



**VELA**  
EDUCATION FUND



**Classrooms  
Anywhere**

Insights from  
Community-driven  
Education Models



(Cover) Heartwood Agile Learning Center, Georgia  
(Above) DELTIC Prep, Rhode Island

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Blood-Gas Exchange

Warm-Blooded

Birds

Ⓞ Mammals

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# Foreword

## An Introduction to VELA

**VELA's charge is to cultivate the conditions for out-of-system entrepreneurs to transform the future of education so that it better aligns with the values and priorities of families.**

Launched in 2020, VELA is a national nonprofit fund which supports a community of innovators implementing non-traditional education models. VELA invests in everyday entrepreneurs, which it defines as students, parents, educators, and community members who use their talents and resourcefulness to create their own ventures. VELA invests in these innovators on a trust basis, seeding early-stage programs outside the traditional K–12 system. Rather than dictating solutions to its grantees, VELA asks them to identify the needs of their communities and supports their strategies for meeting those needs.

To date, VELA has awarded more than 1,300 grants totaling over \$11 million to support these non-traditional education models. Grant recipients include students, parents, educators, and community leaders. They reside in all 50 of the United States, as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition to the funding itself, VELA is creating a dynamic community of grant recipients, focused on building connections and increasing awareness of this trailblazing work. Through a private online community, grant recipients enjoy access to collaboration and programming opportunities, and receive communications support, including media outreach and video storytelling.

# Executive Summary

In late 2021, VELA conducted a survey of recent micro grant recipients to gain an understanding of their values, their desired impact, and the resources needed to continue providing programs that meet their learners' and families' needs. This report summarizes key findings from 323 survey responses.

Analysis of the survey response data indicated seven consistent themes:

**1 Nontraditional learning is diverse and dynamic.**

Everyday entrepreneurs are responding to children's educational needs by designing a wide variety of program models and services, spanning a range of learning environments, learning content, and support services for families and learners. VELA grant recipients work across the country in metropolitan, suburban, and rural communities. A plurality of these recipients identify as entrepreneurs serving learners and families outside their own homes, and the majority identify as people of color.

**2 Everyday entrepreneurs are motivated to reimagine learning.**

Nontraditional environments encourage the kind of experimentation grantees believe is necessary for individualized, relevant, and affirming education that focuses on the whole child. Nontraditional models are singularly focused on meeting students' needs through creative approaches.

**3 Models prioritize human development.**

Respondents define and measure success in terms of human flourishing and, in turn, meeting higher-order needs: social needs such as inclusion, belonging, and a sense of community and connection; esteem needs including self-esteem, confidence, respect, and recognition; and self-actualization needs, i.e. the ability to discover and pursue one's potential.

**4 Nontraditional models measure success consistently with their values.**

Respondents prioritize responsiveness to learners and families above all else, and evaluate their programs by their ability to meet learners' and families' needs and expectations. To measure learners' success, they do not generally assess performance using standardized testing or other quantitative assessments. Instead, they rely on other assessment methods—such as observations, projects, portfolios, and self-reflection from learners and families—and deliver those assessments in the context of a supportive environment that prioritizes learner and family flourishing.

**5 Grantees prioritize family engagement.**

Respondents want families and learners to have agency in their educational experiences. Grant recipients report that they want 1) to help families understand that they have meaningfully distinct choices for their learners in terms of learning approaches and educational format, 2) to support families in making the best choices for each individual learner, and 3) to equip families to lead their learners' education.

**6 Grantees are hyper-focused on increasing access.**

As respondents reflect on desired changes in their local education systems, many cite inequitable access to high-quality experiences among their top concerns. They want to change what learning content and experiences are available and who can access them. Their goal is to establish models that can provide equitable access.

**7 Everyday entrepreneurs' needs are many and immediate.**

Many grant recipients are nascent organizations whose founders are motivated by the immediate needs of learners and their families. Often they have little time for or experience with the logistics of day-to-day operational management. They report that they need peer learning and connection, mentors, and tactical support to build their daily operations and scale.

**This survey highlights several opportunities for future work and research.**

- ▶ **For VELA and similar organizations:** Survey respondents emphasized that they want connections to others like them; ideas, resources, and best practices to learn and grow from; tactical operations support; and opportunities to support others. VELA is growing and adapting to meet these needs, and is also hoping other organizations will join in this work.
- ▶ **For philanthropy:** The amount of public funding and philanthropic dollars going to traditional education options vastly exceeds the current support for nontraditional approaches. VELA hopes that more philanthropists fill the vacuum and also adopt approaches that embrace trust, invest in early-stage ideas, and minimize bureaucratic processes.
- ▶ **For education and policymakers:** Families want the flexibility to make the educational decisions that they believe are best for their children. They are asking educators and policymakers to make it easier for them to do so, especially with more resources for nontraditional approaches and more collaboration between nontraditional and traditional systems.
- ▶ **For future research:** Many respondents are nascent organizations and are experiencing high demand. They want to build and scale thoughtfully. Everyday entrepreneurs want practical details about how others have solved key problems of practice, designed their program models, developed responsive content, or measured learning and impact. VELA intends to work closely with grantees to research these topics in deeper ways, to produce practical outputs, and to share learnings with the wider nontraditional education community.

# Background

Notwithstanding the growth of nontraditional education opportunities, there is still much to learn about the everyday entrepreneurs who are responding to family and learner demand.

VELA's learning strategy aims to explore such questions as: What motivates everyday entrepreneurs? How do they define impact or success? What support do they need to succeed? What motivates learners and families to participate in nontraditional learning environments? How do they define learning success or a positive learning environment? What benefits do they see in these environments?

The goal of VELA's learning efforts is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge of nontraditional education innovations and to:

- ▶ highlight the opportunities and challenges that everyday entrepreneurs face when creating nontraditional education innovations;
- ▶ provide guidance (to VELA itself and to the community at large) on how best to support everyday entrepreneurs in establishing, maintaining, and growing nontraditional education innovations;
- ▶ share more widely, with educators, philanthropists, and education policy, reform, and research organizations, data and insights about the values and priorities of learners and families who choose nontraditional education innovations, and
- ▶ identify opportunities to meet the demand for learning environments, content, resources, and tools.

# Methodology

In the fall of 2021, VELA conducted an online survey of 323 VELA micro grant recipients. The goal of this survey was to learn more about what grantees value, how they think about success and impact, and what they need to provide programs and grow.

This initial outreach survey was designed primarily to capture qualitative data from grantees so that VELA's analysis would be driven by the respondents' own words. Open response questions were analyzed, coded for key concepts, and organized into distinct themes.



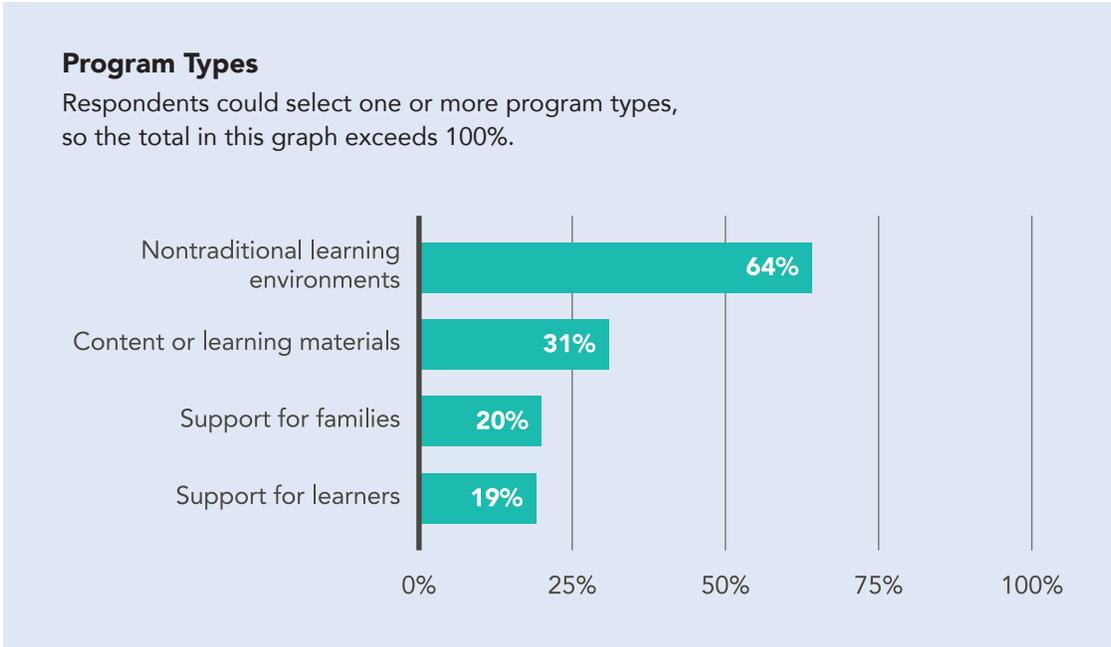
Waves on sand  
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(Top) Engaged Detroit, Michigan  
(Bottom) Indigenous Farm Hub,  
Native American Community Academy, New Mexico

# Nontraditional Learning is Diverse and Dynamic

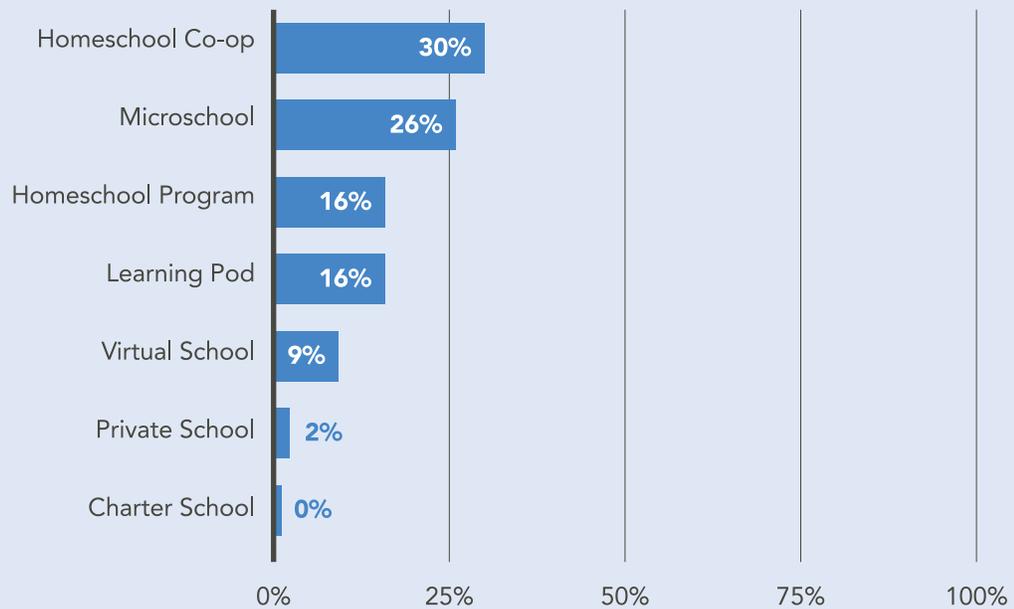
**Everyday entrepreneurs are responding to children’s educational needs by designing a wide variety of program and service models.** Grantees report that they provide learning environments, instructional content, and support services for families and learners. One-quarter report that their models span multiple program types; for example, some have created nontraditional learning environments and, in addition, have developed learning materials for wider use.



Of the 64% of respondents who indicated that they provide a learning environment, nearly half (46%) support homeschooling. This includes homeschool co-ops (30%) that organize resources and/or activities for a community of learners and families engaging in homeschool, and homeschool programs (16%) that facilitate a home-based learning environment for learners who are not enrolled in a public, private, or other school. Most of these homeschooling models (87%) reported in the survey that they serve multiple families.

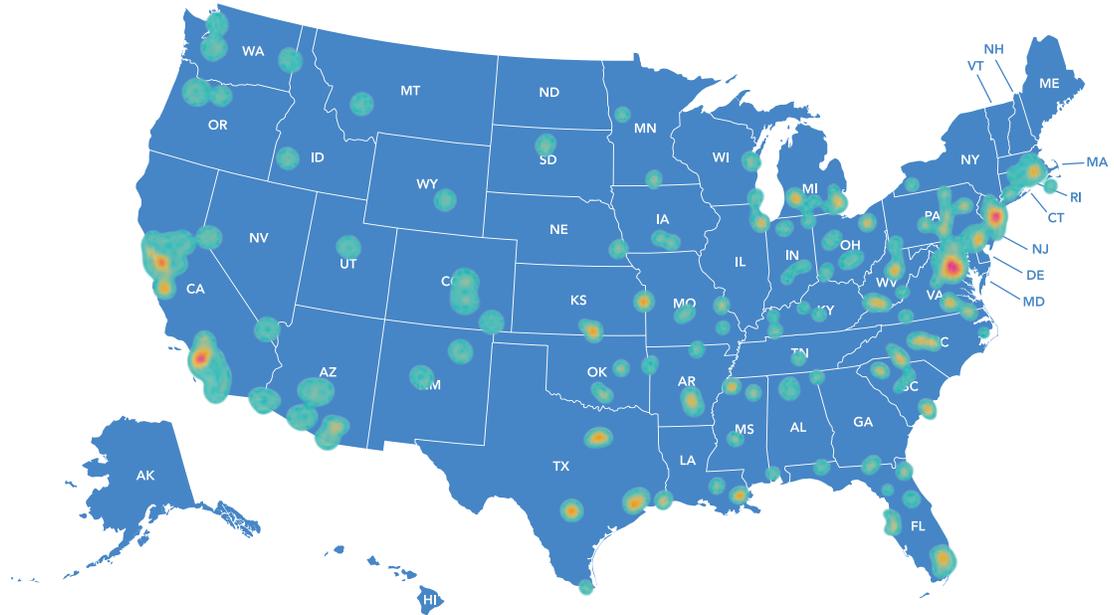
### Learning Environment Types

Respondents who provide learning environments could select a single category that best described that environment.

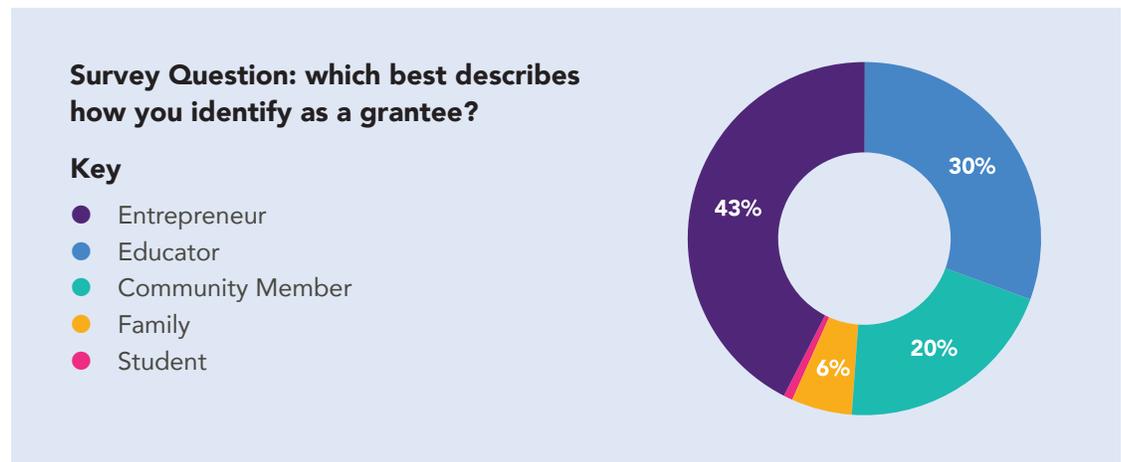


**Programs are serving learners and families all over the country.** Grantees operate local, regional, and national programs from all 50 of the United States, as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Grantees operate from metropolitan, suburban, and rural areas.

**Survey Respondents' Primary Locations**

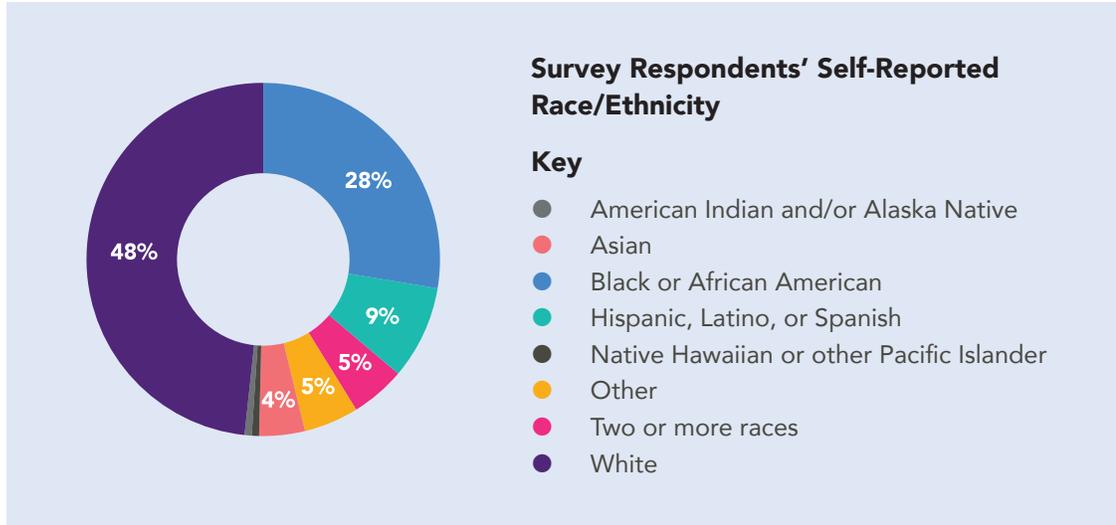


**Entrepreneurs make up the largest group of grantees, and this shapes their approach to the work.** Across VELA's portfolio, nearly half of grantees identify as entrepreneurs. This predominance of entrepreneurship is a strong undercurrent throughout the survey results. These everyday entrepreneurs prioritize responsiveness to learners and families above all else. Grantees want to understand learner and family needs, respond to them with quality programming and customer service, and remain agile so that they can grow and adapt to meet changing demand.

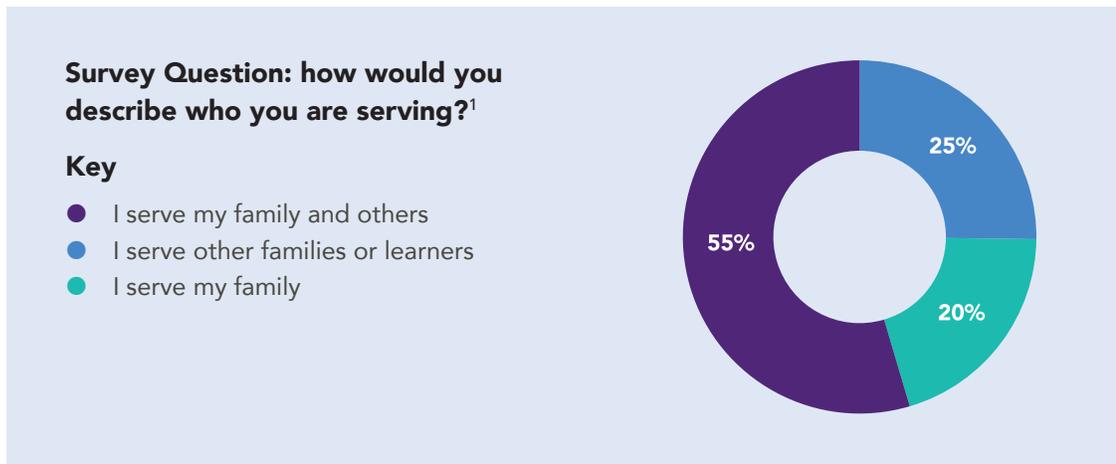


**Nontraditional education is a racially and ethnically diverse movement.**

Fifty-two percent of survey respondents self-identify as people of color; nearly a third as Black or African American.



**Nontraditional learning happens at home and in the community.** Survey findings suggest that there is a wide range of interaction between family-based and community-based models in nontraditional education. Over half of grantees say that they serve both learners in their own families and other families and learners. Another quarter exclusively serves families and learners other than their own.



1. Some respondents who answered “I serve my family” also provided descriptions of their programs, which reveal that many appear to serve other learners and families in addition to their own.

# Everyday Entrepreneurs are Motivated to Reimagine Learning

VELA grantees are driven to build nontraditional models because they have a profound vision for the future of education. They are motivated to provide educational experiences that are customized, relevant, and affirming—experiences that focus on the whole child and inspire lifelong learning. Grantees strive to provide educational journeys that acknowledge individuality, and reject the idea of one-size-fits-all educational models built for the “average” student.

- “ I wish [the local education system] was geared more toward making better people than making better workers.
- “ I want students to feel empowered, creative, resilient, and proud of their culture. I don’t feel enough emphasis is put on teaching the whole child and not just focusing on academic achievement. Schools should prioritize creative ways to teach children life lessons.

Many grantees prioritize involving families and learners in the priority-setting and decision-making process. They emphasize the value of learner-driven (not adult- or politics-driven) and inclusive learning experiences. Many grantees are also deeply motivated to increase access, opportunity, and quality, particularly for those who have historically faced economic and systemic barriers.

- “ I wish the quality of education/educational experiences wasn’t reliant on the socio-economic status of the community a school is in. There are so many discrepancies in the number of opportunities available from school to school, whether that be through in-classroom curriculum or extracurricular offerings.

Grantees also believe that experimentation is critical, and embrace the freedom of nontraditional settings. Everyday entrepreneurs are motivated by their dissatisfaction with the status quo to redefine the look and feel of learning experiences.

- “ I wish more people would be open to experimenting in education; we tend to believe that the status quo option is good enough, so we don’t look for anything better.

# Models Prioritize Human Development

Despite the broad diversity of the VELA grantee community across program model types, the learners and families they serve, and their locations, they share a very similar educational value: namely, learning experiences that are designed to help each learner flourish.

Throughout the survey, grantees consistently described the importance of higher psychological and self-fulfillment needs. Grantees value social needs including love, inclusion, and belonging; esteem needs such as self-esteem, confidence, respect, and recognition; and self-actualization needs, or the ability to discover and pursue one's potential. Learning environments that positively address these needs foster human flourishing.

## Grantees Were Asked

- ▶ What are three values or priorities that drive your program?

## Grantees Responded

Listed in order of frequency in responses.

- ▶ Creating responsive learning experiences
- ▶ Empowering and engaging families
- ▶ Creating access (and more equitable access) to new opportunities
- ▶ Religious values
- ▶ Building community for homeschooling learners and families
- ▶ Justice, equity, liberation, and civic engagement
- ▶ Affirming people of color, multilingual learners, and immigrant families
- ▶ Social and emotional learning
- ▶ Building community and connections
- ▶ Student achievement and excellence
- ▶ Language access and supports

This focus on flourishing extends beyond immediate needs and into more general day-to-day programming. When grantees describe the kinds of learning experiences they hope to design, they describe models that engage learners' full selves; provide individualized, customized experiences; affirm learner and community identities; allow learners and families to participate in decision-making and priority-setting; build on connections between education and the real world (either the things learners can do in it, or the things learners can change about it); and develop loving and trusting relationships.

# Grantees Measure Success Consistently With Their Values

## Grantees were asked

- ▶ How do you know if your program is successful?

## Grantees responded

Listed in order of frequency in responses.

- ▶ There is demand for my program
- ▶ Learners are enthusiastic and engaged in learning activities
- ▶ I receive positive feedback from families and learners
- ▶ Learners are flourishing: connected, building esteem, and pursuing their potential
- ▶ Families are engaged, empowered, and equipped
- ▶ Learners are applying skills (e.g. they are doing things they couldn't do before)
- ▶ Learners are performing or growing academically

As everyday entrepreneurs, grantees recognize the importance of customer needs. Consequently, they focus on responsiveness to individual learner and family needs, and they openly define their own success in those terms.

**Demand.** Grantees overwhelmingly identify demand from learners and families as a key measure of their programs' success. Grantees feel that they are successful when learners and families sign up, show up, enroll year after year, and refer others. Grantees recognize that their nontraditional models exist in an open market. They know that many have a "default" option in the traditional system, and they also know that learners and families can vote with their feet. Grantees recognize the importance of understanding customer needs, being immediately responsive, and providing value.

▶ The growing numbers of families joining is a good indication of our success. Our community values their time and money, and I feel they would stay home if we weren't offering something of value to them.

**Direct feedback from families and learners.** Grantees also cite the importance of direct feedback from learners and families. Many grantees define success in terms of participants who express gratitude, report high satisfaction, or confirm that the programs are providing what they want. Grantees report that their methods for soliciting this feedback are primarily conversation (e.g., informal discussions, regular check-ins, formal debriefs, or reflections) and by administering surveys (most unstructured, and some pre/post).

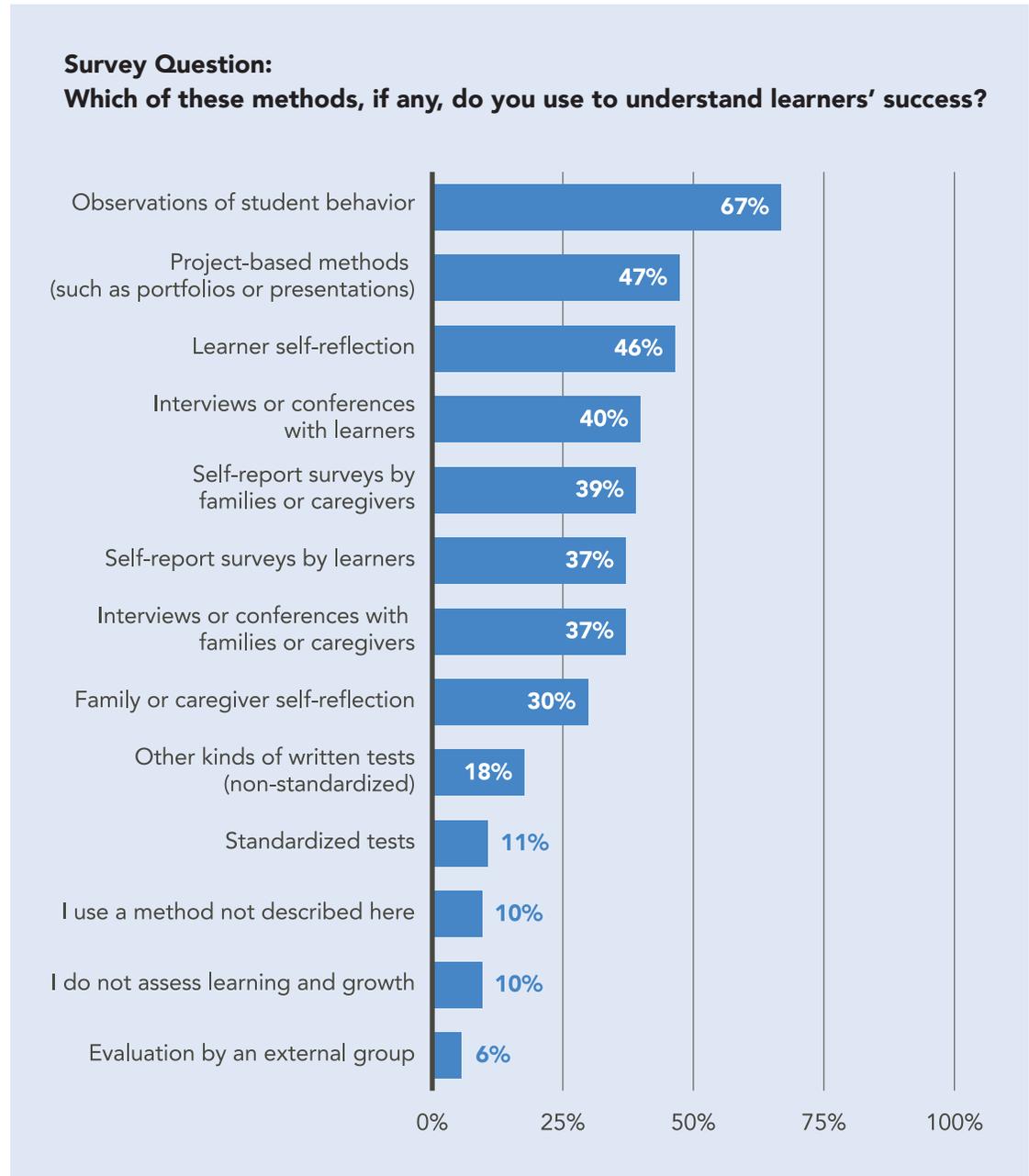
☛ We have had parents express their gratitude for all the information and resources we provide for them to be able to homeschool. Also helping them with what they need to know in order to decide if homeschooling is right for them and how to take the steps to begin.

**Learner engagement.** Respondents also describe their programs' success in terms of learner engagement. Grantees maintain that they are successful when learners are enthusiastic and motivated to learn and contribute.

☛ We would say that the feedback after our STEM station events would confirm [our success]. Also, throughout our events, kids are learning with hands-on activities. They smile, loudly proclaim, giggle, gasp, jump up and down, ask questions, and concentrate during each station.

☛ The children are happy intrinsically motivated learners independent of adult prompting. They are engaged in a wide variety of activities and do not shrink back from a challenge. They are kind, thoughtful and helpful members of the learning community.

To measure learners' success, grantees do not generally assess performance using standardized testing or other quantitative assessments. Instead, they rely on other assessment methods—such as observations, projects, portfolios, and self-reflection from learners and families—and deliver those assessments in the context of a supportive environment that prioritizes learner and family flourishing.



# Grantees Prioritize Family Engagement

Grantees are intensely focused on empowering and engaging families to make more direct decisions about learners' education. Grantees see the family as a critical player in a child's educational experience, and want to equip families to participate deeply in their children's education, and/or educate their children themselves.

■ We have to create spaces where we are thinking about our youth and families as a whole. What can our families and youth bring to the table? What can we offer them? How can we make this experience joyful and unique to them?

Grantees want families to know that they have options and that those options include meaningfully different alternatives. Several grantees reflected that school choice initiatives offer options primarily among traditional-system schools, and that they hope families understand that there are alternate options available that have very different approaches and formats.

■ Our number 1 priority is helping families realize how many learning options are available to their children. One-size-fits-all is definitely not how education works! Each child has their own unique learning style!

■ Families need more options, and they need to be more aware of what options are there. We welcome public, private, and homeschooled students, but most educational programs are only offered to one group (ONLY public school students or ONLY home schooled students). This has been great for the students involved!

Toward this end, grantees engage in efforts to give families an accurate understanding of their options. These include raising awareness of the models available, as well as confronting stereotypes, concerns, and misinformation that families may have about nontraditional options. For example, some respondents spoke specifically about dealing with misinformation about homeschooling in their work (e.g., that homeschooling is illegal, or that homeschooling is not a social experience, or that caregivers must have formal education training in order to homeschool their children).

- We would love to change people’s perception of homeschool education. Showing them how enriching and successful it is for the children and the parents; that it is a viable option for educating children; and that there is support for the entire family.

Grantees also say that they want to support families in making the best decisions for their learners, whether they choose an in-system, out-of-system, or hybrid opportunity. They want to help families navigate the choices available to them and personally invest in their children’s educational success.

- [I] wish there was more acceptance of individual choice for student learning. Parents feel uncomfortable making the choice for themselves, there should be more institutional support for individual family choices about schooling their children.

Finally, if a nontraditional model is the right choice, grantees report their desire to help families make the transition successfully. In many models, grantees provide families with content, tools, mentorship, and peer connections so that families feel confident and equipped.



*Heartwood Agile Learning Center, Georgia*

# Grantees are Hyper-focused on Increasing Access

Grantees report that they are driven to increase access, opportunity, and equity. As respondents reflect on desired changes in their local education systems, many cite inequitable access to high-quality experiences among their top concerns. They are focused on increasing access in several ways.

First, respondents want to change what families and learners can access. They are driven to create and provide opportunities that might be otherwise unavailable in their communities. Grantees seek to identify and fill gaps, whether in the traditional system—such as arts and summer programming—or in the nontraditional system, such as extracurricular opportunities for learners to develop leadership and team skills.

Second, respondents want to change who can access these varied, high-quality opportunities. Many are motivated by inequities in access, and centralize racial and economic justice in their work. These grantees focus on program opportunities for specific populations, including students of color, immigrant or undocumented families, multilingual learners, and at-risk learners.

■ I wish schools had more resources, knowledge, and the capacity to create more responsive safe spaces for the development of Black and Brown boys.

Third, respondents are intentional about how learners and families get access, and prioritize equitable access. Many grantees tailor their business models to provide no- or low-cost services to some or all of their participants. Many grantees acknowledge that this is core to their mission, and a critical reason they fundraise from organizations like VELA.

■ We value the equity principle and intentionally create a diverse and inclusive learning community. Making Montessori education accessible and available to all families regardless of racial identity or income.

# Everyday Entrepreneurs' Needs are Many and Immediate

Many survey questions explored everyday entrepreneurs' needs in order to maintain, thrive, and grow their efforts. Their responses were consistent across program type and grantee demographics.

**More funding sources.** Grantees need (1) access to more grant funding and partnership opportunities, and (2) help putting their best foot forward as they pursue this funding and these relationships. Grantees want to learn about external funding opportunities; to understand which national and local philanthropic initiatives are interested in this work; to learn best practices in writing grants, proposals, and budgets; and to refine the way they pitch their work and communicate their programming, impact, and potential.

**Help with day-to-day operations and management.** Many micro grant recipients are nascent organizations. Most grantees reported that they are actively trying to solve mission-critical operational needs: funding shortfalls, staffing, facilities, recruitment. They want support with these operational needs; for example, they want support with marketing tools and outreach strategies to build awareness, enrollment, and partnerships. They want coaching and mentorship in scaling and ensuring quality while they grow. They want advice and tools on human resources, including strategies for engaging both family and non-family volunteers, transitioning from a volunteer-led organization to one with paid staff, or providing high-quality professional development. They want to learn from others' experiences building leadership and governance structures, such as creating boards. They want advice on budgeting, financial management, or technology tools to streamline their work. Grantees want to learn from experts, fellow grantees who are working through (or have already worked through) similar topics, and mentors who can provide more intensive coaching.

**Strategies for motivation, well-being, and self-sustainability.** Many grantees recognize their personal bandwidth as a key factor in their programs' sustainability. Throughout the survey, grantees constantly emphasized the risk of burnout and asked for help with their own well-being. Many grantees also reported that they can feel alone in their work and value the opportunity to connect with others for inspiration, morale, storytelling, and encouragement.

**Learning from peers and experts.** Grantees are eager to connect with others to source ideas and inspiration for their own work. Grantees want to understand other small organizations' growth journeys so that they can plan wisely for their own. Grantees are interested in how more experienced organizations would advise on planning for the

steps ahead; how others handle growing pains in operational management, governance, staffing, and leadership; and how others maintain quality and connection while scaling. Grantees also want to learn from others' programming. Grantees are eager to share inspiration and ideas, to see what others are doing and how they are doing it, and to see ideas that they can adapt to their own programs. Grantees also want to explore specific design considerations and operational tactics for programs similar to theirs.

**Systemic support.** Many grantees emphasize that families, learners, educators, and policymakers need more awareness of nontraditional options, and that systemic legal and financing changes are needed to lower barriers to entry and access. They also want systemic changes so that nontraditional education has more equal footing with traditional models. Many grantees cite the need for access to public financing (e.g., funding follows the learners) to ease financial burdens for families and program providers; others reference their need for institutional support in such matters as state certification processes or local zoning, to reduce the red tape involved in their operations. Many report that access to adequate facilities and space is a continuous challenge.

👉 Create a culture of yes where we create more room for innovative new ideas and schools like this.

**More cooperation among education providers.** Grantees recognize that many learners participate in both in-system and out-of-system programs and hope more educators and policymakers will recognize the continuum of learning that happens within and between the traditional system, nontraditional programs, and home. Survey respondents reiterated that collaboration among these disciplines could impact how well learners are served; how well educators, learners, and families communicate and jointly support learning; and how well local communities understand their education options and make the right choices for them.

👉 There is a deficit mentality and I wish folks could adopt an asset mindset. Communities in need also have a rich pool of resources to draw from — they may not be material, but innovation, creativity, resilience, and courage are priceless.

👉 The “us vs them” mentality between homeschool and public school. I love advocating for the best educational choice for each child for the given time.

👉 I would like to see more collaboration among educators in my community. There is a strong feeling of competition among homeschool groups in our area which is detrimental to our ability to create more programs that would be beneficial to our students.

# Recommendations

**Findings and analysis of the survey highlight several opportunities for future work and research.**

## For VELA And Similar Organizations

In this survey, VELA heard that grantees want connections to others like them; ideas, resources, and best practices to learn and grow from; tactical operations support; and opportunities to support others. VELA is growing and adapting to meet these needs, and is also hoping other organizations will join in this work. These are important findings not only for this organization, but also for others supporting education work and open to nontraditional models. VELA intends to centralize the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in its ongoing research work so that it can continue to ground future research questions in grantees' work and needs.

## For Philanthropy

The amount of public funding and philanthropic dollars going to traditional education options, such as district schools and charter schools, vastly exceeds the current support for nontraditional approaches. VELA hopes that more philanthropists fill the vacuum that VELA is addressing and that, as a result, other organizations also adopt some of the ways in which VELA makes grants.

**Philanthropists can listen, learn, and trust.** In conversation with grantees, VELA does far more listening than talking. The support it offers is optional and open-ended, and there is no top-down guidance to adapt in certain ways. Reporting requirements are minimized and prioritize learning over compliance.

**Philanthropists can practice trust-based giving.** VELA's grant application is simple and straightforward; on average, it takes applicants about 35 minutes to complete it. By philanthropic standards, VELA is making small bets on many people, and aims to move quickly, both for the benefit of the grantee and for the benefit of the work. This organization believes in meeting the moment, and strives to avoid missing the moment by getting caught up in bureaucratic processes, multiple rounds of review, and extensive reporting requirements.

**Philanthropists can let these small teams build and grow in place.** Rather than making a few big bets on a handful of programs and pressuring them to scale, VELA is placing many bets on many programs and trusting them to grow at the pace that is right for them and for their communities.

Practically, philanthropists who want to help this movement can help provide implementers with funding, investment, and time to find their legs. Educators need a wide range of strategic planning and management supports, which opens up partnerships to those interested in accelerating grantees' products and services in ways beyond funding.

## For Educators And Policymakers

Families want the flexibility to make the educational decisions that they believe are best for their children. They are asking educators and policymakers to make it easier for them to do so.

**Educators and policymakers can promote access.** Many families shoulder the financial burden in order for their children to pursue a nontraditional approach to education, and the costs and sacrifices involved can limit access. More resources for nontraditional approaches could open the door for more families and let them make decisions based on what is truly best for the child, not what is affordable for the family.

**Educators and policymakers can promote options.** Nontraditional approaches to education are not a zero-sum proposition; they do not always require a learner to choose one approach (nontraditional) instead of another (traditional). In some districts, public schools are adopting a la carte options for homeschooling families that allow students to access the traditional environment in the same way they would access a homeschool co-op – for example, for electives and for larger group socialization.

## For Future Research

VELA hopes to work closely with everyday entrepreneurs, educators, learners, and families to understand what types of future research would be most valuable, and how research findings can be shared in a way that can practically influence their practice.

**Grantees want to explore how others have designed their programs.**

Grant recipients want practical details about how others have solved key problems of practice. Specifically, grantees want case studies, models, and best practices that detail the ways others approach program design, content development, and measurement and evaluation. VELA intends to work closely with grantees to research these topics in deeper ways, to produce practical outputs, and to share learnings with the wider nontraditional education community. In the near term, the learning community will be focusing on highly discrete problems of practice and opportunities to elevate the ways that nontraditional models design and deliver programming that is responsive to learners and families above all else.

**Grantees are eager to learn directly from learners and families participating in nontraditional programs.** Grantees want to better understand learners' and families' motivations for choosing nontraditional educational models, including ideas that are working well for learners and families (e.g., specific programs or content; how expectations are being met or exceeded), along with ideas that are not working well.

- What makes a learning community that you feel loved and engaged in?
- [I want to know] what keeps [families and learners] coming back for more. This market segment is self-selecting, so [we want to understand] their decision-making habits around informal educational experiences and how we can customize the product outreach to meet their needs.

*Zucchini's Homeschool Co-op, Georgia*





» What makes a **learning community** that you feel loved and engaged in? »









Humans are amazing and driven. We are creative problem solvers. **Children are so capable of learning on their own and being resilient.** If we trust them a little more, mentor them along the way, and give them latitude to explore, they will thrive, excel, and be remarkable in unique ways. 



[velaeducation.org](http://velaeducation.org)  
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