PBLWorks Research & Evidence Strategic Priority Plan 2025

WE <u>KNOW</u> PBL WORKS; NOW, WE NEED TO <u>SHOW</u> THAT <u>OUR WORK</u> AT PBLWORKS WORKS

Introduction

This plan outlines the work to be done to advance Research & Evidence at PBLWorks. In alignment with the PBLWorks vision, mission, and beliefs, this plan includes strategic and enabling actions for research and evidence to support PBLWorks ambitions to make a positive impact on district and school leaders, teachers, and all students, especially Black and Brown students, using Gold Standard PBL. This plan is also designed to guide and support the implementation of internal and external strategic actions. As such, the plan will be updated on an ongoing basis to reflect changing demands, resources, and learning. Annually, progress will be analyzed, and updates will be made for the subsequent fiscal year.

Vision
All students, especially Black and Brown students, to engage in high quality Project Based Learning to deepen their learning and achieve success in college, career, and life.

Mission
Build the capacity of teachers to design and facilitate quality Project Based Learning and the capacity of school and system leaders to set the conditions for teachers to implement great projects with all students

Our Vision for Racial Equity
Racial equity for all students will be achieved when race and ethnicity no longer predict the outcome of a young person's educational future. The board, leadership team, PBLWorks staff and National Faculty commit to identifying and dismantling racial inequities, and providing equity-based support, so that students furthest from opportunity can achieve their full potential.

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

Research & Evidence Principles

The PBLWorks Research and Evidence team maintains professional memberships and adheres to the AEA Evaluator Competencies and the AERA Code of Ethics. The team developed the principles and framework in support of PBLWorks' commitment to racial equity. In research, *"Deep equity means working toward outcomes in ways that model dignity, justice, and love without re-creating harm in our structures, strategies and working relationships"* (EEI, p.9). To better understand this, the team reviewed the literature on anti-racist evaluation, culturally responsive research practices, and equitable research and evaluation strategies. We then synthesized these sources with PBLWorks' mission, vision, and core values.

The following **principles** demonstrate our ongoing commitment to equitable research practices that guide our work.

1. **People-Centered**
   - Bring data to life through real stories, e.g., interviews, focus groups, or other qualitative means to accurately share lived experiences
   - Collaboration/co-creation/shared power
   - Consider alternative forms of data collection and reporting based on cultural and community norms, e.g., storytelling, when appropriate[1]
   - Asset-based reporting, not just needs-based
   - Protect personally identifiable information (PII), identity, or other private information
2. **Impact-Driven**
   - Be clear in the "why" of how a given research project will work toward increasing access to GSPBL for all students, especially those furthest from opportunity
   - Translate research findings into actionable recommendations based on evidence
   - View research endeavors as opportunities to improve educational equity[2]
3. **Transparent**
   - Share the methods, data, results, and learning with colleagues, teams, and participants
   - Include the context of the work and potential implications in reporting
   - Utilize participatory methods to share power and ensure research design is contextually and culturally relevant, internally and externally[3]
4. **Reflective**
   - Engage in intentional and systematic reflection and feedback cycles to support learning and continuous improvement in our design, methodology, and reporting
   - Counteract common pitfalls in educational research by critically examining researcher positionality, subjectivity, and power dynamics to minimize biases in data collection, analysis, and reporting[4]

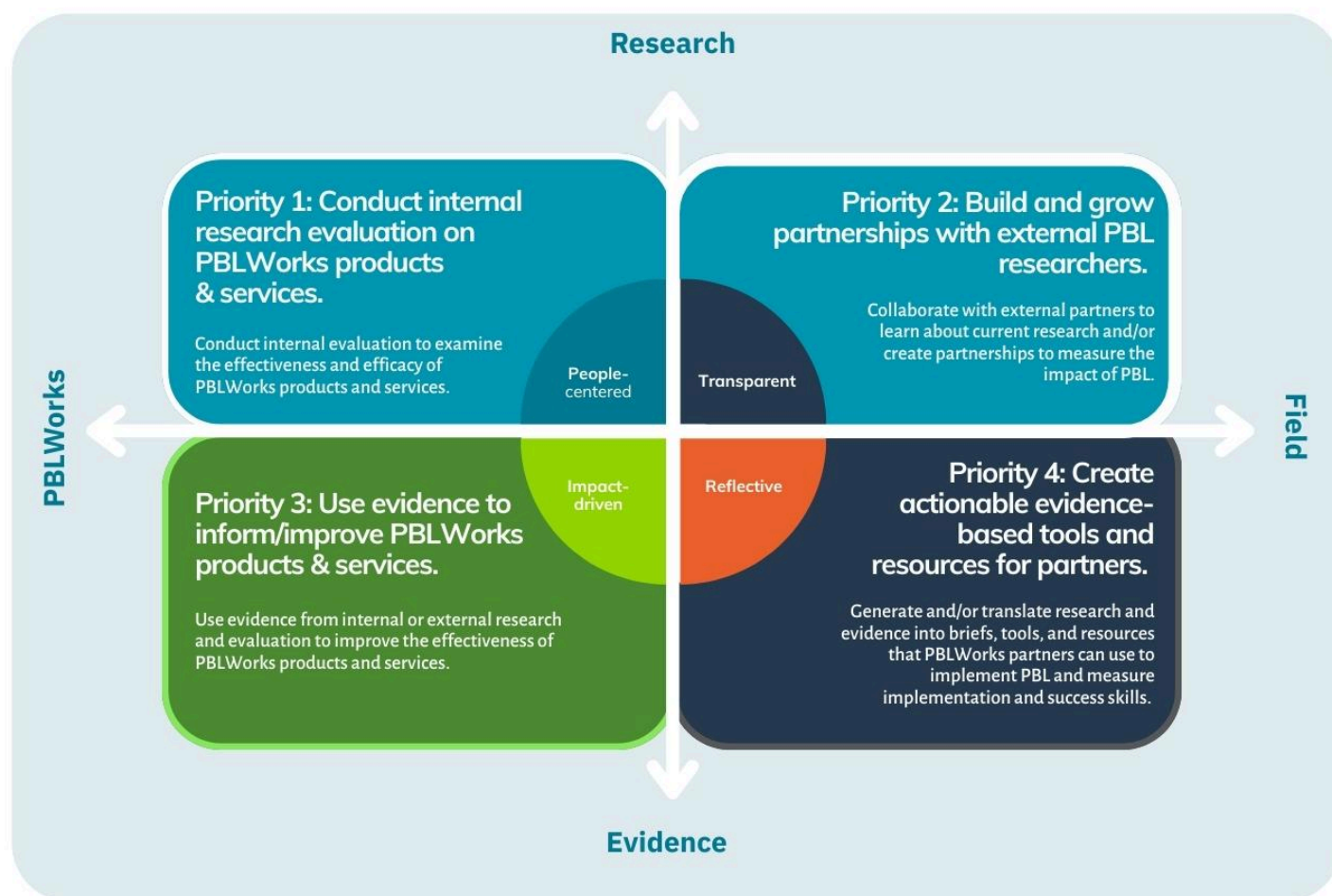[1] The California Endowment: Storytelling Approaches to Program Evaluation.
[2] Equitable Evaluation Framework: EEF Principles
[3] American Evaluation Association Statement On Cultural Competence In Evaluation
[4] Anti-Racist Evaluation Strategies: A Guide for Evaluation Teams
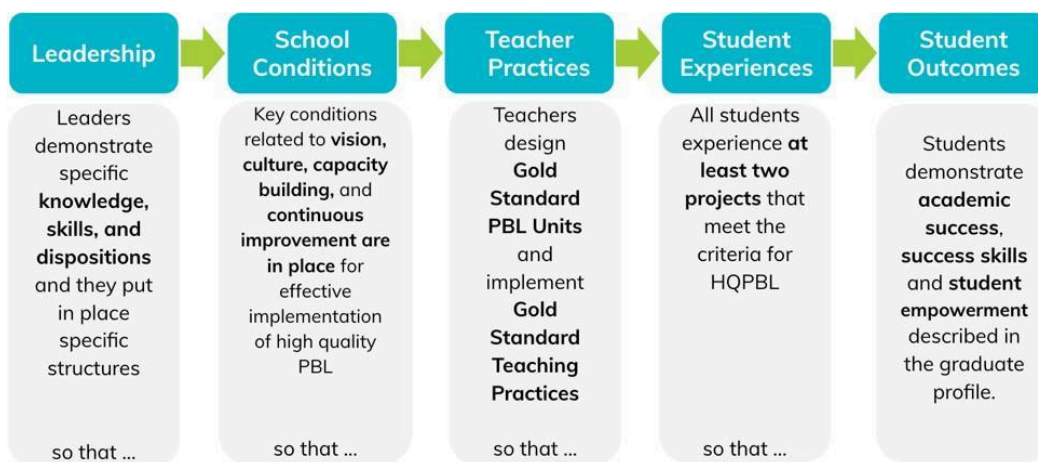
Research & Evidence Framework

The PBLWorks Research and Evidence team uses a matrix framework to design and guide the focus of the work over time, based on four distinct priorities. We designed this framework in 2017 as part of a strategic planning process to clarify the purpose of the research and evidence team; and design, orient, and focus PBLWorks research and evidence work for greater impact. This matrix is based on key insights, risks, and research questions gathered from the management team, project leadership team, board members, and key staff members, and external stakeholders, including national PBL experts and PBL researchers.

Research

PBLWorks

Priority 1: Conduct internal research evaluation on PBLWorks products & services.

Conduct internal evaluation to examine the effectiveness and efficacy of PBLWorks products and services.

People-centered

Priority 2: Build and grow partnerships with external PBL researchers.

Collaborate with external partners to learn about current research and/or create partnerships to measure the impact of PBL.

Transparent

Impact-driven

Reflective

Field

Priority 3: Use evidence to inform/improve PBLWorks products & services.

Use evidence from internal or external research and evaluation to improve the effectiveness of PBLWorks products and services.

Priority 4: Create actionable evidence-based tools and resources for partners.

Generate and/or translate research and evidence into briefs, tools, and resources that PBLWorks partners can use to implement PBL and measure implementation and success skills.

Evidence

Priority 1: Conduct internal research and evaluation on PBLWorks resources and professional services

To deliver on the promise of our vision, mission, and racial equity imperative, we will prioritize establishing an evidence base to show the effectiveness and efficacy of PBLWorks professional services and curriculum resources. PBLWorks will continue to conduct internal research and evaluation to answer key relevant questions at the student, teacher, leader, and school levels in alignment with the PBLWorks Theory of

Action and based on high-priority questions identified by staff and board members and ongoing scans of current PBL research.

Leadership	School Conditions	Teacher Practices	Student Experiences	Student Outcomes
Leaders demonstrate specific **knowledge, skills, and dispositions** and they put in place specific structures	Key conditions related to **vision, culture, capacity building,** and **continuous improvement are in place** for effective implementation of high quality PBL	Teachers design **Gold Standard PBL Units** and implement **Gold Standard Teaching Practices**	All students experience **at least two projects** that meet the criteria for HQPBL	Students demonstrate **academic success, success skills** and **student empowerment** described in the graduate profile.
so that …	so that …	so that …	so that …	

Priority 2: Build partnerships with external PBL researchers

Rigorous research on the efficacy of Project Based Learning (PBL) made a huge leap forward in 2022 as a result of key rigorous research studies supported by Lucas Education Research (LER), including the Knowledge in Action (KIA) study, in which PBLWorks designed and facilitated professional services. Prior to these studies, research on PBL was considered "promising and not proven."A recent PBL literature review (Condliffe, et al., 2017) points to key areas of research needed; specifically: (a) rigorous PBL research, specifically randomized control studies; (b) studies examining non-academic competencies; (c) studies that examine the effect of PBL on mathematics and literacy skills; and (d) efficacy of PBL on varying subgroups. With this elevated foundation for PBL research, the PBLWorks research team is focused on partnering with external researchers to garner support to examine the efficacy of our professional services and products on outcomes for all students, especially Black and Brown students.

Priority 3: Use evidence to continuously improve PBLWorks products and professional service

The need for continuous improvement is widely recognized by staff members as essential for achieving PBLWorks vision and fulfilling the mission and our racial equity imperative. In this work, PBLWorks seeks to put in place a predictable and systematic process for analyzing, reflecting on, and making improvements from a broad array of evidence collected through research projects (e.g., unit tests, pilots), PBL research conducted by partners, service surveys, and authentic artifacts.

Priority 4: Create actionable evidence-based tools and resources for partners

Non-profit organizations are considered by educators as viable sources of valid research (Education Perspectives Research Survey, 2018). One of the most pressing, and often urgent, needs expressed by educators in PBLWorks growing network is evidence that PBL works. PBLWorks will continue to seek innovative ways to identify and generate valid and reliable evidence that pushes the current boundaries on what counts to show what students know and can do, using a broad array of evidence, including state assessment results and alternative authentic measures of student success that describe the whole child. The literature suggests that for research to be used in practice, it must be relevant and integrated into practice. PBLWorks will use human-centered design principles to design tools and resources tailored to the specific and unique needs of educational stakeholder groups: district and school leaders, and teachers.

The growth and sustainability of research and evidence at PBLWorks is dependent on internal capacity and external support. As this work has historically been supported through grants from private foundations, PBLWorks will need to prepare to be best situated to take advantage of funding opportunities that support Priorities 1-4. Other enabling actions include increasing staffing, professional learning, and designing new systems of support.

Aspirations for 2025

By the end of 2025, we aspire to accomplish the following:

- Prioritize internal and external evaluation of our services conducted in districts and schools serving at least 50% or more students who are furthest from opportunity

- Advocate for the creation of a systematic and trustworthy method for counting and tracking outputs, including participants

- Complete an external study to examine the effectiveness or efficacy of our curriculum-related services in mathematics and social studies

- Partner with researchers who use culturally responsive research approaches

- Refine a scalable, systemic, sustainable, and systematic approach to engaging in the internal evaluation of services and curriculum resources, using formative and summative data to improve products and answer emerging questions

- Align, optimize, and/or implement systems that support data collection, analysis, and reporting (e.g., Salesforce, Form Assembly, Conga, Tableau, InVivo)

- Implement a system(s) to identify and report on schools and districts that have evidence of improved outcomes, implementation bright spots, or key "wins" due to engagement with PBLWorks in an effort to move along the evidence continuum

- Create and publish current, relevant PBL-related research-based resources based on trends from the field to support our partners in the field

2025 Research & Evidence Priorities

Based on the PBLWorks Research & Evidence Frame, the priorities for 2025 are described below.

Priority 1: Internal Research & Evaluation	Priority 2: Build External Research Partnerships
• NEW FACILITATED SERVICES. Evaluate the effectiveness of new workshops in achieving their stated outcomes and encouraging further interest in and implementation of PBL. • PBL TEACH. Support the set-up of key analytics for exploration to support early learning, identify trends, and inform the next steps in data collection. • CURRICULUM. Facilitate curriculum tests and pilots to gather feedback from the field to refine and improve teacher and student experiences.	RIGOROUS RESEARCH STUDIES ON PBLWORKS. Continue to leverage our partnership with USC's Center for Applied Research in Education to pursue grant opportunities designed to examine the impact of our PBL model on leader, teacher, and student outcomes.
Priority 3: Use Evidence to Improve PBLWorks Services	**Priority 4: Create Actionable Evidence-Based Tools and Resources**
• IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS. Utilize existing data to investigate factors impacting implementation (readiness, confidence, design approach). • DATA SYSTEMS. Categorize and organize historical data and establish a sustainable and scalable framework for incoming data. • EMERGING QUESTIONS. Utilize new skills and technology to probe deeper into the exploratory data and generate a research plan for future data. • RESEARCH SPOTLIGHTS. Share highlights from internal research and evaluation findings with PBLWorks staff.	• TOOLKITS. Revise and refresh the District PBL Evidence Framework Toolkit. Update the School PBL Evidence Framework Toolkit (as needed) based on new products/resources. • CASE STUDIES. Publish the School and District Mini Case studies to lift up bright spots while adding to the evidence continuum. • EVIDENCE BRIEFS. Publish two Evidence Briefs on emerging relevant K-12 issues and PBL.

Five-Year Research Agenda

- Identify and agree on key constructs within our locus of control that we intend to measure over time.
- Conduct review & analysis of other curriculum-based professional learning organizations' measurement and evaluation approaches.
- Improve backend data warehousing/organization efforts (e.g., Drive, Salesforce, Excel) and improve systems for clean and sustainable data collection.
- Continue to examine untapped historical and/or longitudinal data to uncover trends.
  - e.g., What are the best combinations of resources and professional learning that lead to implementation and impact?
- Create and implement new data collection plans with metrics/strategies to evaluate curriculum units and associated professional learning, such as:
  - How is the level of use of CBPL related to project implementation and outcomes?
    - e.g., using an established implementation framework such as the levels of use framework/concerns-based adoption model
  - Deep dive of teacher-level implementation integrity with educators using TEACH.
  - Mixed methods evaluation of teachers' digital behavior (on TEACH app) vs. classroom

behavior (how they implement units).
- ○ Uncover & share additional potential findings from the USC study data (e.g., delve further into the data and answer other questions beyond what USC presents to us).
- Consider designing a longitudinal study to closely follow a set of teachers, schools, or districts as they progress through their PBL journey.
- Implement the Strategic Data Use Rubric within ELT/LT and then across teams to improve organization-wide data usage
- Collaborate with marketing to redesign the PBLWorks Research page to:
  - ○ Highlight key partners
  - ○ Share success stories
  - ○ Reframe research for a broader audience use
  - ○ Ensure our research publications are easily accessible and organized

Risks and Mitigation Strategies

The Research and Evidence (R&E) team acknowledges key risks associated with this plan and will address them in the following ways:
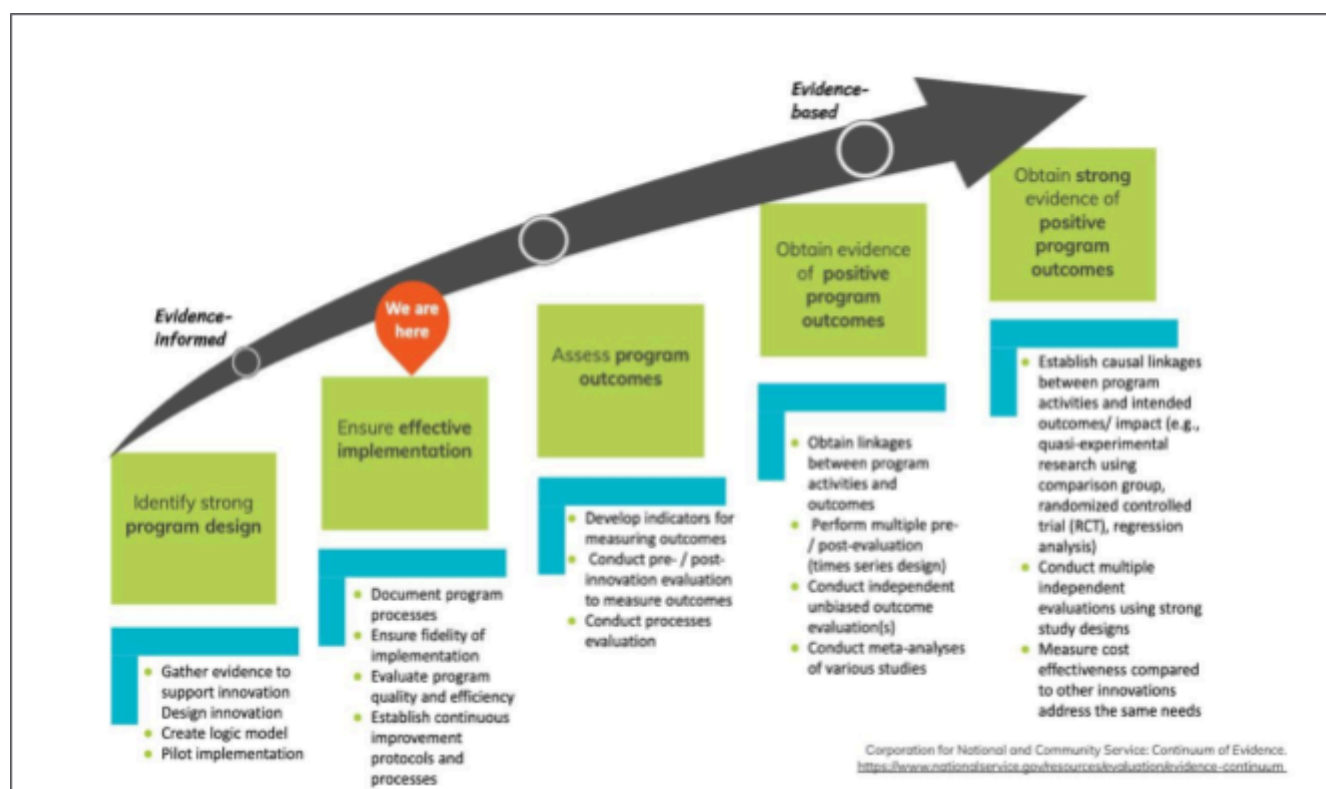
Risk	Mitigation Strategies
Overreaching focus on student outcomes: PBLWorks has a direct influence over educators, not students. Making the case for improved student outcomes in schools where PBLWorks-trained teachers and leaders work is hard to do.	This plan includes a research agenda that examines various outcomes, including those of leaders, teachers, and students. We will selectively identify opportunities to conduct rigorous external research in sites where PBLWorks has a deep impact and can show a causal relationship between services and outcomes. We will focus on internal work at the teacher level outcomes.
Insufficient dosage of teacher services to achieve results: Currently, teacher service offerings (e.g., PBL 101 and SSVs) may be insufficient in dosage to ensure achievement of student outcomes, based on research.	With the addition of virtual follow-up services (online modules, online courses, teacher online consultancy), including expanded Sustained Support Visit (SSV) offerings, the potential dosage of teacher services is increased. This provides an opportunity for even greater alignment of services with research on professional development and student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007; Joyce & Showers, 2002).
Lack of fidelity of implementation in services: Currently, there is variation across services in facilitation and content. This is likely to increase as PBLWorks grows.	This remains an area of focus, with increasing fidelity, through the development of codified service and delivery models designed to ensure a consistent participant experience aligned with outcomes.
Findings show limited or no evidence: It is possible that we engage in internal evaluation and external research to determine the effectiveness and efficacy of our resources and services; then, what?	We plan to frame internal evaluation and rigorous research as both an opportunity to show what works to learn about what we need to improve as dual outcomes that matter.
Plan creep: This plan is a living document that will provide the flexibility needed to align implementation with available resources. This is a strength of the plan and could pose a risk because other work could creep in based on shifting priorities and resources.	This plan is designed as a living document. The R&E team will adopt a regular cycle for updating the plan, with set timelines, protocols, and input from the Design and Innovation, Partnership Advancement, and Leadership teams.

Background

This section provides important background information as context for the current research and evidence plan, promoting a shared understanding of our current position on the Evidence Continuum, key assumptions underlying the work, and a record of key milestones accomplished to date.

Our Journey on the Evidence Continuum

We are taking a modularized approach to our internal research and evaluation work, moving along the Continuum based on the prioritization of key questions identified by internal teams and the insights gained from both internal and external research and evaluation. To demonstrate that PBLWorks products and services constitute an evidence-based practice, we continue to partner with external researchers to secure funding for a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of our district partnership services. This would significantly accelerate our journey on the continuum.

Corporation for National and Community Service: Continuum of Evidence. https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/evidence-continuum

Assumptions:

- Focusing research internally on PBLWorks services. PBLWorks' mission is squarely focused on teachers and leaders who are within PBLWorks professional services reach, with high aspirations for transforming student experiences through these means. Getting results for students through professional development is a challenge, but not impossible. Research indicates that professional development can enhance student achievement (e.g., Yoon, 2007). PBLWorks will prioritize research focusing on the effectiveness and efficacy of PBLWorks professional services and products to

gather evidence of what works, partnering with other organizations (e.g., Lucas Education Research) to support the dissemination and use of their findings.

- Racial Equity: The PBLWorks Research & Evidence team recognizes the need to increase our capacity to conduct culturally responsible and equitable research and evaluation in partnership with researchers and evaluators of color, thereby supporting and promoting the success of all students to achieve positive outcomes. We adhere to equity-informed principles throughout the research process and strive to counteract historical racial inequities in education research.

- Inclusive Evidence: New, better evidence is needed to provide a holistic understanding of what all students, including and especially students of color, know and can do as a result of engaging in PBL (and learning in general). PBLWorks will push the boundaries of what counts as evidence by testing out alternative authentic measures to show progress, success, and achievement, partnering with others who are committed to equity; and elevating this conversation nationally.

- Modularization of Research and Evidence: Moving from evidence-informed to evidence-based will likely not be a sequential set of actions. The research and evidence team will focus on organizational areas of focus and pay close attention to emergent needs and aligned funding opportunities along the evidence continuum.