



# How Do Two-Generation Approaches Affect Whole Families?

## Executive Summary from the Vimenti 2Gen Model Evaluation in Puerto Rico

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Addressing childhood poverty in the United States poses a significant and multifaceted challenge (Chetty and Hendren 2018a, 2018b; Ludwig et al. 2013; Hughes and Tucker 2018).<sup>1</sup> This challenge is particularly pronounced in Puerto Rico, where high rates of poverty intertwine with systemic factors to contribute to elevated rates of food insecurity, underemployment, exposure to violence, and risk of asthma, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes (Enchautegui, Arroyo-Quijano, and Blakely-Vallecillo 2021). Two-generation (2Gen) approaches aim to address these complex challenges by recognizing the interconnectedness of family dynamics, neighborhood contexts, and child outcomes. By empowering families through comprehensive strategies, 2Gen initiatives aim to break the cycle of poverty and foster multidimensional well-being for both children and caregivers.

While 2Gen approaches are growing in popularity, few studies have rigorously assessed their effects on whole family outcomes. For this study, we seek to begin filling this gap by assessing the effectiveness of a 2Gen approach implemented at Vimenti in Puerto Rico. To do so, we ask the following research questions:

1. What effect does the Vimenti 2Gen model have on Vimenti's pillars of focus: the educational attainment of children and parents (education pillar), the economic outcomes of parents (economic pillar), and the mental, physical, and socioemotional health of the family as a whole (social pillar)?<sup>2</sup>
2. How closely does Vimenti adhere to the Aspen Institute 2Gen principles,<sup>3</sup> and to what extent might this explain differences in outcomes for Vimenti students and families?
3. How satisfied are families (at Vimenti and at comparison schools) with the education, services, and programs available to their families through their school and, in the case of comparison families, through other service providers?

## Two-Generation Approaches

Two-generation approaches are holistic interventions aimed at empowering families by simultaneously addressing the needs of children and caregivers and aligning services and supports with families' economic, social, and education goals. These approaches might include child care assistance during adult education programs, or integrated workforce development and early childhood education services. Two-generation approaches operate on the principle that family well-being is inseparable from the conditions of caregivers, children, and their communities.

The roots of 2Gen approaches trace back to programs like Head Start, which integrated 2Gen principles in the 1960s, though the term itself emerged later. Today, over 500 organizations across the US and a few other countries implement 2Gen approaches, often driven by core principles such as equity, innovation, and systems alignment.<sup>4</sup> These initiatives prioritize outcomes for both children and adults, engage families in decisionmaking processes, and aim to address systemic disparities while promoting comprehensive supports across domains including, but not limited to, education, health, and economic stability.

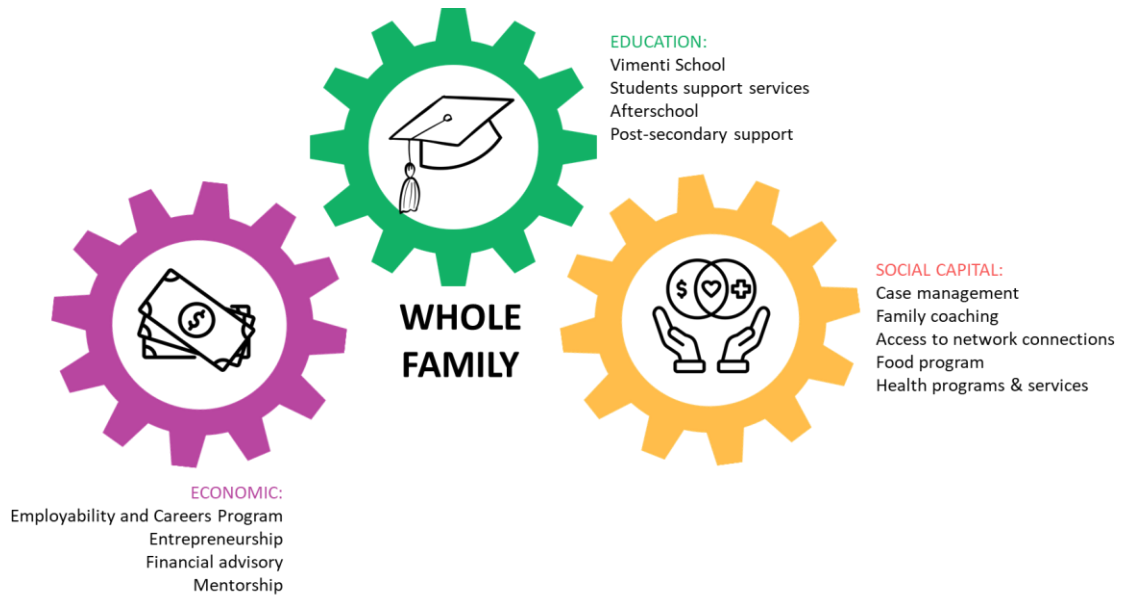
## Vimenti

Vimenti is an integrated service center for families in Puerto Rico that uses a 2Gen approach to provide a one-stop shop for a variety of services. It was started within the Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico in 2018 but is now independently managed. Vimenti combines a public charter school, or an *escuela pública alianza*, with a comprehensive service center dedicated to both parents and children. Vimenti operates in the Residencial Ernesto Ramos Antonini, a public housing project in the San Juan metropolitan area, where the poverty rate is 61 percent<sup>5</sup> and the community confronts significant economic challenges exacerbated by high crime rates. Vimenti employs a holistic family-centered approach to address the needs of children, parents, and families simultaneously, organized around three core pillars: education, economic, and social capital and health (figure 1).

FIGURE 1

## Vimenti Pillars

*How Vimenti describes their model*



Source: Image and text provided by Vimenti.

## Methods

To answer our research questions, we undertook a comparative analysis involving a subset of Vimenti families and a control group of families drawn from traditional public schools situated in similar neighborhoods that had family characteristics analogous to those of Vimenti. We employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys and focus groups with both sets of families and interviews with service providers from Vimenti and comparison schools. Our survey methodology involved two phases: we administered one survey at the onset of the 2022–23 academic year and another at its conclusion. This dual-stage approach allowed us to examine disparities in outcomes at the academic year’s end via t-tests of statistical significance and disparities in outcome changes between Vimenti and the comparison families during the academic year via a two-way fixed effects difference-in-differences model.

## Findings: The Effect of Vimenti’s Approach across Its Education, Economic, and Social Pillars

Our first research question looked at the effect of the Vimenti 2Gen model on the educational attainment of children and parents, the economic outcomes of parents, and the mental, physical, and socioemotional health of the family as a whole. We find that in the 2022–23 school year, Vimenti

families performed better than comparison families in a variety of measures and indices in each of Vimenti's three pillars (table 1).

#### EDUCATION PILLAR

- Vimenti students had higher kindergarten through first grade and kindergarten through fifth grade academic index scores than comparison students at the end of the school year.
- Vimenti students had lower chronic absenteeism than comparison students throughout the school year.
- Vimenti parents had higher levels of education at the end of the school year than comparison parents.
- Vimenti students showed a greater decrease in chronic absenteeism between the beginning and end of the school year than comparison students.

#### ECONOMIC PILLAR

- Vimenti parents were more likely to be employed at the end of the school year than comparison families.
- Vimenti parents were more likely to have a higher income at the end of the school year than comparison families.
- Vimenti parents were more likely to have gained new skills throughout the school year than comparison families.
- Vimenti parents were more likely to own a car at the end of the school year than comparison families.
- Vimenti parents did not experience any statistically significant changes in economic outcomes between the beginning of the school year and end of the school year compared with the comparison parents.

#### SOCIAL PILLAR

- Vimenti families had greater access to quality health care at the end of the school year than comparison families.
- Vimenti families had greater improvements in access to quality health care between the beginning of the school year and the end of the school year than comparison families.

TABLE 1

**Vimenti Families Outperformed Comparison Families in 9 of 20 Education, Economic, and Social Outcomes**

*Outcomes from the 2022–23 school year*

	T-tests at outcome	Difference-in-difference
<b>Education pillar</b>		
Kindergarten through first grade academic performance	+**	Effect not detected
Second through fifth grade academic performance	+*	Effect not detected
Child Motor skills and spatial reasoning	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Child Chronic absenteeism	-*	_***
Parent education	+***	Effect not detected
<b>Economic pillar</b>		
Parent employment	+***	Effect not detected
Parent family income	+*	Effect not detected
Parent job quality	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Parent job tenure	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Parent entrepreneurship	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Parent new skills	+**	Effect not detected
Parent financial health	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Parent car ownership	+***	Effect not detected
Parent housing	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
<b>Social pillar</b>		
Child physical health	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Parent mental and physical health	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Child access to health screenings	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Family access to quality health care	+**	+**
Child behavior and emotional intelligence	Effect not detected	Effect not detected
Positive parent behaviors	Effect not detected	Effect not detected

**Source:** Authors’ analysis of survey data from a survey administered by the authors to parents at Vimenti and traditional public schools at the beginning and end of the 2022–23 school year.

**Notes:** For all measures except chronic absenteeism, a positive coefficient indicates that Vimenti families performed better than comparison families. For chronic absenteeism, a negative coefficient means that Vimenti families performed better than comparison families (i.e., had lower chronic absenteeism).

\* =  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Qualitative findings, collected from focus groups with parents and interviews with school staff, suggest that Vimenti’s approach to academic development is linked to students’ higher academic performance than comparison schools, with many parents noting improvements in their children’s academic performance since enrollment. Within the economic pillar, qualitative findings suggest that

Vimenti’s strategies help support parents in improving their economic and financial outcomes, perhaps in part through Vimenti’s provision of employment, finance, and entrepreneurship workshops. While the quantitative findings within the social pillar are infrequently statistically significant, qualitative findings indicate that Vimenti families were happy with and grateful for the support they received for their children’s health. There was little consensus around the availability or quality of parent-focused social pillar activities provided by Vimenti, as almost none of the Vimenti parents in the focus groups explicitly mentioned being connected to a specialist for their medical needs or attending a parent-focused health workshop. This could reflect a need for additional offerings in this area, a lack of access to health care services, or parents’ inability to attend workshops because of work or other economic responsibilities.

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*“[Los empleados de Vimenti] están ayudando [a los estudiantes] a desarrollar lo que son los valores. Siempre en casa, obviamente, le inculcamos los valores que tenga cada quién en su hogar. Pero aquí [en Vimenti], lo que es la empatía, compañerismo, el ayudar a otras personas, ellos están bien enfocados en eso.”*

*—Una madre del grupo focal de Vimenti*

*Translation: “[Vimenti staff] are helping [the students] develop values. Obviously at home, we teach kids the values we have in the home. But here [at Vimenti], they are very focused on empathy, teamwork, and helping other people.”*

*—Vimenti focus group parent*

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## **Vimenti’s Fidelity to 2Gen Principles**

Our second research question looked at how closely Vimenti adheres to 2Gen principles and to what extent this fidelity could explain differences in outcomes for Vimenti students and families. Our fidelity study revealed the following key findings for each of the five Aspen Institute 2Gen principles.<sup>6</sup> We use these principles because Ascend at the Aspen Institute is seen by interviewees as a leader in the field for the modern 2Gen approach.

### **MEASURE AND ACCOUNT FOR OUTCOMES FOR BOTH CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS**

The first principle of the 2Gen approach focuses on the needs of children and parents within families. Vimenti demonstrates a strong commitment to this principle through staff familiarity with the 2Gen model, comprehensive intake processes, and tailored approaches to education. By continuing to grow

their robust data collection and evaluation efforts, Vimenti can ensure ongoing improvement in serving the holistic needs of families.

#### ENGAGE WITH AND LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF FAMILIES

The principle of engaging with families in 2Gen programs is evident in Vimenti's efforts to incorporate family perspectives at both individual and organizational levels. Survey data and qualitative findings highlight Vimenti's success in listening to parents' concerns and building trusting relationships. Vimenti has a parent council and a parent representative on its board of directors. However, focus group participants were not aware of these opportunities for parents. Increased communication about the council and board could help parents know they can reach out to these representatives as issues arise.

#### ENSURE EQUITY

Vimenti's equity-driven approach acknowledges and prioritizes marginalized communities, particularly those in public housing projects like the Residencial Ernesto Ramos Antonini and children with special education needs. Challenges, such as navigating "poverty traps," as identified by Vimenti staff in qualitative interviews, and addressing systemic failures within Puerto Rico's education system persist, but Vimenti's holistic approach gives case managers the needed resources engage with parents and children in a frequent, intensive, and supportive way. Although Vimenti provides government-mandated services for special education students, gaps remain for students with severe disabilities, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and resource mobilization by traditional and charter public schools, including timely fund disbursement by the Puerto Rico Department of Education. Moving forward, Vimenti could expand its equity efforts by disaggregating data to better understand the experiences of various subgroups, fostering inclusivity, and proactively addressing systemic inequities within its community.

#### FOSTER INNOVATION AND EVIDENCE TOGETHER

Vimenti leads in innovation by integrating emerging evidence and adapting the 2Gen model for Puerto Rico, notably in public housing communities. Through rigorous evaluation and research, Vimenti contributes significantly to the 2Gen field, informing the field's strategic roadmap and sharing insights with educational and governmental entities. Challenges persist in aligning poverty measures to the specific levels of poverty in Puerto Rico, but collaborations with other 2Gen organizations, such as the Colorado-based Family Resource Center Association, provide valuable insights.<sup>7</sup> Vimenti recently acquired a \$10.5 million grant from the US Department of Education's Full-Service Community Schools program, which presents an opportunity to expand and scale its efforts and impact.<sup>8</sup> And Vimenti's involvement in networks like the Ascend Network present opportunities for further knowledge exchange and collaboration.

#### ALIGN SERVICES AND FUNDINGS STREAMS FOR FAMILIES

The principle of aligning services and funding streams allows 2Gen programs to provide comprehensive support for both parents and children. Vimenti is evolving from being a part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico to being an independent organization with access to various funding sources. Now operating as a public charter school, it advocates for broader adoption of the 2Gen model while

prioritizing transparency in funding allocation. As a next step, Vimenti could document the overall share of expenditures for parents and children separately, including across public, private, and philanthropic funds, to identify where targeted fundraising could help accelerate outcome improvements. This could be a critical guidepost for other public and charter schools in Puerto Rico aiming to replicate 2Gen systems at their schools.

#### IMPROVING VIMENTI'S LOGIC MODEL FOR BETTER OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

We also examined the extent to which Vimenti's logic model adheres to the five Aspen Institute 2Gen principles. Vimenti's model effectively illustrates its theory of change, yet we suggest improvements for clarity and alignment with 2Gen principles. Subheadings should align with Vimenti's three pillars or with the six components of 2Gen programs as outlined by the Aspen Institute<sup>9</sup> with clearer distinctions between child and parent outcomes. We also recommend incorporating measures for family goals, parent voice, and systems change. Ensuring measures reflect the five Aspen Institute 2Gen principles,<sup>10</sup> particularly the principle of engaging with and listening to the voices of families, is vital for robust evaluation and program development.

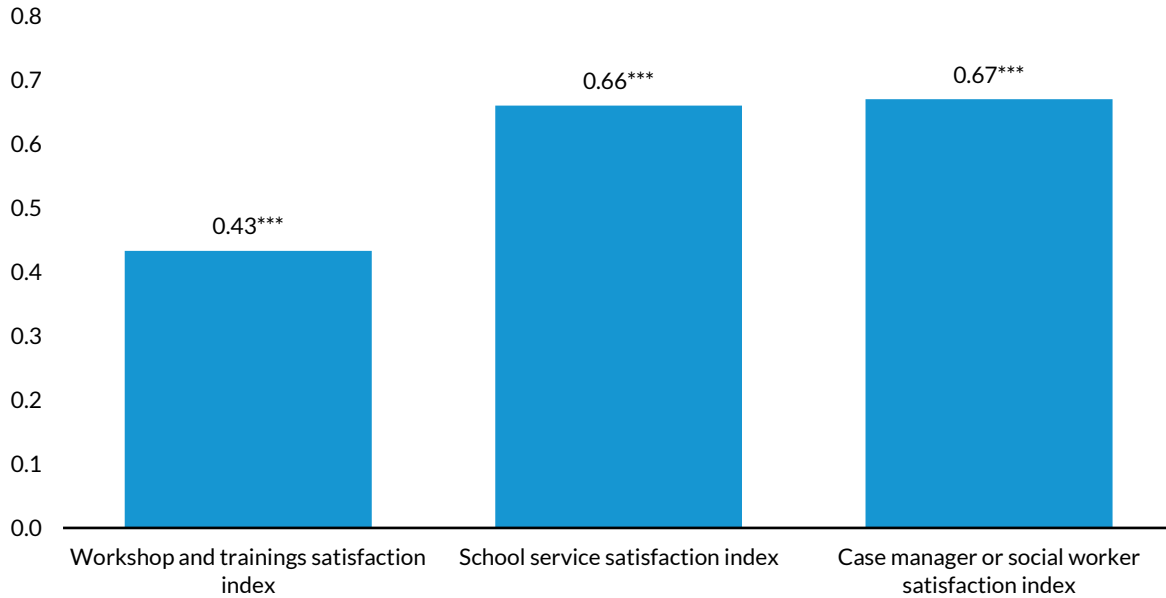
### Program Satisfaction

Our third research question looked at how satisfied families are with the education, services, and programs available through their school or elsewhere. Our assessment of program satisfaction showed that Vimenti families were more satisfied with their school and community supports across all three indices of satisfaction at the end of the school year than those in the comparison group (figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Differences in Family Satisfaction at the End of the 2022–23 Academic Year

Satisfaction of Vimenti families compared with families at comparison schools across three indices



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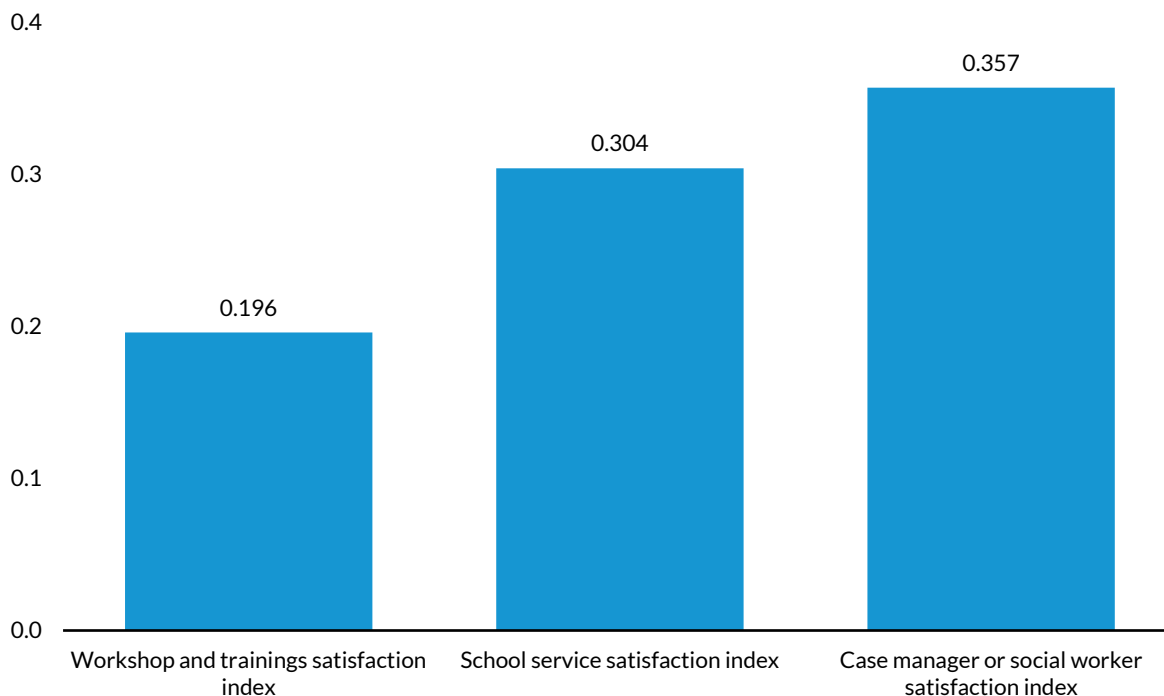
**Source:** Authors' analysis of survey data from a survey administered by the authors to parents at Vimenti and traditional public schools at the end of the 2022–23 school year. Satisfaction indices were created by the authors from individual survey questions.

**Notes:** \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Specifically, Vimenti families reported being more satisfied than comparison school families at the 1 percent significance level with all of the following: workshops and trainings (including a social-emotional workshop and entrepreneurship programs); school services (including classes and extracurricular activities for students.); and case managers/social workers.<sup>11</sup> While the difference in outcomes between the beginning of the year and the end of the year were not significant, they were all positive (figure 3).

FIGURE 3

**Difference-in-Differences in Family Satisfaction between the Beginning and End of the 2022–23 Academic Year across Three Indices**



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**Source:** Authors’ analysis of survey data from a survey administered by the authors to parents at Vimenti and traditional public schools at the beginning and end of the 2022–23 school year. Satisfaction indices were created by the authors from individual survey questions.

**Notes:** Results are based on a fixed effects model with both individual and time fixed effects included. We calculate heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the individual level.

## Limitations

There are three key limitations to our analysis. First, we do not have a random sample, so some of the findings could reflect selection bias into the program rather than a truly causal effect of Vimenti on outcomes. Second, we compare families in a 2Gen charter school to families in traditional public schools so some of the differences observed could be caused by Vimenti’s charter school status rather than its 2Gen model. And third, our sample size is not exceptionally large (177 total: 92 in the treatment group and 85 in the comparison group); a larger sample size could offer increased statistical power and greater generalizability.

## Lessons Learned

Vimenti recently secured funding to expand the 2Gen model to other public charter schools and traditional schools throughout the island.<sup>12</sup> Some lessons learned that might guide this effort include the following:

- Qualitative findings suggest that Vimenti's positive educational outcomes for children are due to Vimenti's unique approach to academic development. This includes the schools' attendance procedures, tiered learning model, integrated case management, and robust after-school services.
- Vimenti showed higher economic outcomes for parents than for comparison parents, which may be related in part to Vimenti's offering of employment, finance, and entrepreneurship workshops. One of the flagship economic workshops is a month-long training that includes soft skills development, interview practice, and job placement support.
- Vimenti families showed greater increases in access to quality health care throughout the school year than comparison families. This may be related to the quality of Vimenti's coordinated in-house team, including nurses, psychologists, and therapists, as well as the services Vimenti brings in, including health screenings and on-site pediatrician annual check-ups.
- Data from our focus groups and interviews indicate that Vimenti excels at listening to parents. Both parents and staff emphasized that the Vimenti community values listening to and building trusting relationships with families. One best practice that other schools could adopt is increasing the frequency of communication and touch points with families, both individually and at school-wide events.
- The fidelity study noted that Vimenti supports families that have been stigmatized, criminalized, and overpoliced, and that Vimenti's understanding of entrenched structural poverty is a key difference in how Vimenti is implementing equity goals compared with comparison schools.
- Vimenti is attempting to better serve special education families by ensuring all of the government mandated services, including dedicated staff and therapists for students, are integrated into all Vimenti programming. Our qualitative findings suggest that Vimenti case managers in particular help families more efficiently navigate the bureaucratic process of getting their children certified as having special needs.

There are also ways in which Vimenti could continue to grow to further strengthen the 2Gen model:

- Vimenti could continue to expand its economic pillar offerings, since finding within that pillar were less robust than in the education pillar. This may include providing new workshops, expanding the availability and frequency of trainings and workshops, and further advertising these offerings to parents.

- Vimenti could continue to expand its offerings in the social pillar, since findings within this pillar were less robust than in the education pillar. This might include enhancing both child and parent health offerings, coordinating with the new health clinic in the neighborhood, and working with parents to increase positive behaviors such as reading to their children and reinforcing school subjects at home.
- Vimenti could further communicate opportunities for parent voice at the organizational level such as within governance or advisory bodies. Vimenti could also help parents to become community-based resident researchers to support their internal evaluation efforts.
- Vimenti could continue to advocate for resource mobilization for students with severe disabilities.

Moving forward, there is significant opportunity for Vimenti and other schools to continue scaling up combined education, employment, and social interventions in order to disrupt systemic poverty and help families most affected by structural poverty. By addressing challenges and building on successful strategies, approaches like the one Vimenti is taking can serve as exemplary models for comprehensive family support and empowerment for other 2Gen programs in Puerto Rico and beyond.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Murphey and Zakia Redd, “5 Ways Poverty Harms Children,” Child Trends, January 8, 2014, <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/5-ways-poverty-harms-children>.

<sup>2</sup> For brevity, we use the term “parent” throughout to refer to parents or the primary caregivers of a child. We acknowledge the complexity of various family structures, and that some of the households in our study have a grandparent or other figure serving as primary caregiver. Additionally, we note that the Spanish translation of “parent” is not gender neutral, and requires specifying gender with “*madre*” or “*padre*.”

<sup>3</sup> Author’s calculations from US Census Bureau 2018–22 five-year American Community Survey data.

<sup>4</sup> Author’s calculations from US Census Bureau 2018–22 five-year American Community Survey data.

<sup>5</sup> Author’s calculations from US Census Bureau 2018–22 five-year American Community Survey data.

<sup>6</sup> Ascend at the Aspen Institute, “The 2Gen Approach,” accessed May 2, 2024, <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/2gen-approach/>

<sup>7</sup> Family Resource Center Association, “Creating Strong and Thriving Families,” accessed May 2, 2024, <https://www.cofamilycenters.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Philanthropy News Digest, “Vimenti by Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico gets \$10.5M grant,” accessed May 2, 2024, [https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/other-sources/article/?id=12197240&title=Vimenti-by-Boys-&Girls-Clubs-of-Puerto-Rico-gets-\\$10.5M-grant](https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/other-sources/article/?id=12197240&title=Vimenti-by-Boys-&Girls-Clubs-of-Puerto-Rico-gets-$10.5M-grant)

<sup>9</sup> Ascend at the Aspen Institute, “The 2Gen Approach.”

<sup>10</sup> Ascend at the Aspen Institute, “The 2Gen Approach.”

<sup>11</sup> In this evaluation, we treated case managers at Vimenti and social workers at comparison schools as comparable, due to the similarity in their roles, primarily in managing supports and direct engagement with families.

<sup>12</sup> Philanthropy News Digest, “Vimenti by Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico gets \$10.5M grant.”

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