THE GREAT DISRUPTION: THE IMPACT OF URBAN SCHOOL TURNOVER ON EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT

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I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband and two amazing sons.

We embarked on this journey as a family. You held to your promise

by creating space for me to study, read, and write.

You understood as my laptop traveled to amusement parks and birthday parties.

You cheered for me every step of the way. You held to your promise,

and the completion of this dissertation demonstrates to you that I held to mine.

A promise fulfilled.

We did it!

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ABSTRACT

THE GREAT DISRUPTION: THE IMPACT OF URBAN SCHOOL TURNOVER ON EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT

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Superintendent turnover has long been a persistent challenge for urban school districts and their external partnering organizations. To shed light on its impact, a comprehensive study was conducted, focusing on the six strategies outlined in the "Partnering for Student Success: A Practical Guide to Building Effective School-Based Partnerships" framework. The primary objective was to investigate if external organizations utilized these strategies to sustain their partnership efforts and if they remained effective during periods of superintendent turnover. A qualitative research design was employed, involving 25 participants, including external partners, funders of external partners, superintendents, and teachers engaged in partnership work. Social capital theory and the significance of relationships and mutual credibility were foundational in this investigation. Analysis of the data resulted in significant findings that underscored the crucial role of relationships in establishing trust, securing funding for partnerships, retaining institutional knowledge, comprehending the superintendent's vision, and recognizing the influence of race. The study's contributions offer a set of recommendations to guide external partners in their collaborations with urban K-12 schools. Ultimately, this research aims to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of partnerships in urban school districts, leading to improved educational outcomes for students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The genesis of this research study was derived from my work as an educational partner in urban K-12 schools. The nonprofit organization I worked for provided coaching support to K-12 schools and districts in areas such as core content instruction, equity, leadership, and social-emotional learning, with a specific focus on traditionally underserved communities. Instead of prescribing "off-the-shelf" solutions to schools' problems, we prioritized collaboration with schools and district leaders to identify their needs.

My experience working with school-based partnerships has taught me that it is crucial to recognize school practitioners as experts at identifying issues within their school or district. This requires building strong relationships with school leadership teams to communicate their needs and guide the scope of work effectively. Unfortunately, frequent superintendent turnover in urban schools has presented a significant challenge to providing consistent support, often delaying or halting services altogether.

The complexities within high-needs urban school districts have increased over time, and superintendent turnover consistently presents as a significant barrier (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). The impact of a superintendent on urban K-12 schools can be substantial, as a superintendent plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience of students and ensuring the success of the school district. High turnover can disrupt the continuity of partnerships, erode trust and stability among partners, and create a lack of institutional memory. Additionally, turnover can lead to a lack of commitment and investment in the partnership.

To mitigate the negative effects of turnover as an external partner, clear communication, setting expectations and goals, building trust and relationships, and having a plan in place for addressing turnover are essential. Turnover in partnership work in K-12 schools can have a

significant impact on the effectiveness of the partnership and the ability of partners to achieve their goals, as evidenced by a study commissioned by the Philadelphia Education Fund and the School District of Philadelphia that examined nine different professional development initiatives (Christman et al., 1997).

It is important to note that the professional development programs cited in the Philadelphia study were multi-year commitments, making district stability critical to moving forward. The study not only illustrated the impact of disruptions to program implementation but also highlighted the revolving nature of partnership work in schools, particularly multi-year partnerships that require significant investments of time and resources from both external partnering organizations and schools or districts.

External partnerships can be essential to supporting teachers in providing opportunities for students. It is crucial to expand our understanding of how to maintain external partnerships despite turnover. The impact of high superintendent turnover on the work supported by external organizations is an area that is under-researched yet critically significant, particularly for external organizations partnering with urban schools with significant Black and Brown student populations. To better understand what strategies, if any, have helped in moments of superintendent turnover and what impact such turnover has had, if any, in delaying or severing partnerships, this study examined the experiences of external partners in urban school settings.

Research Questions

Through this qualitative study, I sought to learn more about the sustainability of partnership work through transition. I also wanted to understand if the strategies used by external organizations to maintain their partnerships are effective in moments of turnover. In the study, I highlight the experiences of external partners and what happens to their work when turnover

occurs in schools. My hope is that the learning from the findings of this study contribute to the broader research on inter-organizational partnerships. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of external partners, when superintendent turnover occurs in urban schools, what strategies are used to manage the sustainability of their support in schools?
2. Are these strategies effective in moments of turnover?

Rationale

School leaders are expected to lead and manage, including the evaluation and development of teachers to improve student learning. However, in urban school districts, high turnover can hinder a school's ability to sustain results over time (Waters & Marzano, 2006). As an external partner in K-12, I wanted to learn how external organizations can provide services that can result in sustained change in urban schools, despite district and school-based leadership turnover. It has been my experience that the lack of stability consistently delays partnership work and hinders our ability to see sustainable outcomes. In an effort to enhance comprehension of the experiences of external partners, the present study aimed to ascertain the most effective means by which such entities can provide services that result in sustained change, despite turnover.

In addition, minority students increasingly dominate enrollment in America's urban school districts. Urban schools enroll 24% of all public-school students in the United States and are a poor option for many students (Ravitch, 1998). Unfortunately, most urban students are ill-prepared academically (Ravitch, 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021) recorded that between fall 2009 and fall 2018, the percentage of Hispanic public-school students increased from 22% to 27%. Minority students disproportionally attended schools where

the combined enrollment of minority students was at least 75% of total enrollment in fall 2018 (NCES, 2021). These data showed that Black and Brown students are experiencing higher rates of leadership turnover.

Given the makeup of today's urban schools, Black and Brown students are at the receiving end of instability. This is in addition to other known complexities that plague urban schools and impact student achievement. The research of external partners is imperative because students, education leaders, and the community must work differently to benefit from the learnings of continuous program implementation. This study highlighted the experiences of multi-year contracted external partners in supporting school-wide and district initiatives or services during superintendent transitions.

The Impact of Partnerships

Growing up in the inner city, I experienced firsthand the educational limitations of the area. I attended a mid-Atlantic school district that currently serves around 14,500 students. The student-teacher ratio is 16:1, and state test scores indicate that only 10% of students are proficient in math and 20% in reading (NCES, 2020). The student body is comprised of 50% Hispanic and 46% Black students, and the graduation rate is approximately 68%. This urban community is home to about 28% of the city's residents living in poverty, which is nearly twice the state average, with 16% of households earning less than $10,000 annually (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, n.d.).

It was in my middle school, situated in an urban community, when I can recall my first interaction with an external partnering organization. I was selected to participate in an afterschool creative writing class. The outside organization bussed students to the local museum where we wrote, read, and engaged our various writing pieces aloud. We had the opportunity to

freely explore the museum and inquire about artifacts. I was exposed to new ways of writing, listening, and sharing. However, after a few weeks, that program abruptly ended. There was no closure or reason given, but the experience remains a core memory. And so does the disruption.

On the contrary, just before high school, I transferred to a mostly White suburban high school where the guidance counselor encouraged me to attend community college instead of a 4-year college. This was completely discouraging because that was not my plan. It was not what I saw for myself. I desired to become a first-generation college graduate. As fate would have it, in my junior year of high school, my African American literature teacher invited me on my first college tour in partnership with a Black fraternity. This experience completely shaped my entire educational journey and arguably shifted my access to generational wealth. This one partnership, albeit an informal partner, opened the doors for me to attend college, which provided access to so many other doors, including this journey to a terminal degree.

Collaboration and trust are crucial aspects of engaging in partnerships. The belief that educators must possess all the solutions can reinforce compartmentalization within schools. In contrast, partnerships denote an agreement between two or more parties to work together towards a common objective. Partnerships recognize that schools in isolation may not possess all the answers in the educational context. To promote greater equity within school systems, schools can leverage partnerships with the broader community for support. However, establishing a partnership necessitates a growth mindset on the part of school leaders, enabling the community to think critically about reimagining education and harnessing the abundant resources available to schools.

Exploring the role of external partnering organizations that support urban K-12 schools represents a pertinent area of research, given the growing significance of external partnerships in

K-12 education as schools strive to deliver more comprehensive educational experiences for their students. Collaborations with community organizations, businesses, and other educational institutions can provide schools with access to resources and opportunities that may not be available to them otherwise (Harris, 2002; Johnson & Brown, 2009). Investigating these partnerships can yield insights into the advantages and challenges of such collaborations, while also furnishing guidance for schools and organizations seeking to establish effective partnerships. Moreover, as external partnerships continue to play an increasingly vital role in K-12 education, comprehending the factors that contribute to successful partnerships can prove instrumental in enhancing educational outcomes for students (LeFloch & Barbour, 2014).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before delving into the literature on urban school turnover and external partnerships, it is important to first define key terms such as *urban*, *turnover*, and *partnership*. While previous research on turnover has largely focused on teachers and principals, this literature review examined the factors that contribute to superintendent turnover and its effects on school districts.

Defining *urban* is crucial as it sets the context for the study. The term *urban* can refer to densely populated areas with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and typically includes public schools that serve a large number of students (Knox & McCarthy, 2011). Understanding the unique challenges faced by urban schools can help inform strategies to address issues related to superintendent turnover and external partnerships.

Turnover refers to the process of employees leaving their positions, and it is an issue that has received increasing attention in the field of education (Shields, 2002). While much research has focused on teacher and principal turnover, the impact of superintendent turnover can be just as significant. Superintendent turnover can destabilize school districts and hinder the implementation of long-term plans and initiatives.

Finally, Badiali et al. (2000) and Druckman et al. (2002) defined the word *partnership* by associating it with networks, consortia, and alliances that work alongside K-12 schools and districts. These partnerships can range from community-based organizations (CBOs) to businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. Understanding the role of external partners in urban school districts can help identify potential sources of support and resources for addressing issues related to superintendent turnover.

Superintendent Turnover Is the Urban School Curse

Superintendent turnover in K-12 urban schools has been a longstanding issue that can have significant impacts on student outcomes, district stability, and community trust. The turnover of superintendents, who are the top leaders in school districts, can occur for a variety of reasons, including differences in vision or leadership style, policy disagreements, burnout, or personal reasons (Grissom and Mitani, 2016). Half of the nation's largest school districts, which collectively represent 12.5 million students, have had a disruption or change in leadership since March 2020 (ILO Group, 2022). Additionally, the ILO (2022) study highlighted that leadership turnover among the nation's largest districts has increased 46% when comparing the 2 years before the pandemic began in March 2020 and the 2 years following the beginning of the pandemic.

In earlier years, superintendents were in seats longer (Pascopella, 2011). However, this was not true of superintendents serving in school districts with the highest percentage of students of color. According to a study conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), the average tenure of urban superintendents increased from 2.3 years in 1999 to 3.6 years in 2010 (Pascopella, 2011). The Broad Center report surveyed superintendents who held positions in the 100 largest school districts, including many who had since left, and found that they had been in the office for an average of 6 years before they departed (Superville, 2020). However, the study noted that tenure was *half* as long for superintendents serving in districts with the highest percentages of students of color (typically found in urban school districts).

In other words, schools with higher Black and Brown student populations consistently experience higher rates of turnover. Contrary to urban schools, school districts where 25% or fewer students were students of color, the average tenure duration was nearly 12 years

(Superville, 2020). According to a recent study by an education strategy and policy firm, the ILO Group (2022), turnover increased by 46% for superintendents in the nation's largest school districts between the 2-year spans of 2018-2020 and 2020-2022. In 246 of the nation's 500 largest districts, leadership changes occurred between March 2020 and September 2022.

The role of race in the superintendency cannot be disregarded, as evidenced by the mere 2 percent representation of Black superintendents nationwide, according to the latest count by the AASA (Thomas et al, 2023). While existing research has primarily focused on the barriers faced by Black individuals in obtaining superintendent positions, it tends to overlook the systemic obstacles that persist once they assume these roles. In light of this, there has been a recent call to formally document the experiences of Black superintendents. Dr. Shawn Joseph, an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and Co-Director of the Urban Superintendent Academy at Howard University, has published an article titled "A Call for Black Superintendents to Document their Experiences Through Authoethnography," emphasizing the need for Black superintendents to describe and advance understanding of their unique experiences (Joseph, 2023).

Dr. Joseph underscores the challenges faced by Black urban superintendents within the contemporary educational, cultural, and political landscape, particularly in urban districts. To effectively convey the structural and systemic racism confronted by Black superintendents, Dr. Joseph encourages black superintendents, document, and contribute to the knowledge base through the utilization of autoethnographies (Joseph, 2023).

Notably, the experiences of Black superintendents are multifaceted, encompassing prejudices, job-related pressures, heightened expectations, increased workload, and unconventional challenges (Simmons, 2013; Wilson & Kowalski, 2017). Hugh J. Scott, former

dean for programs in education at Hunter College in New York City and author of "The African American Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat?," highlights the significant demands placed on African American superintendents, with many perceiving them as miracle workers (Scott, 1980). These superintendents often find themselves subjected to criticism and scrutiny.

Current and former Black superintendents have revealed in interviews that grappling with negative assumptions and the constant need to prove their capabilities significantly exacerbate the already demanding nature of their roles. For instance, Ms. Byrd-Bennett, who served as the chief executive officer of the Cleveland school district for seven years, emphasizes the perpetual need to excel and approach every meeting as if presenting a compelling legal case (Birman, 2006). Ms. House, a former Memphis superintendent, underscores that while biases based on race and gender may manifest more subtly than in previous decades, they continue to exert a powerful influence on the dynamics and outcomes of their job (Birman, 2006)

Moreover, the experiences of Black superintendents extend beyond their professional realm. Dr. Andrea Kane, a Black superintendent in Maryland, found herself embroiled in a year-long battle after sending an email to parents following the killing of George Floyd. Such incidents further highlight the challenges faced by Black superintendents in navigating their roles amidst social and racial tensions (Johnson, 2021). Michael D. McFarland, president of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, asserts that many African American school administrators are unjustly stigmatized as activists and subjected to scrutiny for any perceived misstep.

Another added challenge for superintendents is their relationship with the board. The literature reinforces the importance of board and superintendent relationship. “It is essential that those leading the school district share the same vision, beliefs, and mission as those governing

the schools" (Callan & Levinson, 2011, p. 63). However, boards must leave room for superintendents to lead with a sense of autonomy; Clearly defining roles, fostering trust, and maintaining open and effective communication are crucial elements in developing a successful and productive relationship between superintendents and school boards (Banicki & Pacha, 2011; Basom et al., 1999).

The responsibilities of superintendents in suburban and urban school districts are developing and transforming. This transformation of their role and associated expectations brings about greater complexity and changes in the pressures they face. One such pressure is the potential for a strained and untrusting relationship between the superintendent and school board, which can contribute to a higher rate of turnover among superintendents (Chance & Capps, 1992).

School boards have a responsibility to think deeply about what it means to provide services to urban school districts and not task superintendents with unrealistic expectations. More important is to think deeply about what it looks like to measure success. When school board members evaluate the superintendent, it is important that the superintendent has had the opportunity to provide input into the evaluation process (Goon, 2009).

School board members may have limited knowledge of the superintendent's duties, so it is important that the evaluation process does not solely rely on the functions of the superintendent's actual responsibilities. To ensure a fair and equitable evaluation process, the superintendent's input is of utmost importance. Both the school board and the superintendent should provide input to the evaluation process to enhance equity, integrity, and fairness. As Goens (2009) suggests, the inclusion of input from both entities is crucial for a well-rounded evaluation process.

Board members and superintendents are not reluctant to discuss their mutual problems. School board members and superintendents each have defined roles and responsibilities, but often disagree on how to prioritize demands. Without clear awareness between board members and superintendents regarding who ultimately makes decisions, tension can arise over misplaced blame for identified problems and responsibility for solutions (Zagata, 2022). Urban school districts, as well as school districts identified as underperforming, are often engaged in multi-year reform initiatives. To maximize success, boards and superintendents need to work together in support of improving overall student achievement outcomes (Zagata, 2022).

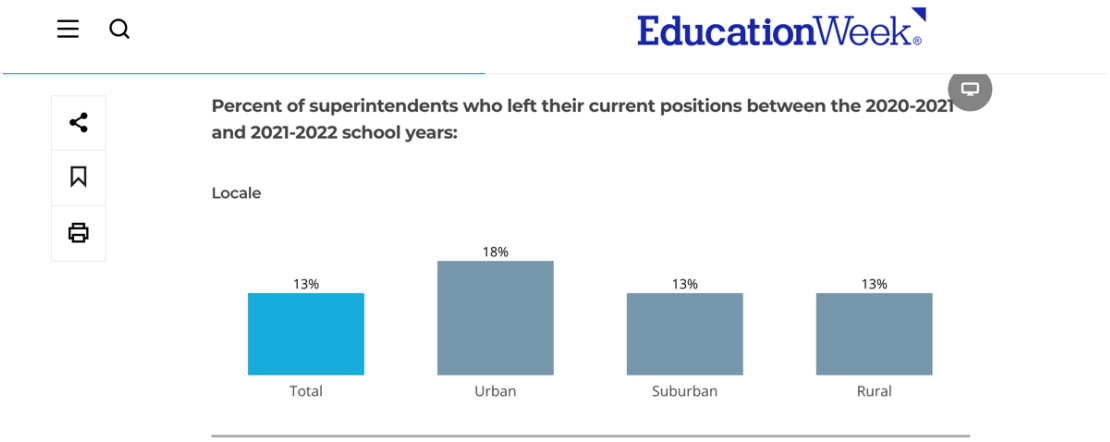
There is conflicting evidence to support the "right" length of tenure for superintendents to see a meaningful impact. No set amount of time has been universally recognized as the "right" length of time for urban superintendents to see change in their districts. However, research has suggested that superintendents need several years to make significant improvements in student outcomes, and longer tenures are associated with greater improvements. The Broad Center for the Management of School Systems prepares superintendents to run urban school districts and improve student performance. The Center recommends that for sustained change, superintendents should wait at least 5 years before leaving their position (Pascopella, 2011). The above research indicated that urban school superintendents typically leave after 3 years. Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a meta-analysis that included 2,714 districts from studies conducted between 1970 and 2005; they noted that positive change in student achievement can be observed as early as 2 years into a superintendent's tenure. However, positive student achievement growth for superintendents serving less than 5 years was mostly observed in rural and Appalachian districts, not urban school districts (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Regardless of time in the position, research has shown that the superintendent role remains exceptionally stressful; however, stress does not necessarily impact job satisfaction. The ILO Group (2022) identified 500 superintendents in the highest-populated school districts in the country; it discovered that between March 2020 and January 2022, 37% (186) of school districts underwent or were currently undergoing leadership changes. In contrast, *EdWeek* surveyed 291 district and charter network leaders and found 85% job satisfaction among school superintendents (Bichu, 2022). However, 13% of school superintendents said they planned to leave their position at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, which aligns with the actual turnover rate from the previous 2020-2021 school year (Bichu, 2022). These data (see Figure 1) indicated that while superintendents feel stress, they also feel satisfied with their role but not enough to stay in the seat.

Grissom and Mitani (2016) attributed the short tenure and frequent turnover of urban superintendents to the growing unmanageability of the superintendent role in urban school districts. Instability at the top hinders the prospects for sustained educational outcomes (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). What we know from the data is that the superintendency job has become increasingly stressful. Despite recent reports about an increase in superintendent job satisfaction, turnover trends remain steady or, in some cases, are growing.

Figure 1

Percent of Superintendents Leaving Positions (2020-2022)



(Sawchuk, 2022)

As a result of superintendent turnover, schools must adjust to frequent leadership changes that impact educational outcomes. The U.S. educational system faces continuous pressure to improve and increase student achievement outcomes, thereby increasing pressure on superintendents (Reuter, 2009). Expectations for superintendent leadership have soared due to heightened demands for student achievement and accountability. Therefore, school district superintendents must continuously identify, develop, and utilize effective leadership characteristics to meet the nation's high expectations for education. Due to the superintendent's insurmountable responsibility, there is a high turnover rate, which disrupts initiatives, programs, and overall district strategy when the superintendent leaves (Reuter, 2009).

However, only limited literature has directly connected the tenure of a school superintendent with student achievement because there are many factors outside the control of superintendents. However, some states intentionally made stronger connections between the

education reform act and superintendent accountability for student achievement. For example, Kentucky instituted its educational reform act in 1990, which increased the accountability of the superintendent for student achievement; the number of resignations and retirements increased to 20% from previous years during the first 5 years of implementation (Glass et al., 2000).

A series of meta-analyses conducted by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) study represents a comprehensive examination of 27 studies conducted between 1970 and the present, utilizing rigorous quantitative methodologies to investigate the influence of school district leaders on student achievement. With a vast sample size encompassing 2,817 districts and 3.4 million students' achievement scores, this research endeavor stands as the largest-ever quantitative analysis of research pertaining to superintendents. The findings derived from this study shed light on several important aspects: (a) the significant impact of district-level leadership on student outcomes; (b) the effectiveness of superintendents in directing their efforts towards establishing goal-oriented districts; (c) a positive correlation between superintendent tenure and student achievement; and (d) a noteworthy and puzzling discovery regarding the concept of autonomy. These findings offer valuable insights into the role of superintendents in educational settings and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this subject (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The Emergence of External Partners

In the 1960s, the US federal government began to increase its support for funding external partnerships in K-12 schools. In K-12 schools, partnerships are comprised of informal and formal organizations linked together by their involvement in schooling and education as institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While initially limited to families and governing bodies such as local, state, and federal education agencies, these partnerships have since expanded to

include universities, nonprofits, businesses, community groups, and other K-12 schools (Byrd & Maloy, 1988; Sanders, 2006). The diverse partnership types have been broadly categorized into school-family partnerships, school-community partnerships, school-university partnerships, and school-industry or business partnerships (Sanders, 2006).

After the 1983 Nation at Risk Report (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983), the 100th U.S. Congress passed the Educational Partnerships Act (1988) to foster alliances between public elementary and secondary schools and private sector representatives. Originally, the act aimed to leverage the resources of private and nonprofit sectors to address the needs of elementary and secondary schools. In 1997, the Obey-Porter legislation allowed the federal government to release $150 million to aid schools in adopting proven comprehensive school reform (CSR) models (Keltner, 1998). As a result, the nation became less interested in one-off reform efforts and began moving towards CSR. The primary responsibility of schools undertaking CSR is to create programs that improve student achievement (Comprehensive School Reform Program Office, 2002).

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) defined CSR as innovative programs that include: curriculum, instruction, assessment, grouping, accommodations for struggling students, parent and community involvement, school organization, and professional development (Wirt et al., 1998). CSR paved the way for future legislation, including Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), which extended the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 by updating the definition of professional development from scientifically based—proven effective based on science to evidence-based—proven effective based on research (Johnson, 2016). NCLB supported collaborations between K-12 schools and external organizations providing instructional support to work on CSR.

The aim of the federal legislation was designed to connect schools and districts, particularly those with economic needs, to funding streams, programming, and services to address the challenges to student achievement (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010). As a result of foundations, other private grantmaking organizations, and government funding, many urban schools have established partnerships to advance access to quality education. In other words, due to limited capacity, state mandates, and resources in many urban school communities, schools have secured partnerships with external organizations to support them with gains towards student achievement (Honig & Coburn, 2007; Datnow & Honig, 2008; Honig, 2004).

Prior to the implementation of the NCLB Act, graduation rates, attendance rates, and teacher certification levels were commonly used metrics to measure school improvement, as noted by Cohen et al. (2018) and Tyack and Cuban (1995). However, with the introduction of NCLB, federal funds were linked to specific accountability measures, forcing chronically low-performing schools to improve or face severe sanctions, as explained by Duke (2012).

Critics of the NCLB Act questioned the use of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets as the primary measure of school performance and accountability, arguing that it overly emphasized standardized test scores and neglected other factors that contribute to a student's academic success (Duke, 2012). Some also argued that the consequences for failing to meet AYP targets were too severe and did not provide adequate support for struggling schools and students. Despite these criticisms, the focus on accountability and improvement under NCLB did lead to some improvements in academic outcomes, particularly for low-income and minority students. Graduation rates and proficiency levels in reading and math did increase during the implementation of NCLB, although the extent to which these improvements can be directly attributed to the law is still a topic of debate. In 2015, NCLB was replaced by Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA), which shifted some of the decision making and accountability back to the states and provided more flexibility in how schools were assessed and supported for improvement.

Despite changes in educational policy and practice over the years, the United States has maintained a strong emphasis on accountability and improving academic outcomes for all students. Legislation such as ESSA has built upon the framework established by previous laws like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). By establishing a system of accountability and consequences for schools that fail to meet academic standards, NCLB aimed to improve the quality of education and outcomes for all students. However, the implementation of the law was not without its criticisms, with some arguing that it placed too much emphasis on standardized testing and did not adequately address the underlying systemic issues that contribute to educational disparities.

During the Obama administration, there was a continued focus on achievement standards and encouraging states to measure school success through metrics that indicated college and career readiness, according to Farrell and Coburn (2017). It emphasized the importance of providing students with well-rounded educational experiences that go beyond traditional academic subjects and recognizes the value of partnerships in achieving this goal (Young et al., 2017). This gave external partners broader opportunities to provide tools, expertise, and resources to aid school improvement (Farrell & Coburn, 2017).

The provision of federal funding enabled schools to broaden their professional development opportunities. However, despite the availability of federal funding for programs that promote student achievement through external partnerships, a report by the Center for American Progress criticized school districts and state education agencies for relying on

fragmented reforms for struggling schools while ignoring broader issues related to human capital and leadership (Ayers & Lazarin, 2011, p. 1). Ayers and Lazarin (2011) recommended a comprehensive approach to improving low-performing schools, involving substantial and sustained interventions, along with external support and oversight, in order to break the cycle of underperformance. They also recommended that schools and districts collaborate with external experts to facilitate this process.

Over the years, federal funding for external partnerships in K-12 schools has continued to evolve and expand. One notable program is the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative, which provides funding for afterschool programs and other activities that take place outside of regular school hours (USDOE, 2010). The program has been instrumental in supporting partnerships between schools and community organizations and has provided valuable resources and support for millions of students across the country (USDOE, 2010).

Federal funding has played an important role in supporting the growth and development of external partnerships in K-12 schools and has helped to ensure that students have access to a wide range of resources and supports to help them succeed. The inception of formal partnerships between schools and external organizations was initiated with the objective of supporting classroom instruction. Federal legislation provided the incentive for schools to begin engaging formal partnerships to address the growing need of students, particularly students in urban schools. Ferguson et al. (2001) emphasized the need for partnership support as schools lack financial, human, and administrative resources. Ferguson et al.'s study of school partnerships demonstrated the power in leveraging the intersections of schools and external partnerships to meet the needs of the overall school community.

Strategies for Maintaining School-based Partnerships

According to the National Association of Partners in Education, Inc. (NAPE, 1991), partnerships in education have become a significant aspect of elementary and secondary schools across the United States. This report presents the results of a national survey conducted between March and August 1991, which gathered information about the status of volunteer and partnership programs. NAPE's 1991 survey, educational partnerships are becoming increasingly important in elementary and secondary schools across the United States. The survey found that over half of the school districts in the country (51%) have active partnership programs. Additionally, the survey revealed that a significant majority of American students, comprising 65% or 29.7 million students, attend school districts that have established educational partnerships (p. 12). Of the nearly 30 million students who attended school districts with partnerships in 1991, 30% of these students lived in urban areas, 50% lived in suburban areas, and 20% lived in rural areas (p. 3).

The results of the NAPE survey indicate that educational partnerships have been widely embraced as a tool to promote student learning and growth in schools throughout the United States. The vast number of students who benefit from such partnerships further emphasizes the potential impact that these collaborations can have in enhancing educational outcomes for students in various contexts. These findings provide persuasive evidence for the effectiveness and significance of educational partnerships in American schools. By forging alliances with external organizations and community stakeholders, schools can effectively address the academic and non-academic needs of their students, providing them with the requisite resources and support for academic achievement.

Whitford (1996) suggested that before embarking on true reform methods, it is crucial for all parties involved to first recognize the need for change and agree that the overall strategy for achieving that change is appropriate. Whitford identifies the merging of agendas between the partners, which results in a shared goal. This type of collaboration, where the partners' agendas become aligned, is known as an "organic" relationship. When the collaboration and the shared goal are institutionally recognized and supported, the resulting partnership becomes stronger and more effective in achieving its goals. By recognizing and supporting the partnership, the institutions involved demonstrate their commitment to the shared goal and ensure that the partnership is sustainable over the long-term.

American Institutes for Research (AIR) produced a report that provides recommendations for school administrators based on original research, informal feedback from staff of low-performing schools in six districts, in collaboration with AIR's education specialists working as school turnaround leaders and lead partners (LeFloch & Barbour, 2014). The study found that establish trust by negotiating clear roles and responsibilities, communicating early and often, and defining the role of the external partner are critical to partnership success. The study magnifies that external school turnaround partners can offer many benefits to schools, including new perspectives, fresh knowledge based on research and practical experience, and the ability to act as thought partners in addressing potential systemic issues (LeFloch & Barbour, 2014).

There has been considerable research on university-school based and family engagement partnership strategies. Establishing university-school partnerships requires a shared understanding of roles and power dynamics. This shared understanding contributes to the importance of external partnerships as two separate entities work collaboratively towards a shared goal (Kruger et al., 2009). The work between university-school collaborations reinforce

that those alliances must be collaborative rather than complementary and should enable tremendous respect and understanding of the types of learning that can be achieved in each setting (Kruger et al., 2009).

A monitoring report released in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education revealed that family engagement was identified as the weakest aspect of compliance by states (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This finding is further supported by the 2012 "MetLife Survey of the American Teacher," which consistently highlights family engagement as one of the most challenging aspects of teachers' and principals' work nationwide (Markow, et al., 2012). The *Partner in Education A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* report introduces the Dual Capacity-Building Framework, which encompasses four key components. First, it outlines the capacity challenges that need to be addressed in order to foster successful home-school partnerships. Secondly, it highlights the essential conditions for the effectiveness of family-school partnership initiatives and interventions. Thirdly, it identifies intermediate capacity goals that should guide family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state, and local levels. Lastly, it describes the desired capacity-building outcomes for both school and program staff, as well as for families. The report goes on to present three case studies featuring a school, a district, and a county, which serve as examples illustrating and expanding upon the implementation of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Mapp, et al., 2017).

Epstein's framework highlights the crucial role of community and family partnerships in fostering student success. By emphasizing two-way collaborations, the framework recognizes that effective involvement goes beyond mere participation and requires active engagement from both parties (Epstein et al., 2019). Each type of involvement outlined in the framework

reinforces the idea that when educators and families work together as equal partners, the potential for positive outcomes increases. Parenting involvement acknowledges the impact of a supportive home environment on children's academic progress (Epstein et al., 2019).

Effective communication ensures that information flows smoothly between schools and families, facilitating a shared understanding of students' needs. Volunteering involvement recognizes the value of parental support in enriching student activities. Learning at home involvement underscores the importance of equipping families with resources to actively contribute to their child's learning journey. Decision-making involvement acknowledges the valuable insights and perspectives that parents bring to school decisions, leading to more inclusive and representative outcomes. Finally, collaborating with the community involvement highlights the potential of leveraging external resources and services to enhance educational programs and student development (Epstein et al., 2019). Epstein's framework underscores that strong partnerships between educators and families are essential for creating a supportive and holistic educational environment that maximizes student success.

The National Science Foundation’s Math and Science Partnership Program (MSP) encourages partnerships between institutions of higher education, local education agencies, state education agencies, and other for-profit and nonprofit entities to improve student achievement by reducing achievement gaps among student populations differentiated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or disability (Jones et al., 2016). MSP partnerships worked on a variety of educational activities at the K-12 level. Those activities included providing in-service (professional development) to existing K-12 classroom teachers; training teacher leaders, coaches, and mentors to work with classroom teachers; and training school administrators or staff (Jones et al., 2016).

Jones et al. (2016) highlighted the Science Teacher Education Partnership (STEPS) project, which used an interpretive framework to conduct a case study of five Australian universities to examine their successful school-based science programs. The seven campuses provided a multiple case study design, enabling understanding across contexts. The interpretive framework's purpose was to ensure that the impact of partnerships was positive and sustainable. According to Jones et al., the four components of the interpretive framework "provide a language and framework to assist stakeholders" in initiating, implementing, evaluating, and growing partnerships (p. 119). The components were: Guiding Pedagogical Principles, Growing University-School Partnerships, Representations of Partnership, and Growth Model.

The STEPS project was designed to provide insight into factors that could lead to sustainable partnerships in K-12 schools by identifying the above components. The STEPS project created a helpful framework designed to inform the success and sustainability of university and school partnerships, but it can be applied to better sustain all school-based partnerships. The limitation of the framework is the outline of the specific strategies to get there. In other words, the framework provides the "what" but not the "how."

To get closer to the "how," a good framework to use is the *Partnering for Student Success: A Practical Guide to Building Effective School-Based Partnerships*—"a toolkit that provides a framework, tools, and resources to guide thoughtful conversations and decisions to establish successful partnerships" (Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1). Funded by the William Penn Foundation, principals and other staff from Philadelphia School District and school-based external partners from national and local organizations produced a report outlining partnership strategies (Costelloe et al., 2016). This framework was created to provide current and future partners with guidance to establish successful and effective partnerships with schools.

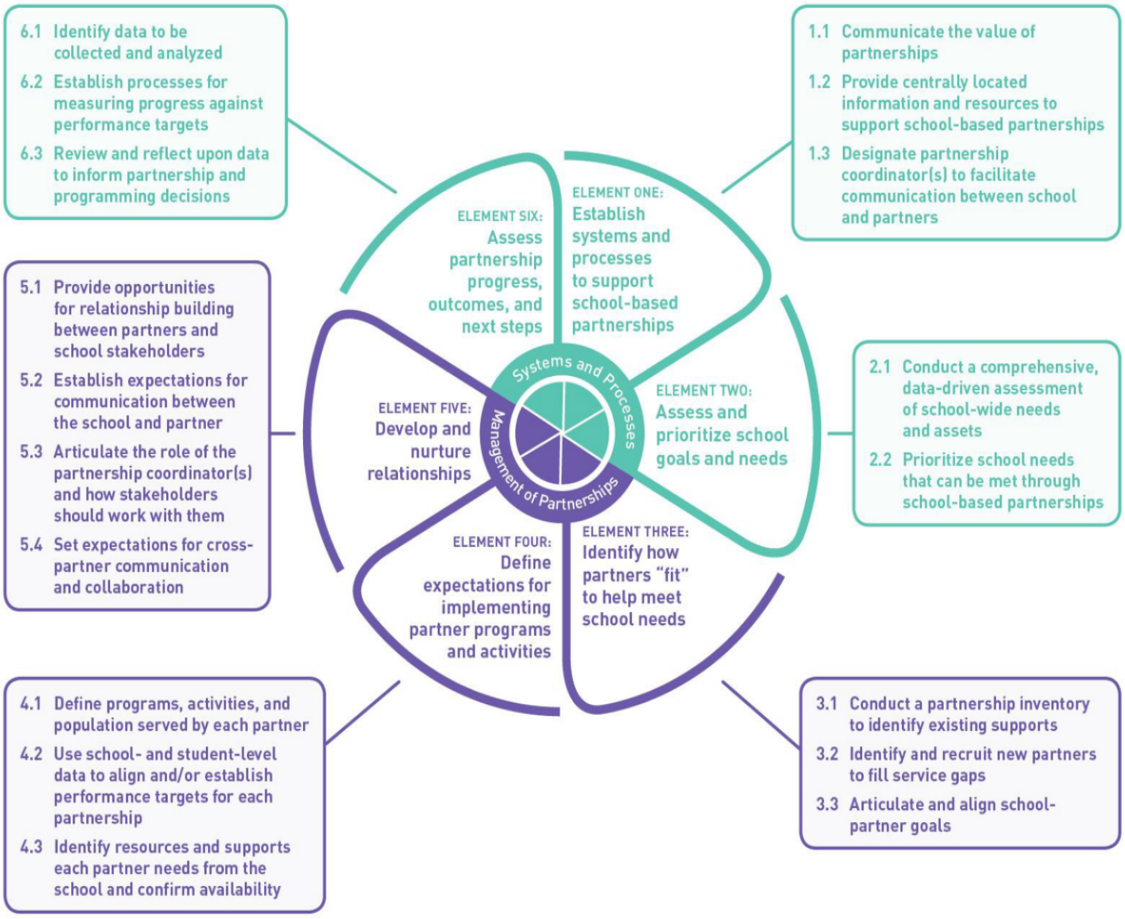
As part of the Philadelphia School District study, two partnership coordination models were evaluated: one led by the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND), and the other led by United Communities' Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative (SEPC). The study highlighted that when districts prioritize school-based partnerships, they must provide resources and supports to assist schools in creating, monitoring, and maintaining partnerships. This can be done through professional development, data analysis, and funding opportunities. The six elements to maintain school-based partnerships effectively fell into two categories: Management and Partnership (MP) and Systems and Processes (SP):

1. Establish systems and processes to support school-based partnerships (SPs);
2. Assess and prioritize school goals and needs (SPs);
3. Identify how partners "fit" to help meet school needs (MPs);
4. Define expectations for implementing partner programs and activities (MPs);
5. Develop and nurture relationships (MPs);
6. Assess partnership progress, outcomes, and next steps (SPs). (Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1)

These elements are depicted in Figure 2, based on Costelloe et al.' work.

Figure 2

Elements of School-based Partnerships



(Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 2)

While these six elements could be useful for external organizations to maintain or sustain effective partnerships, the question remains if external partners are using any of them and whether these strategies are effective in moments of turnover. The research overwhelmingly supported the need for strong relationships between external partners and school leaders, but

what strategies are used to establish and sustain these relationships? Research from the Penn Foundation not only expanded beyond relationships to cite other critical elements that can lead to effective partnerships, but it also broke down the specific elements to define and nurture relationships.

Race and School-Based Partnerships

Racism remains a pervasive issue in educational settings, influencing student experiences and outcomes. School-based partnerships, which involve collaborations between schools and external organizations or community stakeholders, have the potential to address racial disparities and promote educational equity. This literature review aims to explore the existing research on racism within school-based partnerships, examining its impact on educational outcomes, partnership dynamics, strategies for addressing racism, and implications for promoting inclusive and equitable education.

Research indicates that racism within school-based partnerships can contribute to disparities in educational outcomes. Studies have shown that racially marginalized communities often face systemic barriers that limit their access to high-quality partnership opportunities. DeMatthews et al. (2018) highlight that racism may hinder effective collaboration, impede the exchange of resources and knowledge, and perpetuate existing educational inequities. These barriers can limit the ability of schools to engage in meaningful partnerships and hinder the potential benefits for students from marginalized backgrounds.

The presence of racism within school-based partnerships can have detrimental effects on partnership dynamics and collaboration. Irving and Streeter (2020) note that partnerships that do not address issues of race and equity may inadvertently perpetuate racial biases and stereotypes, thus contributing to disparities in student outcomes. A lack of attention to racism within

partnerships can create barriers to meaningful engagement and limit the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. In contrast, partnerships that actively address racism and embrace cultural responsiveness can foster inclusive school climates and contribute to the success of all students.

Efforts to combat racism within school-based partnerships require intentional strategies and a commitment to equity. Mapp and Hong (2020) emphasize the importance of critical conversations about race, power, and privilege as a foundation for building partnerships that promote social justice. Addressing racism necessitates examining and challenging systemic structures and biases within partnership practices, policies, and decision-making processes. Professional development and training for educators and partnership stakeholders can also enhance cultural competence and equip them with the tools to address racism effectively.

Several strategies have been proposed to address racism within school-based partnerships. These include developing clear equity frameworks that guide partnership activities and decision-making processes, promoting diverse and representative voices in partnership leadership and decision-making roles, and actively engaging communities and families from racially marginalized backgrounds. Domina et al. (2021) highlight the importance of anti-racist policies and practices, as well as fostering inclusive partnerships that embrace the strengths and cultural backgrounds of all involved stakeholders.

While progress has been made in recognizing and addressing racism within school-based partnerships, challenges persist. Ongoing research, policy development, and professional development initiatives are necessary to create transformative and anti-racist partnerships. Collaborations between schools, community organizations, and families need to be grounded in equity and social justice to foster inclusive education environments. Additionally, partnerships

must actively seek to dismantle systemic barriers and promote the full participation and engagement of racially marginalized communities.

The literature review highlights the significance of addressing racism within school-based partnerships to promote educational equity and foster inclusive school environments. Understanding the impact of racism on partnership dynamics, educational outcomes, and collaboration is crucial for creating effective strategies to combat systemic racism. Social capital theory provides a lens through which to examine the importance of trust, networks, and resources in building successful partnerships. These partnerships can foster the development of strong networks, mutual trust, and shared resources, thereby enhancing the educational experiences and opportunities available to marginalized students. Through an intersectional approach that combines the principles of social capital theory and anti-racist practices, schools and communities can work together to dismantle systemic barriers and promote equitable and inclusive educational environments.

Social Capital Theory

This study drew on social capital theory to examine the role of relationships in school-based partnerships. More specifically, this study drew on Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, emphasizing structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race (Richardson, 1986). Bourdieu framed social capital by recognizing the sharing of resources by individuals or groups through "more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Bourdieu saw social capital as a property of the individual, derived primarily from one's social position and status. Social capital is irreducibly attached to class and other forms of stratification, which in turn are associated with various forms of benefit or advancement. Bourdieu argued that

capital can present itself in three fundamental ways: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Richardson, 1986). The three capitals are best understood in relation to each other.

Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate of resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of social relationships. These relationships are based on mutual acquaintance and recognition, and can be established through material or symbolic exchanges, or by the application of a common name. However, social capital is heavily reliant on the mutual credibility given in relationships. The size of the network of connections is also dependent on the amount of economic and cultural capital that an individual possesses, as these can be used to establish and maintain social relationships. Therefore, social capital is never completely independent of economic and cultural capital. It depends on the size of the network of connections, which is the product of investment strategies aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short term or long-term.

These relationships are of paramount importance as they encompass both indispensable and discretionary elements, encompassing enduring commitments that are subjectively felt or institutionally guaranteed. Affective dimensions, including feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, and other emotional states, play a pivotal role in the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. Simultaneously, institutional guarantees such as rights and obligations also significantly contribute to the longevity and sustainability of these social bonds. Therefore, an exploration of these multifaceted dynamics is essential to comprehend the intricate fabric of social relationships.

Social capital is an essential resource that is linked to the possession of a durable network of social relationships. The size and durability of this network are dependent on the investment

strategies of individuals, as well as their economic and cultural capital. The existence of social relationships is both necessary and elective and is based on a combination of subjective and institutional factors (Richardson, 1986). The application of social capital theory can provide a useful framework for understanding how relationships between schools and external organizations can support student learning and development. When schools partner with external organizations, the relationship they build can lead to greater collaboration, trust, and a shared sense of responsibility for student success. Social capital theory can provide a valuable lens through which to understand the importance of relationships in supporting student learning and development. Schools and external organizations that invest in building strong relationships based on trust and mutual understanding are more likely to achieve positive outcomes for students, both academically and socially.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to the intangible assets that an individual possesses, such as education, skills, knowledge, and social status, which are valued by society (Bourdieu, 1986). These assets can be used to gain advantages in social and economic situations. Cultural capital is closely linked to the person because it is based on their upbringing, education, and experiences (Bourdieu, 1986). For those who hold economic or political capital, cultural capital can present particular problems. They may lack the specific cultural competence needed to navigate certain social situations or to understand and appreciate cultural products. This can lead to a loss of prestige or social capital.

However, those who possess cultural capital can use it strategically to gain advantages in social and economic situations. They can leverage their knowledge, skills, and social status to gain access to certain networks, to gain recognition and respect, and to negotiate favorable deals.

Cultural capital in its objectified state may present itself as an autonomous, coherent universe, but it is not just a passive collection of assets. It is a dynamic and active force that can be used strategically to gain advantage. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and value cultural capital as a valuable asset that can be leveraged to achieve success in various aspects of life (Richardson, 1986).

Social Capital Theory and Trust

Social capital theory and trust, alongside the importance of relationships, play a crucial role in understanding and improving school-based partnerships. Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasize that trust is a core resource for school improvement and reform, and relationships are a fundamental component of trust-building. Strong relationships between educators, families, and community partners are essential for creating a collaborative and supportive environment within partnerships.

Building and nurturing positive relationships within school-based partnerships is vital for promoting effective collaboration and achieving shared goals. Trust within these relationships fosters open communication, mutual respect, and a sense of collective responsibility. By establishing trusting relationships, stakeholders within partnerships feel comfortable sharing information, ideas, and concerns, which contributes to more productive and meaningful collaboration.

Social capital theory suggests that relationships formed within schools and partnerships are valuable assets that enhance educational outcomes. According to Bryk (2010), social capital encompasses not only trust but also the norms and social networks that facilitate cooperation and collective action. Positive relationships within partnerships contribute to the development of social networks that can be leveraged to share knowledge, resources, and expertise. These

networks enable stakeholders to access and mobilize the necessary support and information, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for students.

Furthermore, Coleman (1988) highlights the significance of social capital in creating human capital. Within school-based partnerships, relationships built on trust and social capital provide opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and resources among stakeholders. Such exchanges contribute to the growth and development of human capital for educators, families, and community members involved. By nurturing relationships and leveraging social capital, schools and external partners can create a supportive environment that fosters continuous learning, collaboration, and innovation.

Understanding the importance of social capital, trust, and relationships within school-based partnerships is essential for promoting effective collaboration, equitable practices, and improved student outcomes. By investing in relationship-building, creating a culture of trust, and fostering supportive networks, schools and external partners can leverage social capital to create inclusive and successful partnerships. These partnerships, grounded in strong relationships and trust, can serve as catalysts for addressing racism, dismantling systemic barriers, and promoting educational equity for all students.

Social Capital Theory and Reciprocity

Social capital theory emphasizes the importance of relationships and social networks in various domains, including schools, organizations, and online communities. One key aspect of social capital theory is the concept of reciprocity, which involves mutual exchanges of resources, trust, and cooperation. This section explores the relationship between social capital theory and reciprocity, drawing on influential works by (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Ellison et al., 2014; Lin, 2001).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) highlight the role of trust in schools as a core resource for improvement and school reform, respectively. Their works underscore the significance of building and nurturing trusting relationships among stakeholders within educational settings. Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that trust serves as a foundation for reciprocity, enabling collaborative efforts, open communication, and shared decision-making processes

In his publication on organizing schools for improvement, Bryk (2010) expands on the importance of social relationships and networks in creating effective educational systems. He emphasizes the need for reciprocal relationships among educators, students, families, and community members to foster collaboration, shared goals, and collective responsibility. This emphasis on reciprocity aligns with the principles of social capital theory.

Coleman's seminal work on social capital (1988) explores its role in the creation of human capital. He highlights how social networks and relationships contribute to the development of skills, knowledge, and resources. Coleman's research emphasizes the importance of reciprocity within social networks, as the exchange of resources and support enhances social capital formation and outcomes. Ellison et al. (2014) expands on this work by focusing on cultivating social resources within online communities, specifically examining the role of Facebook relationship maintenance behaviors in social capital processes. Their study demonstrates that reciprocal interactions and the exchange of resources and support play a crucial role in the formation of social capital within virtual networks. These findings illustrate that reciprocity is not limited to face-to-face interactions but extends to digital spaces, influencing the generation of social capital within online communities. Lin (2001) provides a comprehensive theory of social capital that emphasizes the role of relationships and networks in social structure and action. Lin's work highlights the interconnectedness between social capital

and reciprocity, as reciprocal exchanges contribute to the formation and accumulation of social capital.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the significance of relationship reciprocity in the formation and maintenance of social capital across various domains. Whether in communities, educational settings, workplaces, or online networks, reciprocal relationships characterized by trust, cooperation, and the exchange of resources are integral to the development of social capital. Understanding and fostering relationship reciprocity can thus be instrumental in promoting the accumulation of social capital and its positive effects on individual and collective well-being, cooperation, and organizational performance.

Summary

In summary, social capital theory emphasizes the importance of relationships in school-based partnerships and their role in supporting student learning and development. Social capital, which is linked to the possession of a durable network of social relationships, is influenced by individuals' investment strategies, as well as their economic and cultural capital. Trust is a crucial component of social capital and plays a significant role in building and nurturing positive relationships within partnerships. These relationships foster collaboration, open communication, and a sense of collective responsibility. By leveraging social capital, stakeholders can access knowledge, resources, and support, leading to enhanced educational outcomes. Relationship reciprocity, characterized by trust, cooperation, and the exchange of resources, further strengthens social capital and its positive impact on various domains, including community development, education, workplaces, and online networks. Understanding and fostering relationship reciprocity can promote the accumulation of social capital, ultimately benefiting individuals and collective well-being, cooperation, and organizational performance.

The following methodology section highlights the central role of relationships in studying social capital. Recognizing that relationships are crucial components of social capital, the research methodology focuses on capturing and analyzing the nature and dynamics of these relationships. This section describes the methods employed to investigate and understand the impact of relationships on social capital formation and outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

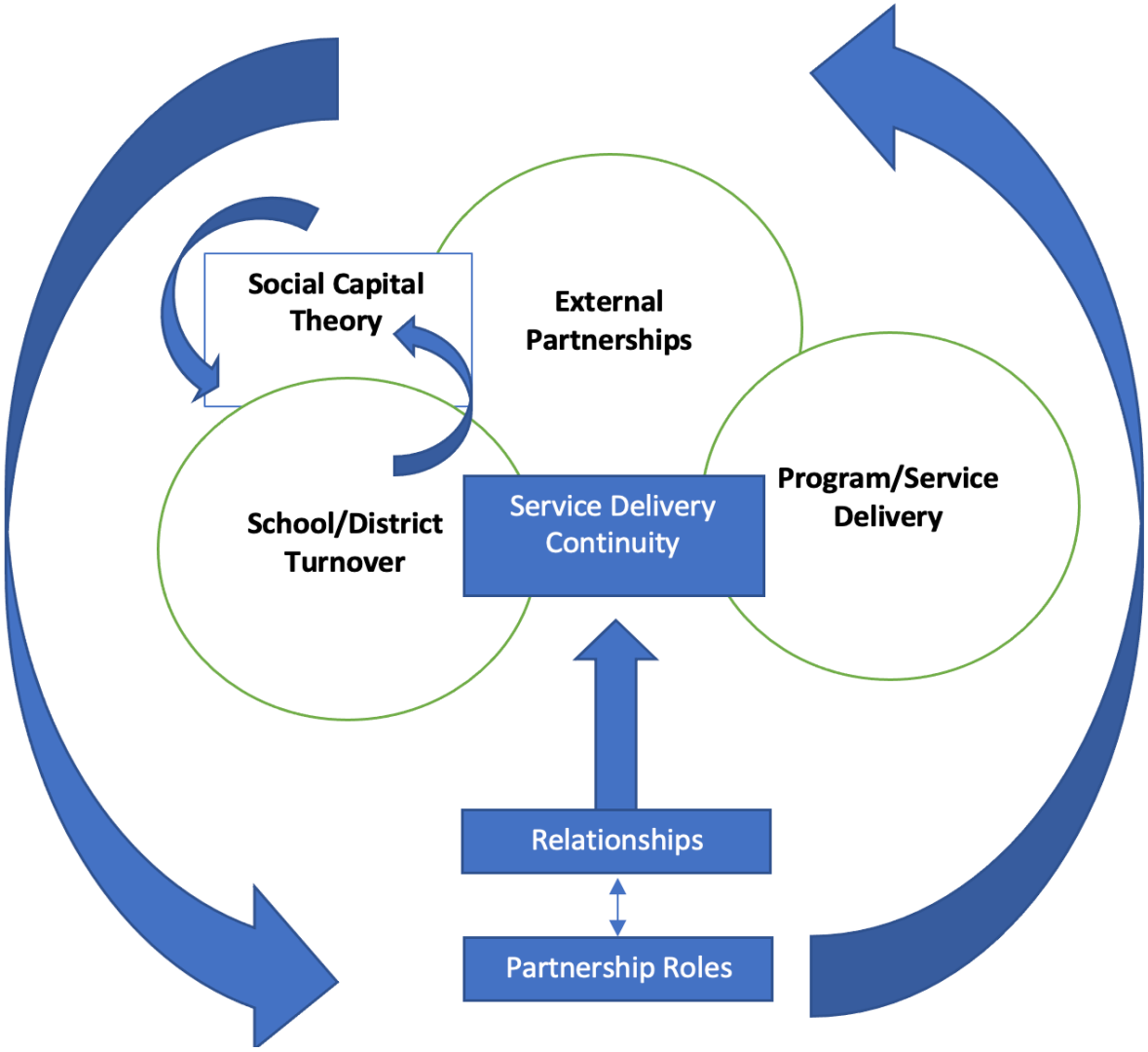
Figure 3 depicts a conceptual framework illustrating my thinking about this problem of practice. The overlapping circles of social capital theory, external partners, and program service delivery are grounded in social capital theory, which encompasses threads of cultural capital and economic capital and highlights the role partnerships play with outside organizations and individuals within schools. These partnerships can include relationships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and government agencies. When external partners work together with schools and the school community, they can have impact on the success of program delivery and continuity to increase resources and opportunities available to students, improve communication and collaboration, and build trust and a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

However, the benefits of these partnerships can also be influenced by factors such as the distribution of power and resources among partners, cultural differences, and historical inequalities. Therefore, it is important for partnerships to be structured in a way that promotes equity and inclusiveness, and to be informed by a deep understanding of the communities they serve—in other words, the idea that social connections, networks, and relationships can serve as a valuable resource, much like physical or financial capital. Social capital theory suggests that

social connections can provide access to information, resources, and opportunities, which can lead to improved outcomes.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examined external partnerships in urban school districts that work across the K-12 continuum. The study analyzed the experiences of external partnerships and, therefore, was originally scoped to focus on external organizations that provide instructional support to K-12 urban schools. The goal was to get a deeper understanding of the perceived effects of turnover at the district level or school level.

Based on participant feedback and time constraints, I expanded the participant pool to include funders, teachers, afterschool providers, and a board member to provide more contextual knowledge of external partners' experience. Also, this helped to shed more insight into the similarities and differences that may exist between an afterschool provider experience and an instructional partner experience. I triangulated the external partner experience by interviewing superintendents to gain more insight into their experience with external providers. Limited research previously highlighted the external partnership perspective as it relates to program success in urban schools. This study aimed to bring greater awareness to what external partners believe created the barriers that negatively impact program outcomes and/or highlight what they know works well.

In the following section, I describe the participant selection criteria, data collection methods, and acknowledgment of my positionality. A combination of individual interviews and focus groups was used to collect data. This study prioritized an inquiry stance in which external partnering organizations were invited to unpack their strategies for maintaining effective partnerships and the impact of turnover.

Participant Selection

I engaged in purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to identify external partners that provided instructional support. However, snowball sampling led me to open the study to include participants beyond instructional partners and superintendents including afterschool and social service providers, funders, teachers, and one board member. I chose to select a broad range of participants, regardless of geographic location or relations to one another. Based on the first few interviews, it was clear that opening the study to include a broader participation pool would allow for more expansive learning opportunities around the similarities and differences across partnership types. In addition, by including teachers, superintendents, and board member perspectives, I was able to better understand the impact on the school community in moments of superintendent turnover.

My first step was to comb my LinkedIn and personal networks. I then developed an email outlining the criteria for potential participants to narrow in on my target audience. My goal was initially to interview 30 participants. However, due to time constraints, I successfully interviewed 25 educators and educational stakeholders, representing more than 15 states (note: some external partners and funders have multiple contracts with urban schools across the country). Participants included instructional coaches, K-12 school providers (social service and afterschool), funders, superintendents, teachers, and one K-12 board member. I prioritized participants who had multi-year contracts providing K-12 support in urban schools.

Data Collection

This research study focused on the partnering organizations' experiences and whether superintendent turnover impacted their school partnership outcomes through interviews and a follow-up focus group. I conducted interviews with external organizations that worked or

previously worked within the same school district. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter. I used snowball sampling to identify other participants that meet the criteria of the study.

The 25 interviews were conducted using a person-centered approach. A person-centered approach prioritizes the participant's experience by interviewing "in ways that show careful attention to the individual as well as respect for the opinions, feelings, and ideas expressed" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 128). This approach was critical to learn from participants' challenges and successes within their partnering school districts. The fidelity of the research aimed to magnify participant experience in efforts to capture other possibilities that impede their work.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument of data collection and analysis. I utilized Zoom for a 60-minute recorded interview and cleaned up the transcript for each participant. For my qualitative research strand, the data examined consisted of narrative descriptions based on interviews and observations made during the interviews. Qualitative semi-structured interviews allowed participants the opportunity to offer in-depth responses regarding their experiences working in various school partnerships. Patton (2002) expanded on the use of qualitative methods, which recognize that "understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person's shoes, from trying to discern how others think, act, and feel" (p. 49). Interviews were primarily guided by an approved protocol and focused on the following areas:

- Turnover – Understanding participants' experience with school leadership turnover/or stability and its impact.
- Relationships – Exploring how participants' relationship with the school contributed or not to their support in schools.

- Sustainable Partnership – Learning what other factors lead to a sustainable partnership between external partners and schools.

Focus Groups

After the interviews were conducted and coded, all 25 participants were invited to attend a virtual presentation of my findings, based on their availability, to review and reflect on the themes identified. Due to time constraints, I was only able to provide participants with 1 week notice. As a result, two people attended the live presentation. However, I followed up with the entire participant pool, providing a video of the presentation and a jam board to provide feedback. As a result, three additional participants provided feedback. In the presentation, I summarized the themes including the role of relationships, alignment, funding, school and partnership goal alignment, among others. The focus group gave me an opportunity to better understand what was missing and areas that could be considered for future research.

Documents and Archival Data

I identified and analyzed primary naturally occurring documents and secondary sources to affirm or inquire about themes generated from participant interviews. Archival data refers to "documents that already exist in a group or organization (or other context) that are called naturally occurring documents—that is, they exist without the involvement, facilitation or instigation of the researcher" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 151). The artifacts I used for this study were school improvement plans, board minutes, and approved resolutions which reflect partnership agreement and generally respond to school improvement plans. These documents were generally accessible via the school district and partnership websites. Collecting these documents helped to verify any connections between school improvement goals and partnership goals. However, it did not help to better understand the sitting superintendent's goals as most

school improvements plans range from 3-5 years and likely are not updated to reflect that rapidly changing world of education. The strategic plan becomes quickly obsolete across transitions.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves using different methods as a check on one another, to determine if methods with different strengths and limitations all support a single conclusion (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Maxwell, 2013). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), "triangulation is a set of processes that researchers use to enhance the validity of a study" (p. 174). In addition to the semi-structured interviews, documents review and focus groups, I interviewed superintendents, one board member, and teachers who participated in external partnership work, which added opportunities for methodological triangulation.

Positionality and Validity

I acknowledge my role as an employee at an external organization providing services to urban school districts that experience high rates of turnover. In my current role, I build relationships with district leaders to match our coaching services with district needs. I have experienced firsthand the negative effects of high turnover in the urban schools where we work. I acknowledge my own negative experiences with leadership turnover and the impact on our coaching work. In the design and implementation of this study, I have memoed about my experiences and used dialogic engagement with my critical inquiry group to help mitigate issues of validity and bias.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. After each interview, I reflected on salient points that were made. I then re-listened to each interview a different time to see if any additional insights surfaced. Data analysis occurred on an ongoing basis to ensure the

"intentional, systematic scrutiny of the data at various stages and moments throughout the research process" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 234).

After listening to the data for a second time, I uploaded each transcript into Dedoose, a coding software, to begin the process of assigning codes. I began with entering first-order codes and assigned definitions to each code. The first-order codes were developed utilizing the six elements identified in the *Partnering for Student Success: A Practical Guide to Building Effective School-Based Partnerships* framework.

As a reminder, the six elements to effectively maintain school-based partnerships fell under two categories: Management and Partnership (MP) and Systems and Processes (SP):

1. Establish systems and processes to support school-based partnerships (SPs);
2. Assess and prioritize school goals and needs (SPs);
3. Identify how partners "fit" to help meet school needs (MPs);
4. Define expectations for implementing partner programs and activities (MPs);
5. Develop and nurture relationships (MPs);
6. Assess partnership progress, outcomes, and next steps (SPs). (Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1)

After coding and uploading my first-order codes and definitions, I then looked at my grounding theory, Social Capital Theory, to identify codes that would be relevant. While the role of relationships was well represented in the first-order codes, based on the six elements outlined in the framework, I added codes like funding source, which speaks to the external organizational "rights" to be in partnership. I also added the role of politics to dive more deeply into relationship motivators. After identifying first-order codes and social capital-related codes, I

used open coding to identify any additional codes that were surfacing from the data. Table1 presents the code related to my data.

Table 1

Codes

First-Order Codes	Social Capital Codes	Open Codes
Relationships (R)	Social Capital (SC)	Principal Role (PR)
Systems and Processes (SP)	Politics (P)	Power (P)
Aligning to School Goals (SGs)	Funding Source (F)	Institutional Knowledge (IK)
Communication (C),	Trust (TS)	Stakeholders Role (S)
Evaluation/Outcomes (EO)	Culture (CT)	Race (RC)
Transition (T)		Superintendent Ambitions (SA)
Disruption (D)		Vision (V)
Sustained Work (SW)		Burnout (B)
Success Time (ST)		Teacher Motivators (TM)
Management of Partnership (MP)		

Table 2

Table of Codes and Literature

Code	Definition	Connection to Literature
B	Represents burnout, highlighting the phenomenon of burnout among educators	The turnover of superintendents, who are the top leaders in school districts, can occur for a variety of reasons, including differences in vision or leadership style, policy disagreements, burnout, or personal reasons (Grissom and Mitani, 2016).
C	Highlights the importance of effective communication in education	Trust leads to effective communication and serves as a foundation for reciprocity, enabling collaborative efforts, open communication, and shared decision-making processes (Bryk and Schneider, 2002).
CT	Stands for culture, indicating the influence of cultural factors on educational practices	Cultural capital is closely linked to the person because it is based on their upbringing, education, and experiences (Bourdieu, 1986).
D	Represents disruption, indicating the challenges and disruptions in educational settings	Half of the nation's largest school districts, which collectively represent 12.5 million students, have had a disruption or change in leadership since March 2020 (ILO Group, 2022).
EO	Concerns the assessment and measurement of the results, impacts, or achievements of a particular initiative or intervention	Assess partnership progress, outcomes, and next steps (Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1).
F	Stands for funding source, representing the financial support for educational initiatives	Ferguson et al. (2001) emphasized the need for partnership support as schools lack financial, human, and administrative resources.
IK	Represents the institutional knowledge that exists within a partnership	Coleman's seminal work on social capital (1988) explores its role in the creation of human capital. He highlights how social networks and relationships contribute to the development of skills, knowledge, and resources.
MP	Represents management of partnership, indicating the effective management of collaborative partnerships in education	Effective management of partnerships involves establishing clear goals, roles, and communication channels to foster collaboration and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes (Bryk, 2010 & (Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1).).

Code	Definition	Connection to Literature
P	Refers to politics, indicating the influence of power dynamics in educational contexts	Power dynamics and political factors shape social capital formation and affect educational practices (Lin, 2001; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).
PR	Principal role, referring to the leadership role of principals in partnership	Principals play a crucial role in building and nurturing trusting relationships within educational settings, which in turn impact collaboration, instructional practices, and student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).
PW	The role of power dynamics between partner and school	Power dynamics between partners and schools can influence decision-making, resource allocation, and partnership outcomes (Bryk, 2010).
R	Represents the code for relationships, indicating the importance of social connections	Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of relationships and social networks in various domains (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988). Relationships contribute to the formation of social capital and affect educational outcomes (Bryk, 2010).
RC	This code represents the role race in relationships and management of school partnerships	Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, emphasizing structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race (Richardson, 1986).
S	Refers to stakeholders' role, indicating the involvement, responsibilities, and influence	Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, administrators, and community members, play important roles in education and have varying degrees of involvement and influence on decision-making and outcomes (Bryk, 2010; Epstein et al., 2019).
SA	Superintendent ambitions, indicating the career goals and aspirations of superintendents	Superintendents' career goals and aspirations shape their leadership practices and influence the direction of educational institutions (Grissom and Mitani, 2016).
SC	Social Capital is our grounding theory to reinforce relationships	Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, emphasizing structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race (Richardson, 1986).
SG	Represents fit, indicating the alignment between partners and schools	The fit between educational practices and goals affects social capital formation and educational outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Code	Definition	Connection to Literature
SP	Represents systems and processes, highlighting the organizational aspects of educational systems	Educational systems involve various systems and processes that influence social capital and educational outcomes (Bryk, 2010; Costelloe et al., 2016, p. 1).
ST	Represents success time, highlighting the time taken to achieve educational success	The time taken to achieve educational success can vary based on various factors such as student characteristics, instructional strategies, and support systems (Waters & Marzano, 2006).
SW	Represents sustained work, referring to the sustained effort and commitment	Sustained work and commitment are important for achieving educational goals and improving outcomes over time in urban (Waters & Marzano, 2006).
T	Relates to the turnover, particularly in terms of shifts or transitions between different stages, roles, or contexts	Grissom and Mitani (2016) attributed the short tenure and frequent turnover of urban superintendents to the growing unmanageability of the superintendent role in urban school districts.
TM	Stands for teacher motivators, indicating the factors that motivate teachers in their work	Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, administrators, and community members, play important roles in education and have varying degrees of involvement and influence on decision-making and outcomes (Bryk, 2010; Epstein et al., 2019).
TS	Stands for trust, emphasizing the importance of trust in fostering positive relationships	Trust is a fundamental component of social capital and affects collaboration and decision-making processes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ellison et al., 2014).
V	Stands for vision, emphasizing the importance of a clear vision in educational leadership	The turnover of superintendents, who are the top leaders in school districts, can occur for a variety of reasons, including differences in vision or leadership style, policy disagreements, burnout, or personal reasons (Grissom and Mitani, 2016).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings from the research study based on the data analysis outlined in Chapter 3. Data, which were collected across a 10-week period, were limited to the interviews, access to public documents, and focus groups. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact on partnership work as a result of superintendent turnover. Specifically, the goal of this study was to better understand if certain factors led to the sustainability of external partnership in moments of transition.

The interview questions supported my overall research questions by focusing on what strategies lead to a successful partnership, the role of relationships, external partner support of school structures, goals, and the participants' experience with superintendent turnover. This chapter lifts the voices of the participants and identifies the salient themes with supporting evidence from the interviews to answer the research questions.

The next sections outline the research questions and participant characteristics, followed by the related findings and a summary. Data were collected by way of semi-structured qualitative interviews followed by a focus group to outline the themes for feedback and interpretation The five findings all centered around relationships. The first finding explores trust and its impact on partnership relationships. The second finding investigates the influence of relationships on funding opportunities. The third finding focuses on the role of relationships in the transfer and retention of institutional knowledge. The fourth finding examines how relationships shape alignment with vision and values. Lastly, the final finding explores the role of race and its impact on relationship formation. These findings shed light on the vital role that relationships play in various dimensions of this study, and their implications will be further explored in subsequent sections.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided my interviews were:

1. From the perspective of external partners, when superintendent turnover occurs in urban schools, what strategies are used to manage the sustainability of their support in schools?
2. Are these strategies effective in moments of turnover?

Participant Characteristics

Twenty-five participants involved in some level of partnership work agreed to participate in this study. I decided to broaden the study beyond instructional partners to provide more contextual insight and learn from the various levels of external partnership work. Also, lifting the experiences of those at the school or district site, beyond superintendents, who interacted with external partnership work strengthened the study. Sixteen of the participants were staff of external organizations (13 instructional partners and three afterschool providers); two were teachers working directly with external partners; two were former superintendents who had experience with inheriting, eliminating or hiring external partners; and one was a board member charged with approving external partnership work.

Table 3 presents anonymized names, with affiliations and partnership roles accurately reflecting the identity of each participant. While the study criteria were initially intended to be instructional partners and validated through superintendent experiences, it became evident after a few interviews that the study would benefit from a broader scope, including teachers, after school providers, and funders of external partnership work. For example, afterschool and social service providers, were frequently funded differently and experienced turnover differently than instructional partners.

Table 3

Participant Profiles

Participant	Affiliation	Partnership Role
1. Nancy	Coach	Instructional Partner
2. Alice	Coach	Instructional Partner
3. Yadi	On-site Provider (homeless)	Social Service Provider
4. Edith	External Partner Funder	Funder
5. Nicole	Recently Retired Teacher	School-based partnership point of contact
6. Kevin	Board Member	Approved various partnership agreements
7. Evan	Coach	Instructional Partner
8. Ivonne	On-Site Provider (afterschool)	Afterschool Provider
9. Lawrence	On-Site Provider (afterschool)	Afterschool Provider
10. Yonah	Superintendent	Inherited external partners, eliminated partners, and hired partners
11. Matthew	Coach	Instructional Partner
12. Anita	Project Director	Instructional/nonprofit partner
13. Emon	On-Site Provider (afterschool)	Afterschool Provider
14. Yale	External Partner Funder	Funder
15. Evelyn	On-Site Provider	School Day/Afterschool Provider
16. Autumn	External Partner Funder	Funder
17. Elizabeth	Coach	Instructional Partner
18. Nitza	Coach	Instructional Partner
19. Sam	External Partner Funder	Funder
20. Yosef	Provider (Summer)	Summer boarding school provider—works with superintendent to identify students/funding
21. Ana	Former Project Director	Instructional Partner
22. Aiesha	Coach	Instructional Partner
23. Ellie	Teacher	School-based partnership point of contact
24. Emily	Superintendent	Inherited external partners, eliminated partners, and hired partners
25. Aniya	Coach	Instructional Partner

Document Review

During the document review process, primary and secondary sources were collected to either support or challenge the themes generated from participant interviews. Partnership frameworks, school improvement plans, and school websites were reviewed to verify any connections between school goals and partnership goals. Despite superintendents' belief that the partnership process was transparent and readily available on their websites, it was found that this was not always the case. Although some districts had a dedicated partnership webpage, the information provided was often unclear regarding the current partnerships or the work involved. Furthermore, it was discovered that school improvement plans quickly become outdated with each leadership transition, despite being typically updated every 3-5 years.

Focus Group

The individuals who gave feedback through Jamboard were particularly drawn to the findings related to relationships and communication. They found the revelation of underutilizing strategic planning during times of transition to be the most shocking. A participant specifically pointed out a discrepancy in vision between the superintendent and the principal. When participants were asked what aspects were absent from the findings, they expressed a desire to explore further the impact of funding on initiatives and whether well-funded initiatives faced fewer disruptions. They suggested that utilizing Memos of Understanding (MOUs) or partnership agreements could potentially bridge some of the identified gaps, but also noted that cost-benefit analysis should be taken into account. They acknowledged as well that the level of buy-in from stakeholders depended on the ease of implementation and the perceived benefits.

Semi Structured Interviews

The following sections detail the research questions and characteristics of the participants, and subsequently present the related findings along with a summary. Data was obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews. The contextualized results consist of five key findings, namely: (a) Relationships and Trust, (b) Relationships and Funding, (c) Relationships and Institutional Knowledge, (d) Relationships and Vision and Values Alignment, and (e) Relationships and Race.

Finding # 1: Relationships and Trust

In the context of school-based partnerships, the establishment of relationships is crucial as it serves as the cornerstone for fostering trust and effective communication amongst all stakeholders. The presence of strong relationships between schools and their external partners enhances the likelihood of collaborative efforts towards shared objectives, leading to favorable outcomes for students (Waters & Marzano, 2006). However, building such relationships encounter significant barriers such as limited time, capacity, and a lack of reciprocity. Additionally, strong relationships in school-based partnerships engender a sense of investment amongst all parties, particularly in the success of the partnership. When partners feel connected to the school and its students, they are more inclined to offer their time, resources, and expertise to support school initiatives beyond the contractual obligations (LeFloch & Barbour, 2014).

Regardless of the partnership role, everyone interviewed agreed that trust is necessary to form strong relationships. The themes that emerged around trust and relationships from the data centered on the need to "cast relationships wide"—in other words, diversifying the relationships across the school and district to maintain program stability. The participants also highlighted the relationship between trust and communication. These themes were evident in the interviews with

Sam, Yadi, Edith, Yosef, and Matthew, who discussed the significance of building relationships, establishing trust and maintaining them over time. “We were building relationships and we would measure how many people do we know—that’s very, very important. So, when change happens, you’re considered a true partner of theirs, and they’re just going to continue with it” (Matthew, Participant Interview, 2022).

However, participant data varied related to the emphasis placed on developing and cultivating relationships. The time it takes to develop trusting relationships and the revolving nature of district leaders were cited as reasons why this prioritization varied. Lawrence, an afterschool provider, emphasized the lack of reciprocity in the relationship and the need to fulfill program commitments regardless: “I think we have learned we are successful because we do not rely solely on the relationships, and we know that we’ve got to do our job without their help. We have to fulfill our end of the relationship whether or not they [school leadership] do theirs” (Lawrence, Participant Interview, 2022).

Participants reinforced that trust is important in partnership relationships because they strengthen program continuity and communication between external partners and grantees. Yonah, a former superintendent of a large urban district, reflected on the criticality of trust and transparency:

> You have to show up and be part of the team. And then if you don’t want to do that, you can’t come at lunch and afterschool, you can’t just randomly walk into the school and go to the secretary and ask for Johnny in room two or three and tell him to come to the office. You are not welcome in our building during school hours for lunch. Unless you’re part of the solution. (Yonah, Participant Interview, 2022)

Sam, a funder supporting K-12 schools, said that relationships can help significantly during challenging times: “Well, I mean, obviously, everything comes down to relationships to me. I mean, everything comes down to relationships. If you build a trusting relationship, it can

often survive misunderstandings or little shakeups" (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022). When relationships are established, they help overcome challenges and create a foundation for learning.

Aiesha, an external partner, reinforced the importance of trust and how it can lead to greater access in schools and program autonomy, particularly because of the challenges faced by superintendents in smaller school districts. She noted that in some cases, these districts may be running many different programs, which can be overwhelming for the superintendent to manage. As a result, Aiesha suggested that superintendents in smaller districts may not be able to devote as much attention, due to capacity limitations, to each individual program as they might like. However, by developing trust, she suggested that these superintendents were generally willing to support teachers and staff who were implementing these programs and that they were available to hear about any issues or challenges that arise.

> And really, in some districts, it may have been a hundred different programs that district is running. So, they were like, you know, as long as you have it…the superintendent was like, you got it great. You know, come see me if there's a problem, like they also have so much on their plate. (Aiesha, Participant Interview, 2022)

Trusting Relationships Improves Program Sustainability

Several participants mentioned that building strong relationships with external partners and grantees can help with the sustainability of programs beyond the grant funding. Edith, a K-12 funder, highlighted the importance of maintaining relationships with higher-ups in school districts to ensure the sustainability of programs. Sam, the funder supporting K-12 schools, emphasized the importance of developing partnerships that go beyond funding cycles. He said, "If we're funding something for a year or two, that's not really the point. The point is what happens after we're gone. And so, we're always looking for ways to build relationships that are going to last beyond the funding cycle" (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022).

There was a recognition from funders that they expected program sustainability to be established from day one. Sam highlighted the need to plan for sustainability from the onset of a project, and to consider factors that can make a program less vulnerable to changes in funding. This is important for ensuring that programs can continue to be effective over time, even as leadership changes or external factors shift. Sam noted that sustainability planning can be especially challenging in large urban districts, which can be complex and have many different stakeholders to manage. Sam highlighted the importance of sustainability in terms of both programmatic and financial sustainability:

> I guess my overall thing is, what does it demonstrate between programmatic sustainability and financial sustainability? They're intertwined. But as you get in the water supply, it's a lot less vulnerable to changes in money, and you should plan for sustainability from the onset. I would give that advice to anyone trying to do that work. (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022)

Similarly, Yonah, a former superintendent, highlighted the importance of building long-term relationships with external partners to ensure program sustainability. He noted that external partners can bring a valuable perspective to the table, and that by working together, grantees and external partners can develop solutions that are sustainable over the long-term. According to Yonah, "It's really important to have those external partners involved in the conversation because they bring a unique perspective, and they can also help ensure that the program is sustainable over the long-term" (Yonah, Participant Interview, 2022).

In addition, relationships facilitate advocacy efforts and help organizations fight for their programs; they also allow for wider networks of champions, reducing the risk of relying solely on one person. Matthew, an instructional partner in education technology, highlighted the importance of casting a wide net and reflected on a time where building relationships with

multiple stakeholders, even outside of the district office, helped to avoid starting from square one when there was a turnover in the leadership.

> But if that person goes away, and that's the only relationship you have, you're stuck. And you're starting over from square one is very, very costly, right. So, I tell my salespeople you have to go wide, bring in all the potential stakeholders. And yes, that'll take some time in the short term, but it's going to save you time long-term. And so really go out there, and regardless of if you think you have a champion at the school district, go wider and try to click multiple champions because superintendents when they turn over, oftentimes their cabinet turns over as well. There was a district, I'm not going to name the district, but there was a district that I was working with that was looking really, really promising for us—the superintendent, the chief information officer, and the chief academic officer all left in the span of a month. (Matthew, Participant Interview, 2022)

Yosef explained that in such scenarios, when superintendent transitions happened, they can reach out to counselors or other school leaders with whom they have established trust with and ask them to communicate any issues or needs to the new superintendent or leadership team. By maintaining these relationships, Yosef hoped to ensure that the program can continue to receive support from the school, regardless of changes in leadership.

> Yes, [relationships are helpful] when you have a sustained kind of senior leadership or school leader in counselors who understand the program. At the same time, sometimes that is not the case. So, in the best-case scenario, the superintendent leaves but we have the same counselors that we've been talking with for the past four or five years. So, when we're trying to go to the school, we can get into building; or when we're trying to connect to the superintendent and the superintendent's not responding, I can reach out to the school leader, or I can reach out to the counselor and say, like, Dr. So So was not responding. Can you kind of relay up that this is a problem that we need to continue, and we need them to commit to X amount of slots. So, if I have that core relationship regardless of who the superintendent [is], I'm hoping that they will be able to communicate up and manage up in terms of the superintendent. (Yosef, Participant Interview, 2022)

Trusting Relationships Improves Communication

Communication is critical in partnership because it helps to establish trust, clarify expectations, and ensure that all parties are working towards common goals. Trust is necessary to

build effective communication which enables partners to share information, ideas, and feedback with one another. Moreover, communication is essential for ensuring that partners are working together in a coordinated and strategic manner.

The importance of communication for successful partnership implementation was evident throughout participant interviews. Participants spoke about trust and communication as essential in partnership work in urban K-12 schools. Superintendents who participated in the study spoke about the importance establishing trust and communication between partner and district office to make sure staff and faculty were clear about the goals of the partnership. However, partners reflected on experiences when communication was strong and when the lack of communication from the district to staff resulted in "cold handoffs" to staff, placing partners in a unique position not only train, but to introduce the work for the first time and answer questions about the need for the partnership.

Alice emphasized the significance of communication and the negative impact of a lack of communication on the success of the partnership: "I guess we feel like they don't prioritize, like the communication with us, because it is maybe a smaller subset of either the budget or the time, you know, whatever it is that they're doing. So, it kind of sometimes feels like we're left holding the bag" (Alice, Participant Interview, 2022). Alice went on to reflect on a time when the school staff was not informed about the partnership until their first professional development session, which resulted in confusion and reduced engagement.

> We were in preparation for opening launching day, which was the second day of school. We get there on the second day, and they're like, so what are you here for? All the teachers, we're working and all of the staff [had no idea]. I have fifteen instructors there, and they're like, we're happy to see you. We know your program and we're excited but like, can you tell us how this like fits into [our work], and we're like wasn't that part of the [superintendent's] conversation? (Alice, Participant Interview, 2022)

Poor communication can also impact program funding and, consequently, sustainability. Ivonne, an after school provider, described a time where lack of communication within the organization led to a delay in receiving funding. The issue may have been overlooked due to a transition in leadership, which could have caused a breakdown in communication between the finance team and other departments: "…we didn't get paid until January when our first check should have come in September, and the second check should have been like November. And so, we're like that's a half a million dollars we don't have in our operating budget that we thought we would have" (Ivonne, Participant Interview, 2022).

On the other hand, Emily, a recently retired superintendent, highlighted a time when she supported the district in communicating the partnership to their staff, resulting in successful implementation: "So, you have to think about how are you going to communicate this [partnership]. How are you going to, first of all, communicate that this is an asset value for our kids, and how can we communicate it in a way that people don't go, Oh my god, not another [one]" (Emily, Participant Interview, 2022).

Additionally, Yale, a funder, discussed the importance of clear and consistent communication from school leaders in promoting partnership work focusing on equity. Yale talked about the work being "controversial" and the need for superintendent backing. Without a clear message from the top, principals may not feel empowered or confident in executing equity work in their own buildings. This can be particularly challenging for principals of color who may already face additional barriers and challenges in their role. Yale reflected on challenges of external organization supporting equity work in K-12 schools:

> And if the very top is not communicating a very clear message around intent…I believe principals who have the skill will actually execute the work in their building versus principals who don't feel like they have the skill. Here's the ironic part: We do have a

> large amount of principals of color, not majority, but a large amount, a higher percentage of leaders of color than we do teachers of color. Let's put it that way. But remember, if everyone who reports to me is White, how comfortable am I going to be executing this [equity work]? If the person at the very top of the organization is not outwardly saying this is where we are. (Yale, Participant Interview, 2022)

Some partners have figured out how to elevate the communication beyond the district level as a strategy to continue the partnership. Yosef explained that they do not solely rely on schools and districts to spread the word about the program. Instead, Yosef has established a partnership with the Department of Education, and directly mails information to scholars and their families to make them aware of the program. Additionally, the program holds seminars with school counselors and leaders as well as schedules school visits to speak directly with counselors and present to potential applicants.

> We don't necessarily only rely on the schools and the districts to talk about a program. We are directly part of the DOE, so we are able to directly mail to scholars and their families. So, they're aware of the program. But then in addition to that, we hold seminars with school counselors and school leaders, so that they're understanding the services that we're offering and understanding what we're doing. We scheduled school visits, so we could talk face to face with counselors and present to potential applicants. So those three things combined, it helps people to really understand what we're doing. And if for whatever reason school personnel are dropping the ball, the students are still getting the information directly. (Yosef, Participant Interview, 2022)

Lawrence, an afterschool provider, lifted the high-stakes nature of clear communication and its impact on students, as, for example, ensuring that children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans receive appropriate accommodations and support in the classroom. This may require making sure that the classroom space is conducive to their needs and the staff is properly trained and qualified to provide the necessary support to "make sure that we understand how to help them and that we're qualified to help them with classroom space and making sure that appropriate space is made available" (Lawrence, Participant Interview, 2022).

Summary of Finding #1

The data highlights the importance of relationships and trust in school-based partnerships. Participants emphasized that strong relationships serve as the cornerstone for effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders. Trust was identified as a crucial element in building and maintaining relationships, fostering investment in the partnership's success. It was noted that relationships need to be diversified across schools and districts to ensure program stability, particularly in the face of leadership turnover. Furthermore, participants highlighted the role of trust in promoting program sustainability beyond grant funding cycles. Clear and consistent communication was identified as a vital component in establishing trust, aligning expectations, and overcoming challenges. The findings emphasize the significance of prioritizing relationship building and fostering trust to enhance the success of school-based partnerships.

Participants reinforced that establishing and nurturing trusting relationships is essential for successful school-based partnerships. Trust helps in fostering effective communication, program continuity, and shared commitment to achieving common goals. By recognizing the significance of relationships and prioritizing trust-building efforts, schools and external partners can enhance collaboration and work together more effectively in addressing challenges and promoting positive outcomes for students.

Finding #2: Relationships and Funding

Without funding, schools may not have the financial resources to sustain initiatives, and this can result in a lack of progress or even failure to achieve their goals. Sam, a funder, recognized the time it takes to understand the work and produce outcomes:

> We're actually on a learning journey. It takes a long time for people to believe you when you say you're on a learning journey, like we don't know the answer. We're funding you to help us figure it out. (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022)

Yonah, a former superintendent, discussed that their best partners had both ideas and funding: "We would recognize twelve partners per year and tell their story. In our business, we talk about cycles of inquiry. Our best partners were the ones who had a good idea and cash to implement it" (Yonah, Participant Interview, 2022).

However, lack of funding leads to slower scalability and partnership implementation. Lawrence reflected on how lack of funding impacted their ability to provide afterschool programming: "Recently, I was asked to open at another district, and I said no. The reason I said no was because their budget made no sense. When I brought that to their attention, I think they recognized that their budget was unreasonable, but they just didn't have anything more. And so that was unfortunately the situation" (Lawrence, Participant Interview, 2022).

Additionally, funding organizations looked for a clear path and alignment with the district's priorities to support the experimental work. Therefore, effective program implementation is key to ensuring that K-12 partnerships achieve their intended outcomes and make a meaningful difference in the lives of students. Yale, a funder of external programs, talked about the need for the superintendent to share their vision with the team. Yale reflected specifically on a partnership supporting equity work in schools:

> So, our partnership started three superintendents ago. So that's the difficult part. But because the board adopted a policy, right, the policy can't sit on shelves and never get executed. But the second superintendent to come in made it her business to make the work a priority. The superintendent is probably the most outwardly facing person of the organization. So, if they don't make a thing, whatever the thing is a proper priority, people in the organization aren't going to do things that in our society are controversial. So, the superintendent's role is critical. (Yale, Participant Interview, 2022)

Sam, another funder of school-based partnerships, described the criticality of superintendent vision: "…we would often ask the superintendent, okay, so what are your priorities now for the year?" (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022). In order for external organizations and the funders who support them to align work with the priorities of the school district, they need to understand the district's current initiatives. Additionally, having a clear framework for the partnership helps ensure that the work is consistent and aligned over time, even as leadership or personnel may change. By working closely with the superintendent and other district leaders, external organizations can help promote the prioritization of program continuity and sustainability within the school.

> But really what we needed was the superintendent to paint a clear path so that the people underneath him could do this experimental work. But I think, trying to provide cover for that superintendent, because we were coming in [the school] and they were like they're doing different work. But they [external organization] was also walking in with a check for $10 or $12 million to try it. (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022)

Funding Systems of Change

Building effective systems and processes in K-12 schools is essential for creating a stable, supportive, and effective learning environment for students, educators, and the external partners that support them. One of the recommendations from the Institute of Education Science report *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* was to maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction. This required ensuring that "all school leaders and instructional staff monitor progress regularly, and systematically make adjustments to strengthen teaching and student learning" (Herman et al., 2008). However, the interviews showed that intentionality around system building was inconsistent.

Participants discussed different approaches to managing partnerships between school districts and external organizations. Nancy, a participant in the study, highlighted the challenge of time as a significant barrier in building processes around professional development:

> We built scopes and sequences of professional learning that tied to the observation and feedback patterns that we were seeing in classrooms and what the knowledge teachers needed so that we could then develop professional development that's connected to ongoing cycles. And so, time is another structure, you know, that was really critical. (Nancy, Participant Interview, 2022)

Ellie discussed how an external partner helped develop systems for leveling students: "They [external organization] helped us develop systems for leveling of students. They helped us teachers who would struggle they would work on their level" (Ellie, Participant Interview, 2022).

However, Yonah, a former superintendent, discussed the difficulty of scaling systems through partnerships. Yonah acknowledged that some partnerships were doing good work, but they were not able to share their findings with the wider system. There was no centralized system to collect and analyze data. There was also a concern around partners being focused on their own interests rather than the interests of the broader education system.

> There was some [partnerships] doing really good work. And I want to say maybe in thirty or forty of our schools, and they were learning a lot about what worked, but there was really no way for them to feed that into the whole system. Likewise, we were doing good work in many schools, some of which were not the ones that they were serving, and there's no way for us to see that data. I mean, they [partners] were being self-serving... they were a little self-serving, but in this case, I agree, there needs to be somebody somewhere who is tracking the data. Otherwise, we're just constantly, oh, here's a new idea. Let's try it out for us. Let's try this other new idea. So, we just waste that much resource. Time, money, effort, and energy. (Yonah, Participant Interview, 2022)

Partners are thought necessary in system building. Aiesha, who is currently building systems for a partnering school district, emphasized the importance of having a vision and cycle of learning to support new adoptions: "I have one of my early adopters who moved over to X school, she's moved up into a leadership role. So, she is developing this right now. She has this

new incubation project with personalized learning. I'm working with her on actually developing a system because they want something, but they don't know what" (Aiesha, Participant Interview, 2022).

There was an acknowledgment from funders that system building is an underfunded area in school-based partnerships. Sam reinforced that, as a funder, they are framework-agnostic; however, there was need for a systematic way to track outcome measures: "I'm not dictating what the framework is, it can be different for everybody, but like, there has to be some mutually agreed accountable method of checking it" (Evan, Participant Interview, 2022). Yale, also an external funder, suggested that in order for policies and processes to be effective and sustainable, there needs to be a long-term investment in building them out.

> So, in my opinion, as a partner, right, there needs to be a longer-term investment to building out a process that assists that policy, that outlives people. That's actually the problem, right? People are so invested in like, we got to do something with people, and I go, no, no, we need to build something that actually, yes, does invest in people, but people, when it's not dependent on very specific people, that's a partner. I will say it's a long-term investment. (Yale, Participant Interview, 2022)

Summary of Finding #2

The findings highlight the significance of funding partnerships and systems building in K-12 partnerships. Adequate funding is crucial for sustaining initiatives and achieving desired outcomes. Participants emphasized the need for partners to have both ideas and financial resources to implement programs effectively. Lack of funding can hinder scalability and slow down partnership implementation, impacting the progress of initiatives. Clear alignment between the partnership's goals and the district's priorities is vital for securing funding and ensuring ongoing support from external organizations. Effective communication and collaboration with

superintendents and district leaders are essential in promoting program continuity and sustainability.

In addition, the importance of systems building in K-12 partnerships was discussed. Building effective systems and processes within schools is essential for creating a supportive and consistent learning environment. However, participants highlighted inconsistencies and challenges in system development. Time constraints were identified as a significant barrier, but participants also recognized the need for intentional efforts to develop systems for professional development, leveling students, and data collection. Partnerships were acknowledged as valuable in system building, but there was a lack of centralized systems for sharing findings and collecting data across the education system. Participants emphasized the need for long-term investments in system development and a systematic approach to track outcome measures, ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of policies and processes.

Finding # 3: Relationships and Institutional Knowledge

Anita, in her role as an instructional partner, acknowledged that delays and disruptions in school partnerships were not exclusively caused by turnover on the school side. Rather, turnover within the partnering organization also played a significant role, leading to delays and a loss of institutional memory. Consequently, building strong relationships within the school required a greater investment of time:

> Our school's director was there for a long time then left and things kind of fell apart. We also had someone [a new partner liaison] who wasn't so great. So that kind of caused a problem. No matter how much mission planning you do, or succession planning, there is just no accounting for all of that institutional knowledge…the turnover in-house created some big gaps. (Anita, Participant Interview, 2022)

During discussions with participants, two distinct viewpoints emerged regarding the establishment of relationships in a program setting. Some participants highlighted the importance

of maintaining relationships with individuals who have institutional knowledge. These relationships are vital to ensuring stability within the program, as individuals with institutional knowledge are often able to provide context, background information, and key insights that can help a program navigate through challenges and changes. Such relationships also ensure that the program can continue even when personnel changes occur.

On the other hand, some participants emphasized the need to establish relationships with a broad network of stakeholders. These individuals can include counselors, community members, teachers and others. By building trusting relationships with a wide range of people, the program avoids the risk of over-reliance on any single individual, preventing significant disruption in case of turnover or other changes.

The data collected from the participants suggested that building strong relationships is a crucial factor in retaining institutional knowledge and therefore improve program sustainability. By investing time and resources in establishing and maintaining relationships, programs can create a supportive environment that fosters trust. Strong relationships promote transparency, communication and trust, helping to address challenges and overcome obstacles more effectively.

Yadi, a social service provider, invests in building relationships with people who have been with the school for a long time. As a result, they are less impacted by superintendent turnover and have institutional knowledge. According to Yadi:

> It's rare when the entire guidance department at one school leaves, right. There's always somebody who's still there. And honestly, I feel like it's always the elder statesman, so to speak. So, if they've been around for a good chunk of time, they tell the new folks, this is how it's done. (Yadi, Participant Interview, 2022)

Summary of Finding #3

The findings emphasize the significance of building and maintaining strong relationships in school partnerships to reinforce institutional memory. Turnover, both within schools and partnering organizations, can lead to delays, disruptions, and a loss of institutional knowledge, highlighting the importance of establishing relationships with individuals who possess that knowledge. These relationships provide stability, context, and valuable insights that can help navigate challenges and changes within the program. On the other hand, establishing relationships with a wide network of stakeholders is also crucial to avoid over-reliance on any single individual, mitigating the risks associated with turnover or other changes.

Investing time and resources in building relationships promotes trust, transparency, and effective communication. It creates a supportive environment that fosters collaboration and allows for the sharing of information, ideas, and feedback. By developing strong relationships, programs can better address challenges, overcome obstacles, and ensure program sustainability. Building relationships with both individuals who possess institutional knowledge and a broader network of stakeholders enhances program stability and reduces the impact of turnover or changes in leadership.

Finding #4: Relationships and Vision and Value Alignment

Understanding the superintendent's vision and motivation is important in partnership because it helps partners align the goals and objectives of the partnership with the leader’s vision. The superintendent plays a critical role in setting the direction and priorities of the district and is responsible for ensuring that all stakeholders, including partners, are working together toward a common goal (Grissom and Mitani, 2016).

The themes that arose from this finding included the importance of having a shared vision and understanding between school leadership and external partners because of the impact on program continuity and shared core values. Participant data revealed how important the role of superintendents was in establishing and communicating the vision for partnerships—ensuring that the vision aligned with the district's core values and beliefs. There was a desire from participants for consistency in district leadership to avoid vision misalignment. The themes highlighted the complex and interconnected nature of school-based partnerships and the need for a clear and collaborative approach to their development and implementation.

The codes for this finding appeared in a number of ways, with the parent code of vision and subcodes of superintendent evaluation, motivation, and overall career goals. What was not as clear from the data was how superintendents used the strategic plan. Only a few times did participants mention using the strategic plan as a roadmap to the vision—and when mentioned, the partner initiated it. Understanding the superintendent's vision did not always reflect the individual school and partnership goals, but rather professional goals and legacy. Aiesha reflected on her work as an instructional partner and the need to be clear on the vision to begin the work:

> A lot of times we want partnerships, but we can't get it until we get to leadership and who has the vision. So, when they have this vision, they notice [we are] the best thing out there. So now they're like, hey, I couldn't touch that issue before, but now you have a visionary leader. (Aiesha, Participant Interview, 2022)

Vision and Program Continuity

Program continuity was reinforced as a vital component throughout the participant interviews—specifically, the critical importance of having a clear vision and leadership buy-in when it comes to making school-based partnerships successful. Program continuity is crucial in

K-12 partnerships because it determines the success of the partnership and its impact on the students and the school community. Without effective implementation, even the best ideas and intentions will not lead to positive outcomes. Ana reflected on her work as an instructional partner and the need to be clear on the vision to begin the work: “You have to show the alignment. Even though we have objectives how do those objectives meet what they [superintendents] want to do” (Ana, Participant Interview, 2022).

Shared Core Values

Participants consistently suggested that core value alignment is crucial for managing expectations in K-12 partnerships. The participants emphasized the importance of having a shared vision and goals that can lead to clearer understanding of core values and partnership expectations. Without this intentionality, there may be misunderstandings or miscommunications about expectations and outcomes, leading to potential conflicts or disappointment. For example, Sam, one of the funders interviewed, mentioned the importance of aligning their framework with the superintendent’s priorities and existing initiatives: “We will look for ways to align that with our general framework because with a framework, we can say, look, you gotta hire, you gotta hire and train principals” (Sam, Participant Interview, 2022). This helps to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal and reduces the likelihood of misaligned expectations or unmet outcomes.

Participants approached the path toward alignment in various ways. One participant asked schools to pick areas on their strategic plan to ensure that they were all in agreement on program expectations. Once there is shared superintendent vision, partners can align their program delivery: “And so, our content feeds into the work that we’re doing with them. It’s our

NorthStar" (Nancy, Participant Interview, 2022). Elizabeth, an instructional partner, looked at the role of the board and the responsibility it has to reinforce the strategic plan to guide incoming superintendents in moments of turnover to ensure consistent alignment despite turnover:

> I do wonder about the role that school boards play in sustaining like an orientation to this work, right, like if the superintendent is transitioning regularly. Does the school board not have some responsibility to maintain or sustain the direction of the district? Is there a strategic plan guiding the work? And when they are doing their superintendent search, are they requiring the superintendents that apply to commit to the strategic plan that exists? (Elizabeth, Participant Interview, 2022)

Participants wanted to make sure that everyone was in agreement with the work that needed to be done. Ana, an instructional partner, highlighted the need for visionary leadership to establish partnerships and ensure that everyone was on the same page. Ana emphasized that it was crucial to understand how the key stakeholders, such as the board, the union, and parents, were being evaluating the superintendent: "It has to align with the vision, the goals, the priorities, the evaluation. And once all of those things align, it's like a train. It's unstoppable. But it has to align" (Ana, Participant Interview, 2022). By doing so, external partners can ensure that their programs and initiatives align with the values and priorities of the school district and its stakeholders, which can increase the likelihood of success and sustainability of the partnership. Core value alignment can also help to manage expectations and avoid misunderstandings or conflicts between the external partner and the school district.

Align Partnership Work to School Goals

Aligning partnership work with school goals is important because it helps to ensure that the partnership is focused on initiatives and activities that will have a positive impact on student learning and achievement. When partners work collaboratively with the school to identify and

prioritize goals, they can better tailor their efforts and resources to support the school's priorities and achieve meaningful outcomes.

Slightly different than understanding superintendent vison and motivators, this finding suggested that beyond superintendent vision, alignment between the school district's goals and the organization's goals is crucial for successful partnerships. Instructional coaches, such as Nancy, focused on aligning their content with the district's strategic plan: "I ask district leadership to pick three areas that are aligned to their strategic plan for the district" (Nancy, Participant Interview, 2022). However, Nicole, a teacher leader, highlighted that the revolving nature of principals and a lack of knowledge from assistant superintendents make it difficult to use the school improvement plan as a guide for partnership work: "The teachers would say, okay, we're going to do as much as we can to look and make sure that [everything] was on this plan and that it's basically executed. However, if the principal that was just involved has just been displaced, your plan is basically gone" (Nicole, Participant Interview, 2022).

Evan believed that the partner has a responsibility to help schools make sense of the data and develop partnership objectives based on it: "I think we play a role there as well in in some partnerships. We are going to look at your data with you and we're going to help you sense-make and prioritize" (Evan, Participant Interview, 2022). Alice highlighted that alignment could feel like misalignment on the partnership side: "Sometimes [schools] are like, just do the good work that you do. And we're like, okay. Do you want to like to tell us what else you have going on?" (Alice, Participant Interview, 2022). The findings suggested that partners play a larger role in helping schools identify the alignment between the school district's goals and the organization's goals, along with an understanding of the school's contextual factors.

Elizabeth talked about the challenges in the initial conversations with superintendents, explaining the alignment of partnership work without the opportunity to show it through the work with schools:

> The best work that we do is when we're with the schools, and when we're like really changing practice. And then we have much more to say to the superintendent, right, like, even in a project that I'm in right now. We're working with the superintendents, but they don't really understand what we do because they haven't given us access to their schools. And so, it's like, well, we can't really tell you how powerful this work is. (Elizabeth, Participant Interview, 2022)

Elizabeth posited that there may be a disconnect between the work that external partners provide and the understanding of that work by school leadership. Aligning with school goals must intimately involve school priorities and how partners are effectively meeting those priorities.

Summary of Finding #4

This finding underscores the importance of understanding the superintendent's vision and aligning partnership goals with the district's priorities. The superintendent plays a critical role in setting the direction and priorities of the district, and their vision serves as a guiding force for partnerships. Building strong relationships and alignment with the superintendent's vision can enhance program continuity, shared core values, and overall success.

It is crucial to establish shared core values and goals between school leadership and external partners to manage expectations and ensure effective collaboration. Alignment with the school district's goals helps partners tailor their efforts to support the district's priorities, leading to meaningful outcomes. However, challenges such as turnover and a lack of knowledge among assistant superintendents can create difficulties in aligning partnership work with school goals. External partners have a responsibility to help schools understand the data, develop objectives, and demonstrate the alignment between their work and the district's goals. Clear communication,

collaborative efforts, and ongoing engagement with schools are vital for successful alignment and effective implementation. By understanding and aligning with the superintendent's vision and school goals, partnerships can foster a supportive environment that promotes program sustainability and positive impacts on student learning and achievement.

Finding #5: Relationships and Race

One salient observation that arose during the participant interviews was the role of race in urban schools. More than a third of the participants interviewed mentioned race. Superintendents mentioned race in relation to either being a Black superintendent deliberately working towards helping minority students through partnership support or being a White superintendent supporting students of color. Funders mentioned that intermediaries they fund needed to be comfortable discussing disparity, and upholding systems of White supremacy and a sensitivity about the pressures for minority leaders, specifically Black superintendents, to navigate this space. Partners mentioned race as it related to either being a Black person doing the work of instructional coaching and having to prove themselves or being a White person doing partnership work and ensuring they are not appearing as the “white savior.”

Ellie raised concerns about the "white savior" mentality prevalent among some partners entering the urban education settings. She emphasized the need for cultural competency and the ability to embrace different cultures and perspectives.

> I don't want to say this…I mean, I don't want to sound racist, right, but you'll have a lot of white savior mentality like coming in and they've gone to these urban ed programs, whatever. And, and not everybody. But of course, they'll come in and it's when they're actually experiencing the kids that they discover that it's totally different than what you read. You read these scenarios. And it's not something you can learn, right? So being able to step out of what your goal box would be and just embrace the culture. (Ellie, Participant Interview, 2022)

Anita emphasized the importance of community recognition and understanding when addressing issues of equity. She highlighted the need to move beyond a "white savior" mentality and to establish genuine connections and trust within the community being served. This underscores the significance of acknowledging and respecting the racial context in which relationships are formed.

> People know [organization] , so they know that it's not like some fly by night, white savior organization coming in to try to like do a one and done type thing in our schools or to exploit the students and the in the community. Especially if you're an equity practitioner, right and equity professionals so a lot of I keep saying the white savior thing because as a part of my own experience and seeing that like, folks not understanding the difference between giving people fish and teaching them how to fish and trying to just come in and put a Band-Aid on the problem. (Anita, Participant Interview, 2022)

Nancy highlighted how identity features, such as race and gender, played a crucial role in establishing either quicker or slower connections based on trust and reciprocation. This suggests that individuals' racial backgrounds can shape the dynamics of their relationships with others, influencing the speed at which trust and understanding are built.

> I do think like our social location really matter. So my relationship with a male leader, for example, that's younger than me, who's white compared to an older white male compared to a man of color or a woman of color, or somebody who's LGBTQ like all those little identity features really sort of create either more deeper, quicker connection or might be a slower sort of connection as we get to know each other and build trust. (Nancy, Participant Interview, 2022)

Yale, as a leader in a predominantly white workforce, discussed the dynamics of being a Black man in a position of authority. He highlighted the challenges he faced due to being the only person of color in his professional environment, emphasizing the higher scrutiny he experienced compared to his white counterparts. He brings up an interesting connection between a perceived resistance being a Black leader conducting equity work in schools.

> I'm not saying they were least interested because they're a person of color because it's much more complex being superintendent. Wearing my other hat being an assistant superintendent, I know it was more political than a person wanting to engage in the right work. And, in most cases, superintendents of color or leaders of color, are under more scrutiny than their white counterparts, no matter what the work is. So all the work was directly connected to this person, very existence. I know they were under more scrutiny than their white counterparts. (Yale, Participant Interview, 2022)

Autumn discussed funding partners who are comfortable discussing disparities and acknowledging the influence of racism in the education system. She emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of anti-Black racism and intersectionality, particularly when examining turnover rates and challenges faced by students of color. This finding suggests that addressing racial disparities requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying cultural and systemic issues.

> You know, providers that that are a fit for us are very comfortable talking about disparity. They are not colorblind, they do not believe that if we treat all students equally, all students will be able to succeed. They believe that students need the kind of attention that is best suited to where they are and that means that every student is going to get something different. I would say, they're not shy about discussing some of the topics that can create a lot of emotion. I would say while they may not have a complex understanding of all of the ways in which racism manifests itself in our school system, they're comfortable acknowledging that we are where we are because of multiple factors and not blaming students or their families for what we see. (Autumn, Participant Interview, 2022)

Yonah pointed out the demographic shifts in different regions and their implications for racial dynamics. He highlighted how gentrification and changes in the population composition can influence the racial makeup of educational institutions. This finding highlights the importance of considering the racial context within specific geographic areas and its impact on relationship dynamics.

> I think [school district] may be on the edge of the majority white for the first time in 30-40 years, because gentrification and a tech hub and a lot of families of color being pushed out of housing markets. So the suburban districts are now far greater percentage of color. X became majority Hispanic during the time that I was there, I ended up getting fired

> because I was doing too good of a job trying to help Hispanic students. It's something that's been my passion. How to make a difference for students of color because we have never done a good job. Not only is it the right thing to do but half our students are students of color. (Yonah, Participant Interview, 2022)

Emily shared her experiences as an African American female professional, highlighting the unique challenges she faced due to racial and gender biases. She spoke about the need for recognition and respect in her role and the importance of addressing assumptions and stereotypes. Emily discussed the dynamics of support and questioning faced by Black principals in predominantly white environments. She emphasized the issue of skepticism and resistance when black leaders advocate for change, highlighting the disparities in how their authority is perceived.

> As the first African American, female superintendent my experience was unique to me. Especially having people respect your authority and knowledge base in various areas. They assume you don't know about this or don't worry about that. They think I'm going to go talk to the guy over here, well, wait, that guy works for me. So you don't need to talk to him. You need to talk to me, and we need to come to a meeting. (Emily, Participant Interview, 2022)

On the contrary, Emon shared his perspective as organization led by two black co-founders. He suggested that the racial composition of an organization can influence the speed at which trust is built, potentially fostering a more immediate sense of connection among individuals of the same racial background.

> In my organization, it didn't take as long we were able to really gain the trust. And part of that could be the racial component as well. The organization that I worked for before was predominantly white, and it ran as a predominantly white organization. But this one is two black guys, who are the co-founders and running it. So that could have played a part of quickly building trust as well. (Emon, Participant Interview, 2022)

Summary of Finding #5

The role of race in urban schools and its impact on partnerships is very real. Participants mentioned race in various contexts, such as the presence of a "white savior" mentality, the challenges faced by minority leaders, and the need for cultural competency and recognition of racial dynamics. There was an emphasis on the importance of understanding and addressing disparities, acknowledging racism in the education system, and building trust through genuine connections within the community being served.

Participants emphasized the significance of race in establishing relationships, with identity features like race and gender shaping the dynamics of trust and reciprocation. They discussed the scrutiny and challenges faced by black leaders compared to their white counterparts, as well as the need to overcome assumptions, stereotypes, and biases. The racial composition of organizations was also seen as a factor influencing the speed at which trust is built. These findings underscore the importance of acknowledging and addressing racial dynamics and disparities in educational partnerships. Cultural competency, recognition of the impact of racism, and a commitment to equity and inclusivity are crucial for fostering effective and authentic partnerships that truly serve the needs of students and communities.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this chapter, interpretations, implications, and limitations related to the findings are described in detail, and the research questions are answered with supporting data from the study. A discussion of the study findings in relation to the literature, limitations of the study, and interpretations puts the findings in perspective. Chapter 5 ends with recommendations and considerations for future research. This chapter is divided into five sections: (a) introduction, (b) connecting summary of findings to the research questions, (c) connecting findings to social capital theory, (d) limitations, and (e) recommendations.

Introduction

In this study, the goal was to explore the partnerships between school districts and external organizations, specifically examining what factors contribute to successful partnerships. To achieve this goal, data were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews and a focus group with participants from both school districts and partnering organizations. To answer these research questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with multi-year contracted external partners who had experience working with urban schools that had undergone superintendent turnover. I asked about their experiences with managing sustainability, their support in schools during times of turnover, and whether the strategies around establishing systems and process, prioritizing school goals, identifying how partners "fit", defining expectations, nurturing relationships and assessing partnership progress mentioned in the *Partnering for Student Success: A Practical Guide to Building Effective School-Based Partnerships* framework were helpful in moments of turnover. I also provided an opportunity for participants to add other strategies that they found effective.

During the interviews, I asked about the effectiveness of these strategies, specifically whether they were able to maintain the same level of support during the superintendent turnover and whether they were able to achieve their intended goals. After analyzing the interview data, I was able to identify several strategies that external partners used to manage the sustainability of their support in schools during times of superintendent turnover. Although these strategies did not always prevent disruptions, they proved to be a useful tool to mitigate disruptions. These strategies included maintaining strong relationships with school staff, aligning their support with the school's goals, increasing communication and transparency, and diversifying their points of contact within the school. The availability of funding was also a significant factor in ensuring sustainability.

Partners that came with their own funding through outside funders and were not paid through district budgets were more likely to sustain the partnership. In addition, there was an interesting connection between parental influence and the perceived need for the partnership. For example, the afterschool programs interviewed were not impacted by superintendent turnover. Parents have relationships directly with the service provider in this case and minimum funding came directly from the school budget. This was evident in the interviews with afterschool partners Evelyn, Ivonne, Lawrence and Emon. Additionally, I found that these strategies were generally effective in maintaining support during times of turnover. However, external partners did face some challenges, such as a shift in priorities within the school district. This research provided an opportunity for external partners to reflect about ways they manage their support in schools during times of superintendent turnover.

Answering Research Questions Through the Findings

Research Questions

1. From the perspective of external partners, when superintendent turnover occurs in urban schools, what strategies are used to manage the sustainability of their support in schools?
2. Were these strategies helpful in moments of turnover?

Finding #1: Relationships and Trust

The data from the study emphasize the crucial role of relationships in educational partnerships, shedding light on the challenges faced by school leaders in establishing and maintaining external connections. The participants shared their experiences and perspectives, revealing a common concern about feeling like a burden rather than a source of support within the school community. This resonates with Beabout's (2010) argument that forging relationships can be a complex task for school leaders.

While the involvement of the superintendent or principal was instrumental in initiating partnerships, the sustainability of their support posed challenges. Program disruptions occurred when the partnership relied heavily on the relationship with the school or district leader, especially in cases of turnover or transitions. However, the study also highlighted the advantages of existing partnerships with former school leaders when partners moved to new districts with transitioning superintendents. Although this helped the partners in their transition, it did not necessarily benefit the school community, as it could lead to further disruptions.

A significant finding from the study was the recognition that building relationships across multiple levels of the school structure yielded better results than relying solely on the school and district leader. Participants emphasized the need for strong and sustainable partnerships that

involved relationships with various staff members within the school. By fostering connections and collaborations among multiple stakeholders, including teachers, staff, and administrators, partnerships were better equipped to navigate challenges and sustain their impact.

These findings align with the School-Community Learning Partnerships framework, which emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships at various levels. The framework suggests that successful partnerships require building trust beyond the top leadership level, recognizing the value of engaging multiple stakeholders within the school community. By fostering relationships and trust among a wider range of individuals, partnerships can overcome disruptions caused by leadership turnover and ensure their long-term sustainability.

This finding underscores the significance of trusting relationships in educational partnerships and the challenges associated with establishing and maintaining these connections. It highlights the need for a multi-level approach to building relationships within the school community, involving stakeholders beyond the superintendent or principal. By prioritizing strong and sustainable partnerships that foster connections at various levels, educational partnerships can overcome obstacles, promote continuity, and ultimately enhance their impact on student learning and success.

Finding #2: Relationships and Funding

The study's findings reinforce the crucial link between relationships and funding in educational partnerships. It became evident that strong and lasting relationships, both within the school community and with external partners, play a pivotal role in the success of funding these collaborations. Participants stressed the significance of nurturing these connections as they contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of the initiatives.

The data shed light on the indispensable role of funding in maintaining educational partnerships. Without adequate financial resources, initiatives may encounter obstacles hindering their progress or, worse, lead to failure in achieving their intended objectives. Funding organizations sought partnerships that aligned with the district's priorities and provided a clear path for program implementation. This approach was deemed essential for achieving desired outcomes and creating a meaningful impact on students' lives.

This finding strongly emphasizes the interdependence of relationships and funding in the realm of educational partnerships. By placing a greater emphasis on cultivating strong connections and securing appropriate financial resources, these collaborations can significantly enhance their impact and remain consistent in schools during moments of turnover. Prioritizing both aspects is vital for ensuring the longevity and prosperity of educational partnerships.

Finding #3: Relationships and Institutional Knowledge

The interconnectedness of relationships and institutional knowledge in educational partnerships is apparent. Participants emphasized the critical role of strong and sustainable relationships in the success of partnerships, both within the school community and with external partners. Building relationships at multiple levels and among various stakeholders within the school structure was seen as crucial, particularly during times of turnover and change. These relationships fostered trust, transparency, and effective communication, enabling partnerships to navigate challenges and work towards shared goals.

Furthermore, the data emphasized the importance of institutional knowledge in maintaining continuity and promoting program sustainability. Participants acknowledged that turnover, both within the school and the partnering organization, could lead to delays, disruptions, and a loss of institutional memory. Building strong relationships and investing time

in understanding the school's history, context, and core values helped partners navigate through these challenges. Partners with institutional knowledge could provide valuable insights, context, and continuity, ensuring that the partnership can continue even in the face of personnel changes.

The findings underscore the importance of nurturing strong relationships and leveraging institutional knowledge to support the success and sustainability of educational partnerships. By investing in relationships and understanding the institutional context, partners can foster trust, enhance communication, and navigate challenges more effectively. This, in turn, contributes to the continuity of partnership initiatives, promotes program sustainability, and ultimately benefits students, teachers, and the school community as a whole.

Finding #4: Relationships and Vision and Value Alignment

The importance of aligning with superintendent and individual school goals emerged as a crucial factor in measuring success among partners. Partners found that defining success with the school was highly effective in achieving their objectives. However, this did not always mean aligning with established school plans such as school improvement plans or strategic plans, even if such plans were the reason why the partner was hired initially.

This finding was consistent with the research conducted by Patterson (2004) and Sconzert et al. (2004), who found that goals of schools and their external partners did not always align, leading to misalignment in partnership outcomes. Therefore, partners needed to be aware of the individual school goals and work towards aligning their efforts with those goals. This meant that partners needed to demonstrate their role in helping the school achieve those goals, whether it was increasing reading and math proficiencies or increasing the capacity of teacher leaders.

While aligning with individual school goals seemed effective in determining a successful partnership, it did not always lead to a sustained partnership. Partners reported that sustainability

was often a challenge, and there were several reasons for this. One reason was the lack or shift in funding support during transition, which made it difficult to sustain the partnership over the long-term. Another reason was the changing priorities and leadership within the school or district, which could result in a shift in focus away from the partnershi''s goals.

Aligning with individual school goals and superintendent goals was also a critical factor in measuring success among partners. However, sustaining the partnership over the long-term required overcoming challenges related to funding, support, and shifting priorities and leadership within the school or district. Partners reported that they considered a range of factors when attempting to understand superintendents' motives, including the way in which the board was evaluating superintendents and the legacy that superintendents aspired to leave behind. It was clear to partners that understanding why superintendents had taken on the role was crucial in helping them to manage their partnership expectations. This knowledge helped partners to understand the timeline of the partnership commitment, as well as the superintendent's priorities and the challenges that they might face in fulfilling their role.

It is worth noting that while understanding superintendents' motives was helpful in managing partnership expectations, it was unclear whether it was effective in the moment of turnover. However, partners found it to be an effective strategy for managing their own roles and expectations, which in turn helped to support successful partnerships even if that meant within the superintendent’s short tenure. It also helped partners transition with the superintendent into new territories.

Finding #5: Relationships and Race

The findings of the study underscore the critical connection between race and relationships in educational partnerships. Participants emphasized the significance of

acknowledging and respecting school culture as a fundamental element in cultivating strong partnership relationships and fostering trust. Both superintendents and external partners recognized that a deep understanding of school culture played a pivotal role in facilitating smoother transitions, improving communication, and enhancing the partnership's sustainability. This understanding aligns with the concept of cultural competence, where partners who demonstrated cultural awareness and responsiveness were better equipped to establish effective relationships (Bourdieu, 1986).

This finding emphasizes the vital role that race, and cultural competence play in shaping relationships within educational partnerships. By embracing cultural understanding and leveraging effective data practices alongside sustainable funding, these partnerships can thrive, promoting equitable outcomes and fostering success for all involved parties.

Connecting Findings to Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, as proposed by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), provides valuable insights into the dynamics of relationships within educational partnerships. The theory posits that social connections and networks play a crucial role in achieving desired outcomes, and the findings of this study align with this perspective.

Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of social connections and networks in achieving desired outcomes. This study’s findings suggested that the importance of relationships in school partnerships is consistent with social capital theory (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). The significance of relationship building with stakeholders beyond superintendents and principals was highlighted in the findings, and it was noted that casting relationships widely across the school structure was helpful in moments of turnover. This reinforced the importance of developing and maintaining social networks across the school structure.

Applying social capital theory to educational partnerships offers a valuable framework for understanding the underlying dynamics at play. It emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining social connections and networks to achieve partnership success. By actively leveraging social capital, schools can create a supportive environment that promotes student achievement and success. This involves cultivating relationships, nurturing effective communication channels, and tapping into the diverse expertise and resources within the school community.

The relevance of social capital theory in the context of educational partnerships. By recognizing the significance of relationships and communication, partnerships can harness social capital to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability. By fostering strong social connections and leveraging collective resources, schools can create a collaborative ecosystem that maximizes the potential for positive educational outcomes.

Limitations

Several limitations to the research should be acknowledged. There are methodological limitations for the study in terms of sample size, which could have affected the validity and reliability of the findings. The study was originally designed for external partners, specifically instructional partners, but after expanding the participant pool to funders, superintendents' afterschool programs, and teachers, I realized that opening up the study earlier would have yielded further richness in diverse participant experiences.

The protocol did not ask any specific question about the role of race. Yet, a salient observation explicitly addressed by participants was the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in school-based partnerships. I think the role of race may have provided more insight into the possible relationships between Black and Brown students' experience, turnover, and

program disruption. Given the importance of these factors in promoting student success and well-being, it would be helpful to understand partners experience with race, equity and inclusion.

Another limitation was the lack of parent perspectives. The findings primarily focused on the perspectives of school stakeholders and external partners. It would be useful to also understand how parents perceive school partnerships and what factors they believe are important for successful collaboration, especially as the findings highlight their influence in partnership sustainability. Parents can aid in advocating for more sustainability by advocating for the types of partnerships that think benefit their school community.

Recommendations

To sustain school-based partnerships with external organizations, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is necessary. This approach involves strengthening relationships with various stakeholders, aligning with superintendent's vision and school goals and recognizing the role of race. These recommendations are based on findings that highlighted the importance of these factors in promoting successful and sustainable partnerships.

Strengthen Relationships with Multiple Stakeholders

To maintain sustainable partnerships between external organizations and schools, it is imperative to prioritize building strong relationships across different levels of the school structure. This involves establishing connections with various stakeholders, including teachers, staff, and students. In response to the time constraints around building relationships with multiple stakeholders across the school structure, partners should prioritize teachers. A practical approach for achieving partnership sustainability is to focus on gaining the support and commitment of teachers. Teacher buy-in is critical. To co-create work with teachers, external partners should request data, or conduct a needs assessment, about how teachers perceive the

problem. This method will ensure that the work is led by the stakeholders who are impacted most by partnership, increasing the probability of long-term sustainability.

Take Time to Understand Superintendent's Vision and School Goals

To enhance partnerships between external organizations and schools, it is crucial to comprehend the superintendent's motives and align partnership efforts with their objectives. Partners should strive to understand how their work aligns with the superintendent's vision for the school. This comprehension can aid in the effective management of partnership roles, timelines, and expectations, leading to better partnership outcomes. While this may not guarantee long-term sustainability, it can provide insight into how the leader measures success. Furthermore, partners can work within the superintendent's tenure to maximize the partnership's impact within the given timeframe.

For partnerships between external organizations and schools to be successful, it is important for partners to align their work with the goals of the school to measure success. Gathering data early in the partnership can help track progress and substantiate the need for the work. Defining success in collaboration with the school can demonstrate the role of external partners in achieving those goals. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the need for school leaders, including principals and superintendents, to prioritize the interest of teachers. Therefore, partners should aim to strike a balance between their own goals and objectives and the needs and priorities of the school. This approach will increase the likelihood of a mutually beneficial and sustainable partnership that delivers meaningful results for all involved parties.

Recognize the Role of Race

To establish and maintain successful partnerships between external organizations and schools, it is imperative to recognize the role of race as a significant dimension. In addition to

understanding the school culture, partners must navigate racial dynamics and prioritize cultural competency to foster equitable relationships and create an inclusive partnership that respects diverse perspectives. It is crucial for partners to be mindful of the racial dynamics within the school community and work towards building relationships that acknowledge and value the experiences of all stakeholders, particularly those from marginalized racial backgrounds. This involves actively addressing issues of racial equity and power dynamics within the partnership and developing cultural competence to understand and respond to the unique needs and experiences of racially diverse students and communities.

To truly foster successful partnerships in education, an intentional focus on addressing racial dynamics and promoting racial equity is necessary. By cultivating inclusive relationships, and interpreting data through a racial equity lens, and prioritizing racial justice, partners can not only achieve their objectives but also contribute to a more equitable and just educational system for all students. Embracing race as a critical dimension in partnership endeavors will lead to a transformative and meaningful impact on educational outcomes for students of all backgrounds.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings of the study discussed above, more research is needed to examine the impact of partnerships on different stakeholders, including students, teachers and school leaders. Research could investigate how partnerships can support the development of teacher capacity and enhance student engagement as well as foster greater community involvement in school improvement efforts.

By delving more deeply into these areas of research, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how partnerships can be effectively utilized to improve educational outcomes for all students, particularly those who are most in need. This understanding can inform the

development of more effective partnership models and strategies that can be scaled and sustained to benefit K-12 schools and their communities. In addition, more research could be dedicated to exploring the impact of partnerships on different stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and parents. This could involve investigating how partnerships can improve teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction, enhance student engagement and motivation, and strengthen parent-teacher relationships.

Finally, another important area for future research could be the exploration of equity and access issues related to partnerships. This could involve investigating how partnerships can be leveraged to address inequities in educational opportunities for students from historically marginalized groups as well as how partnerships can support efforts to improve access to resources and opportunities for these students. This could involve investigating how partnerships can address the needs of underrepresented student groups, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, and students from low-income families. Additionally, research could explore how partnerships can effectively address systemic issues related to equity and access in education, such as unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

Conclusion

According to the study's results, the success of partnerships between external organizations and K-12 schools hinges on a number of vital factors that revolve around the dynamics of relationships. These include building strong relationships with various stakeholders, establishing trust between external partners and schools, aligning partnership goals with both the superintendent's and the school's objectives, securing sustainable funding, establishing long-term systems and structures for partnership management and recognizing the role of race in partnership work. While external partners are constantly needing to shift with the changes of the

education landscape, the strategies outlined in this study can assist partners at the onset to help strengthen the lasting impact of the work in schools to ensure that the work is deeply rooted and continues despite turnover.

Future research should focus on investigating the systematization of partnership work. This refers to the process of creating a standardized system for documenting and organizing partnership efforts beyond contracts and MOUs, which can be inconsistent across different schools and districts. Systematization can have significant implications for schools' ability to have institutional memory of the work provided by external partnerships past, present, and future. By documenting these partnerships, schools can ensure that they are building upon past successes and avoiding past mistakes.

Additionally, there is a need to examine the impact of partnerships on different stakeholders, particularly Black school leaders, and the issues of equity and access in education. Partnerships can play an important role in promoting educational equity and access, but it is essential to understand how they are impacting different groups. By examining these issues, researchers can identify ways to make partnerships more effective in improving educational outcomes for all students, regardless of race or ethnicity.

While understanding best practices for building and sustaining partnerships is crucial, it does not guarantee long-term sustainability. To institutionalize the work of partnerships, it is important to prioritize sustainability of the work produced through partnerships. This research magnifies the need for greater systemization of the work produced through partnership which can help create a more equitable and accessible education system that benefits all students. With significant funding allocated to school improvement and reform, it is critical to prioritize the systems to support partnership work in K-12 schools. Without proper tracking and sustainability

of partnership efforts, students who need the most support may continue to receive inadequate learning and support. With intentional allocation to school improvement and reform, we can prioritize partnership work in K-12 schools to achieve long-lasting positive outcomes for students.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Superintendent turnover is a reality in urban school districts. The purpose of this study is to learn from the experiences of external organizations about the factors that contribute to disruptions or partial implementation of work supported through external partnerships in urban school.

1. To get started, in your introduction, please tell me who you are, the type of service-delivery you provide and how long you have worked at your organization?

2. What is your current role and overall urban school experience ?

3. What do you consider to be a successful partnership between a school and external organizations?
    a. What preconditions contribute to or inhibit successful partnerships?

4. Has the superintendent at the school you support changed over time?
    a. If so, was your organization able to sustain the work with continuity? If so, how?
    b. If not, have you experienced any delays to the work during your contractual period?

5. What role, if any, does your superintendent play in the development of your objectives?
   Probe: How does it impact your goals?

6. What is the most superintendent turnover you have experienced at one school district?

7. How long ideally would you need to work within a school to be successful?
   Probe: How long does it take to be effective?

8. Have you developed any systems or processes to support your school-based partnerships?
    a. If so, can you tell me about one.
    b. Was this system or process helpful in a moment of turnover?

9. Do you prioritize school goals and needs in your service delivery?
    a. If so, how do you identify whether a school is the right "fit" when engaging in new partnerships?
    b. How do you evaluate progress and outcomes?

10. How do you define expectations for implementing partner programs and activities?

11. How do you develop and nurture your partnership relationships?
    a. How are the relationships helpful, or not, in moments of turnover?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

The Great Disruption: The Impact of Urban School Turnover

on External Partnership Support

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Rand Quinn
Associate Professor, GSE
University of Pennsylvania
[redacted]

CO-INVESTIGATOR
Dynell Kellyman
Ed.D Candidate 2023
University of Pennsylvania
[redacted]

PURPOSE OF STUDY
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of superintendent turnover on service delivery from external partners. The study aims to highlight the experiences of external partners when district turnover occurs. I hope to develop a set of recommendations based on my analyses. These recommendations will hopefully contribute to the broader research on inter-organizational partnerships.

Given the makeup of today's urban schools, Black and Brown students are at the receiving end of instability in leadership, in addition to other known complexities that plague urban schools and impact student achievement. The research of external partners is imperative because students, education leaders and the community must work differently. This study will explore whether the best practices used by external organizations work in a moment of leadership turnover. The study will highlight the experiences of external partners in supporting school-wide and district goals during leadership changes.

STUDY PROCEDURES
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1:1 interview which will be conducted via Zoom at a time of day that is convenient for you. Our discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed to capture your insights, in your words. interview is expected to last no more than 60 minutes.
    - **Turnover** – Understanding your experience with school leadership turnover/or stability and its impact. I will categorize the turnover experience how recent they experienced the turnover, the nature of their departure (contentious, amicable, etc.)
    - **Relationships** – Exploring how their relationship with the school contributed or not to their support in schools.
    - **Sustainable Partnership** – Learning what other factors lead to a sustainable partnership (or not) between external partners and schools.

- Optional participation in an overview of the data collected and focus-group discussion via Zoom presentation. An invitation will be sent to all participants via email.

RISKS
You may experience emotional distress caused by remembering unpleasant experiences and/ or discussions.

BENEFITS
This study seeks to examine the impact of superintendent turnover, also referred to as leadership turnover, on the implementation of external partnerships. The study aims to highlight the experiences of external partners when school or district turnover occurs. I hope to develop a set of recommendations based on my analyses from interviews with external organizations who have been grappling with disruption in service delivery. These recommendations will contribute to the broader research on inter-organizational partnerships.

CONFIDENTIALITY
For the purposes of this research study, your answers will be anonymous. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (865) 354-3000, ext. 4822.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Focus Group Email

Hello Participants,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. I would love to share my findings and allow you to provide feedback or additional thoughts.

As a reminder, the study aims to highlight the experiences of external partners when district turnover occurs. I plan to develop a set of recommendations based on my analyses. These recommendations will contribute to the broader research on inter-organizational partnerships. The study highlights the experiences of external partners in supporting school-wide and district goals during leadership changes.

Due to time constraints, I have identified a time that will hopefully work for you. I will record the session and share it by request.

To protect the anonymity of all participants, I would like you to join the Zoom session with your camera off and replace your name with a Participant # that will be emailed separately.

The identified time is Thursday, March 16, at 4 p.m. EST.

I will send a separate calendar request.

Participant calendar invite:

Per my email, I am hopeful that you are able to attend the discussion about the findings. To protect the anonymity of participants, I ask that you please turn your camera off and replace your name with Participant X. Zoom link.
_____-

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