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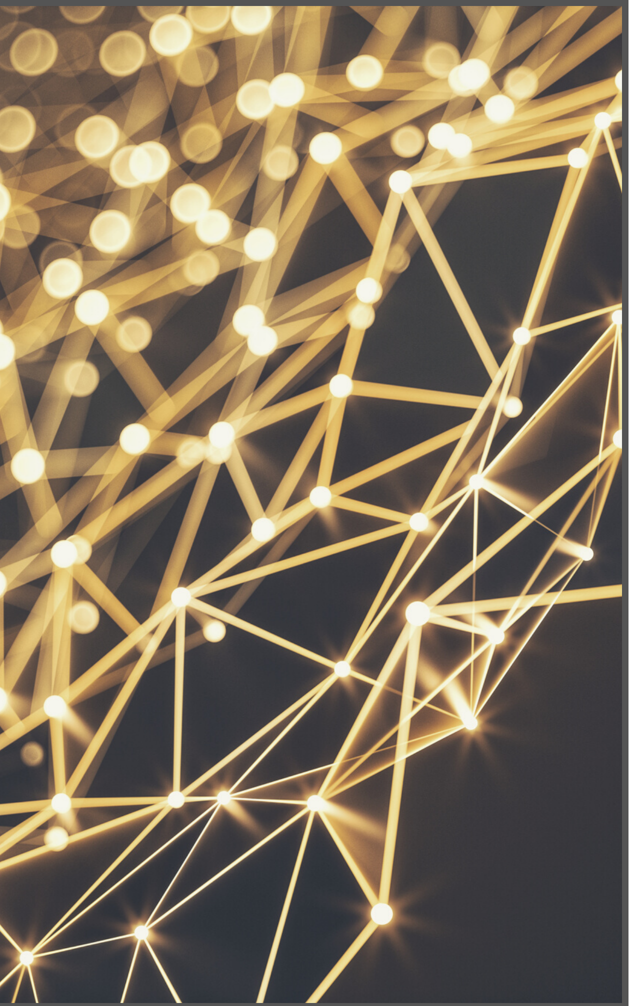

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NOVEMBER 3, 2022 I VOL. 4(3)

Welcome to Our Fall Edition

By Paula Arce-Trigatti I NNERPP

Welcome to the third issue of NNERPP Extra of 2022! We hope your fall has been off to a good start and that you are staying safe and well. In this edition, we are excited to share four new articles with you, many of which are inspired by conversations we hosted at the NNERPP Annual Forum – our annual gathering as a community, taking place every summer. Many important topics rose to the top at the Annual Forum; here, we highlight just a few. We look forward to exploring additional insights from the Annual Forum in future editions!

In this edition, we bring you the following articles:

- Research Insights: Two NNERPP members share how they are approaching studying mental health in schools and what they have found so far in their respective projects.
- RPP Deep Dive: We hear how one NNERPP member used their NNERPP Annual Forum attendance as a professional learning opportunity to strengthen the relationship between research- and practice-side members of the partnership.
- Extra Credit: We introduce Version 2 of the RPP Brokers Handbook, which codifies the work of brokers in RPPs, thereby identifying the specific and essential role they play in enabling public scholarship and social impact.
- Improving Improvement: Proving Ground shares insights from a recent survey examining partners' perceptions on how well Proving Ground has been building partners' capacity to improve.
- Research Headlines: We share a roundup listing all of our members' research from the past quarter.

Happy reading!

NNERPP I Extra Online
Be sure to check out the NNERPP I Extra website if you'd like to explore this issue's articles (and more!) online.

About NNERPP
NNERPP aims to develop, support, and connect research-practice partnerships in education to improve their productivity. Please visit our website at nnerpp.rice.edu and find us on Twitter: @RPP_Network.

Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools

Isela Peña, Rodolfo Rincones, and Holly Fields I Paso Del Norte Partnership for Education Research, and
David Naff I Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium

IN THIS "RESEARCH INSIGHTS" EDITION

In this edition of our "Research Insights" series, we examine what two NNERPP members are finding in two in-process research projects investigating how to support mental health in schools. The two RPP teams, one based in El Paso, Texas, and one in Richmond, Virginia, highlight their respective projects and what they have found so far, including how the direct involvement of school- and district side partners was critical to their respective research projects.

WHY THIS ARTICLE

Supporting mental health in K-12 schools has become increasingly important amidst the unprecedented challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic accelerated mental health challenges for both students and educators, while also disrupting access to school-based mental health supports. At the same time, mental health can still be a taboo topic. By diving deeper into the research conducted by two RPPs and how they went about designing their projects, we hope to highlight promising approaches to studying this topic as well as to improving student and educator mental health.

OVERVIEW

Let's first take a quick look at the two partnerships featured in this article and the corresponding research artifacts. In Table 1 below, you'll find the partnership name as well as a brief description of the RPP in column 1 and the title and link to the research artifacts in column 2, where available.

Table 1. List of RPPs + Artifacts Included in This Article (Ordered by Region: West to Northeast)

Partnership	Artifact
Paso Del Norte Partnership for Education Research: PDNPER is a partnership between several school districts in the El Paso region (Clint Independent School District, El Paso ISD, San Elizario ISD, Ysleta ISD, Fabens ISD, and Socorro ISD), community agencies in the region, and the College of Education at The University of Texas at El Paso.	This project is currently ongoing. Artifacts are not publicly available yet.
Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium: MERC is a partnership between several Richmond-area school districts (Chesterfield County Public Schools, Goochland County Public Schools, Hanover County Public Schools, Henrico County Public Schools, Petersburg City Public Schools, and Richmond Public Schools) and Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education.	This project is currently ongoing. You can find initial literature reviews, podcast episodes, and more information on the project on this landing page: Supporting Mental Health in Schools Study

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Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools, continued

(I) EL PASO, TEXAS

We invited members of the El Paso partnership to share more about their research project on supporting mental health in schools in their region. See below for what they have shared!

Research Questions

This study focuses on examining the general well-being of educators in the El Paso, TX region. Well-being was broadly defined to include levels of stress, compassion satisfaction and fatigue, burnout, self-care practices. In addition to exploring the overall well-being of educators, we also wanted to examine and better understand the following:

1. What has been the impact of COVID-19 on educator well-being?
2. What have been the behaviors and/or tools educators have used to thrive in their respective roles?
3. What have been the most adverse experiences related to well-being?
4. What additional supports are needed?
5. What changes need to be made to educational policies?

Context and Research Methods

This study is a culmination of the collective needs that arose during our Fall 2021 Symposium for Understanding and Improving Educator Well-Being: A Hybrid Event on K-12 Educator Mental Health Needs in the Paso del Norte Region. Symposium participants, including K-12 practitioners and higher-education professors, gained a better understanding of stress, burnout, trauma, and overall mental health demographics in our community. They also participated in a mindfulness activity that practitioners could use in their daily lives. However, the feedback from the K-12 participants indicated that due to the continuing issues of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the challenges of students and families navigating the ongoing immigration issues in the border community, much more research was needed to address the critical mental health needs of educators and school leaders in our community. A few months following the symposium, we met with district leaders of one large urban and two rural school districts to propose the study, and they agreed to partner in this endeavor.

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which the quantitative and qualitative phases are procedurally predetermined so a priority exists where the quantitative portion of the study precedes the qualitative portion. Data collection and analysis occurred at two sequential stages of the research. In the first quantitative phase, online-survey data was gathered and analyzed. The survey was emailed to approximately 3,000 educators in the partnering districts. Under the category of educators, we included teachers, principals, assistant principals, librarians, counselors, nurses, instructional coaches, and other personnel that serves in an informal and/or formal leadership capacity at the campus level.

In the second qualitative phase, which builds on the findings from the first phase, interviews and focus groups were utilized to obtain data. The survey included an option for participants to volunteer to participate in either one-to-one or focus interviews. We conducted approximately 30 interviews and completed the data collection in August.

Throughout this process, we engaged with the districts in different ways. Prior to sending out the survey, we shared the survey instrument with the districts to get their feedback and make sure the questions were aligned to the data they were interested in

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Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools, continued

gathering. We also worked closely with the districts to identify the participants and collect their email addresses. Once the survey was sent out, we sought their advice on how to increase survey participation.

What Does the Research Show?

We are currently conducting the data analysis for this study. We anticipate completing the analysis in the next few months and sharing the findings with the districts. Preliminary findings indicate that the amount of stress and burnout increased after the onset of COVID-19. While many educators reported working over 50 hours a week pre-COVID, the number of educators working over 50 hours in the past 2.5 years has increased. From the interviews, one of the big takeaways for us was the commitment all the interviewees expressed to their students and school communities. Despite the feelings of burnout and in some cases, considering leaving the field, what was reflected in each interview was the reason these educators continued to show up every day was the students.

How Was the Work Used in Practice?

The results and findings from this study are anticipated to serve several purposes. Our participating school districts are planning to utilize the findings to make informed decisions about programs, policies, and other supports that will address the needs of their educators. For example, one of the participating rural districts, San Elizario Independent School District, is implementing a wellbeing initiative for its employees called Healing@theNest. This is a 5-year plan for the recovery of the body, soul, and mind of its educators. As we continue to share additional data with them, they remain committed to utilize the data to drive future support systems for their employees.

As the opportunities present themselves, our hope is to continue to collaborate with these districts as they implement programs to address educator well-being. This research study has the potential to open other lines of inquiry in school and district leadership based on needs identified by the districts.

(II) RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

We invited members of the Richmond-based partnership to share more about their research project on supporting mental health in schools in their region. Let's dive into what they shared!

Research Questions

Our first component of our study focuses on understanding what programs and practices school divisions [1] in the MERC region are currently employing to support student and faculty mental health, and what characteristics make them successful.

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Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools, continued

The second component examines the current emotional and professional capacity of faculty and staff in MERC division schools to meet the mental health needs of their students. Our complete set of research questions is listed in our research design.

Context and Research Methods

This study was commissioned by our school divisions in recognition of the unique mental health challenges that their students, staff, and families were facing in the wake of COVID-19. This tracks with broader research suggesting that there are rising mental health needs in schools, and that schools thus urgently need resources and evidence-based practices for effectively addressing them. The topic of supporting mental health in schools had been proposed as a potential MERC study for previous research cycles, but it was not until the pandemic that our divisions decided to pursue it in depth.

To explore this topic, we are executing the research in two components:

Component one explores current practices for supporting the mental health of students, staff, and families in MERC division schools. To learn more about this, we are conducting an informational survey throughout our region where school-based mental health providers will share information about their current programs and initiatives, which we will then compile to share with central office personnel to offer a landscape analysis of what efforts currently exist in their divisions. Then we will display those programs and initiatives in an online dashboard accessible to school counselors, social workers, and psychologists throughout our region so they can search and filter the information to best meet the needs of their students. We hope that this will prove to be a clearinghouse platform for sharing resources related to mental health support among our school divisions. The informational survey was designed by both university-based researchers and school-based personnel on our study team and we will partner with a coordinator of mental health services from each division to administer it. This approach ensures that the survey is relevant to the needs and interests of our partners, maximizing the potential value of its findings. Additionally, we will select three programs from this phase to conduct an evaluation on, offering findings to all MERC divisions for potential scalability in our region.

For component two, we are conducting a survey during the 2023-2024 academic year of all school-based faculty and staff in the MERC region to understand their emotional and professional capacity to meet the mental health needs of their students. This will include questions about their own current mental health, how they perceive the current mental health of their students, and how prepared they feel to meet those mental health needs. Once again, our school division partners serving on our study team helped design this survey and will be instrumental in helping us interpret the findings.

What Does the Research Show?

We are still in the literature review and data collection phase of our study, but the literature indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic was massively disruptive to the lives of our students and their families, that caregiver (e.g. parent) and youth mental health are closely connected, and that there was evidence of broad increases in stress, anxiety, and depression in the wake of the pandemic. Some student groups had their mental health particularly impacted, including underrepresented racial minority students, low-income students, female and non-binary students, students with existing disabilities and mental health challenges, and students struggling with substance abuse. The research also shows evidence of considerable resilience and coping skills demonstrated by PK-12 aged youth during the challenges posed by COVID-19.

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Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools, continued

How Will the Work Be Used in Practice?

We anticipate that the dashboard generated from this study will serve as a clearinghouse of resources for the school-based mental health providers in our region, and that the evaluation aspect of our study will offer evidence of what mental health programs are most effective in different school contexts. Additionally, we anticipate the results of our faculty and staff survey to serve as a timely needs assessment, offering direct feedback from educators about what policies and practices are supportive or not for the mental health of staff and students in the region. We expect this to inform decision-making for school board policies related to mental health in our school divisions.

IMPLICATIONS AND INSIGHTS

Here, both RPP teams share some additional thoughts on their projects, including insights that emerged while working on the projects and thoughts on possible implications of the projects once completed.

EL PASO, TEXAS

In our RPP work, we always aim to collaborate with districts to identify specific areas of need and co-create research projects that can generate practical solutions and resources to address needs. With this project, our mutual interests in investigating educator wellbeing made it a very nice fit for both the research- and practice-side partners. However, once we began the study, we noticed that participation in the survey was not as high as we had expected. As we reflected on why there was low participation, we knew that wellbeing was a real issue, but felt that the topic itself may be taboo. Educators may have felt hesitant to talk about their wellbeing needs and experiences. In their day-to-day, wellbeing was not being discussed or addressed, particularly in the earlier phase of the pandemic. As we analyze the interview data during the next phase of this project, we will be curious to see if any patterns in responses emerge that might support this idea. Additionally, with so many urgent issues competing for their time, giving up 30 minutes to complete a survey and an hour to participate in an interview may have been too cumbersome for some of these educators.

Limited time was also a challenge as we considered to what extent we should be engaging our district partners in the research process. Did they have time to engage in problem-solving discussions around logistics, research design, and other relevant issues? Many of the research-side partners in our partnership are former practice-side people, so we are especially cognizant of the limited time districts have to give to external projects. One of the lessons we learned throughout this project is that we need to include our district partners in more strategic and intentional ways throughout the entire process. For example, for future projects, from the outset, we intend to co-design the research study, set realistic expectations for the roles each of the partners will play, the outcomes the research is expected to produce, and establish meeting timelines for updates, problem-solving, and other issues that may need to be addressed. We believe this will help us as a region to develop a research culture, and more importantly a research partnership culture that will allow us to continue to grow this work. Our ultimate goal is to engage in authentic and meaningful partnerships, and this project has yielded many useful lessons so far in working towards that goal.

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Supporting Mental Health And Wellbeing In Schools, continued

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

It is a working theory of our study that because of the rising mental health needs in our schools and the tendency for school-based mental health providers like counselors, social workers, and psychologists to be overloaded, teachers will also be tasked with offering mental health support at a time when they are feeling high levels of stress and burnout. This lends itself to what we hope will be a practical implication of our study: actionable strategies for ensuring that all faculty and staff are sufficiently trained in providing mental health support to students while also ensuring that their own mental health needs are met. Additionally, we hope that our study illustrates how RPPs can generate practical resources for immediate use in schools in the form of dashboards that also help further the research.

CONCLUSION

Supporting mental health in schools is critical but challenging as both students' and educators' well-being has been impacted by COVID-19 and pandemic-related challenges. Additionally, mental health can be a delicate topic to broach. RPPs are well positioned to take on studying this topic – as both the El Paso and the Richmond team shared above, their close collaboration with practice-side partners has been critical to getting it right. We look forward to hearing more about their projects as they move forward.

- *Isela Peña is Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Foundations at The University of Texas at El Paso; Rodolfo Rincones is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Foundations at The University of Texas at El Paso; Holly Fields is Assistant Director for Research-Practice Partnerships of the Paso del Norte Partnership for Education Research; and David Naff is Associate Director of the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium and Assistant Professor of Foundations of Education at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education.*

[1] School divisions in Virginia are similar to school districts in other states.

One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum

By Beth Vaade and Bri Monahan | Madison Metropolitan School District Research & Innovation + Madison Education Partnership, and Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

INTRODUCTION

This past July, we held our seventh NNERPP Annual Forum, our yearly gathering of NNERPP members and friends in the research-practice partnership (RPP) space to come together and learn about all-things-RPP. The Forum's main purpose is to provide shared learning opportunities across attendees in order to continue cultivating our collective knowledge of how to do RPP work. Sessions are organized around critical topics that have emerged from our members' experiences; these include, for example, discussions featuring real-life examples of how equity shows up in RPPs, workshopping around the nuts and bolts of RPPs, and more philosophical conversations around what is or is not an RPP. NNERPP members not only attend but also lead sessions and present at the Forum. Over the last three years we've offered a virtual Forum, which has allowed us to invite our members to "bring" up to 20 people from their partnership to attend. Most have taken us up on that offer and thus, we've had robust participation in the meeting from many people who might not be able to attend an in-person Forum.

Although the Forum is a great place to hear, talk, and learn about a wide variety of RPP models, promising practices, and successes, we stop short of referring to it as a formal "professional development" opportunity, even though it could certainly be considered that. The main reason for this is our intentional preference for how learning takes place, i.e., it is left entirely up to attendees (as opposed to us requiring or outlining how learning should occur). To that end, we work with the NNERPP Steering Committee to pick and organize sessions that are likely to be relevant and useful to our members and the field, but how participants engage in those learning opportunities, and to what extent, is completely self-directed. This allows members to adopt a "take what we need" approach to their learning and make choices about how to utilize the opportunities at the Forum that best suit their context. Accordingly, there is a wide range in how members engage in the Forum, with some teams building their own internally driven professional development experiences centered around the Forum, while others send a few key informants that will then report back to the full RPP team on various ideas that might be relevant, to everything in between.

In this Deep Dive, we will hear from the Madison Education Partnership (MEP), which is an RPP based in Madison, Wisconsin and features a collaboration between the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Following this year's Forum, two of the MMSD leaders of MEP - Bri Monahan and Beth Vaade - shared their approach to partnership learning, which involved using the Annual Forum as an anchor for that learning. This led to a number of interesting (and sometimes unanticipated!) insights for the MEP team, which the team shares below in hopes that others might draw inspiration from their efforts in designing their own partnership learning opportunities. We also think MEP's experiences might be useful for the RPP sector more generally, especially as we

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

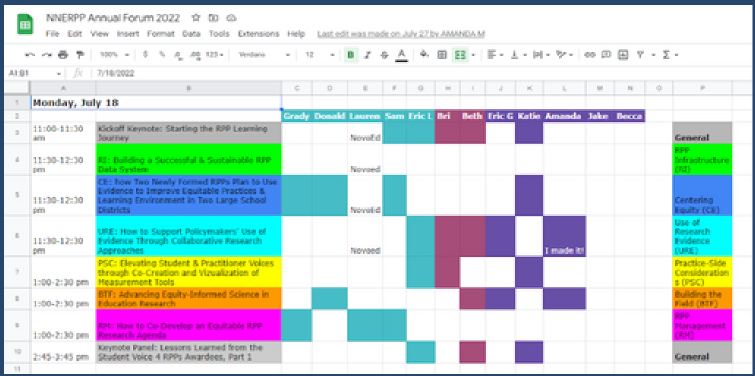
continue to conceptualize partnership work as one that occurs at the "boundaries of research and practice." In particular, we highlight below how the NNERPP Annual Forum ended up serving as a "boundary practice" that helped bring together members of both the "R" and "P" sides into a "third space" that might otherwise not have occurred. These types of "boundary crossing" activities are key to building and strengthening relationships across "R" and "P", which is fundamental to partnership work.

PART 1: OVERVIEW OF THE MEP LEARNING OPPORTUNITY FROM BETH & BRI ON THE MEP TEAM

During the 2021-22 school year, we as the practice-side leaders of our RPP set out to strengthen the working relationship between our UW-Madison based MEP staff (4 total) and the district's Institutional Research & Evaluation (IRE) team (7 total). While these two teams knew each other and had worked together in the past, we believed we could build a stronger relationship between them that would lead to more collaborative, rewarding, and engaged research. We tested out a new way of working by implementing a biweekly team connection, where we met for an hour in-person and on Zoom to share projects, give feedback, and get to know each other. We also identified the NNERPP Annual Forum as a opportunity for shared professional development around RPPs. We asked both teams (UW-Madison and MMSD) to sign up for Annual Forum sessions and to attend two internal meetings - one prior to the Forum to calibrate and prepare and one after the Forum to debrief and share. We believed the Annual Forum would provide an opportunity for a shared learning experience across teams, where neither team were experts and both brought important perspectives to the table. We also knew we needed some structure to the experience to ensure that it wasn't just an individual opportunity, but a chance to further our shared goal of strengthening relationships between IRE and UW-Madison MEP staff.

In practical terms, here's what we set up:

- One 60 minute pre-meeting one week prior to the Forum: We offered this as a hybrid meeting (both in-person and on Zoom) and scheduled it during our regular biweekly team connection. We structured and facilitated the meeting, which focused on three main topics: 1) completing a spreadsheet where each member identified which sessions they would attend at the Annual Forum; 2) creating shared commitments for our combined team on how we would communicate these learnings (e.g., Slack conversations for those attending the same session; a document where you would post 1-3 key takeaways from each session you attend); and 3) giving time for those who had previously attended the Annual Forum to share tips and tricks, and those new to the Annual Forum to ask questions. We captured all these learnings on a Jamboard and in Google Sheets.



Artifact 1: Spreadsheet identifying which sessions each member would attend.

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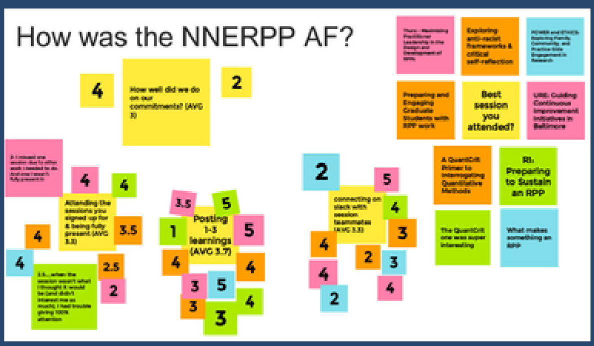
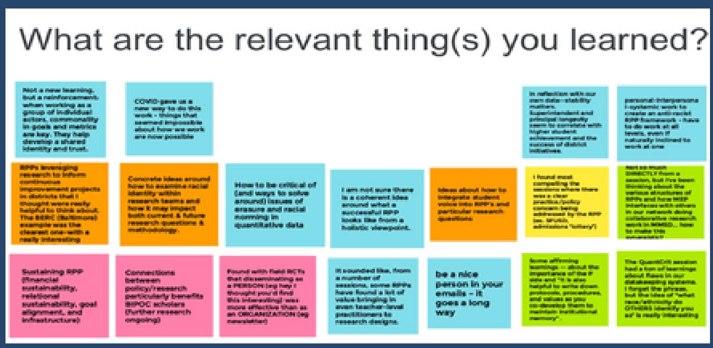
One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

- One 60 minute post-meeting one week after the Forum: We again offered this as a hybrid meeting and scheduled it during our regular biweekly team connection. We structured and facilitated the meeting, which focused on three main topics: 1) sharing the best sessions we attended and the top lesson we learned; 2) debriefing on the experience (e.g., how did it go for you, what feedback would you give NNERPP); and 3) identifying actionable takeaways we can use for the coming year's work together. We captured all these learnings on a Jamboard and in Google Sheets.



Artifact 2: Jamboard answering the questions: "How well did we do on our commitments?" and "Best session you attended?"



Artifact 3: Jamboard answering the question: "What are the relevant thing(s) you learned?"

PART 2: LESSONS LEARNED BY MEP LEADERS

Our MEP Lesson #1 – The NNERPP Annual Forum can serve as a boundary practice

Through this experience, we learned a lot about how to broker relationships and leverage professional learning opportunities like the Annual Forum. The pre-meeting helped us effectively set up systems to attend and engage in the Forum collectively. We connected with each other in advance, figured out which sessions others were interested in (and shifted our own preferences at times based on what others selected), and created systems to ensure we held each other accountable to participate fully.

While those actions helped, we faced some surprising hurdles in reaching our overarching goal of strengthening the relationship between the two teams through this pre-meeting. Because most of the UW MEP team had attended the Annual Forum previously and most of IRE had not, our conversations to prepare for the Forum unintentionally set up MEP as "experts" and IRE as "newbies" to the work. In reflecting on that meeting, we noticed after the fact that dynamic fed into some of the historical relationship concerns, where MEP faculty as researchers show up with more power and autonomy while IRE as practitioners feel less powerful and more treated as on-demand support. In an effort to be helpful and share their experience (and excitement around how great they thought the Annual Forum could be for everyone), our MEP teammates made it feel like IRE was entering "their space" at NNERPP.

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

The post-meeting dynamic, however, had a very different feel. We still accomplished our goals of checking in on our commitments, sharing key learnings, and debriefing on the experience as a whole. But since the conversation focused on the Annual Forum experience itself (an activity which everyone now had in common), we found that it leveled the playing field in terms of who was an "expert." When we broke down the experience (e.g., who enjoyed it, who struggled to find value in particular sessions), we found that it crossed team lines (as opposed to our pre-meeting, where MEP team members were aligned in their experiences of the Forum, separate from the IRE team). This led to a more interesting, dynamic, and inclusive discussion across the whole group. Through that conversation, we came together more as a collaborative group, rather than as individual teams, which aligned with our overall goal of trying to strengthen our relationship and shared trust.

NNERPP's Reflections on Lesson #1: Annual Forum as a boundary practice

As we alluded to in the Introduction, the MEP team's experience of intentionally planning partnership learning that used the NNERPP Annual Forum as an anchor ended up resulting in a meaningful exchange across the two organizations, one that might not have occurred otherwise. We think this is a great example of a boundary practice, defined as "partnership activities that bring together multiple participants with varying roles, perspectives, experiences, and areas of expertise, and who are situated within organizations with different capacities and conditions" (Farrell, et al., 2022, p. 3). Boundary practices are essential to supporting the necessary joint work that takes place in RPPs, particularly because they enable "in-between and hybrid activity systems" to occur (Penuel, et al., 2015, p. 190). As Beth and Bri described above, the joint experience of participating in the Annual Forum together enabled the "R" and "P" teams of the partnership to collaborate on a level playing field that is not typically an inherent feature of RPP work.

Although we have not previously thought of the Annual Forum as a boundary practice, it is unsurprising to re-interpret its potential in facilitating partnership learning in this way. We intentionally design the Forum to be a non-research based gathering (i.e., not a "conference") where members and friends of the network are invited to explore all aspects of partnership work. Given this implicit hybridity, the Forum provides a nice platform for RPP teams to break through their own organizational boundaries and experience something together – these are indeed the defining characteristics of a boundary practice. From MEP's story shared above, it was especially interesting to see the evolution of the team's discussions and cohesion as a result of participating in the Forum: before, there were distinct lines or boundaries based on organizational home that kept the team from truly feeling "as one"; and after experiencing the Forum together, the teams saw a blurring of their organizational boundaries and found synergy across "R" and "P" lines, which is (again) a critical feature of truly engaging in "joint work".

We share this particular example to hopefully spark conversations among other RPP teams – there are an infinite number of boundary practices one could design in service of supporting the kinds of "boundary crossing" similar to what we described here. Many of these are likely to be internally designed, such as co-writing a synthesis of partnership work that will be presented at a conference, for example. This case is interesting in that the team took advantage of an opportunity that was created externally to them, and leads us to wonder, what kinds of additional boundary practice opportunities could NNERPP design and offer for teams?

Our MEP Lesson #2 – Building "togetherness" may require an emphasis on group-level choices

The experience of having our teammates choose which sessions to attend (with no guidance in advance or requirements that

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

MEP and IRE cover all Annual Forum sessions) gave us interesting insights into how people see their work and role within the RPP. Some teammates gravitated to sessions focused on "Building the Field", while others worked almost exclusively in the "Centering Equity" or "Use of Research Evidence" strands. While a few teammates valued opportunities to connect with others in NNERPP through "Sparklers" and networking, most skipped those sessions, instead opting for content-focused opportunities over those that prioritized relationship-building. As we learned in our debrief at the post-Forum team meeting, whether someone felt a session was useful depended both on their personal interests and in how they saw themselves involved in our RPP or RPPs more generally.

This experience has left us with some key questions as we build out our RPP. If we believe shared learning can be a high-leverage strategy to strengthen relationships and our RPP, then how do we navigate the diversity of preferences in shared learning? Do we honor the desire for individuals to determine their own learning experiences or do we adopt a commitment to pushing out of our comfort zones so that we can truly have a shared experience (or boundary practice) that helps solidify our "togetherness"? In this instance, we really let individuals choose their own adventure at the Forum, but that meant we tended to work inside our comfort zones. Perhaps that's ok, if the diversity of our team means that collectively we had a rich experience. But perhaps we could have done more to push each other to work in new and different ways, which can be what makes an RPP great.

NNERPP's Reflection on Lesson #2: Building "togetherness" may require an emphasis on group-level choices

From the Farrell, et al. paper: "…boundary practices can establish roles, responsibilities, and expectations that clarify what is expected of participants and how they can contribute to the activity as a whole (Davidson & Penuel, 2019)" (p. 3). Staying with this idea of boundary practices, we can see that the Annual Forum did enable the MEP team to do exactly this, i.e., establish "roles, responsibilities, and expectations" around their participation in the Forum, with the aim of supporting shared learning. What is so fascinating about MEP's second reflection though, is that they are highlighting a deeper nuance to this potential than what is implied in the description offered in the paper, especially as it relates to strengthening partnership. That is, how one defines what the "roles, responsibilities, and expectations" are with respect to participation in the boundary practice may either support greater individualistic participation in the activity or may lead to a greater sense of what Beth and Bri call "togetherness" (or what I might call "partnership identity"). In MEP's case, while the Forum itself clearly led to a terrific instance of shared learning across the R and P boundaries for the team (e.g., see Lesson #1), their approach to assigning "roles, responsibilities, and expectations", wherein they left it up to each team member to decide what sessions to attend, may have lessened the degree to which the team worked towards a "partnership identity".

Why does this matter? We can think of partnership identity as a "third space", i.e., not existing in the "R" or "P" sides exclusively but in the middle of, say, a Venn diagram of both of those spaces. This space might be very important for creating deeper commitments to the work, for example, since it invites all members of the partnership to see themselves as part of a unified team. In the case shared here, while MEP was able to transcend boundaries through joint participation in the Forum (evidenced by the post-Forum discussion shared in Lesson #1), the team did not necessarily work intentionally to deepen the shared cultural boundary that makes up "MEP". Thus, allowing everyone to "choose their own adventure" rather than setting forth a set of shared learning goals that each team member would work towards via the Forum seemed to have lessened the team's opportunity to build a shared cultural boundary.

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

It's not clear which way, i.e., enabling individualistic growth versus team "togetherness", is "better" as it likely depends on a number of factors, including where the partnership is in terms of development, age, commitments, trust, etc. One can certainly imagine a team purposefully using the Forum to create a shared learning experience that would still honor the individual preferences of the team, as what MEP ultimately chose to do. Or, using the Forum to help work towards a partnership identity and thereby inviting folks to strategically participate in particular sessions that would advance that aim. And it could also be that both are important – sometimes it makes sense to pursue individualistic goals, while other times it might make sense to work towards shared identity. Regardless, the takeaway reflection here seems to be, while boundary practices are likely critical for encouraging joint work in RPPs, the more micro-level details of how folks participate in that boundary practice may have different implications for advancing a partnership identity.

Our MEP Lesson #3 – The Annual Forum surfaced a larger partnership question, How big is our tent?

For the Annual Forum, we opened up participation to more people than we would otherwise have if it was in-person. This step towards a "bigger MEP tent" has also lifted up a question that had been brewing throughout the year, as we brought our teams together more intentionally to build relationships. Is MEP made up only of the core staff, who then works with the district IRE team on RPP projects, or is MEP ultimately made up of any MMSD or UW staff who are working on a MEP project? This distinction may seem like semantics, but we think it's actually a key definitional issue that structures how we will work together and the way we show up in the work. It shifts the frame to say "I am working with MEP" versus "I am MEP and represent MEP." How does our team understand and determine this frame? Who gets to make this decision of who is MEP and who is not? These questions also intersect with ideas about how we use the learnings from an experience like the Annual Forum. While everyone can choose a session to attend, they may not always feel like they have the authority or power to implement that new knowledge within our RPP.

These questions become even more complicated as we widen the frame beyond the two core teams mentioned here to other MEP collaborators. This year, we focused on creating systems and structure for shared learning between these 12 people, as part of the ongoing line of work and because we supervise and have authority to ask/require those people to attend. But we also invited an additional 8 MEP collaborators to participate in the Annual Forum, including MMSD and UW colleagues working on other projects. They did not engage in this learning experience the way we did, instead attending independently. We'd be curious to debrief with them about how they see themselves in MEP, how they represented us at the Annual Forum and whether they'd be interested in participating in an experience like this next year. We also know that if the Annual Forum returns to in-person (as we hope it will), we could not send all of the 12 folks from this past year to attend. Who will get to go? How do we decide? How do we create shared learning when the attendee list contracts? These are all outstanding questions for us.

NNERPP Reflection on Lesson #3: How big is your tent?

Beth and Bri's Lesson #3 has clear connectivity to the previous two lessons we shared and builds especially on the previous

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

insight, where we introduced the idea of partnership "togetherness" or "identity". In this case, though, Beth and Bri thoughtfully highlight perhaps an even trickier question than the "how" are we building partnership identity we explored in the last section to ask "but, who??"

At first glance, the idea of "who" is involved in the work may seem rather straightforward. After all, there are likely a set of core partners that consistently meet together to collaboratively define and lead the RPP's work. For example, there are instances where the "who" who needs to show up may be obvious, such as named leadership engaging in an annual meeting to revisit the partnership's overarching mission and vision. But this question of "who" becomes less clear once the activity itself is less defined and / or consists of a boundary practice that is already hybrid in nature, such as the Annual Forum.

Incidentally, this is an enduring question that we have grappled with at NNERPP since its inception. In our case, membership in NNERPP is currently limited to RPPs, e.g., those occupying the "third space" we talked about earlier, and thus, we define the "who" at an organizational level. As a result, we have avoided the question of "who" and have instead left it up to the RPPs themselves to decide who from their team should participate across the various activities offered by NNERPP. This question became increasingly more visible over the last three years as we shifted the NNERPP Annual Forum to a virtual event. Because of this feature, we were able to encourage all of our members to "send" up to 20 members of their team to participate. This was a large departure from the in-person versions of previous Forums, where teams were only able to send one R-side and one P-side representative to attend on the RPP's behalf. It was quite interesting from our end to see just who was nominated to attend on a partnership's behalf, since we had only been engaging with a much smaller number of partnership members pre-pandemic.

And therein lies the challenge Beth and Bri are describing: Given the opportunity to participate in less clearly defined partnership activities (such as the Forum), MEP needed to make some calls about who from the team would attend. A number of related questions here include: How deep is the RPP's bench? What implications does this have for the work? For partnership identity? Furthermore, will an RPP be stronger if it has more partnership members that identify as an "RPP-er" of that particular RPP? Of the field more broadly? (In some sense, it seems as though yes, it certainly couldn't hurt, since we already know that sustainability of RPPs depends on planning for turnover [which will happen] and cultivating multiple champions for the work). But of course, this kind of deeper relational investment in strengthening the partnership's identity is not without cost, as it calls upon existing core members to build and deepen connective tissue with more and more individuals (and maybe even more organizations?). Someone (or someones) will need to shepherd this spreading of tissue, and depending on the initial size of the partnership or the proposed work, it may be a challenge to do well. And let us not forget that all of this is in service to a "third space" that is essentially invisible, as it does not exist in the same way that a brick and mortar organization, i.e., the ones making up the partnership, does.

PART 3: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS, ENDURING QUESTIONS

So, what does this all mean for the work? For the broader RPP space, this reflection piece shows the potential that boundary practices can have in supporting partnership learning, which may help strengthen how members of a partnership relate to each other. In addition, boundary practices can be used to both reinforce individual identities within a partnership or to further

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One Partnership's Experience in Supporting RPP Learning & Partnership Development through the NNERPP Annual Forum, continued

develop the partnership's group identity. Because there isn't a "default" mode of learning for these, RPPs will need to intentionally take this into consideration as they integrate boundary practices into their work.

Finally, the challenge of identifying "who" is considered core to the partnership and who might be a member in a more extended capacity requires careful attention, especially because the boundaries of these identities may change depending on a given partnership activity. We recommend mapping out the various organizations considered members of the RPP and then detailing which staff members are considered part of the partnership, including placement of how central they may be to decision making on RPP direction and leadership. An activity like that may help create a shared understanding across partners of the "who" is involved in the work. It might be that this map changes depending on the partnership activity, but it can at least be a starting point. A map like this might even be considered a "boundary object" – "material and conceptual tools used in a partnership that are critical for joint activity" (Farrell, et al., 2022, p. 3).

We hope the lessons and insights shared here can be useful to other partnerships as they ponder how to support RPP learning. And we are so excited to follow along MEP's learning journey and see where they go next!

- *Beth Vaade is Executive Director of Research & Innovation at Madison Metropolitan School District and Co-Director of the Madison Education Partnership; Bri Monahan is the Research Director at Madison Metropolitan School District and Deputy Director of the Madison Education Partnership; and Paula Arce-Trigatti is Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP).*

Introducing the NNERPP RPP Brokers Handbook, V. 2

By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

We are so excited to officially release version 2.0 of the NNERPP RPP Brokers Handbook! The RPP Brokers Handbook codifies the work of brokers in education RPPs, thereby identifying the specific and essential role they play in enabling public scholarship and social impact, in hopes of strengthening the craft of brokering and helping current and aspiring RPP brokers in learning about and honing brokering skills. Our newly released expanded version features a number of new cases, tools, and vignettes that aspiring or current brokers might use to inform their RPP brokering practice.

For those readers who are new to the term and concept of brokering in RPPs, we include the following definition of brokers here, as put forth in the Handbook: A broker is "a person who helps members of research and practice organizations integrate into an RPP by cultivating and maintaining the relationships needed to effectively support research production and use."

Background

Before we dive into the specifics of this Handbook, let's take a short walk to explain how we got here. The RPP brokers conversation started at NNERPP back in 2017 during the Annual Forum, our yearly gathering of members and friends where we talk RPP shop. In this earliest of phases, we didn't actually use the word "broker" to describe the work and role but instead, focused on exploratory conversations examining the situations requiring a "go-between" in RPPs. It was a year later at the 2018 Annual Forum where a session on "Brokers" first made an appearance. Led by Carrie Conaway and Erin O'Hara, who were both leading RPPs at the time and representing practice and research perspectives, respectively, the session invited participants to identify the challenges present in RPP work and how RPP brokers could attend to those. The very early formings of a framework were introduced at that session as well, with a single table listing the activities and responsibilities taken up by brokers in moving between a purely policy/practice oriented space and one focused purely on research.

In the year leading up to the 2019 Annual Forum, the conversation on brokers intensified, with more folks in the NNERPP community recognizing themselves and their work in this new space. By the time we got to the Forum, there was already talk of a Handbook that might formally introduce a definition of RPP brokers and contribute examples of how they show up in RPPs. The 2019 brokering session at the Forum was led by Laura Wentworth and Carrie Conaway, who would then lead us towards the development and writing of the Handbook you see today. In the 2019 session, session attendees were invited to stay connected with the work in a number of ways going forward; one of these ways involved sharing cases, vignettes, or tools that people might have used illustrating how their brokering practice took place in real life. Laura and Carrie led a tremendous effort to collect these over two years, editing and providing feedback along the way. Eventually, Samantha Shewchuk was invited to join the team given her extensive expertise in knowledge mobilization, a closely related area of work to brokering activities. Samantha helped provide a robust literature review that would help the authors connect the real-life experiences of RPP brokers with evidence and findings from research. As a "behind the scenes" supporter of the work all along its history, Paula Arce-Trigatti finally joined the team in an official author capacity in 2021, helping edit the Handbook and contributing key ideas that would inform the framework (in addition to designing the figure itself).

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Introducing the NNERPP RPP Brokers Handbook, V. 2, continued

Why the RPP Brokers Handbook

The NNERPP RPP Brokers Handbook is intended to be a practical, research- and experience-informed handbook that clarifies the various activities that collectively make up "RPP brokering". Its key contributions to the world of RPPs include a framework for how to conceptually understand the role of two defining aims that organize the work of brokers – brokering to strengthen partners and brokering to strengthen partnership – in addition to providing practical guidance from those who have engaged in brokering practices to support RPP work. It joins a short list of books in the RPP space (see for example here and here), and is the only one that focuses exclusively on how to enact the critical role of brokering within partnerships. Our hope is that the Handbook provides much needed knowledge for those aspiring to become a broker, as well as those currently tasked with such activities. We also hope that the Handbook helps make visible a number of key responsibilities and activities that often go unnoticed in RPP work, and yet are absolutely essential to its survival and success.

We provide a brief overview of the six components that make up the RPP Brokers Handbook here; for a more detailed description, please see pages 7 and following and 16 and following in the Handbook itself. As mentioned above, there are two overarching buckets of work that organize the six primary activities that we think brokers engage in: brokering to strengthen partners and brokering to strengthen partnerships. In the first of these buckets, we include (i) competencies: the brokering activities necessary to build individual partners' competency for engaging in an RPP; (ii) relationships: the activities necessary to develop and nurture relationships to weather partnering challenges; and (iii) research use: the activities necessary to create the conditions that will support research production and use within the partnership. Together, this group of activities is focused more on developing the capacity for individuals that will make up the RPP to effectively partner. The second set of components instead focus on the necessary "invisible" structures that the partnership itself will be built on. In this bucket, we include: (i) governance and administration: the brokering activities necessary to develop partnership governance and administrative structures; (ii) process and communication: the activities necessary for designing partnership processes and communications routines; and (iii) assessment and continuous improvement: the activities necessary to support the assessment and continuous improvement of the RPP.

How to Use the Handbook

For users of the Handbook, we recommend reading through the different components of the framework first (page 6), to get a sense for which types of activities tend to constitute "RPP brokering". We then invite readers to dive into the numerous examples, tools, and vignettes curated for the Handbook to better understand how the components of the framework work in practice. These real-world examples can be especially helpful for guiding RPP brokers in their own practice, especially when concrete actions might be needed.

Coming Next

We have two follow-up initiatives on the horizon for this effort: first, we are in the process of writing an open source version of the Handbook that will be published in the next year. Second, we have completed a pilot version of the RPP Brokers Workshop through NNERPP and are now preparing to offer a live version soon. Please stay tuned!

In the meantime, if you find yourself engaging in RPP brokering activities and would like to contribute an example, case study, vignette, or tool that may be featured in the upcoming published version of the Handbook, please reach out to Laura Wentworth (laura@caedpartners.org) for more information.

Happy brokering!

- *Paula Arce-Trigatti is Director of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP).*

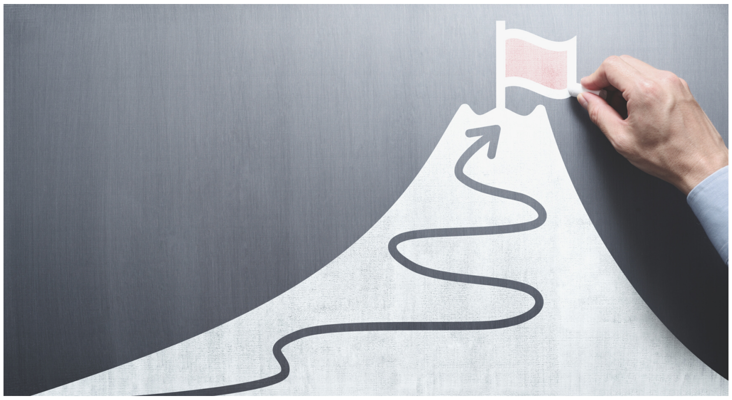
Improving Improvement: How Districts Perceive Improvement Supports

By David Hersh I Proving Ground

This is the eighth installment of Improving Improvement, our quarterly series focused on leveraging the power of research-practice partnerships (RPPs) to build schools', districts', and states' capacity to improve. Last school year, we dove into the questions we hoped to answer, reflected on how to answer those questions, and evaluate the success of improvement efforts, and shared one big reflection on the biggest barrier to improvement for our partners.

In this installment, we examine another big question: To what degree has our partners' capacity to improve increased over the last 5 years? We recently surveyed all of our partners, past and present, to get at exactly this question. Here, we discuss the results –and limits– of this survey.

A Refresher on How We Define Success



Back in our December installment of this series, we shared how we determine whether an improvement effort we are supporting is succeeding. In defining success, we wrote that "Success for us... means our partners hav[e] institutionalized the practice of continuous improvement so thoroughly that they continue practicing the core competencies of improvement with fidelity for all strategically aligned problems of practice long after our engagement ends." We identified 9 core competencies [1] that make up our definition of evidence-based continuous improvement and leading indicators of success to look for in three phases:

> Phase 1: Do our partners execute a high-quality improvement cycle while working with us? How well did they execute each competency and to what degree was the decision outcome-optimizing?
> Phase 2: Based on their work with us, how confident are we that they are able to do this without us – can they generalize from the model we worked on together to other problems of practice? Additionally, how confident are we that they are willing to do this without us – have we created the internal demand?
> Phase 3: Are they doing this after our engagement ends? How well and for how many of their strategic priorities?

Most of our available data from the survey informs Phase 1 and Phase 2 questions. We can begin drawing some inferences about Phase 3 questions, but do not yet have data collection set up for a thorough analysis.

A Little Proving Ground History

As we consider the data we have available to answer the questions in each phase, we need to take into account that how we support our partners in selecting, piloting, testing, and scaling solutions to their problems has evolved substantially over time.

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Improving Improvement: How Districts Perceive Improvement Supports, continued

This is true both in terms of the delivery model partners experienced, the skills we have covered, and the tools we provided. Practicing what we preach, we have been iterating on our model as we've seen partners engage with it. For example, after our initial cohort of partners, our hunch was that they were not well positioned to continue using the process without us. We therefore revised both the content and our delivery to better support authentic capacity building and make the process easier to execute without us. We would, therefore, expect more recent partners to be trending better on our measures of improvement capacity than where our initial cohort was at a similar stage in their engagement with us.

Our first cohort of partners –all of whom were working on improving attendance– experienced intensive one-to-one support from a single coach who conducted three in-person workshops at each partner site each year, with bi-weekly phone check-ins in between, for at least three years. The coach facilitated all sessions live with paper and pen or sticky notes and sharpies. Proving Ground analysts conducted partners' diagnostics on their behalf, and there was intensive support for root cause analysis, intervention prioritization, pilot design, implementation planning, impact analysis –which Proving Ground analysts conducted– and decision-making. Intervention design support was added in their second year. We provided limited support around the other core competencies, most of which were added to the process only later in our engagement with them. Finally, while partners were always members of a network, Proving Ground operated as the hub connecting them, with our annual convening the only built-in opportunity for partners to directly engage with each other.

By contrast, our current partners may experience one of two delivery models, both of which are primarily virtual and both of which are far more partner-led than what the first cohort experienced. For all partners, we provide at least one session for each competency. The 3 site visits a year have been replaced by 9 core Zoom sessions over two years. In each of the delivery models, a Proving Ground coach supports each partner, but rather than leading activities for the partner, our coaches model each activity then provide support and feedback as each partner leads it themselves. The majority of the improvement tools we use now allow for synchronous and asynchronous digital collaboration and we provide intensive support on all competencies. For our intrastate model, in which districts within a state move through the process as a cohort, partners participate in joint workshops with their colleagues from other districts. For our classic model, workshops remain one-to-one. Finally, while we continue hosting an annual convening and the intrastate cohort model naturally provides more opportunities for partners to connect with colleagues in other districts, all partners now also have access to every other partner in the network through a Proving Ground-hosted Slack Workspace and optional, monthly meetings.

We have had several partners experience multiple versions of the service. For example, one partner participated in the initial attendance cohort and is now participating in our classic, one-to-one model to improve math outcomes for elementary and middle school students.

Our hypothesis is that current partners experiencing more ownership of the process and more frequent engagement with and detailed support for all competencies will be better positioned to do continuous improvement work by themselves. We also hypothesize that they would be more engaged and likely to want to continue doing the work after our engagement ends, though there is a fair argument that the opposite might be the case (e.g. if they don't enjoy the work, the more comprehensive approach might reduce the degree to which partners take ownership of the process).

Preliminary Findings from our Partners' Self-Reports

This summer, we surveyed all of our current and past partners, primarily to get a sense for how they perceive the improvement

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Improving Improvement: How Districts Perceive Improvement Supports, continued

supports we have provided so far. Questions ranged from (1) how much partners valued each activity or tool in the process (some competencies comprise multiple activities), to (2) whether the process helped them get better at the competencies, to (3) their likelihood of engaging in the activity –or using the corresponding tools– in the future. All questions were on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. For each question, we also invited open-ended feedback. The data thus largely inform Phase 1 and 2 questions, but we can also generate some hypotheses about Phase 3 questions. There are limits to the conclusions we can draw about agency-level learning and adoption of the practices we train them on, since respondents answered the survey as individuals and not as representatives of their agency.

Who took the survey?

Not surprisingly, we had a better response rate from current partners. Of 32 individual responses, 28 were from current partners while 4 were from past partners. The 32 respondents represent 20 partners, 16 current and 4 past. We thus have responses from participants of half of our 8 past partners and nearly 90% of current partners (16 of 18). Most partners had only one respondent, but 40% (8 partners) had multiple respondents.

Overall Findings

Our partners have generally found all of the tools and activities valuable. Of the 14 tools and activities covering the 7 competencies that nearly all our partners have already engaged with –many partners have not yet gotten to the decision-making and goal reflection competencies yet– the lowest rated had 75% of respondents agree that it was valuable. For most tools and activities, 80% of respondents found them valuable, with the highest rated generating 100% agreement. Several activities garnered strong agreement from over half of participants. The qualitative responses echoed this. For example, one respondent shared, "The total planning process has been a great experience and we have been introduced to a number of useful planning tools that have generated rich discussions within our group." Another wrote, "We found all the tools to be extremely helpful. Additionally, the facilitation was exceptional." Participants also seemed to appreciate the intrastate cohort models' facilitation of cross-district collaboration: "I…most appreciate learning from other districts."

With respect to the Phase 2 questions of whether partners have built capacity to use the activities / tools and are likely to continue using them in the future (and for past partners, the Phase 3 question of whether they continue executing the process), the results are more nuanced. We have been generally successful at building partners' perceptions of their own capacity. Nearly 80% of respondents agreed that "the PG process has helped [them] improve [their] team's continuous improvement… efforts," and nearly 85% feel they are better equipped to do so. At a competency level the results are similar. For example, a large majority agreed that they were better equipped to understand their challenges (>90%) and to identify potential solutions (~84%). The qualitative responses suggest one of the greatest successes is in challenging existing problem

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Improving Improvement: How Districts Perceive Improvement Supports, continued

solving approaches. For example, participants shared, “it is very systematic. It also makes you not jump straight to what you think a solution to the problem might be before you really dive into the why.” Others said, “the process forces us to look at issues more objectively and challenge assumptions about why things are a certain way.” At least half of participants –and in some cases over 80%– indicated they were likely to continue engaging in a given activity in the future.

On the other hand, fewer participants were likely to continue doing each activity than valued the activity. The gap was generally around ten percentage points for agreement and larger for strong agreement. The activity-level responses are consistent with the reflections on the overall Proving Ground process. While nearly 86% of respondents agreed that they felt better equipped to do this work, a bit fewer (80%) indicated that they were likely to use the process overall to address other challenges. Likewise, just over one in three stated that they had applied it to another problem to date, though some of this is a product of how early many partners are in the process. Nevertheless, the results suggest that we’ve had some success but we also have more work to do before we can be confident that partners will continue executing this process after our engagements end. While our hypothesis is that institutional disincentives and the degree to which this process runs counter to some individuals’ instincts remain barriers to sustained adoption of this process, the qualitative responses suggest that time may be the biggest barrier to continuing this work, at least for the few not agreeing that they would continue many of the activities. Said one, “A district could never replicate this process due to the amount of time and manpower required.” Said another, “Too many steps from vision to execution.”

Past vs. Current Partners

The number of past respondents is small enough –and the likelihood of non-response bias high enough– that we hesitate to draw any conclusions from differences in responses between past and current partners. That said, there is little evidence to support our hypothesis that we were less successful with past partners than current ones. The former participants that responded were more likely to agree that the process helped improve their teams improvement efforts (100% to 75%), similarly likely to agree that they were better equipped to engage in continuous improvement work (75% to 85%) and similarly likely to agree that they are likely to use this for other problems and challenges (75% to 79%). As expected, former participants were more likely to say that they had already used the process on other problems and challenges than current partners (75% vs. 29%).

Takeaways

The data from our recent survey serves as one of many sets of data points we will use to learn whether we are achieving Proving Ground’s goals. Despite its limits, the survey informs our questions in several ways. First, our partners generally value the process overall and the tools and support we provide. This suggests that a key element of engagement is present. Similarly, though we cannot objectively say from this data whether our partners are actually building capacity to the degree we want them to, they agree that they are learning, with a large majority of participants agreeing that their teams are getting better at parts or all of the process. On the other hand, although the intent to continue the process is relatively high, agreement rates are lower than valuation and self-reported capacity change. Thus, despite some successes, our efforts to ensure partners continue systematically solving problems after our engagements end likely need to be improved. The barriers our partners identified, most notably the time the process takes relative to how little they have, suggest a good place to start.

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Improving Improvement: How Districts Perceive Improvement Supports, continued

Looking Ahead

Reflecting on what we've done so far, the Proving Ground team took a step back to refine the Core Values that drive our work and we continue iterating on the service we provide. In upcoming installments of Improving Improvement, we will discuss our Core Values and early learnings from the launch of a new service delivery model called Proving Ground Jumpstart and share more detailed updates on the progress of our intrastate networks, the Georgia Improvement Network, the Rhode Island LEAP Support Network, and the new Ohio Improvement Network, including lessons learned from partnering with states to support districts on their improvement journeys.

We are also always open to additional suggestions for topics for future editions of Improving Improvement. Reach out to us with any questions you have about our networks, continuous improvement process, or ideas you'd like to see us tackle.

David Hersh (david_hersh@gse.harvard.edu) is Director of Proving Ground.

[1] The 9 core competencies are:

1. Clearly define the problem and set an improvement goal for it
2. Identify root causes
3. Identify a set of potential interventions aligned to the root causes
4. Prioritize a potential intervention from that set to try
5. Design the intervention using user-centered design principles
6. Plan for implementation and progress monitoring
7. Pilot to generate evidence of impact
8. Use evidence from the pilot to decide whether to stop, scale or adapt
9. Reflect on the results in light of your improvement goal

Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter

ANTI-RACISM

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP
describes formation of an antiracist learning community

ASSESSMENTS

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines Arkansas' NAEP scores

COMPUTER SCIENCE

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS
examines equity in Computer Science access and participation in NYC schools

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

REL SOUTHWEST
develops toolkit to support the development of practical measurement instruments for use in NICs

COVID-19

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION EQUITY & RESEARCH
examines Detroit parents' attitudes on COVID-19 prevention strategies in schools

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines
--Michigan education leaders' perspectives on leading and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic
--perspectives of district, school, and teacher leaders on best practices for supporting student learning during COVID-19
--students' progress on Michigan's benchmark assessments between fall '20 & spring '22

GEORGIA POLICY LABS
examines how concentration rates in CTE changed at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines student engagement in learning during COVID-19

CURRICULUM

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines what resources Michigan elementary teachers use for English Language Arts instruction

DUAL LANGUAGE ENGAGEMENT

ORANGE COUNTY EDUCATION ADVANCEMENT NETWORK
examines dual-language engagement among multilingual parents, students, and teachers

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BALTIMORE EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines kindergarten readiness in Baltimore

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines preliminary Read by Grade Three retention estimates

GEORGIA POLICY LABS
examines impacts of attending a school-based Georgia pre-k site

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines pre-k choice and school readiness

ILLINOIS WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE
examines Illinois early childhood programs

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK
examines what a more equitable post-pandemic early care and education system could look like

ENGLISH AND MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK
examines instructional practices and supports of emergent multilingual learners in NYC's universal Pre-K

REL SOUTHWEST
examines effects of reclassifying English Learner students on student achievement in New Mexico

FAMILY PERSPECTIVES

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines parent perspectives on education-related topics

HIGH SCHOOL

PHILADELPHIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines
--changing requirements in Pennsylvania for high school graduation

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Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter

HIGH SCHOOL, continued

PHILADELPHIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines, continued
--implications of new graduation requirements in the School District of Philadelphia

INSTRUCTION

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines competency-based education in Michigan

MENTAL HEALTH

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP
examines integration of mental health systems and family-school-community collaboration within multi-tiered /level systems of support

POLICING

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS
examines the effects of neighborhood policing on high school graduation rates

POSTSECONDARY

REL SOUTHWEST
examines costs of Texas community colleges

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines key trends and outcomes in student discipline in the Arkansas public schools

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION EQUITY & RSRCH
reconceptualizes the relationship between school transportation and educational access using a mobility justice frame

SCHOOL TURNAROUND

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines the implementation of Michigan's partnership model of school reform through its fourth year

SCHOOL TURNAROUND, continued

REL SOUTHWEST
examines effects of a district-managed restart strategy for low-performing schools in Texas

STUDENT MOBILITY

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines alternatives for measuring continuous enrollment and student mobility

STUDENTS

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines a tool for increasing the diversity of gifted and talented programs

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines elementary school students' grades, attendance, and future outcomes

TEACHERS

ILLINOIS WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE examines
--support staff shortages
--why educators leave the profession

REL SOUTHWEST
examines early progress and outcomes of a grow your own grant program in Texas

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS
evaluates the impact of New York City's teacher and school leaders program

TECHNOLOGY

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines how cell phones should be used in schools

End Notes

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