



TOOLS OF THE MIND

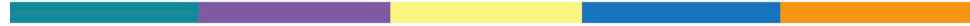
2020 - 2021

ANNUAL REPORT



Resilience
Innovation
Adaptation

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OUR MISSION: To help all children learn and develop to their full potential by applying developmental theory-based principles of learning to early childhood education.

OUR VISION: To empower teachers with the understandings and tools they need to create positive classroom cultures, facilitate intentional, playful learning and support the development of self-regulated learners who achieve their full potentials.



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A Letter from Leadership

Resilience, Innovation, and Adaptation

The past school year has been deeply challenging. All of us at Tools have been inspired by the commitment to children's learning and development demonstrated by teachers and parents despite the uncertainty, shifting conditions and unprecedented obstacles. The imperative of supporting teachers and parents in these difficult times has been an enormous motivator for the Tools team, and the catalyst for innovation on many fronts. Through our shared efforts, we end this year with deepened relationships with our partners, and gratitude for what we have learned. Indeed, we believe Tools is emerging from this year strengthened and better positioned to pursue our mission than when we entered it.

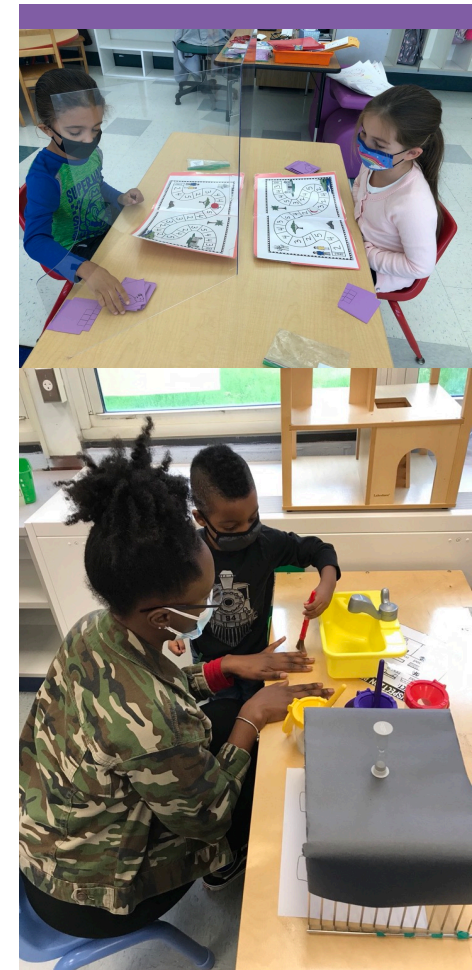
In the report that follows, we will describe some of the innovations and areas of progress that we believe represent the most exciting opportunities for improving outcomes for children at scale, and highlight ways we adapted our work to meet the challenges of the pandemic. Here we would like to reflect briefly on six factors that enabled Tools' resilience and effective adaptive response.

Commitment to Partnership: Tools commits to schools as a partner, not just a service provider. We knew that teachers would be relying heavily on Tools and that we were going to need to be responsive to a changing and diverse landscape of instructional models. We made an early decision that our approach to teacher professional development and support would be entirely virtual. We believed this would offer Tools the best chance to execute with excellence and create the greatest capacity for ongoing flexible response: we could focus as a team, while capitalizing fully on Tools' extensive existing foundation of digital assets and experience in working virtually.

Active Listening: We believed it was vital to stay attuned to the shifting needs of teachers, parents, and administrators amidst constant changes in schools' plans. In particular, the frequent interactions with teachers built into the Tools approach provided an invaluable stream of qualitative insights into emerging challenges, and ideas for ways we could help in the context of each partner relationship. We value the trust-based relationships the Tools team builds with teachers and are grateful for the honest and open sharing of daily challenges and successes we received throughout.

Maintaining and extending our core principles: COVID-19 forced us to distill and extend some of the essential principles underlying Tools approach, to bring these to life in school *and* at home:

- Maintain an emphasis on make-believe play and playful learning in learning at home...*not worksheets and drill*
- Support social emotional development, self-regulation development, and learning how to learn *as well as core academic skills*
- Engage children in creating an inclusive community of learners ... *as well as their educators and families*



A Letter from Leadership

- Leverage teacher’ knowledge of each child’s developmental trajectories to support learning in school *and* at home
- Equip all families to effectively scaffold their child’s development at home through building a partnership with their child’s teacher, working together as a team to effectively to apply Tools approach to meet each child’s specific needs

Organizational capabilities: Tools long-term strategy of investing in digital approaches had built capabilities that had heightened value in the pandemic response. The agility of the Tools technology team and their integrative understanding of both user needs and technology enabled a fast-cycle way of working. The work Tools has put into our digital and organizational systems, including investments in automation and partner support services, and the integration of self-service features for partner account management, made it possible for us to integrate families, extending the use our digital learning apps from school to home.

Funder Belief: The significant investments in advancing Tools offerings, described throughout this report, were only possible through the sustaining support from our strong base of loyal, core funders, some who have supported Tools for 10 years or more, as well as major investments from the LEGO Foundation and the Bezos Family Foundation.

Staff Dedication: At the onset of the pandemic, the Tools team launched an intensive, all-hands sprint to respond. The pace over the past 18 months has simply not let up. The dedication of Tools’ entire staff has been remarkable and inspiring.

We are optimistic about the opportunities ahead. The pandemic has heightened support for early childhood education, accelerated the adoption of digital learning approaches, brought parents in as active partners in their child’s education, and illuminated new ways to support teachers’ professional development. We believe that Tools’ ability to harness technology in service of play-based learning, whole child development and inclusive approaches to learning will be of ever-greater relevance. We hope you will see compelling examples in this report that highlight how our learning with school partners and families in this unforgettable year will strengthen our ability to meet our mission to improve outcomes for all children.

Deborah Leong
Co-Founder & President

Barbara Wilder-Smith
Executive Director & Co-Developer

Nathaniel Foote
Chair of the Board

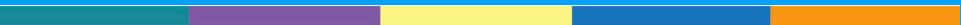




TOOLS OF THE MIND

SY20-21

Resilience & Innovation:
Tools@Home



The Development and Launch of Tools@Home

What did we set out to do?

To face the challenges of COVID-19 school disruption with the generous funding of the LEGO Foundation, we leveraged our learning from a 2020 spring and summer pilot to create and launch Tools@Home for rapid release and use by teachers, families and children.

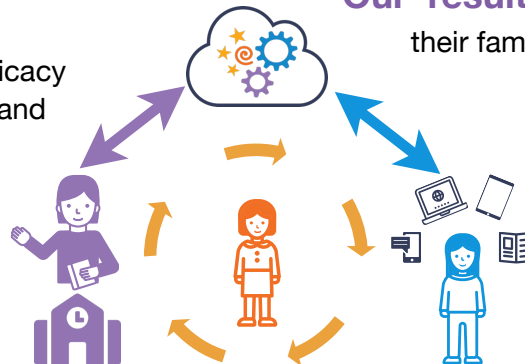
Tools@Home became a pathway for maintaining strong positive child outcomes as learning shifted from school to home.

What is Tools@Home?

Tools@Home is an integrated school:home system of support around each child with data flowing between families and teachers. Tools@Home empowers teachers and families to work together in partnership to apply Tools' approach to scaffold each child's development.

What were our goals?

- Achieve positive outcomes for children in the face of school disruption
- Increase family and caregiver sense of self-efficacy and ability to support their child's learning and development
- Increase teacher satisfaction, their ability to support learning at home and the quality of their relationship with parents



What data informed our learning?

We piloted some of our early ideas and prototypes in spring and summer 2020. As we scaled this intervention to all of our partners in School Year 2020-2021, we:

- Analyzed Tools@Home data
- Surveyed teachers, school administrators and parents
- Interviewed teachers and parents
- Analyzed outcome data from 4 partner school districts in 3 regions of the U.S. with over 1,300 children
- Conducted focus groups with our field team

How many children did Tools@Home reach?

Our goal: To reach 15,000 children and their families

Our result: Tools@Home reached over **23,000** children and their families



Tools@Home: Empowering & Supporting Teachers

Tools@Home supported teachers in navigating the school disruption challenges by:

- **Creating a platform and approach for strong teacher:family partnerships** that placed teachers in a better position to support learning at home
- **Providing a structured framework** to rollout the Tools program on Virtual Classroom freeing teachers from having to invent their own so they could focus on micro-coaching families
- **Pivoting to respond** to emerging teacher needs across the year

1 Transforming Teaching & Learning

To respond to the challenge teachers were facing, we created and delivered a 2-part, virtual professional development series to 2,000+ teachers and school administrators called ***Transforming Teaching & Learning In and Beyond Challenging Times***.

In this series we outlined a call to action for how to approach the year ahead anchored in four big ideas:

Learning is Social: As educators, we will create and define new ways to continue to engage children in buddy and partner activities in safe ways.

Talking is Thinking: We will redouble our efforts to keep children's language use high, and maximize opportunities for shared activity to support children's social emotional, self-regulation and cognitive development.

Make-believe Play Builds Critical Foundational Skills: We will work together to maintain a commitment to engaging children in make-believe play at home and in our classrooms through our collective creativity, ingenuity, and collaboration.

Parents as critical collaborators: We will recognize parents as critical collaborators in supporting learning at home—both in times of school disruption and as an integral part of our work going forward.

Together, we envisioned a new paradigm for how to improve outcomes for all children and close the achievement gap by enhancing school:home communication and providing micro-coaching to parents.

In the delivery of these workshops, we experienced first-hand the stress of teachers grappling with the severity of the pandemic and what it meant for their safety, as they wrote questions like this one that we received in the chat box: *“What happens when teachers are exposed to the virus?”* The workshops provided a safe and open space for teachers to discuss and receive support from colleagues and from Tools.

Despite the situation before them, teachers expressed that they felt empowered to take on the challenge of the year ahead with the new supports and vision Tools was providing.



Parents are going to be more involved in their child's education this way! They will be more informed as to why we do what we do with Tools of the Mind!

— Tools Teacher chat box comment at end of workshop



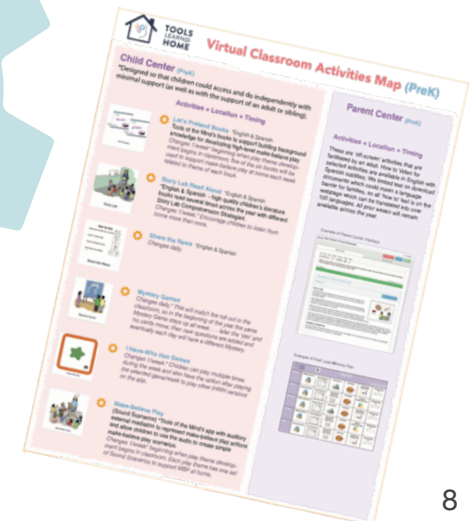
Tools@Home: Extending Direct Support to Families

2

Tools Virtual Classroom: An online individual classroom webpage with daily and weekly Tools@Home resources that engage children and families in core Tools activities. Aligned with Tools' in-school curriculum rollout, families access new content every week for the entire school year, and children access new content each day.

The Virtual classroom has two sections:

- (1) **A Child Center** with familiar Tools activities that children can select and engage in independently with minimal support at home, available in English or Spanish.
- (2) **A Parent Center** with offline playful learning activities, guidance packets, how-to videos, and weekly Learn@Home plans that fully equip parents to support their child's self-regulation development and ownership of their own learning at home. The parent center was designed with a user selected auto-translation feature allowing translation into over 100 languages, and Tools of the Mind how-to video with captioning in Spanish.



Tools@Home: Building Teacher & Family Partnerships

3

Tools Family Connect is a platform for teacher:family communication designed to improve child outcomes. It enables teacher:family text messaging with bidirectional translation and the sharing of photos and video over time.

The pandemic provided us with an opportunity to partner with parents as critical collaborators. Teachers partnered with parents and caregivers to:

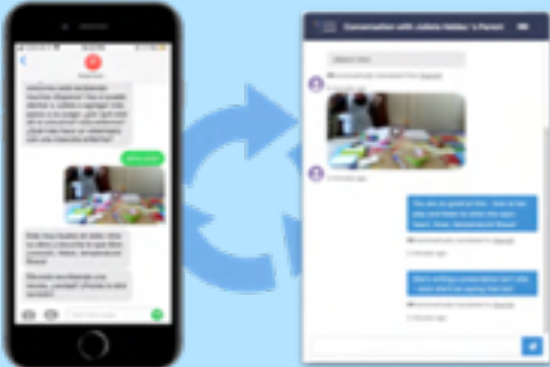
- Help them to learn to observe their children’s development
- Build on what child can do today . . . to support what child will be able to do tomorrow, applying the Vygotskian concept of ZPD
- Provide *micro-coaching*: Focus on one thing their child *can* do with one suggestion of what parents & caregivers can do to amplify their child’s learning
- Commit to positive interactions with parents to build a foundation for effective partnership with bidirectional sharing and learning; parents have expertise on their children; teachers have expertise on child development and supporting diverse learners

“ At the beginning of the year, a parent who speaks Spanish said she was really hesitant to reach out to teachers because we don't speak Spanish. Once we showed her what happens on Family Connect she was much more comfortable. It took off that one worry of language.

— Tools Teacher

The teacher shared the best way to help support writing and now I am helping him that way.

— Tools Parent



Over **422,000 messages** were exchanged between teachers and families on Family Connect this year, with an average of 61* messages exchanged for each child. Of the total messages exchanged, 23% were translated into one of 85 different languages, including Amharic, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Bengali, Hindi, Hmong, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese, and more. **Some of our partners applied our approach on other communication platforms that were being used school-wide across grade-levels.*



Tools@Home: Increasing Access & Equity

4

Enabling PowerTools and DWA access on any computer or tablet

With the goal of increasing access and equity for families and schools, we engineered these apps to work across platforms. This year we made significant efforts to expand access to DWA & PowerTools, developing brand new web-based versions of the existing DWA and PowerTools iOS apps optimized to run on a wide range of tablets and inexpensive Chromebook computers without the need to install anything. This represented a significant development effort, and enables usage on the widest possible range of potential devices that might be present in classrooms or at home.

Developmental Writing Assessment (DWA) & PowerTools Reading

The DWA and PowerTools apps are now multi-platform apps that maximize accessibility for all classrooms, children and families. Teachers can access analytics from both apps in a single portal that is integrated with Family Connect so that teachers can easily message families upon reviewing children's progress and share screenshots of children's drawing and writing samples with a click of a button.

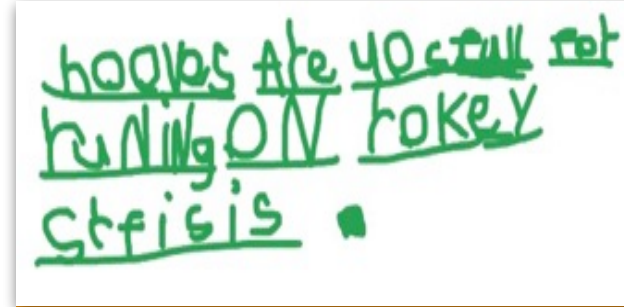
On the DWA, we added the capability for teachers to share a scaffolding message with families that can be played out loud in-app, and we created a gallery view that allows families at home to access previous recordings of the child's drawing and writing. (Before, recordings were only available to teachers). This was built based on our finding that children enjoyed re-watching their own drawing and writing, and actually found errors and omissions in their writing that they would self-correct.

“ I think the DWA is a really phenomenal tool. It tells me a lot about the students' thought processes through allowing me to see the writing process... Through the Portal, I can click on their video to see what they did.

— Tools Teacher

In the classroom the kids actually ask for PowerTools. For me, that's half the battle is getting them to want to read and I feel like they do want to read.

— Tools Teacher



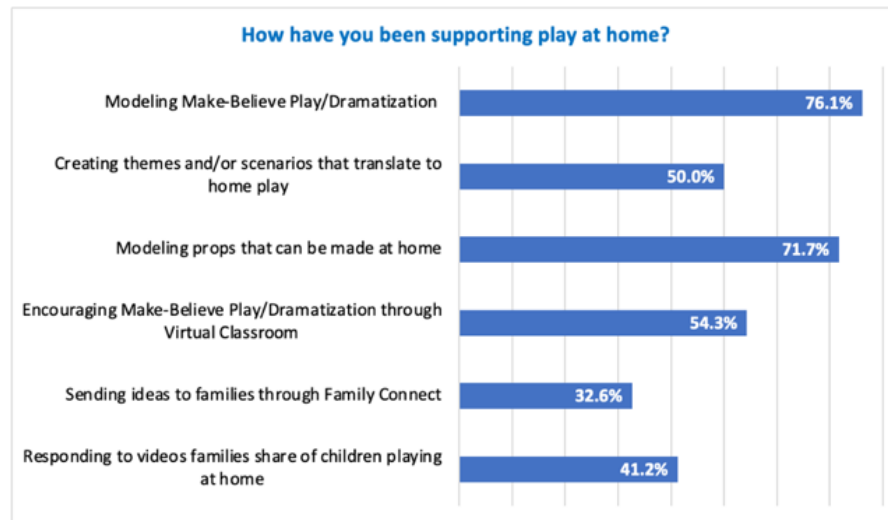
“Hooves are useful for running on rocky surfaces.”



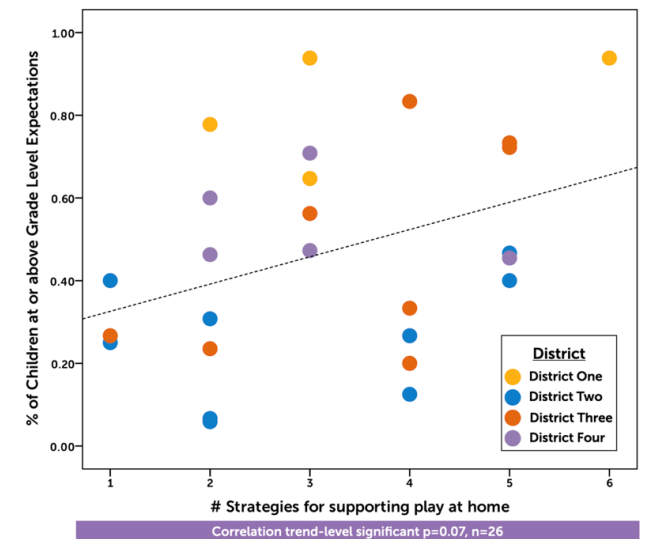
Tools@Home: Teacher Impact & The Power of Play

Teachers and the Tools team worked together to maintain a focus on play and use a wide range of strategies to support engagement in make-believe play and dramatization at home.

The Impact: Teachers who used more strategies to help families facilitate play at home had more children who met or exceeded grade level outcomes on district measures.



Teachers' At-Home Play Strategies and Outcomes



“The relationship between the number of play strategies a teacher employed and the average reading outcome for their classroom was trend-level significant ($\rho=0.36$, $p=0.07$)”

“ We were able to role play it. So he got to show me his interpretation, which I liked. Of course I had to throw in something different. He’s like, “No, Mom, that’s not how the story goes. The story goes this way.” So that means he’s really paying attention.

— Tools Parent



Tools@Home: Case Study—The Power of Partnership

Our setting: *A large, urban, East Coast school district serving 78% non-white students; of those 33% are non-English households.*

A Case Study—The Correlation between Strong Teacher: Family Partnerships & Child Outcomes

For Ms. C, teaching this past school year has been “the most challenging thing [she’s] ever done in [her] career.” Although she has taught older elementary school students for over a decade, this was her first year teaching kindergarten and using the Tools program, in a 100% virtual setting, in the midst of a pandemic, while navigating evolving district policies throughout the year (“they changed our schedule for the fifth time!”). In the area her school was in, parents were struggling and “trying to survive.” For Ms. C, “it was really just trying to meet parents in the middle and asking, ‘*how can I help you help your child?*’”

Ms. C did exactly that using **Family Connect** —communicating with her families on a daily basis to support them to help their child learn at home. She developed close partnerships with families, focusing on emphasizing strengths she was already seeing in parents’ interactions with the child.

Using the **DWA app**, Ms. C could monitor children’s development at home and deepen connection with each family. She reviewed every DWA sample that was uploaded real-time to her dashboard and shared feedback through Family Connect: “I would pick out all these positive things that I liked. And then I would talk about whatever strategy I heard them talking through, how they persevered and overcame whatever was difficult.”

To encourage playful learning at home, Ms. C regularly shared **Learn@Home resources on Virtual Classroom**. She found “parents were religiously using the weekly Learn@Home print-outs for dramatization”, and that the “Interactive Read Alouds were absolutely phenomenal in helping to build children’s vocabulary and understanding of the next Magic Tree House.”



“ She increased her vocabulary, just like she would have, I assume, in a physical classroom, so I’m pretty excited about that, being that she wasn’t in a physical classroom. ”

—Tools Parent



Tools@Home: Case Study—The Power of Partnership

Over time, Ms. C saw that her efforts at building teacher:parent partnerships were having a positive effect. Ms. C started hearing parents mimic her in their interactions with their child, saying things like: “*What other sounds do you hear in that word?*”, “*What word pattern did you learn from Ms. C?*”. Parents in Ms. C’s classroom felt supported too:

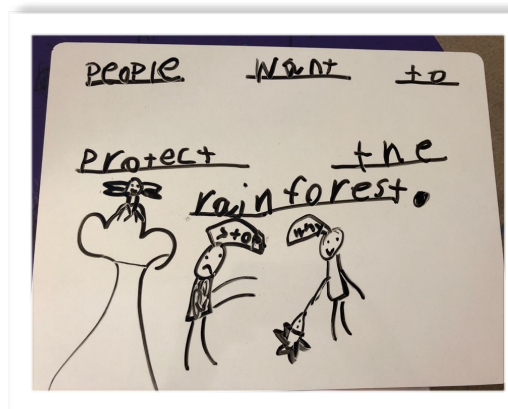
100% of the parents who responded to our survey said they received helpful ideas and strategies, were supported to engage in dramatization at home, felt connected with Ms. C this year, and felt their child was learning and developing.

As Ms. C puts it, “we had that camaraderie together.”

Going forward, Ms. C would love to continue to use Family Connect and engage with the Tools program. She found text messaging allowed for quick back and forths that were responsive to parents, and parents preferred it too. The translation feature was instrumental as well— prior to Family Connect, Ms. C had to rely on Google or ask a colleague to translate messages, which was time consuming. She liked that in Family Connect, messages can “be set in [families’] chosen language—what’s comfortable for them.”

Ms. C would love to see the Tools program extend to upper grade levels: “**My students’ writing really transformed into something amazing**—and I taught 1st grade for 12 to 13 years. I’ve also taught 2nd, 3rd, 4th grades, and now K. I did reading interventions for 5 years. I can see from the 1st grade perspective that the kids are really, really good writers. I wish this program also went into 1st and 2nd grade.” for dramatization”, and that the “Interactive Read Alouds were absolutely phenomenal in helping to build children’s vocabulary and understanding of the next Magic Tree House.”

In this classroom with strong teacher:family partnerships, 72% of kindergarteners in Ms. C’s classroom achieved or exceeded grade-level expectations—the highest in her school-district.



Teachers Are Saying...

“

“The Tools Virtual Classroom allowed us to connect things we were discussing in the classroom and bring it into the student's home. It gave specifics to parents to help coach them through developmentally appropriate activities. It also allowed the students to work on things independently without parent support.”



“Family Connect was an awesome feature. Some families I've had a thousand messages with! In the past, I would have used Google translate to translate an email or get a trusted colleague to be a translator for me. Having Family Connect with the translation feature helped take out the middle man.”

“I could tell that parents were learning how to help their child in Scaffolded Writing because I would hear parents applying strategies that I've shared on the DWA recordings.”

“We have never communicated with parents more than we have this year with Family Connect. I'd like to use it every year.”

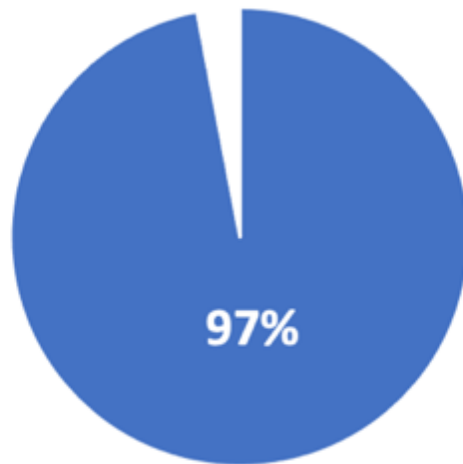
“Being able to communicate in their language has really helped a lot. Last year, we had a parent who didn't communicate with me often and that has changed this year. I get responses really quickly. Parents have appreciated it. It's really great to have quick back and forth communication. Can't do this over email. “

“Across the board, everything Tools has developed — we fully felt supported. Felt we were the least stressed out across the district. Really helped make a crazy situation better.”

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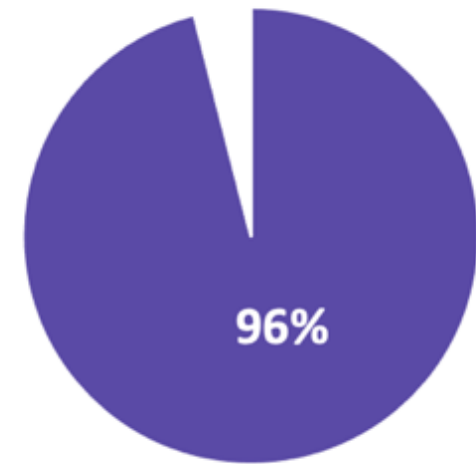
Tools@Home: Family Impact

Tools@Home effectively facilitated the development of strong teacher:family partnerships



97% of surveyed families felt connected with their child's teacher.

Families felt increased confidence in supporting their child's learning



96% of surveyed families felt more confident in their ability to support their child's learning and development at home as compared to the start of the school year.



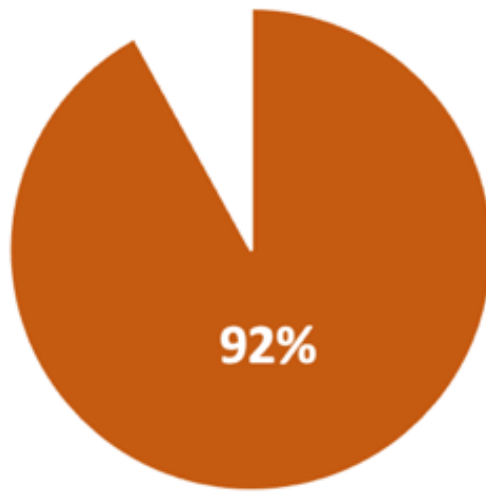
I really enjoyed this year. Being so connected to the families is an experience that being in the classroom doesn't afford you. I cannot lose this family connection - it has been vital to success.

– Tools Teacher



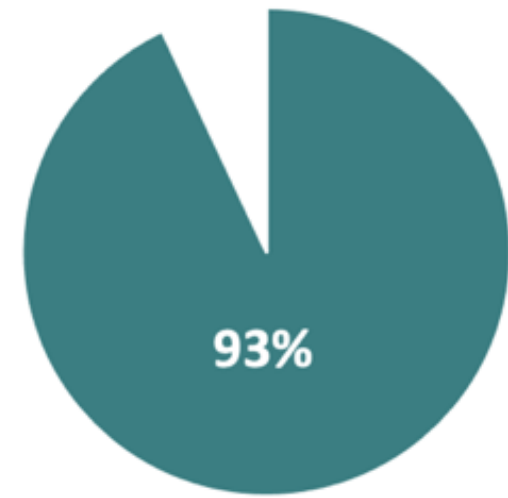
Tools@Home: Impact on Families

Families recognized the value of play

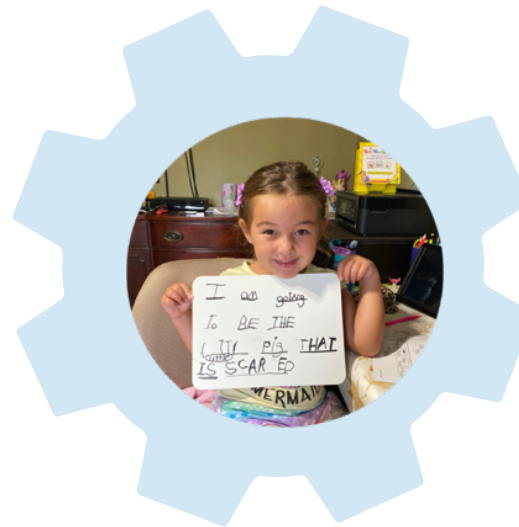


Greater than 90% of surveyed Tools@Home PreK and K families recognized the value of make-believe play and dramatization in their children's learning and development.

Families felt their children were learning and developing despite school disruption



In our family survey, 93% felt their child is learning and developing, despite the impact of COVID-19.



I think make-believe play is very, very important. It's the brain functioning -- the more the kids play, the more the brain develops."

– Tools Parent



Families Are Saying...

“

"I was always in the loop—so I really felt like I was part of my kid's educational team and played a significant role. I'd say it was like a partnership trying to see what [my child]'s doing in school, what he's doing here, and we feed reports to each other and updates."



"I feel like Tools of the Mind took the weight off my shoulders. . . I was able to be the support person with the activities, structure and framework Tools provided."

"My son's vocabulary has increased tremendously, to the point where if I'm typing something for work, he's reading my emails. It freaks me out because I'm like, "Dude, I didn't teach you that!" He sounded out all his words. And when we go to the store, he's like, "Mom, this word is that." And I'm like, "I'm so proud of you."

"I'm just excited that my daughter is most likely going to enter fall at grade level, that she's not going to be behind or I didn't do her any damage by keeping her at home this past year. And I think Tools of the Mind played a huge part in that."

"I feel this is the closest relationship I've ever had with a teacher."

". . . when I think back to when I was kindergarten, I wasn't doing any of what [my child] is doing, and I'm 38. Now I can see the development of how children begin to write and phonetically spell—he doesn't even realize he's writing a sentence before he's actually physically doing it."

"Tools@Home broadened my scope and empowered me."

"I wanted to take the time to tell you that it's been a wonderful experience."

”

Tools at Home: Child Impact

We found that when teacher:family partnerships are in place to support children's play and learning at home, children can benefit and achieve strong academic outcomes even in the face of tremendous school disruption and a pandemic.

In the districts in which we had data share agreements, our analysis showed

- **The investment of teachers and families in partnerships with high frequency of connection correlated with strengthened outcomes:**

The top 3 classrooms with the highest Family Connect usage saw an average of 49% of children achieving or exceeding grade-level expectations

in contrast, the 3 classrooms with the lowest Family Connect usage had an average of 37% of children achieving or exceeding grade-level expectations

- We observed more of the qualities of high-level make-believe play in at-home video than in what teachers were able to facilitate in classrooms with social distancing requirements

While the discourse in the field is highly focused on learning losses from the pandemic, our experience this year suggests there are important gains to which we need to afford equal attention, and extend to impact future years beyond the pandemic.

The positive gains from our vantage point

- Establishing powerful teacher:family partnerships
- Strengthening the home:school connection
- Empowering families to value and support play and learning at home
- Creating continuity in approach between home and school to supporting children's learning and development



This was the most parent involvement and parent communication in my 13 years of teaching.

—Tools Teacher





TOOLS OF THE MIND



FY21 Adaptation in Action:
Service Delivery & Initiatives



Virtual Support to Empower Teachers

Pivoting to Virtual Professional Development

In the summer of 2020, we began converting all of our core professional development for delivery via a virtual model. Over the course of the school year, we re-designed over 100 hours of workshop content using the very best of instructional design, ensuring that there were ample opportunities to engage with one another via video-conferencing “break out” rooms, use of reaction buttons, independent off-screen work, and feedback via the chat box. We adapted and refined as we encountered various modes of school in response to the pandemic: hybrid models, entirely virtual, and a few that never left the brick and mortar buildings. In many circumstances, teachers were teaching and learning from home, and did not have access to their classrooms or Tools materials. This required continuous innovation to create an approach that could work in a myriad of conditions to support all our teachers.

Expanding Possibilities Virtually: A Tools Field Team Member’s Story

“I was working with a district in one state, which had been teaching completely virtually but was heading back in-person soon. They sought support to understand how certain time blocks worked in the classroom. Another district I worked closely with in a different state had been in-person most of the year, and I thought that this is an excellent opportunity to enable teachers to help each other. So I asked one of my teachers if we could come on a virtual field trip to her classroom. We all came on Zoom and were able to observe her the whole morning: Opening Group, Play Planning, Play Practice, and Play. The teachers loved it and were so happy to see Tools in action with actual kids. We never would have been able to do this if we were not in a virtual mindset.”

“The way the TOOLS team is supporting teachers through the COVID pandemic and understanding the challenges with distance learning is much appreciated.

— A Tools Administrator



“This was absolutely the best virtual workshop I learned so much (and I am technologically challenged and *not* a virtual learner!) Thank you!

— A Tools Teacher



Virtual Support to Empower Teachers

Tools Connect

Tools Connect for Teachers, was an innovation to allow teachers to directly message their dedicated Tools Partnership Development Manager (PDM), share videos and photos of their classrooms, ask questions, share reflections, engage in regular exchanges and feel supported. Tools Connect included monthly teacher video ‘challenges’ that asked teachers to share a video of a Tools activity. As teachers completed these challenges, they received a badge on Tools Connect that celebrated their achievements.

This past school year, **over 12,000 messages were exchanged between teachers and their PDMs** over Tools Connect. In our teacher survey, we found that **94% of teachers who used Tools Connect found it “very helpful” or “helpful” in implementing Tools and supporting families to learn at home.**

“I found it very helpful and my Tools support person responded right away with answers to my questions, which helped me to better support a family.”

— A Tools Teacher



Professional Learning Community (PLC) Sessions

To better support teachers in a wide variety of contexts, we instituted monthly Virtual Professional Learning Community (PLC) interactive sessions for each school, facilitated by their dedicated PDM. At the end of the year when we surveyed teachers to learn what had the greatest impact on their classroom practice, several teachers shared that it was their “monthly PLC meeting with our Tools trainer.”

“The once a month Tools PLCs are extremely helpful. Going into detail and showing different ways to alter games to fit the needs of your classroom while also having teachers share ideas and ways to help.”

— Tools Teacher

Tools Community

Tools Community, an online forum in which Tools teachers from across the country can connect with and learn directly from each other was developed in response to teacher needs -- we heard many requests for practical how-to of virtual delivery. We recruited Tools teachers to take turns in the role of Community “Playmakers” to share new posts and engage in regular discussions.

By the end of the 20/21 school year, **over 800 teachers** accessed Community. In our teacher survey, we found that **82% of teachers** who used Community found it **helpful/very helpful.**

“I like that we have an open forum to ask questions, share ideas, and get clarification on Tools things.”

— Tools Teacher

Teacher Endorsement

The Tools of the Mind Endorsement Process is designed to engage educators and school-based coaches in a meaningful reflective process, and to recognize excellence in Tools teaching and coaching practices. Endorsement is the gateway to joining a community of highly skilled Tools practitioners, able to lift up the practice of colleagues and contribute to the work of the Tools of the Mind organization as we continue to change and grow.

In SY20-21, we offered teachers engaged in Year 3 professional development the flexibility of submitting Endorsement video when circumstances were more typical. Out of 74 teachers and coaches, 9 teachers and 11 coaches chose to complete Tools of the Mind's Endorsement Process in the spring, with the others delaying until SY21-22. We can't wait to have more teachers join this wonderful group! Below are some of their reflections on Tools.



Ayesha Harrell, New Jersey
Years Teaching Tools: 15 years

What would you say to a teacher or a program considering implementing Tools of the Mind?

"If they are looking to teach young learners in a new way that strays away from cookie cutter techniques, this is the program for them. They will constantly evolve and grow as a teacher to meet the needs of children with varying skills and experiences."



Stephanie Tamn, New Jersey
Years Teaching Tools: 4 years

What do teachers learn in Tools of the Mind professional development?

"Not only do teachers learn how to implement the curriculum, but you also learn about child development and key skills that will help a child to be successful in life and learning in the future!"



Paulina Gutierrez, Colorado
Years as a Tools Coach/Master Teacher: 8

What would you say to an administrator considering implementing Tools of the Mind?

"Tools of the Mind is not only an amazing curriculum for reading, writing, math, etc. It is a program that will make a difference in your students' behavior not only in early childhood but in the years that follow."



Carol Krasowski, New Jersey
Years as a Tools Coach/Master Teacher: 13

What would you say to an administrator considering implementing Tools of the Mind?

"I would happily tell any administrator that the Vygotskian theory is brilliantly developmentally age-appropriate and just overall an amazing premise for young children's learning. The program emphasizes self-regulation, shared activity, and executive functioning with a focus on make-believe play, literacy, mathematics, and science. It not only exposes children to an array of skills but it fosters language, positive social interaction, mature play, and offers so many wonderful learning experiences. The Tools curriculum is aligned with the Common Core Standards and provides professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals. Tools provides layers of school readiness for our young learners and continues to bridge the gap for many students. Most of all, the teachers and children love the program, making it a perfect fit for any early childhood classroom."

Resilience & Adaptation

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Action

From its beginning, Tools of the Mind was developed to address the systemic racism and instructional inequalities facing children in marginalized communities. Our objective was to create an early childhood program sensitive to diversity, promoting equity and emphasizing inclusivity in its core design through the application of social-constructivist Vygotskian theory. In our intrinsically motivating approach, children develop self-regulation while learning how to learn and how to engage in positive social relationships with every peer in the classroom.

Bringing those principles to life in the classroom has been at the core of Tools curriculum design and teacher professional development for the past 2+ decades. Learning how to bring the Tools values around DEI to life in an at-home or hybrid setting was a new challenge.

Highlights of key initiatives (also referenced elsewhere in the report) that were motivated out of a central concern for DEI:

Enabled multi-platform PowerTools and DWA access, expanding beyond an iPad-only app to reach more families

Family Connect that enables auto-translation into over 100 languages to support teacher:family communication

Parent Center design allows for translation into over 100 languages

Child Center design provides access to recorded books and activities in Spanish and English

Parent micro-coaching model used to empower all parents to engage with their children to support learning at home in partnership with teachers

In addition, as a means of guiding and furthering these initiatives, we formed a DEI advisory group of Tools staff members and engaged a DEI consultant to build our internal capacity to be responsive. We continue our efforts to update our materials, and recommended readings to uplift inclusive, diverse representations and stories.



READ OUR BLOG!
A Conversation About Instructional Equity with Zaretta Hammond, Part 1



Zaretta Hammond shares her thinking on instructional equity in this wide-ranging and thought-provoking interview.



What We've Been Reading:

“A Conversation About Instructional Equity with Zaretta Hammond” from the Center for the Collaborative Classroom

Resilience & Adaptation Research

A commitment to innovation, research & continuous improvement to strengthen child outcomes

Beyond measuring the impact of Tools@Home on families, teachers and children, Tools of the Mind's Research Team was grateful for the partnership of a New Jersey school district in piloting the Invented Spelling Inventory (ISI) this spring in both PreK and Kindergarten classrooms, using Tools' digital Developmental Writing Assessment (DWA).

The goal of this project was to understand how PreK and K children approached the writing of a set of words that spanned a range of challenge levels both at, and well above, their own writing levels. The Tools Research Team, in collaboration with Dr. Rebecca Treiman, the Burke and Elizabeth High Baker Professor of Child Developmental Psychology and head of the Reading and Language Lab at Washington University in St. Louis, examined the difference between children's own writing of a word, and that of a word's "conventional" spelling, to determine a distance score. This distance score has been used in Dr. Treiman's prior research (Treiman, et. al, 2019) and has established a reliable correlation between children's writing development and reading achievement in later grades. This is a novel approach to foundational literacy skill-tracking that captures each child's developmental trajectory beyond that of classic 'correct' and 'incorrect' measures. Dr. Treiman's work provides a way to assess and track a child's growing knowledge of the phonics system necessary for reading and writing.

Results from the small pilot study this year indicate that both PreK and Kindergarten children demonstrated growth in their invented spelling of the 12 words between March/April and May/June.

Growth in Invented Spelling

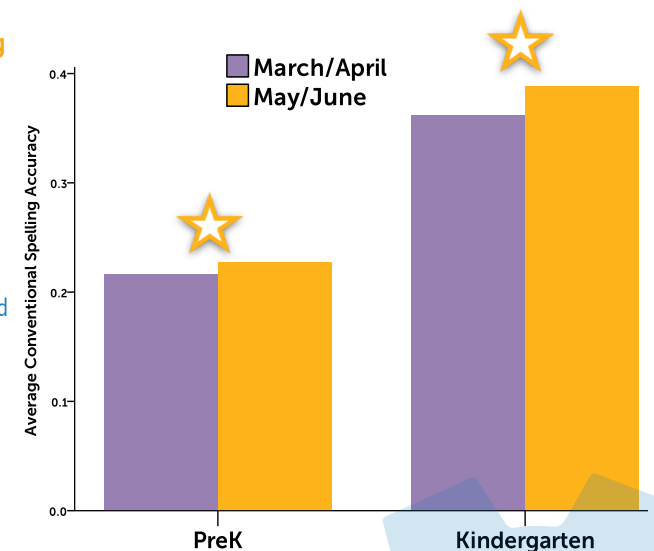
Both PreK and Kindergarten children demonstrated growth in invented spelling from time one to time two.

This improvement is particularly impressive given the short time frame between assessments and the impact of COVID-19 on the school year.

In the future, we want to look at invented spelling development across a longer period of time, i.e. beginning, middle, and end of the school year, and follow children's reading progress through 3rd grade to explore and validate the predictive power of this measure.



Higher scores represent fewer errors



What Our Team Said...

Our staff went above and beyond this year so we could support our teacher, administrator, school district and program partners. I want to express tremendous gratitude to this exceptional team.

Here are some of their thoughts looking back on the year.

— Barb Wilder-Smith, Executive Director



“Tools@Home was a saving grace — we pivoted remarkably in response to the circumstances; I’m so proud of how we responded to COVID-19.”

“I cannot believe everybody did what they did and pulled it together in such a professional way—I received so many comments that this is incredible.”

“We were very calm and collected and I felt very supported through this challenging time.”

“ This year involved a tremendous amount of teamwork and resilience.”

“I’m constantly amazed by what tools was able to, how quickly we pivoted and what we were able to create in just a few months time to launch the school year “

“It was a stressful experience handled with positivity and grace.”

“There is no way I could have reached as many teachers personally if I was traveling — this was much more productive”

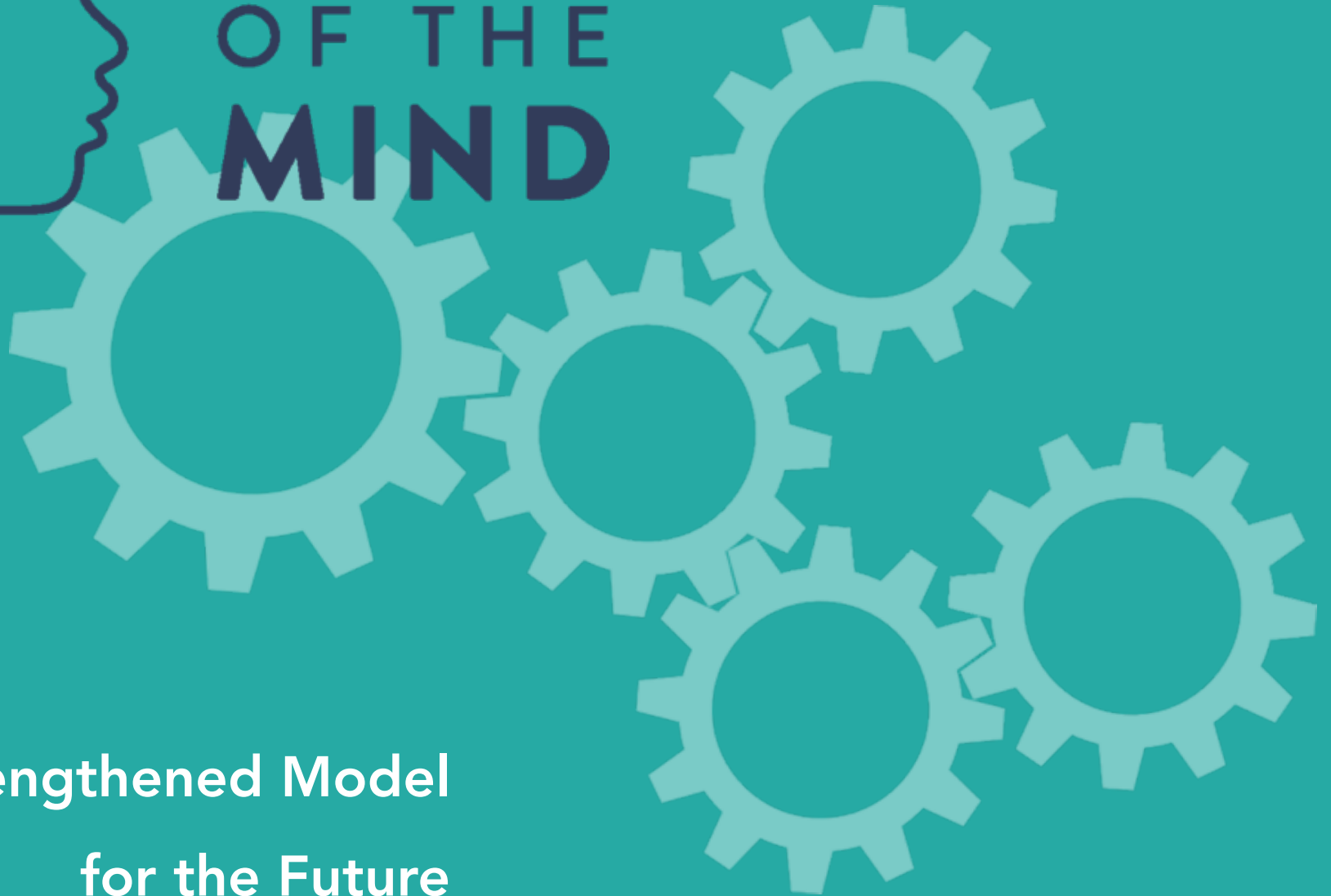
“This was a true test of our resilience and ability to hold steady in applying our approach within all that was going on — creating a holistic authentic framework that meets teachers where teachers actually are and provides what they need — I am so proud.”

“I love everything we’ve done and think we need to plan for how we will keep using it”.

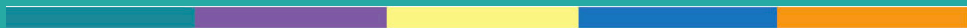




TOOLS OF THE MIND



A Strengthened Model
for the Future

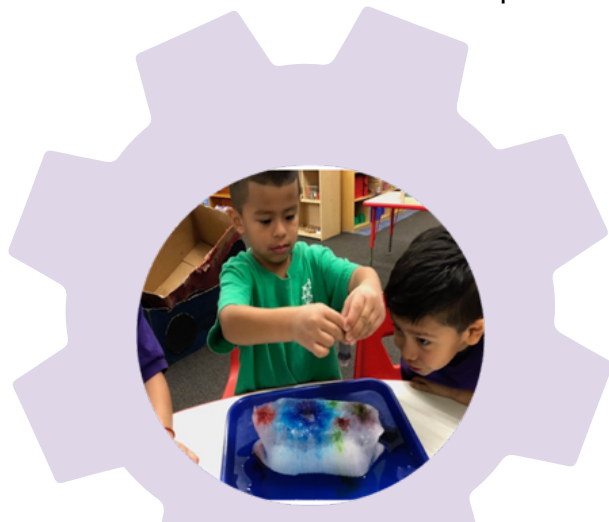


A Lasting Impact: The Tools Program Going Forward

Our core program will be forever changed by what we developed and learned this year. Next year, our work will build on our findings that teacher:family partnerships and the extension of learning activities and approaches from school to home impacts child development, and has meaningful benefits to the families and teachers involved. We will continue to expand our reach to parents and strengthen Tools teachers' capabilities to build strong teacher:family partnerships.

Our portfolio of offerings for SY 2021-2022 will include:

- **Virtual professional development** integrating new features for engagement and interaction
- **Professional Learning Community (PLC)**, small group discussions focused on strengthening instructional practice to support children's growth and learning
- **1:1 individualized video coaching** to support each teacher and classroom on a new Tools video platform



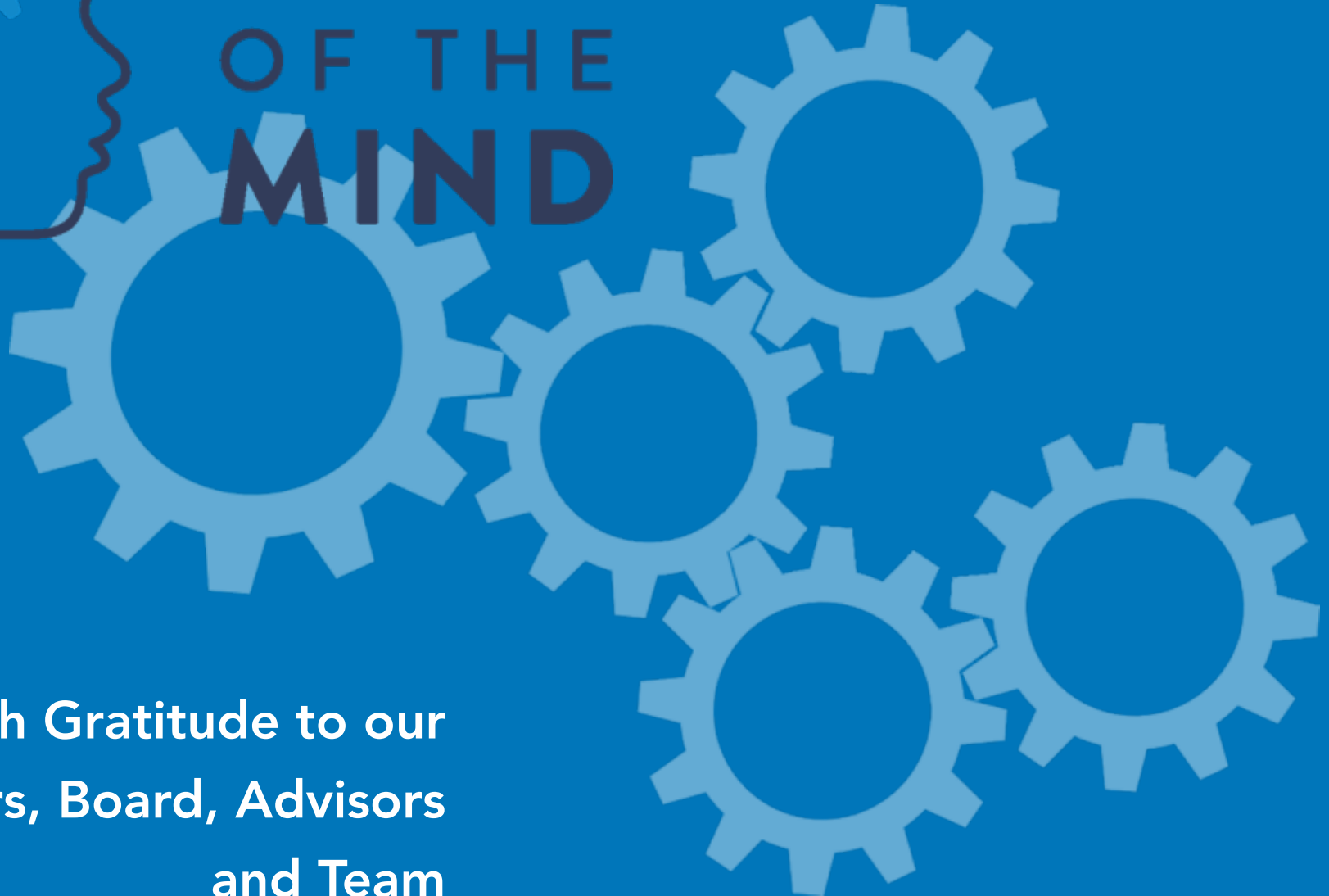
An online Essential Subscription platform that includes:

- **eTools**—A library of resources for teachers, administrators, coaches, and parents
- **iScaffold**—An on-demand professional development tool for teachers that provides in-the-moment support in implementing Tools activities and approach, with guidance for how to scaffold each individual child's growth
- **New Learn@Home**—Family and Child Centers with at-home activities designed to support and extend in-school learning
- **Family Connect**—To support family:teacher partnerships, upgraded in new ways incorporating teacher and family feedback
- **DWA and PowerTools**—With data analytics dashboards, offering customized child and classroom literacy data from the PowerTools Integrated Literacy Learning System to support data-informed instructional decisions for use in school and at home
- **Community**—a Tools online network for shared learning
- *And more to come!*

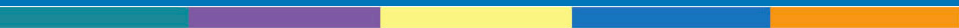




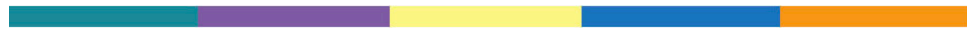
TOOLS OF THE MIND



With Gratitude to our
Supporters, Board, Advisors
and Team



With Gratitude to Our FY21 Supporters



Board of Directors



Thomas Aaro

Director

Tom Aaro is a business executive with over 35 years experience with leading Fortune 500 companies in marketing, sales, strategic planning and entrepreneurship. He has been a corporate executive with Kraft/General Foods, Cadbury Schweppes and Nestle. He was a partner and CEO of a marketing consulting/promotional agency (MGR-Marketing Drive) with numerous top consumer packaged goods clients, and the Founder/Managing Partner of BlueBlack, an agency that provided strategic consulting, promotional marketing and training. He has been serving on the Tools of Mind's business advisory board for the past two years, assisting in the development of its positioning, strategic planning, marketing and sales strategies. Mr. Aaro has an M.B.A. from the J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University and a B.S.B. in Business from the University of Minnesota.



Ellen Galinsky

Director

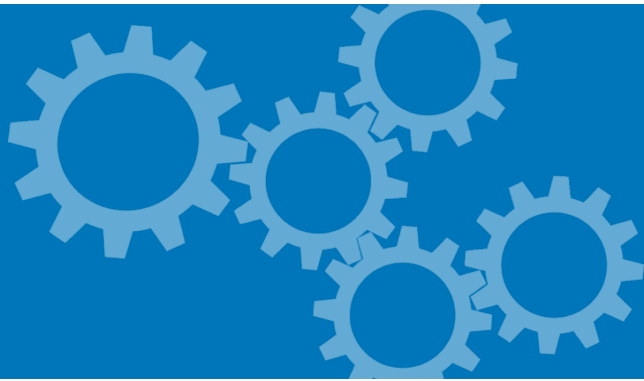
Ellen Galinsky is the chief science officer at the Bezos Family Foundation where she also serves as executive director of Mind in the Making. In addition, she is a senior research advisor for the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). She also remains president of Families and Work Institute. Her life's work revolves around identifying important societal questions as they emerge, conducting research to seek answers, and turning the findings into action. She has written more than 100 books and reports and over 300 articles, and has received a wide array of honors, including being elected as President of the National Association for the Education of Young Children; being elected as a member of the National Academy of Human Resources.



Nathaniel Foote

Director and Board Chair

Nathaniel Foote is Chairman of TruePoint, a consulting firm, and a founding Board member of the Center for Higher Ambition Leadership, a 501(c)(3) non-profit. He also serves as a Director of CitiesRISE and as a Senior Fellow of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. From 2014-2018, he served as Chairman of Activate Healthcare, a private equity-backed healthcare venture that grew 30%+ per year during that period, while achieving industry leadership on patient outcomes, cost control and customer satisfaction. A former partner at McKinsey & Co., Mr. Foote brings 35 years of experience helping organizations improve performance and accelerate growth through sharpened strategic direction, greater organizational alignment, and increased leadership team effectiveness.



Board of Directors



Elsa Holguin
Director

Elsa Holguin is President and CEO of Denver Preschool Program (DPP), which champions, funds and increases access to quality preschool across the City and County of Denver. Previously, as senior program officer at Rose Community Foundation, she directed the Foundation's Child and Family Development area, which supports the development and improvement of early childhood education, parent education programs that help strengthen families. Ms. Holguin was appointed in 2015 by Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper for a second term as a commissioner for the Early Childhood Leadership Commission. She currently chairs the board of Early Milestones Colorado and serves on the board of the National Early Childhood Funders Collaborative.



Jacqueline Jones
Director

Jacqueline is President & CEO of the Foundation for Child Development, where she is responsible for developing and implementing its strategic vision and goals. Prior to her tenure at the Foundation for Child Development, Dr. Jones served as a Senior Advisor on Early Learning to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and as the country's first Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning in the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to her position in the Obama Administration, Dr. Jones served as the Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Early Childhood Education in the New Jersey State Department of Education and as a Senior Research Scientist at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton for over 15 years. Dr. Jones has been a visiting faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a full-time faculty member at the City University of New York. She received both her Masters and Ph.D. degrees from Northwestern University.



Deborah Leong
Director, Co-founder, and President

Deborah Leong is a leading authority on the development of executive functions, Vygotskian approach, and early childhood assessments, and author of numerous books and articles on the topics. She is a Professor Emerita of Cognitive Developmental Psychology at Metropolitan State University of Denver, where she served as the director of the Auraria Early Learning Center for 3 years. Dr. Leong developed the Tools of the Mind approach with Dr. Bodrova with whom she has written numerous books, articles, and educational videos on the Vygotskian Approach to Psychology and the development of play. She received a B.A. in Psychology from Stanford University; a M.E.d. from Harvard University; and a Ph.D. in Psychological Studies in Education and Developmental Psychology from Stanford University.



Business Advisory Group

Margaret Covell

Margaret Covell is an Executive Fellow at the Center for Higher Ambition Leadership where her work centers on long term economic and social value creation within the Private Equity / Private Investing arena. Working both in the Private Equity space and in management consulting, Ms. Covell has spent over thirty years helping for-profit companies and not-for-profit organizations to develop winning business strategies and to build the underlying capabilities required to deliver the strategies. At Pinnacle Search Partners, Margaret's role enables her to tap into her broad network to help companies find executive talent that are the right cultural fit for their companies.

Peter Dunn

Peter Dunn was the Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Activate Healthcare, which he built from concept into an industry leader with over 150,000 patients served and best-in-class levels of patient engagement and customer satisfaction. Before founding Activate Healthcare, Peter served as CEO/President of Borden Foods and of the Steak 'n Shake Restaurant Company. Peter brings a strong consumer goods marketing background, with a focus on innovation and new product development, and was responsible for launching 'Lunchables', the most successful new food product of the 1980s. He has also served as Chairman of the Board of Feeding America, which distributes over 3 billion pounds of food via the national food bank network.

Chris Richmond

Over the last 40 years, Chris Richmond has led or advised on numerous high growth businesses and ventures, most recently as a Director at TruePoint. Previously, Chris ran three separate businesses within General Electric Capital Corporation as CEO over an 11-year period. Between 1994 and 2001, he built the Commercial Equipment Financing business from a U.S.-focused business into the largest business in GE Capital, with \$75 billion in portfolio assets and \$30 billion in annual sales in 18 countries. In 1997, Chris was appointed an Officer of the General Electric Company. He was also active in teaching at GE's Leadership School. Chris's earlier experience includes three years as President and COO of Syska and Hennessey Engineers, Executive Director of a large Public Authority in New York and CEO of a software firm. Chris is a Board member and immediate past president of a Boys and Girls club in Boston and is on the Board of Interise, a not for profit organization helping small businesses build capability and grow in inner cities throughout the U.S.



Scientific & Technology Advisory Group

Susan Athey

Stanford University School of Business
Artificial Intelligence Modeling of Human
Decision Making Processes

Linda Espinosa

University of Missouri
English Language Learners

Phil Fisher

University of Oregon
Executive Functions and Bio Measures of
Stress

Roberta Golinkoff

University of Delaware
Oral Language Development and Effects
of Playful Learning

Jim Gray

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Technology and Child Development

Daryl Greenfield

University of Florida
Scientific Concept Development

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

Temple University
Oral Language Development and Effects
of Playful Learning

Dana McCoy

Harvard University
Executive Functions Development

Luke Miratrix

Harvard University
Causal Inference Methods

James Radner

University of Toronto
Data-driven Outcomes Improvement

Catherine Snow

Harvard University
Reading Development, Lead Author of
Preventing Reading Difficulties

Rebecca Treiman

Washington University in St. Louis
Writing Development

John Willet

Harvard University
Statistical Modeling of Longitudinal Data



Management Team



Barbara Wilder-Smith

**Executive Director &
Co-Developer**

Barbara Wilder-Smith has more than 30 years of experience working with early childhood educators and programs across the country. She is a former teacher, teacher-educator, coach, program director, researcher and Tools trainer. Barb was promoted in March 2018 to lead the overall execution of Tools strategy and operations and the management and development of all staff. She led the Tools program's Content Development Team from 2013-2018, developing the 7th edition PreK and K manuals and the Tools program's technology resources including iScaffold, PowerTools and the DWA. She led the Tools program in the New England region, and managed two IES research studies. She received a B.A. in Education and a Ed.M. from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Mara Viana

Director of Operations, Systems & Innovation

Mara Viana joined Tools of the Mind in July of 2019 with over 10 years of experience in socially beneficial design, research, and education. She is committed to participatory research practices that value diverse ways of experiencing the world, that are co-constructed and mutually respectful, and which contribute to radically inclusive futures. In her role at Tools, Mara takes a systems level view of the experience of all stakeholders in the Tools ecosystem and works to improve their workflows and access to data. Since joining Tools, Mara has collaboratively overseen the redesign of the organization's Salesforce environment, developed and implemented systems and processes that support Tools as it scales, and developed accessible solutions for data access across the organization. Mara received degrees from the University of Colorado and Rhode Island School of Design.

Moira S. Rodgers

**Director of Partnership &
Business Development**

Moira S. Rodgers has broad experience across education sectors. From public schools, to the MA Department of Education, to educational publishing, Moira brings a unique set of skills to the team. Over the past 25 years, she has been a teacher, curriculum developer, elementary curriculum director, director of professional development, and a principal. She brings significant grant writing, project management, and communications experience to the organization. Moira has a long history with Tools of the Mind, having led its implementation in her school system, and using it as a focus for her doctoral thesis. She has both a B.A. and an M.B.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, an M.Ed. from Boston College, and an Ed.D. from Northeastern University.

Megan Siebert Spacciapoli

**Director of Evaluation &
Large Urban Partnerships**

Megan Spacciapoli is the Director of Evaluation & Urban Partnerships with a passion for early childhood and extensive experience managing research and evaluation projects. Prior to joining Tools of the Mind, Megan worked as an Early Childhood Researcher at SRI International supporting the design and implementation of a Kindergarten Entry Assessment in multiple states. Megan also spent a number of years working as a Research Manager at DC Public Schools, helping support the implementation of early childhood assessments and a blended Head Start Model and managing a large-scale program evaluation. She earned her Ph.D. in Applied Developmental Psychology from Fordham University and a B.S. in Psychology from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Management Team



Oliver Saunders Wilder

Lead Technologist and Product Development Manager

Over the past 10 years, Oliver Saunders-Wilder has been responsible for the creation and development of a number of technology solutions that are major products for Tools of the Mind, including iScaffold and PowerTools. He has also served as a Simons Postdoctoral Fellow at the MIT Media Lab and the Simons Center for the Social Brain at MIT. He previously served as Product Manager at Affectiva, and helped to found the business with a faculty member from the MIT Media Lab. While there, he was responsible for taking the iCahn technology from a university prototype to a high-quality commercial product, and holds 12 patents related to this work. He has a Ph.D. in a joint program between the College of Computer and Information Science and the Bouve College of Health Science at Northeastern University, and a B.A. from Harvard (cum laude) with a concentration in Psychology and a citation in Engineering.

Elena Bodrova

Co-Founder and Knowledge Advisor

Elena is a leading authority on the Vygotskian approach to education and she is the co-founder of Tools. She began her work at the Center for Preschool Innovations in Moscow, Russia where she worked with Vygotsky's direct students. She was a visiting faculty member at Metropolitan State University of Denver and then a senior researcher at McREL International for 14 years. She and Deborah Leong have co-written books and articles on Vygotskian theory, play, child assessment, and child development. She holds a Ph.D. in Child Development and Educational Psychology from Russian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and M.A. in Child Development and Educational psychology from Moscow State University, Russia.

Cyndi Cadigan

Manager of Finance and Administration

Cyndi Cadigan joined Tools in June 2019, after serving for 17 years as a Grants and Finance Manager for Third Sector New England, where she managed a portfolio of Fiscal Sponsor clients, and also headed federal compliance initiatives within the accounting department. Previously, she was an auditor with PriceWaterhouse Coopers. She received a B.S. and an M.B.A. in Accounting from the Indiana University Kelley School of Business.

David Brooke

Creative Development Manager

David Brooke has been leading the content team for the past six years, working on major grants, developing new video of classroom activities for iScaffold, designing professional development slides, contributing to the design and creation of our PowerTools application, and even serving as the voice of the badger in our PowerTools videos. Previously, David was a Media Production Specialist for a big-data corporation developing animation and video skills leveraging his B.S. in film and screenwriting at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Our Team

Angie Alvis

Associate Director of Partnership Development

Samuel Banks

Business Development Manager

David Brooke

Creative Development Manager

Cynthia Brown

Business Development Analyst

Cyndi Cadigan

Finance and Administration Manager

Carol Caroll

Partnership Development Specialist

Susan Coopersmith

Partnership Development Specialist

Carolyn Erhart

Program Assistant

Luis Gallego

Partnership Development Manager

Ashton Hankins

Technology Specialist

Jennifer Jeffries

Evaluation & Data Administrator

Tatianna Plefka

Partnership Development Administrator

Nancy O'Connell

Partnership Development Specialist

Aisha O'Donnell

Partnership Development Manager

Jennifer Martin

Partnership Development Manager

Leslie Pekarek

Lead Partnership Manager

Angela Robinson

Content Specialist

Alina Russo

Partnership Development Manager

Jillian Sullivan

Lead Evaluation & Data Specialist

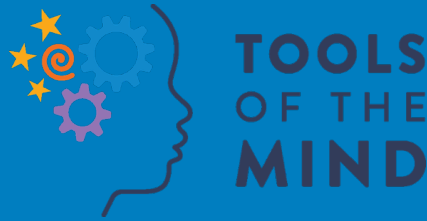
David Venter

Marketing Development Manager

Kim Wilson

Partnership Development Manager





2020 - 2021

ANNUAL REPORT

A History Built on Theory



“What a child can do today with assistance, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.”

Lev Vygotsky

The Tools of the Mind curriculum began in 1993, when Dr. Elena Bodrova and Dr. Deborah Leong began working together in early childhood classrooms to improve children’s ability to learn, and teach educators new techniques for working with children.

The concept of “tools of the mind” comes from Vygotsky, who believed that just as physical tools extend our physical abilities, mental tools extend our mental abilities, enabling us to solve problems and create solutions in the modern world. When applied to children, this means that to successfully function in school and beyond, children need to learn more than a set of facts and skills. They need to master a set of mental tools—tools of the mind

According to Vygotsky, until children learn to use mental tools, their learning is largely controlled by the environment; they attend only to the things that are brightest or loudest, and they can remember something only if has been repeated many times. After children master mental tools, they become in charge of their own learning by attending and remembering in an intentional and purposeful way. In the same way that using certain mental tools can transform children’s cognitive behaviors, using other mental tools can transform their physical, social, and emotional behaviors. Children become “masters of their own behavior.” As children are taught and practice an increasing number of mental tools, they transform not only their external behaviors, but also their minds.

2021 marks the 125th anniversary of Vygotsky’s birth— His theories live on in Tools of the Mind classrooms!

Resilience
Innovation
Adaptation