accomplishments include:



BIG THOUGHT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What is Big Thought?

Big Thought is a nonprofit organization with a mission to close the opportunity gap by equipping youth to imagine and create their best lives and world. Through in-school, out-of-school, and community partnership programs, Big Thought provides students with access to high-quality learning experiences that power creativity and foster social and emotional well-being.

What is Big Thought's mission?

To make imagination a part of everyday learning.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of building the skills, knowledge and attitudes that students and adults need to be successful in school, work and life. SEL includes knowing and controlling your emotions, understanding and collaborating with others, making positive choices, and demonstrating resiliency.

How many programs does Big Thought have?

Big Thought has 11 total programs from direct to youth programs, to learning systems, and research, evaluation and design programs.

What is the focus on Big Thought's programs?

At our core, Big Thought empowers youth to:

1. Build their creative muscle
2. Develop social and emotional skills and well-being
3. Discover and share their authentic voice.

Who are Big Thought's core partners?

Our major partnerships currently include Dallas ISD, the City of Dallas, The United Way of Dallas, Dallas Afterschool, Dallas Parks & Rec and SEL Dallas.

Are Big Thought team members available for public speaking and panel events?

Yes! We believe in sharing our research and expertise with educators, policy makers and civic leaders, both in public and private institutions. Please reach out to our media contacts for inquiries!

FOOTNOTES



1. Big Thought FY18 Annual Service Report
2. Big Thought FY19 Annual Service Report
3. Big Thought Summer 2019 Artivism and Creative Solutions Analysis – Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project Data
4. Big Thought Summer 2019 Creative Solutions Analysis – Social Skills Inventory System Data
5. Youth's writing samples were assessed during a Spring 2015 program at Henry Wade Detention Center using the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) six-trait writing scale.
6. 21 Century Creative Learning Center External Evaluation, Cycles 5, 6 and 7 (2009-2016)
7. FY19 Deveraux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) 2+ point increase, pre/post; magnitude of T-score differences based on Cohen's d-ratio
8. Big Thought Learning Partners Analysis, 2014-2017
9. Dallas County Juvenile Department Report, 2019
10. SMU Center on Research and Evaluation report on Dallas City of Learning, October 2018



BIG THOUGHT

For press inquiries, please contact:

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