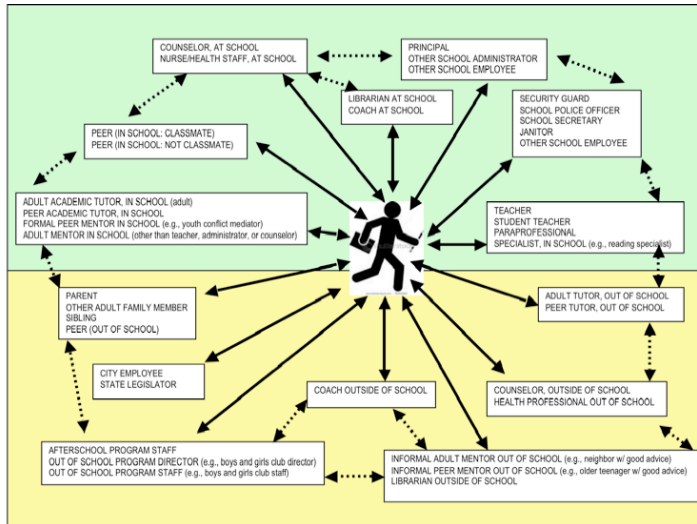


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ONEVILLE: community cooperation in young people's success

Sharing in the success of young people – and each young person



OneVille is a pilot community project pursuing a vision already shared across Somerville. **How can people across this diverse city work together, to support the city's young people to pursue their potential?** How can we **share resources, ideas, information, and effort** to support young people, and each young person? How can **basic technology** help?

We're testing tools and strategies to support communication between people in young people's lives. We're here to figure out strategies in Somerville that can then go anywhere.

Lots of people in Somerville already work very hard to support young people. But people are also calling for more ways of working together to support young people *individually*, across *schools*, and *community-wide*. They're also increasingly saying that basic technology can help. So, for the next year, in community working groups, we're testing and designing community communication tools that can:

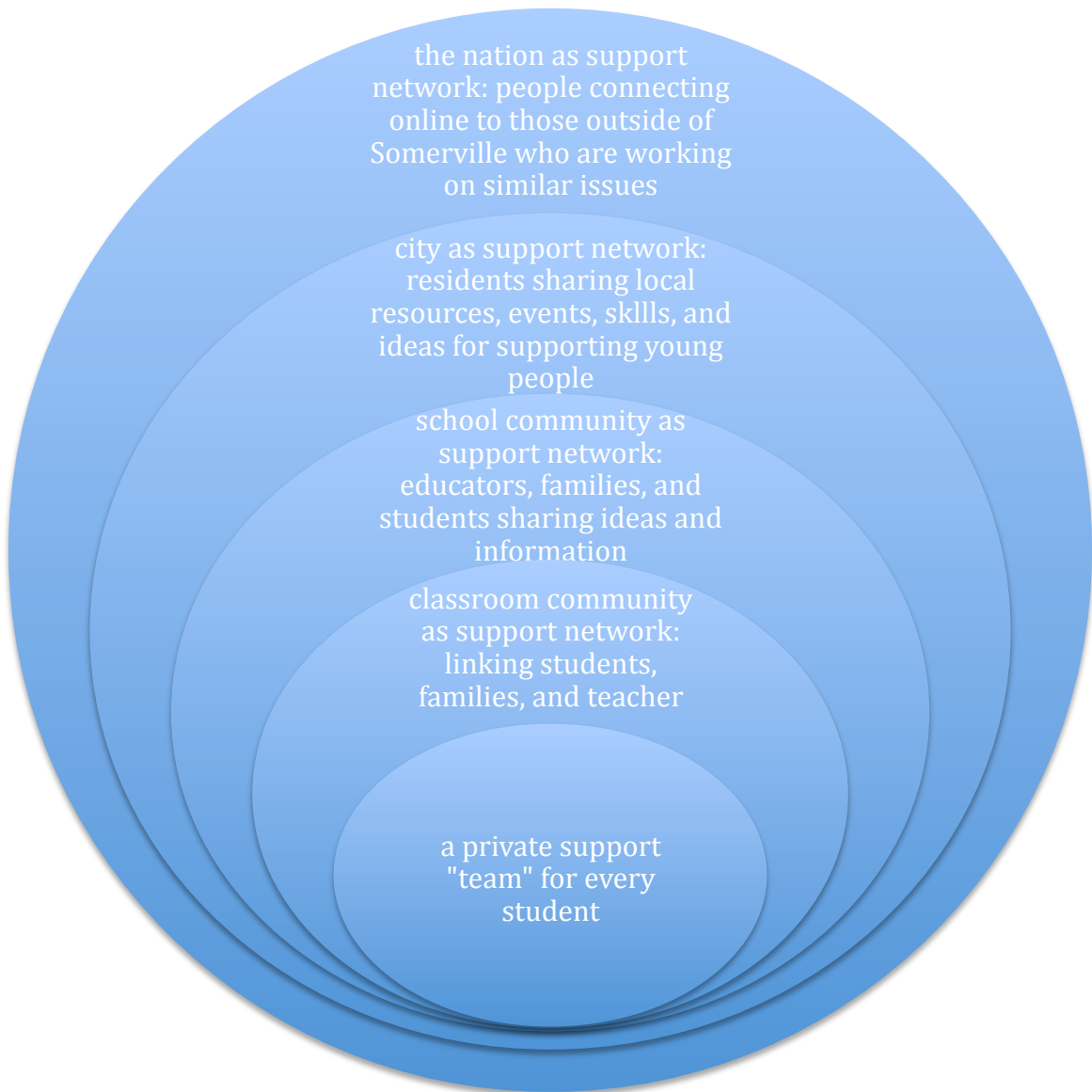
- 1. Help supporters pay close attention to the learning and development of every young person in Somerville.**
- 2. Help more young people and families share information, ideas, resources, events, and programs across their schools and across the community.**

(As we go, we'll be working on ways to help solve translation and technology barriers in the community, so everyone can participate effectively in young people's success. We'll also keep working to find ways of getting more people in the community sharing skills and knowledge with young people.)

Here's where the people of Somerville have led OneVille work over the past 9 months. ¹

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OneVille's overall vision: a city as an ecosystem of information-sharing, communication, and youth support. What tools and strategies would support communication and collaboration between the people who share the lives of *individual* young people, who share *classrooms*, who share *schools*, and who share a *city*?



We've seen in the past year of work in Somerville that to partner in young people's success, people need tools and strategies helping them to share information on the *individual children* they share (did Jose understand the math assignment he did in class or at home? How is he doing on credits toward graduation?); on the *classrooms* they share (what's the homework tonight? How are students experiencing the classroom?), on the *schools* they share (what

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afterschool opportunities are available for children? How are parents experiencing their interactions with teachers and administrators?), and on the resources and information in the *city* they share (where's the science fair? Where are youth jobs? Can everyone see the most recent youth health survey?). We have also seen that supporting young people requires a combination of *face to face* communications about supporting young people (like a parent-teacher meeting or parent coffee hour where people share information), *print* communications about supporting young people (like a handout in a backpack or a sign on the wall informing a parent of an opportunity or student work), and *electronic* communications about supporting young people (like a student checking her grades online or chatting online with peers about homework, or a parent checking the internet for resources). Finally, we've seen that we need to *overcome barriers* of translation and tech access in particular if necessary partners are to offer and receive information about how young people are doing and how they might be supported.

So, after a year of experimentation and groundwork laid with people of all ages in Somerville, we are now co-designing and pilot-testing a toolbox of "community communication tools" and strategies that can support necessary communication between youth, families, educators, and community members. We're examining how a combination of cell phones and computers, face to face dialogue, and paper can support families, students, educators, and community members to communicate about supporting the success of *each* student, the success of students who share *classrooms* and *schools*, and students *citywide*.

OneVille Working Groups, 2010-11:

OneVille goal 1, 2010-11: test and implement 3 tools that could eventually help a team of supporters pay close attention to the learning and development of every young person in Somerville.

OneVille's first fundamental idea is to create an intergenerational support team around each young person, with the young person as full participant. We are convinced that technology can help, and we're working closely with people in the schools and community to design and test the following three tools for supporting individual students. Our vision is that these 3 tools could eventually fit together in a dynamite student-support approach! We want each tool to support speakers of languages other than English and to be accessible by a cell phone, so people who don't own computers can participate. We'll see which tools eventually come together in Somerville:

Working Group 1: "Team around kids." Goal: test ways supporters around every young person could communicate at any time. Lots of supporters help out students in Somerville. But what if a *team* of supporters was on call at any time to support a young person's progress? This past summer, we started working with **teachers and students** from Somerville High to explore how a teacher and each young person in her class could use social media to stay in contact with a "team" of supporters of each young person's choice.² Texting rose to the top as students' most common (and rapid!) communication tool. This fall, in several classrooms at Next Wave and Full Circle, Somerville's alternative middle and high school, students and teachers will test ways that teacher, students, parents/guardians, and also possibly full "support teams" could text each other to communicate when the student needs support.

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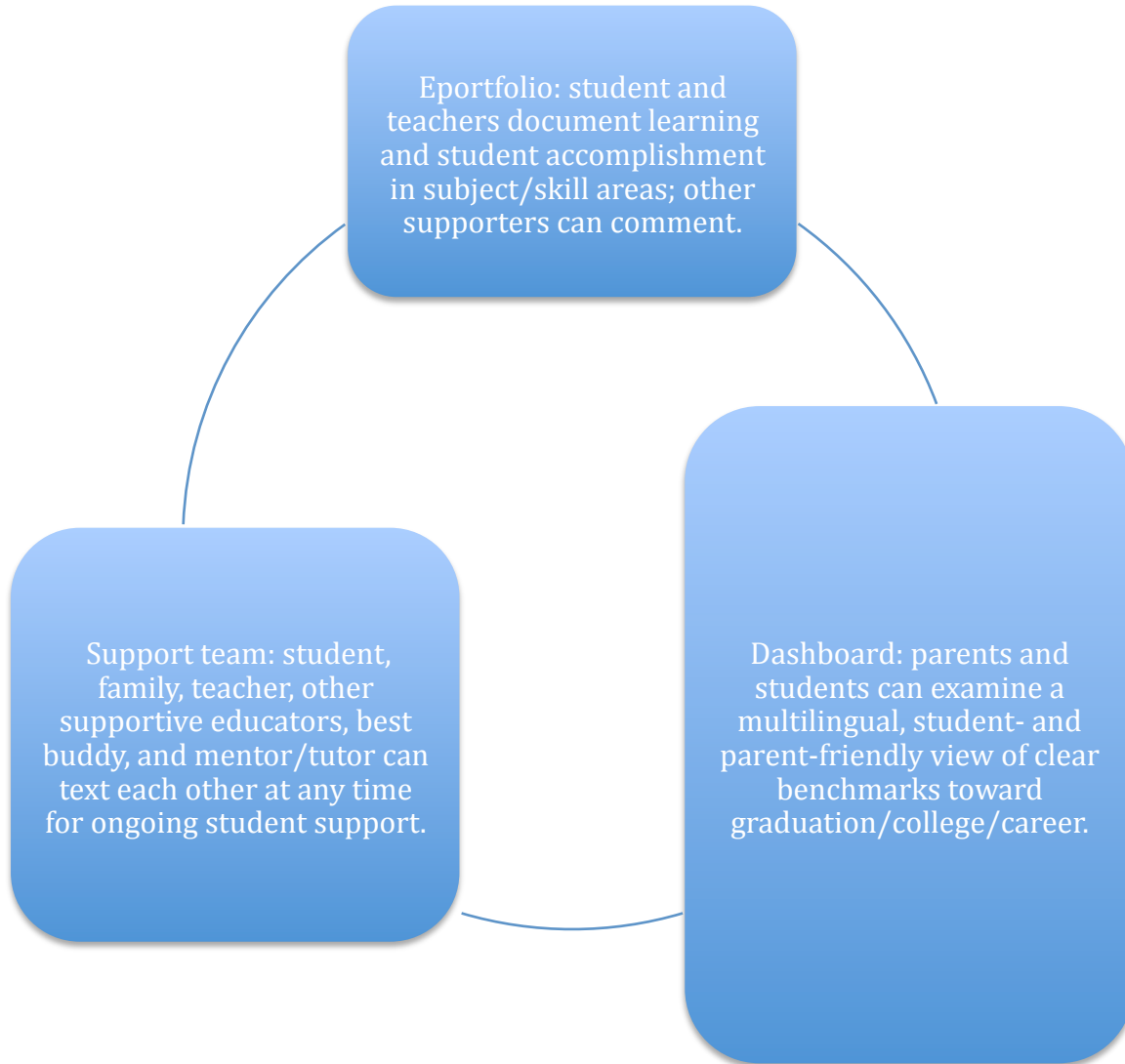
“Team” members may eventually include mentors, tutors, and peer supporters. “Team” members could also talk face to face as needed about specific things that can support young people and their learning. We will start by supporting group teacher-student texting about homework, attendance, and other school related reminders, and then, we’ll add in “support team” members of students’ choice, one at a time for every youth. By the end of the pilot, we want to know how texting, in combination with face to face discussion and other media, could assist each young person in Somerville to seek support and be supported when needed.

Working Group 2: Dashboard. Goal: create a tool showing youth and parents a simple, clear view of individual students’ progress, so that every student can plan for graduation, college, and career.³ To support young people, people need to stay informed about how young people are doing. “Data” needs to be clear and accessible to families and students themselves. **Guided by parents, teachers, and youth**, we’re designing and testing out a multilingual, community-friendly “dashboard” (a quick data view) that families and youth could use to discuss and easily keep track of how each young person is doing on getting to graduation and college. (“Teams” could meet in person to look at the dashboard to plan for the success of individual students. Community groups could also look at larger data patterns, to consider ways of supporting lots of young people.)

Working Group 3: Eportfolio. Goal: create an online place to privately display each student’s learning and work. Somerville educators and youth know that tests aren’t the only way to demonstrate student learning and skills. We’re now working to support **teachers and students at Somerville High** to design a multimedia ePortfolio for each student that will help students demonstrate what they can do — and support informed conversations about sparking and supporting young people’s learning.⁴ (Eventually, teams including other respondents chosen by students [such as parents and career/college mentors] could look at these together.) The High School was already planning on expanding their portfolio work. We’re thrilled to support it!

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VISION FOR THREE COLLABORATIVE TOOLS SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOMERVILLE:



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OneVille goal 2, 2010-11: In community teams, test and implement tools and strategies that can help young people and families share information, ideas, resources, events, and programs across their schools and across the community.

OneVille's other fundamental idea is that resources for young people exist across the community, but just need to circulate more widely and get tapped more often. We believe that technology can help with this, too. In 2010-11, we'll support small community working groups of people who live in Somerville, in figuring out how to seed sustainable efforts on the following. This is a long term effort and we're going to get as far as we can this year:

Working Group 4: Schoolwide information sharing. Goal: support innovations in parent information. As the Healey School unifies, we're going to support a **Healey School Council working group on parent communication**. Together, we'll figure out how to share information with every parent and get input from all parents who want to give it. Parents and administrators have expressed interest in creating a **OneVille Parent Connector Network**, where parents, especially bilingual parents, would help get important school information out to other parents, collect input from other parents, meet regularly to share stories and suggestions from parents, and log solutions online. This will also help us explore new ways to **employ the bilingual skills of parents in translation** of school-related information.

Working Group 5: Citywide information- and resource-sharing. Goal: support additional efforts to share information across the community. In a public meeting July 22, we invited **media makers from the schools, city, and community** to brainstorm ways to better share existing events and information related to kids and families. All agreed that information on existing resources, events, programs, and opportunities that can support young people and families in Somerville is scattered across websites, listservs, and paper announcements, and too often not translated. People's first interest was to consolidate an online, multilingual **community calendar** (fed by multiple calendars) that will help more people stay informed about opportunities, events, and programs for young people and families in the city. The group brainstormed other possible next projects, related to the use of **bulletin boards**, and also **community access TV, radio, Facebook (for youth in particular), and newspapers** for sharing information on events. We're pursuing these leads with people in the district, city, community, and surrounding universities.

Working Group 6: To make all this possible – support family computer training. Since so many opportunities and so much data circulates online, today, supporting young people requires equal computer literacy. Computers exist for public use at libraries, schools, and housing developments; everyone says that what is most lacking is people to teach others how to use the computers, and also, computers and internet at home. We've started supporting a creative pilot project by Caroline Meeks, graduate of Somerville High School; her "Sugar on a Stick" program allows families to take home a USB "stick" of free software to continue work on projects even without the internet. We're helping her jumpstart a "family computing" project in collaboration with Somerville's Haitian Coalition (of Somerville's Clarendon Hill housing development): kids will learn software and then show their parents how to use computers for supporting their kids (how to open gmail accounts and get on public listservs to get information about community events; how to explore the community calendar or city websites; how to view the district's student information system; and more). Over time, we could teach parents to use the 3 individual-level support tools described earlier. We've also

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helped to connect her to 400 computers that the Somerville School Committee declared as surplus; she's been working with Somerville High youth (including a student intern we'll keep funding) to refurbish the computers so that more families can take home usable computers for free. A true community partnership!

We'll work to share out what we're learning and doing in all these efforts to support young people. We're starting **OneVille wikis** (collaborative websites) where participants in all working groups can eventually share out what they are doing and learning so others learn too. We'll keep asking:

←-----→

Who needs to communicate which information to whom, through which media, to support young people in Somerville? What are the barriers to such communication, and how can these be overcome?

So, we'll spend a year supporting working groups to test and implement some key communication tools and strategies desired by the community, to support everyday communication about ways of supporting young people's success. Each working group will have a coordinator, a budget for necessary resources and a timeline, and report out progress on OneVille's blog and public wikis. Contact us to join one of our Working Groups. And let us know if there's another community communication tool that is particularly needed in Somerville. Maybe we can work with you to make it.

What have we done and learned so far?

We've done and learned a lot since fall 2009, while laying the groundwork for everything described above. We've been learning about existing communications and student support needs in Somerville, by talking to people of all ages throughout the community informally and through interviews and focus groups. We've also been testing tools and strategies to support communication around *individuals*, in *classrooms*, in *schools*, and throughout the *city*.

For example, to support discussion of individual students' progress, with youth in a Healey afterschool club, we began to test a private social network allowing students to communicate about school outside of class with peers and potentially teachers. We particularly explored video "blogs" ("vlogs"), where young people spoke about specific classroom strategies that support their learning. This summer, with a SHS teacher and two classes of summer school students, we explored the concept of convening a support team around every student, using social media to communicate about the student's progress. We worked for six weeks with two insightful groups of young people. A few weeks into the course, we decided to focus the pilot exclusively on researching students' current support relationships, and their current and potential use of social media for support conversations. The natural use of texting in everyday support conversations, and the role of both in-school and non-parental supporters in youths' existing support networks, has risen to the top as an issue we are now exploring in our next small pilot of a "support team around every student." We laid the groundwork for supporting eportfolios at the High School and designing a "dashboard" with others in Somerville.

To support schoolwide communication, we piloted multilingual parent dialogues and coffee hours at the Healey School, designed to get diverse parents talking to one another for the first

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time across boundaries of program, income, and language about shared issues in their schools. We piloted academic “reading night” events as a strategy for getting parents and young people together to build collective spirit and share strategies for improving skills. More broadly, we have sparked discussions across the community about improving translation, tech access/training, and public information so that more families can access information about their children and engage in public discussion.

All of this helped us learn what communications people in Somerville think are needed to support every young person in Somerville. We’ve focused our 2010-11 “community communication tool” work around community recommendations.

What else we’ve learned!

This is our first time doing a community project of this scale and type, and it’s been a steep learning curve! We want to support excitement and energy that already exists in the city. That’s how we’ll fill gaps and create stuff that will stick around.

-Collaboration. We also want to clarify that we are not a competitive group but rather, working to collaborate on creative solutions (and free/open source solutions) that can help everyone. We work with everyone, from young people to moms to the Superintendent.

-Learning. Some of us work in universities, where we do research on communication, education, equity, and technology. Still, we’re here primarily to do work in the community. At the same time, in order to do this work well and to make these efforts transferable, we are researching the current situation related to young people and researching our own efforts to help improve it. In addition to our eventually public wikis, we plan to write articles and books on what we’re learning. If you’re the writing type, join us.

-Longevity. We’ve started as a pilot project, but we want to support this type of work in Somerville long-term.

-OneVille. When people ask “who” OneVille “is,” our answer is “everybody in the community,” with a core of OneVille “coordinators” for the coming year. All working groups should bring together a diverse crew and involve young people, teachers, parents, and people who speak Somerville’s major languages. Coordinators will be paid additionally, meet regularly, and be held responsible for reaching benchmarks on each project by September 2011.

Join us in figuring out some new ways of supporting young people in Somerville!

¹ *This report was written by OneVille’s lead researcher, Mica Pollock, but it reflects work across the OneVille Project. Thanks to all contributors!*

² Here’s one link to research supporting the texting approach and use of cell phones for student and family communication in education: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/logged-in-using-technology-to-engage-families-in-children-s-education>. We’re seeing more and more people employing phones this way. Figuring out how to use these tools safely and carefully for communication with key partners is our goal!

Note on where we fit into Somerville: Many people in Somerville have been interested in the "support team" approach, or even suggested it themselves at various community meetings. At the August 2 SomerPromise meeting, for just one example, afterschool providers were again talking about the need for afterschool providers and tutors to communicate with teachers about what young people need to work on. This working group will start the exploration.

³ This summer, in our work with a SHS teacher and two classes of insightful summer school students, students also indicated an interest in accessing data more often for tracking their attendance and other progress, an issue we plan to address in our work to develop an easy-to-understand "dashboard" for parents and students. New Visions, in NYC, seems to be one of the most advanced projects in the country using a dashboard style tool to display data directly to parents and young people (with clear benchmarks that help students and parents plan for student success). <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/new-visions-for-public-schools-using-data-to-engage-families>. (Other districts are moving toward showing parents and students how to access their "student information system" – Somerville's "X2.") The New Visions tool has been available in Spanish and English and has to date been used successfully in quarterly, official "views" for parents rather than available for viewing at any time as we propose (they too are moving in the "live view" direction). In Somerville, we propose to create a free, open source dashboard that can be shared with other districts. We also propose that combining a dashboard with face to face and tech-supported conversations between "support team" members (see above) *and* with an eportfolio (see below) would really assist in ongoing planning for student success.

Note on where we fit into Somerville: We hope that our dashboard (and support team approach, above, and the high school's eportfolio model, below) could assist SomerPromise, even as SomerPromise also pursues more agency data sharing. A community-friendly dashboard for every young person will help make it normal for the entire community to view and discuss data. In terms of individual-level dashboards, students/parents already have access to the district's student information system, X2, but those we have talked to say they don't tend to use it regularly or easily understand it. Nor is X2 multilingual. Nor does it highlight key benchmarks students need to reach. Finally, the State also requires all students "at risk" of failing to have an "individual student support plan" (ISSP) that includes a timeline, progress monitoring, and benchmarks for each student. This sort of template could live on any student's dashboard, supporting "teams" of supporters to be in contact on a specific plan for a student. We're exploring this.

⁴ **Note on where we fit into Somerville:** the high school already was interested in expanding their portfolio effort; we're supporting that desire.