



# 2021 Year End Review

**A Summary of  
What We've Learned**

BUCK INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION

**PBLworks**

# About Us

**Buck Institute for Education** (BIE) is a national nonprofit (dba PBLWorks).

**Our mission** is to build the capacity of teachers to design and implement high quality projects and for school leaders to create the conditions for teachers to do so.

**Our vision** is for all students, including Black and Brown students, to engage in high quality Project Based Learning (PBL) to deepen learning and achieve success in college, career, and life.

**Project  
Based  
Learning  
for all.**

“ All students, especially Black and Brown students, should have access to quality Project Based Learning to deepen their learning and achieve success in college, career, and life. ”

# What We've Learned

Since 1999, we have offered professional development in Project Based Learning (PBL) to teachers and leaders at the school and district level. Our core beliefs about high quality PBL are based on our collective experience seeing what is possible for all students, including Black and Brown students. When done well, PBL...

- Transforms students by inspiring them to think differently about themselves as learners, collaborators, and leaders
- Prepares students for success in college, career, and life
- Leads students to master core academic content and builds success skills
- Advances educational equity and empowers youth furthest from opportunity
- Enables teachers to make a difference in their students' lives

## Organizational Highlights from 2021 include:

- The adoption of an Equity Tool used to review workshops and services.
- The integration of racial equity work into day-to-day workflows instead of designated Advancing Racial Equity Action Teams.
- Met our 2021 goal of reaching more teachers who serve 50% or more Black and Brown students.
- Continued focus on recruiting and retaining a diverse staff. In September of 2021, our professional staff consisted of 43% people of color (POC), up from 38% in 2017.

## Advancing Racial Equity through PBL - A PBLWorks Imperative

We are focused on advancing racial equity through high quality PBL because it enables all students, especially Black and Brown students, to gain the academic content knowledge and understanding, the success skills, and the sense of agency that will help them in college, career and life. Given systemic and institutionalized racism and the oppression of Black and Brown students in the educational system, we strive individually and collectively to ensure that Black and Brown students experience Gold Standard Project Based Learning at least twice a year in their school. Our focus on advancing racial equity for Black and Brown students does not preclude us from addressing any and all other issues of inequity and oppression for any other people and working for all students to experience Gold Standard PBL. Furthermore, we work towards all students experiencing Gold Standard PBL — excluding no one.

As part of our commitment to advancing racial equity, the staff and Board continue to sharpen our focus on:

- Building the capacity of our staff facilitators, including National Faculty, to effectively and productively address and interrupt implicit and explicit bias, racism, white privilege and other barriers to advancing racial equity as it surfaces in our

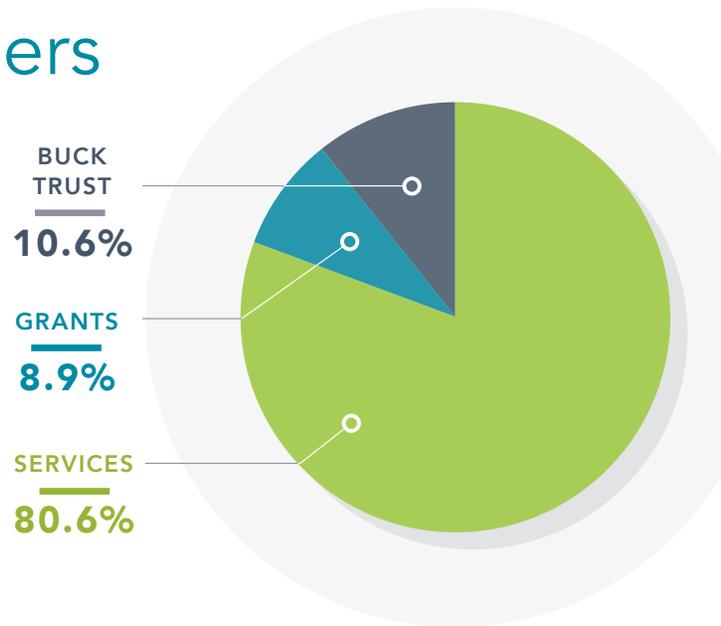
training with system, district, and school leaders and teachers.

- Creating workshop materials and resources that will explicitly address how PBL is a vehicle to advance our racial equity vision and we will contextualize the relationship between racial equity and PBL in all our resources and materials.
- Purposeful choosing of district and school partners that serve the national average or more of students furthest from opportunity, especially Black and Brown students.
- Learning as much as we can about racial equity, practice skills to interrupt racial inequity, and to set and implement organizational policies in a racially equitable way, so that we model in our organization the changes we seek in school systems, schools, and classrooms.



# By the Numbers

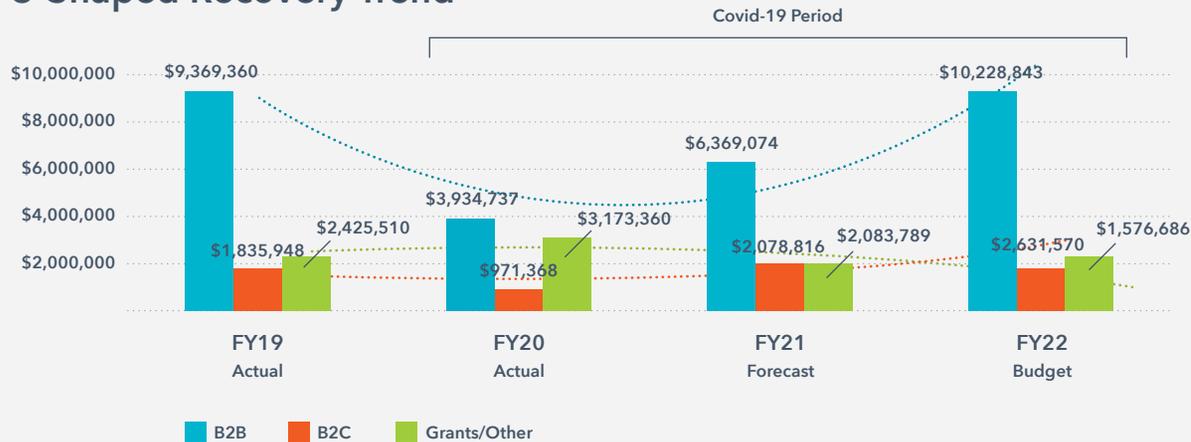
PBLWorks Has A Sustainable Non-profit Model



PBLWORKS MAINTAINS A SUCCESSFUL NON-PROFIT MODEL THAT IS NOT DEPENDENT ON PHILANTHROPY. IN 2021, **81% OF OUR REVENUE WAS FROM SERVICES PROVIDED TO EDUCATORS.**

PBLWorks demonstrated a strong recovery in 2021 with its ability to provide relevant support to educators in the field.

## U-Shaped Recovery Trend



*A U-Shape recovery trend is emerging for B2B revenue primarily driven by virtual services, College Board and the Kentucky service contract. B2B YOY revenue increased by 62% from FY20 to FY21 and B2C revenue increased by 114% which includes publications and PBL World.*



PBLWorks consistently provides high-quality professional learning experiences.

**97%**

OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED THAT THEY ARE "VERY SATISFIED" WITH THEIR WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE



IN 2021, PBLWORKS STAFF AND NATIONAL FACULTY FACILITATED



**797** WORKSHOPS AND SERVICES WITH AN OVERALL NET PROMOTOR SCORE (NPS) OF 53, ABOVE THE INDUSTRY AVERAGE FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES.<sup>2</sup>

We work to increase our impact on Black and Brown students by reaching teachers and districts who support them.

**54%**

OF EDUCATORS who engaged in our workshops serve 50% or more black and brown students.

**71%**

OF OUR DISTRICT PARTNERS serve 50% or more black and brown students in their districts located across 10 states.

**85%**

OF THE SCHOOLS in our School Leadership Networks (SLN) service 50% or more black and brown students.

IN 2021, WE SERVED OVER

**10,000** EDUCATORS IN MORE THAN **420** SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS, WHO IN TURN, SUPPORT MORE THAN **2.5 MILLION** STUDENTS.



<sup>2</sup> Net-promoter-score (NPS)



**It works!**

**EVIDENCE OF  
IMPACT**

### **Adding rigorous PBL to Advanced Placement Courses improved student achievement on AP exams.**

Knowledge in Action (KIA): In 2021, Lucas Education Research (LER) published the results of four rigorous studies showing a positive impact of PBL on student outcomes, including the Knowledge in Action (KIA) study for which PBLWorks designed and facilitated the professional development. This study is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of 3,645 students in five large urban districts engaged in both AP Environmental Science and AP U.S. Government and Politics PBL courses and traditional courses. Researchers from the University of Southern California (USC) found that students in AP PBL courses outperformed students in traditional AP courses by 8 percentage points.

## The Scaling High-Quality PBL for Deeper Learning Impact project found high project implementation rates and increased success skills development.

In 2021, PBLWorks completed a three-year research practice partnership focused on scaling high-quality PBL in two districts: Pearl City Waipahu Complex Area (PCW) in Hawaii and Manchester School District (MSD) in New Hampshire. The Scaling High-Quality PBL for Deeper Learning Impact project found high project implementation rates and increased success skills development.

- Project Implementation in PCW: 73% of all students (N = 10,274) in Pearl City Waipahu Complex Area engaged in at least two projects. 71% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, 73% of English Language Learners, and 77% of students eligible for special services engaged in two projects in 2019-2020.
- Project Implementation in MSD: 68% of all students (N = 9,003) in the Manchester School District engaged in at least two projects. 69% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, 69% of English Language Learners, and 67% of students eligible for special services engaged in two projects in 2019-2020.
- Increased Success Skills in PCW: Of the 130 plus students in the Pearl City Waipahu Complex Area surveyed, high percentages reported that engaging in projects increased their knowledge of academic content, especially in learning facts and ideas (93%), critical thinking skills (99%), communication skills (99%), and collaboration skills (95%).
- Increased Success Skills in MSD: Of the 400 plus students in the Manchester School District surveyed, high percentages reported that engaging in projects increased their knowledge of academic content, especially in learning facts and ideas (85%), critical thinking skills (97%), communication skills (98%), and collaboration skills (94%).

## FROM THE FIELD:

# Our 2021 PBL Champions

Each year we honor PBL Champions from the field who are nominated by their peers. The recipients of the PBL Champion awards demonstrate a commitment to PBL; have done quality, lasting work; and have shown evidence of impact on students.

**Dr. Yolanda Roberson**, Interventionist at John P. Freeman Optional School in Tennessee, led a school-wide PBL project during the 2020-2021 school year called “flatten the curve” in which all student projects were centered on the coronavirus pandemic.

*“You have the opportunity to help students think critically, bring out their creativity, learn to collaborate with those that they may not have worked with otherwise, (and) develop their reading or communication skills. They can develop these skills all while sharing something about their culture and background with you.”*

She said Project Based Learning creates moments that are life-changing for students and is an opportunity to advance racial equity.

*“All you need is heart, enthusiasm, and a willingness to go outside of your comfort zone to give your students voice and choice, and a lens through which you can see the endless opportunities for your students, especially those that cannot see their full potential, but you can,”* she said.

*“Remember, if you grab their heart, their minds will follow.”*

**“What my school and I were able to do this year has been a life-changing experience for me,”**

*Dr. Yolanda Roberson*

**"We were truly making the decision to create today's 21st-century learners,"**

*Principal Michael Pellegrino*

**Waxpool Elementary School** in Loudoun County, Virginia, was named the PBL Champion School for its commitment to Project Based Learning, including during the pandemic. The school opened in 2019 as a "wall-to-wall concept school" focused on Project Based Learning.

*"Providing students with experiences relevant to their lives really helped to meet the needs of all students regardless of previous experiences, background knowledge, race, gender, (or) economics."*

**Pearl City Waipahu Complex Area** in Hawaii and the **Manchester School District** in New Hampshire were both selected as PBL Champion Districts for their work to scale high quality Project Based Learning during a three-year research partnership with PBLWorks. Since the partnership began, more than 70% of the students in their districts have now experienced high quality Project Based Learning.

*"Our ultimate goal was to ensure students are college, career, and citizenship ready when they leave our school system, and PBL has helped propel us in this effort."*

*Superintendent Keith Hui,  
Pearl City-Waipahu Complex Area*

**"The commitment we made for PBL to be implemented across all of our schools has transformed the way we facilitate teaching and learning,"**

*Superintendent Keith Hui,  
Pearl City-Waipahu Complex Area*

**"A game changer for our students, teachers, and district. It has improved our student engagement, teacher efficacy, and student experiences,"**

*Assistant Superintendent Amy Allen,  
Manchester School District*

## Expanding and Deepening our Impact

We are creating PBL ecosystems to scale PBL. Our model is a systems approach built on existing assets (e.g., relationships, leadership, partnerships) to create sustainable school leadership networks for leaders and teachers to learn with and from one another while increasing the number of students experiencing high quality Project Based Learning (HQPBL).

### **The Hawaiian Innovative Leadership Network**

**(HILN)** began in 2017 and is a successful model of statewide PBL scaling that we replicated in two different states. Since the launch of HILN in 2017, we have reached 68 school leaders across four cohorts of school leaders, including the pilot year across all of the islands. Over the course of the last four years, 23% of HIDOE's 293 public and charter school leaders have engaged in HILN. HILN includes 59 leaders from HIDOE public schools, and 9 leaders from HIDOE charter schools. Collectively, HILN leaders serve a total of 25,456 students, representing 15% of HIDOE's total student enrollment (n = 174,704) in 2020-2021. HILN leaders in Cohort 4 launches in March 2022.

*“Because of HILN, I have been able to lead my staff and school forward in this work. Taking us through it step by step and creating plans, having a framework, has been really really beneficial. I have the foundation to work with my teachers and answer their questions. I can put myself in my teachers' shoes now for example as I prepare for my own Presentation of Learning.”* Cynthia Rothdeutsch, Principal at Kamalii Elementary School

### **We are leading the California Innovative Leadership Network (CILN),**

which is a statewide network that is a replication of HILN that launched in February 2021. The network serves 13 schools; 92% of the schools serve 50% or more Black and Brown students.

### **The Massachusetts School Leadership Network**

is a regional approach and includes school leader and teacher services for each school selected to participate; Cohort 1 launched in March 2021 with 10 schools. 30% of the schools serve 50% or more Black and Brown students. A second cohort of schools is slated to begin in March 2022.

*“PBL is our way to make great things happen for kids. The MA SLN has been transformative in how we continue to develop the capacity of our teachers for Gold Standard PBL. The support for the leadership team has been excellent.”*  
Vinnie Regan, Principal at Mary Walsh Elementary

In January 2022, we launched a statewide PBL initiative in partnership with the **Kentucky Department of Education** that engages 492 schools across the 8 educational cooperatives in the state of KY. This translates into approximately 216,000 of the 647,987 public-school students in the State.

### Offering New Services to Individual Educators

In 2021, we started offering new business to consumer (B2C) services to individual educators through Open Online Workshops in addition to the Online Courses and PBL World. These additional online services supported almost 2,700 educators who may not otherwise have had access to PBL workshops through their schools or districts.

### Supporting Educators through Free Resources

In 2021, PBLWorks has continued to offer free and open resources to support educators in the field. Currently, there are more than 226,000 educators who have created free my.pblworks.org accounts where they access free project ideas, research-based success skills rubrics, strategy guides to support teachers as they are designing and implementing projects. New and updated resources are consistently added to the collection. For example, in 2021, the District PBL Evidence Framework Toolkit was added to support district leaders who are planning, monitoring, and supporting PBL implementation.



## Looking Ahead: OER Gold Standard PBL Units

In 2020, we completed a strategic planning process to define our path for the next three years. In our new Strategic Plan 2020-2023, we are launching a new line of work focused on creating K-12 student-centered Open Educational Resource (OER) Gold Standard PBL social studies and science/STEM units organized by themes such as racial, social, and/or environmental justice. The decision to move in this direction is based on results from a comprehensive year-long inquiry that included a review of the research on high-quality instruction materials (HQIM), research on Project Based Learning, market analyses, case studies, and consultation with leading curriculum experts. The addition of Lucas Education Research (LER) studies, including the Knowledge in Action study, for which we designed and facilitated the professional development, ensures we are perfectly poised for this opportunity to have a greater impact.

Delivering on our commitment to advancing racial equity led us to a deep examination of several strategic priorities for the next several years, including curriculum. In the spring and summer of 2020, we worked closely with Education First to explore

multiple opportunities for equity, impact, and growth, through student-facing PBL curricula. The examination of the curriculum opportunity included: an analysis of the curriculum and high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) market scan, a case study of EL Education's curriculum business, review and analyses of existing PBL curricula, interviews of leaders of curriculum organizations, desk research, in-depth competitor profiles, and analyses of PBLWorks' data.

The analyses of these data revealed that expanding our current offerings to include PBL curriculum is a highly viable opportunity for PBLWorks to increase our impact and grow our place in the market while advancing racial equity.

The new curricula will be a unique and powerful supplement to the traditional curriculum that 90% of students experience in K-12 schools. Offering a high-quality and ready-made PBL curriculum to educators at no charge will increase access to high-quality PBL curriculum, increase the likelihood that teachers implement high-quality projects, and increase impact for all students, especially Black and Brown students.

## Key characteristics of PBL curriculum

High Quality	Culturally Responsive	Accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aligned with key content standards</li> <li>○ Aligned with PBLWorks' Gold Standard Design Elements<sup>3</sup></li> <li>○ Inclusive of PBLWorks' Project Based Teaching Practices<sup>4</sup></li> <li>○ Aligned with the HQPBL Framework<sup>5</sup></li> <li>○ Inclusive of Embedded High Quality (end note)</li> <li>○ Performance Assessment (HQPA)<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aligned with Dimensions of Equity<sup>7</sup></li> <li>○ Inclusive of literacy strategies to increase access to core content for all students</li> <li>○ Adaptable with clear guidance on how to contextualize based on context, students, and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Open Educational Resource (OER)</li> <li>○ Available under Creative Commons licenses that allow for commercial use (e.g.): <i>Attribution CC BY, Attribution ShareAlike CC BY-SA, and Attribution- NoDerivs CC BY-ND</i></li> <li>○ Support through <i>my.PBLWorks.org</i>, our online platform, partner platforms, and in PBLWorks' professional development</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> PBLWorks' [Gold Standard Design Elements](#) include: challenging problem or question, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, critique and revision, public product, and reflection.

<sup>4</sup> PBLWorks' [Gold Standard Project Based Teaching Practices](#) include: design and plan, build the culture, manage activities, engage and coach, scaffold student learning, and assess student learning.

<sup>5</sup> [The Framework for High Quality PBL](#) (HQPBL) includes six criteria for student experiences in high quality PBL including: intellectually challenging, authenticity, collaboration, project management, public product, and reflection.

<sup>6</sup> Envision Learning Partners (ELP) defines [high quality performance assessment](#) (HQPA) as: tight on success criteria, open to different learner approaches, authentic, and a learning experience in and of itself.

<sup>7</sup> Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. The [framework](#) offered by Hammond includes three dimensions of equity: multicultural education, social justice, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

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