



NNERPP
EXTRA

VOL. 5(2) | JUNE 2023

Delivering Fresh Ideas From the Intersection of Education Research, Policy & Practice



By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER EDITION

Welcome to the second edition of Volume 5 of NNERPP Extra! We are excited to share our summer edition with you, which includes four new articles: First up, a reflection by CAFÉCS about their partnership research on the impacts of a computer science graduation requirement; next, we share a community-wide reflection examining how our members think about and engage in policy-related work; following that we revisit the essentials of establishing an RPP; and finally, we are honored to share a special op-ed calling for critical reflection and action in structuring research conferences. A special thank you goes to our wonderful guest authors who contributed to this issue.

Happy reading!

NNERPP | Extra Online

Be sure to check out the NNERPP | 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](https://twitter.com/RPP_Network).

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OVERVIEW

THE RESEARCH ARTIFACT

[“Impact of the CPS Computer Science Graduation Policy on Student Access and Outcomes”](#)
By Steven McGee, Lucia Dettori, and Andrew Rasmussen (2022)

THE RPP: MISSION

The [Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science \(CAFÉCS\)](#) is an RPP among [Chicago Public Schools \(CPS\)](#) teachers and administrators, university computer science faculty from [University of Illinois at Chicago](#), [DePaul University](#), and [Loyola University Chicago](#), and educational researchers from [The Learning Partnership](#) and [Partner to Improve](#). **CAFÉCS places the accent on equity to emphasize our computer science education goals for CPS. CAFÉCS focuses on research and**

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development that enables CPS to ensure that all students in CPS participate in engaging, relevant, and rigorous computing experiences, to increase opportunities for all students to pursue computing pathways, and to prepare all students for the future of work.

THE RPP: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

In 2009, CPS computer science teacher Don Yanek, district administrator Brenda Wilkerson, and three university computer scientists, Lucia Dettori (DePaul University), Ron Greenberg (Loyola University Chicago), and Dale Reed (University of Illinois Chicago) came together to collaborate on a shared goal: to provide all CPS students access to compelling and relevant computer science experiences. At the time, the nation was experiencing a dramatic decrease in the number of college graduates majoring in computer science (McGee et al., 2013). For several years, the group explored various options for supporting computer science in CPS. **In 2011, the team identified the [Exploring Computer Science \(ECS\) program](#), which includes curriculum and teacher professional development, as a promising option** (Goode et al., 2014; Margolis et al., 2012). Three teachers traveled to Los Angeles in the summer of 2011 to participate in the ECS professional development in preparation for a pilot test of the program in Chicago. The professional development uses a Teacher-Learner-Observer model followed by a debrief allowing teachers to reflect and discuss the impact of equity and inquiry strategies in the lesson. ECS was developed for the Los Angeles public schools. **In 2012, CPS became the first school district to adopt the ECS program outside of Los Angeles** (Reed et al., 2015). At the time, computer science programs and curricula in public school districts were nascent. Since that time, ECS has expanded to at least 34 states and Puerto Rico, including the seven largest school districts, as well as some rural locations and reservations.

In parallel, the group sought funding to scale up ECS professional development in Chicago. The first collaborative grant from the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#)—Taste of Computing—was awarded to the group in 2011 (Dettori et al., 2011). As part of this grant, Steven McGee of The Learning Partnership joined the collaborative to support the research and evaluation activities. CAFÉCS research on the initial implementation of ECS provided preliminary evidence of the benefits of ECS as the foundational course for high school computer science pathways. Not only does ECS support equivalent outcomes regardless of students' race/ethnicity and gender (McGee, McGee-Tekula, Duck, McGee, et al., 2018), it also equivalently increases interest in pursuing additional computer science coursework (McGee, McGee-Tekula, Duck, Dettori, et al., 2018). As the ECS program spread to more CPS schools, the mayor's office and CPS launched the CS4All initiative in 2013 to expand computer science opportunities across all grade levels in Chicago (Zumbach, 2013). A goal of the CPS CS4All initiative was to provide computer science courses in every high school and work towards incorporating computer science into high school graduation requirements (City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor, 2013). After four years of pilot

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implementation of ECS, **CPS became the first school district in the nation to enact a high school computer science graduation requirement**, with ECS serving as the foundational course for the requirement. Students either had to complete a yearlong computer science class or apply for a waiver if they were participating in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, or a similar career-oriented or college prep program. Although less than half of the high schools in CPS offered any computer science at the time, CAFÉCS research showing the benefit of ECS as a foundational course (described above) provided the Board with confidence that the ECS curriculum and professional development could spread to all high schools in CPS.

When NSF launched the CS4All RPP program, the Chicago team received one of the first two large grants awarded, and **CAFÉCS was formalized as an official RPP in 2017**. At that time, Partner to Improve (led by Erin Henrick) joined the partnership as the external evaluator. Starting in October 2017, the goal of CAFÉCS was to understand and address variation in the implementation of ECS across CPS. In 2019, CAFÉCS joined NNERPP. In 2021, Kristan Beck became the 4th director of the Office of Computer Science in CPS.

WHY THIS WORK

In June 2020 and June 2021, more than fourteen thousand students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) graduated each year with one year of high school computer science credit in fulfillment of CPS' computer science graduation requirement. With the graduation of the first two cohorts of CPS students subject to the graduation requirement, the time was right for CAFÉCS to undertake a systematic analysis of the state of computer science in CPS as well as the full impact of the graduation requirement.

WHAT THE WORK EXAMINES

Previous Preliminary Evidence of the Benefits of ECS

The CAFÉCS analysis of the impact of CPS's CS graduation requirement builds on previous partnership work exploring the benefits of the ECS course: CAFÉCS research found that ECS not only supports equivalent outcomes regardless of students' race/ethnicity and gender (McGee, McGee- Tekula, Duck, McGee, et al., 2018), it also equivalently increases interest in pursuing additional computer science coursework (McGee, McGee-Tekula, Duck, Dettori, et al., 2018). The participation of African American and Latinx students in Advanced Placement (AP) computer science doubled two years after the graduation requirement was enacted. African American and Latinx students were 1.5 times more likely to have taken ECS prior to their AP class than white and Asian students (Boda & McGee, 2021). ECS also serves as effective preparation for AP CS A, as the students who took ECS prior to AP CS A were 3.5 times more likely to pass

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the AP exam with a score of 3 or higher than those who did not take ECS first (Boda & McGee, 2021).

Both previous and current CAFÉCS research priorities are shaped by the problems of practice facing the CPS Office of Computer Science, as identified and shared by Office of Computer Science staff. CAFÉCS uses a variety of meeting formats to foster collaboration in its weekly meetings. In the early days of CAFÉCS, the entire collaborative met monthly to support implementation of the graduation requirement; now, we meet on an ad hoc basis. During the meetings of the entire collaborative, CPS leaders share the district priorities for computer science and the CAFÉCS team aligns its activities to the priorities of CPS. When CPS identifies problems of practice, CAFÉCS addresses them through a collaborative problem-solving cycle (Lewis et al., 2022) involving six stages:

- (1) CPS leaders identify a problem they are facing.
- (2) CAFÉCS partners brainstorm hypotheses during meetings of the entire collaborative.
- (3) The CAFÉCS leadership team filters and prioritizes the hypotheses to test during the weekly meetings.
- (4) The research team engages in data analysis.
- (5) The research team shares the results in both leadership team meetings and in meetings of the entire collaborative.
- (6) The results inform both the Office of Computer Science strategies and the CAFÉCS research agenda.

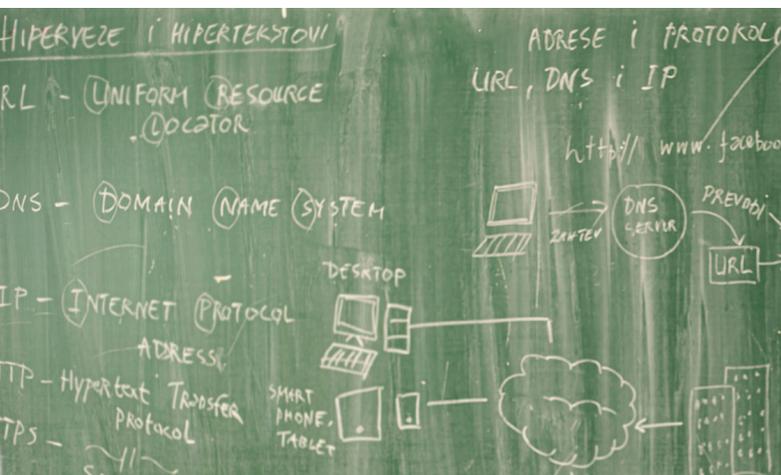
This problem-solving cycle was used in CAFÉCS research exploring factors that correlate with students failing the ECS class (McGee et al., 2018). The results pointed to the importance of ECS professional development for ECS teachers in reducing the course failure rate. CPS computer science integration specialists used these results in communicating with principals about the importance of the ECS professional development. The results also laid the foundation of further research and development around high-quality credit recovery (Johnson et al., 2022).

Exploring the Impact of the CS Graduation Requirement

After the second cohort of students subject to the computer science graduation requirement graduated from CPS, CAFÉCS launched an evaluation of the graduation requirement, funded by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) Group Foundation. In summer 2022, The Learning Partnership established a summer fellowship program for advanced graduate students and early career researchers (also funded by the CME Group Foundation) to conduct this analysis on the impact of CPS's CS graduation requirement. The fellowship program provided an opportunity to get an external examination of the impact while at the same time to provide early career researchers with exposure to partnership work. A national search was conducted, and six fellows were invited to participate through a competitive selection process. As part of the 8-week fellowship, the fellows

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attended an initial 3-day orientation session in June 2022 in Chicago. The orientation included a discussion with the CAFÉCS leadership team and members of the Office of Computer Science at CPS. After the orientation, the fellows worked remotely to conduct their analyses. They had weekly virtual check-ins with The Learning Partnership, and also had access to one of three quantitative mentors who met with the fellows virtually twice during the summer and provided feedback. The fellows also met remotely with staff from the Office of Computer Science at the midpoint of their analyses to get feedback. At the end of the fellowship in August, the fellows participated in a symposium [event](#) that served as a celebration of the success of the graduation requirement (Dettori et al., 2022).



The CAPE framework (Fletcher & Warner, 2021) provided the conceptual framing guiding the impact evaluation of the graduation requirement. In particular, each letter in “CAPE” stands for a dimension of work that needs to be attended to in support of a specific aim. In our case, for example, to ensure that CPS supports equal access to and course performance in computer science, the district needs to develop **C**apacity for schools to offer computer science, increase **A**ccess to computer science, ensure equal **P**articipation, and then examine how computer science **E**xperiences lead to equal outcomes. Applying this framework, the six fellows conducted analyses related to different aspects of the following four research questions:

- (1) How did CPS's **Capacity** to offer computer science change after the graduation requirement was enacted?
- (2) How did **Access** to computer science courses change after the graduation requirement was enacted?
- (3) How did **Participation** in computer science change after the graduation requirement was enacted?
- (4) How consistent were the student **Experiences** in and outcomes from their computer science courses before and after the enactment of the graduation requirement?

HOW HAS THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS' COMPUTER SCIENCE GRADUATION REQUIREMENT IMPACTED STUDENTS?, CONTINUED

FINDINGS

The summer fellows presented the following results across all four dimensions of the CAPE framework:

(1) CAFÉCS research provided evidence of the key role that teachers play in the success of students in computer science (McGee, Greenberg, et al., 2018). Lack of qualified computer science teachers restricts schools' **Capacity** to offer computer science. The ECS professional development program supported a rapid expansion of school **Capacity** after the enactment of the graduation requirement by increasing the number of qualified computer science teachers. At the time the graduation requirement was enacted, roughly half of the schools did not offer any computer science and 2/3 did not have sufficient capacity to support computer science for all students. Larger schools with fewer low-income students and a strong college-going climate were more likely to offer computer science just before the enactment of the graduation requirement. By the time the first cohort graduated, almost 90% of high schools had sufficient capacity to offer computer science to all students.

(2) There was a statistically significant increase in **Access** to computer science after the computer science graduation requirement. All high schools offered computer science by the time that the first cohort graduated.

(3) There was a statistically significant

increase in **Participation** in computer science across all demographic groups after the graduation requirement. By the time the second cohort graduated after the requirement, the demographics of students taking computer science matched the demographics of the district.

(4) Students' **Experiences** with ECS led to equivalent course performance between students taking ECS before and after the enactment of the graduation requirement. The number of students pursuing computer science pathways in CPS doubled after the enactment of the graduation requirement.

At the celebration event, two Black female CPS high school students shared their experiences with ECS:

"I would absolutely consider continuing this and not just because it's very good at helping me out with computer science, also it's the way that they taught it. It actually took time for me to understand it because even though I love computer science, I was struggling in the beginning but it was always the different ways they would explain it and the different ways that they would backtrack and make sure everyone understood. It's definitely something I would want to continue not just for computer science but also some kids as they said beforehand you actually have an opinion and you actually do have a voice and it may take time but you will understand." - CPS sophomore computer science student

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“The words “computer” and “science” together can give some people the wrong impression. I would have to say to take the class seriously and to actually try to enjoy it. At first learning all the different code blocks can seem confusing but once you actually get it, it’s a pretty fun class. I would definitely tell them to try and enjoy it.” - CPS sophomore computer science student

IMPACT AND USE OF THE WORK

The analyses conducted by the summer fellows provided an opportunity for the community to celebrate the success of the computer science graduation requirement. DePaul University hosted a hybrid event in which the fellows presented the results of their analyses interspersed with opportunities for CPS administrators, teachers, and students to share how the graduation requirement has impacted them (Dettori et al., 2022). The development of the report also provided an opportunity for CAFÉCS to reflect on the strategies they used to support the enactment and implementation of the graduation requirement. CAFÉCS identified four key strategies for enabling sustainable change in school districts, which are organized into the **PROSPER framework** (Programs, Research, Organizational Structure, and Policy for Equitable Results):

(1) **Programs:** CAFÉCS impacted the selection and implementation of computer science programs

(2) **Research:** CAFÉCS conducted research to understand and address problems of practice facing the Office of Computer Science

(3) **Organizational Structure:** CAFÉCS funding impacted organizational structures in CPS

(4) **Policy:** CAFÉCS impacted the enactment and implementation of the district graduation requirement policy. The successful implementation of the graduation requirement has increased **Equitable Results** in computer science education in CPS by expanding capacity, access, and participation leading to equitable experiences

This research may serve as a blueprint for other districts who are pursuing computer science access for all students. One consistent theme across all of the findings is the important role that teachers played in the success of the initiative: Teachers are the most important ingredient for ensuring that schools have the capacity to offer computer science courses that lead to equivalent course experiences for all students. Access to computer science was constrained by the availability of qualified teachers. In addition, the consistency of student outcomes before and after the implementation of the graduation requirement rested upon the consistency and quality of the professional development. CPS was able to achieve success in the implementation of the graduation requirement policy because the district focused on expanding access to high quality professional development, leading to an increase in the number of qualified teachers as

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a means to build school capacity to offer computer science. Likewise, for school districts considering enacting a policy like a high school computer science graduation requirement, it is essential that districts have a plan for capacity building before enacting such a significant policy, given the critical role teachers play.

OPEN QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

After the release of the report, members of the research team met with the entire Department of Computer Science to discuss the results of the analyses and next steps. Two major interrelated open questions emerged from the discussion:

- (1) Given that one of the mechanisms by which students can secure a waiver from the computer science requirement is through participation in career & technical education (CTE) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, members of the Department of Computer Science raised concerns around the possibility that there may be inequitable access to advanced computer science coursework at schools offering CTE information technology pathways. How does the waiver process impact equity of access to computer science?
- (2) A second observation emerged around possible barriers to access. In particular, schools with higher percentages of Black/African American students are less likely to offer an AP computer science course. What additional factors affect access to and experience of advanced computer science coursework?

CAFÉCS will host summer fellows in 2023 to investigate these open questions.

This article was written by members of the [CAFÉCS](#) leadership team: Andrew Rasmussen is Miscellaneous Employee at [Chicago Public Schools](#); Kristan Beck is Director of Computer Science at [Chicago Public Schools Department of Computer Science](#); Don Yanek is a teacher at [Mather High School](#); Steven McGee is President at [The Learning Partnership](#); Lucia Dettori is Interim Dean at [DePaul University](#); Ronald Greenberg is Professor of Computer Science at [Loyola University](#); Dale Reed is Clinical Professor in Computer Science at [University of Illinois Chicago](#); and Erin Henrick is President of [Partner to Improve](#).

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DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO 'POLICY'? HOW RPPs ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK

By Nina Spitzley | NNERPP, with NNERPP members



"I don't think research-practice partnerships (RPPs) do any policy work since the 'P' in RPP stands for 'practice' and not 'policy'."

Over the past year, we have found ourselves in a number of conversations where this assumption has surfaced. Interestingly, we have also seen a few renaming efforts recently where the label "RPP" has been expanded to include a third "P", as in research-practice-policy partnerships ("RP3").

What is fascinating about both of these developments is that as far as we can tell—based on NNERPP membership—, a sizable majority of RPPs actually engage heavily in policy-related work, despite the name suggesting otherwise. To check our understanding, we invited our membership to reflect with us and further explore what the "practice" in "research-practice partnership" really refers to. Let's dive in!

THE RPPers REFLECTING WITH US

To explore these questions, we turned to the NNERPP community, inviting RPPers from the diverse group of partnerships (in terms of structure, size, age, involved partners, and research foci) that make up the network to share their thoughts on five open-ended questions about policy and/or practice in RPPs. We received responses from fifteen RPPs, three of which were submitted by a team of RPPers replying together, and four of which were submitted anonymously.

We posed the following initial survey questions to our group of RPPers:

[1] How does your team define the word "practice" in research-practice partnerships? What does that word mean to you?

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

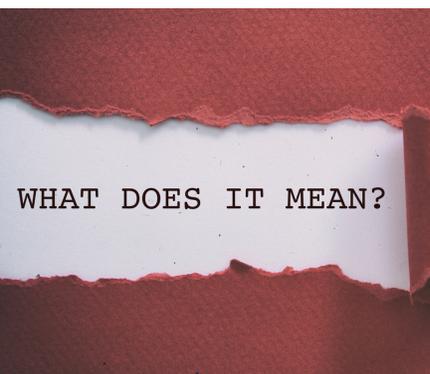
[2] Does your team engage in policy-related work? How so?

[3] What percentage of your work falls into policy-related work (if you are able to quantify this)?

[4] What boundaries (if any) do you see between “practice-related” efforts and “policy-related” efforts in your RPP? Are the boundaries blurred or firm?

[5] Are there any other comments or thoughts you would like to share?

Below we share a synthesis and discussion of what our group of RPPers shared and the themes that emerged.



HOW DOES YOUR TEAM DEFINE THE “PRACTICE” IN RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS?

We began our exploration by asking those doing RPP work to reflect on and share what “practice” actually means to them, since the inclusion of the word “practice” rather than or without being followed by the word “policy” seems to be the root of the assumption we have been fielding. In sharing how their teams define and think about the word “practice” in research-practice partnerships, our RPPers shared overall similar responses and yet placed an emphasis on three different elements: Some defined practice as mostly an action, namely that of enacting and implementing; some tied practice more closely to people and place; and some emphasized the close connection between practice and policy in their answers. These three elements can certainly be related, which is why we characterize them here as three points of emphasis rather than distinct definitions.

[1] Practice = Enacting or implementing

Here, respondents focused on enacting and implementing when talking about the “practice” part of RPPs: As one respondent wrote, “practice is tied to implementation and direct services” (anonymous). Meg Bates from the [Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative](#) put it as follows: “‘Practice’ simply means putting the research to use in some real way.” Here, she emphasizes the connection between research and practice, adding “I don’t even like separating us and our partners as ‘researchers’ or ‘practitioners’ because, in our partnership, we can both be engaged in research activities and both be thinking about ‘practical use’ of the research.” Similarly, the [Institute for School Partnership](#) team

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

pointed to the research-practice connection, saying: “Our work blurs the line between research and practice making it difficult to tease apart.” The team then offered a definition of practice that is more closely tied to people and place, which we examine in the next paragraph.

[2] Practice = Tied to people and place

Another set of responses pointed more directly to the people (such as district leaders) that do the enacting and implementing and the places where they do so (such as schools and other organizations). For example, the team from the Institute for School Partnership shared their definition of practice as follows: “From a practical perspective, we are interested in improving and supporting the practice of educating students at every level – from teacher professional learning and curriculum development to classroom pedagogy to school or district systems, staffing, policies and procedures, all of which layer together to create the learning environment.” Pati Ruiz from [Districts Helping Districts: Scaling Inclusive Computational Thinking Pathways](#), shared that “practice for us refers to those in the districts and schools doing the work of developing and implementing Computational Thinking pathways,” while another respondent similarly defined practice as “how practitioners enact their work in schools – it’s where the design of a role or program gets implemented” (anonymous). In the same vein, another respondent shared that to them, “practice means those with student and educator facing functions, and making decisions that impact districts, schools, educators and students” (anonymous) and another says that “[practice] typically refers to our district-side partners, which would include anyone connected to the district” (anonymous). The [Partnership for Early Education Research](#) team (Joanna Meyer, Michael Strambler, and Clare Waterman) shared their perspective: “[Practice means] those whose primary role consists of implementing and/or supporting the implementation of education programs, including educators, education administrators, and policy-makers.”

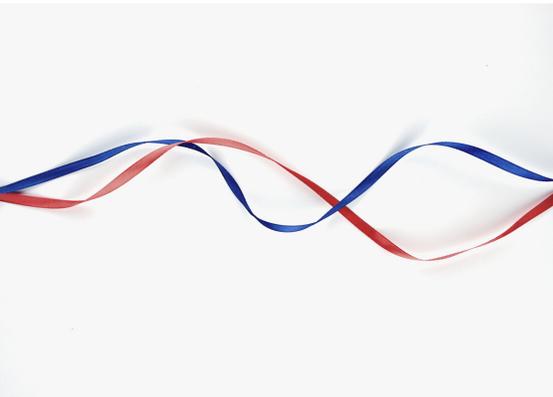
Similarly, Laura Wentworth from the [Stanford-SFUSD Partnership](#) wrote: “In our context, it means the school district leaders and their connections to the network of community members (e.g., teachers, parents, students, city officials, etc.)” Jesse Senechal from the [Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium](#) says: “We define practice as the non university-side partners. In the narrowest sense, our definition of ‘practice’ includes school-based professionals (teachers, non instructional staff, counselors, social workers, etc.) and central office personnel.” Jesse adds that other non-university partners are often part of partnership projects as well and are thus increasingly understood to also be part of the practice-side, including community-side partners (such as students and parents) and local policy makers, “primarily school board members.” Dale Reed from the [Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science](#) defines practice as “meeting the needs of our customers, the higher ed professors and the students, teachers, and administrators in the school districts we serve,” interestingly including university professors in his “people and place”-tied definition. Finally, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg understands practice as an “existing or co-developed goal/mission for the organizations that provide educational intervention.”

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

[3] Practice = Policy

While some of these definitions hint at a connection between practice and policy, another set of definitions draws more explicit connections, understanding policy to be part of the definition of practice. David Naff from the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium began with a people / place definition, defining practice as “anything happening at the K-12 school-building level,” but then added that “practices tend to represent the actual implementation of written policies, although policy and practice are not always directly aligned.” Elaine Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, and David Stevens from the [UChicago Consortium on School Research](#) similarly point to a strong enough connection between practice and policy that leads them to include both in their definition of the word “practice” in RPPs: “We consider school-level practice and district policies that influence practice to be intertwined.” Lindsay Weixler from the [New Orleans Collaborative for Early Childhood Research](#) shares a similar perspective: “Practice is everything that directly affects people’s lives and experiences – policy, curriculum, family supports, programs, etc.”

Our fourth survey question more directly examines how our respondents think about the boundaries (if any) between “practice-related” efforts and “policy-related” efforts in their RPP, and we will get to that soon, but we do wish to note here how interesting it is that a number of respondents already understand both practice and policy to be part of what the word “practice” in “research-practice partnership” means.



DOES YOUR TEAM HOW RPPs ENGAGE IN POLICY-RELATED WORK?

Now that we have examined some ways in which different RPPs and RPPers think about the “practice” part of RPPs, let’s dive into the question of whether and how our group of respondents engaging in policy-related work in their respective partnerships. From our collection of respondents, only one reported their RPP not engaging in policy-related work. In the remaining responses, we found four ways partnerships are engaging in policy-related work (and note that

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

these are not mutually exclusive and most partnerships are engaging in more than one of these approaches).

[1] Informing policy through partnership research

A number of RPPers shared that their partnerships are engaging in policy-related work by impacting or informing policy through partnership research. Some respondents mentioned this being the case at specific levels, such as at the state level, the district policy level, or the school policy level. One anonymous respondent shared, “For us, policy-related work is related to the implications of our work – what does research on practice or implementation tell us about how policies at district, state, or city-levels might need to be changed?”, and another said, “Yes, [we engage in policy work] by providing information relevant to those making decisions on education policy and programs.” One RPPer similarly responded, “our RPPs are interested in affecting district policies so that the policies are evidence-based” and added that the partnerships also sometimes work to inform local government and city policy but don’t do much work related to state and federal policy. While saying that their research doesn’t take policy stances, the Institute for School Partnership team pointed out that research findings can “shine a light on issues that are impacted by policy, such as potential impacts of the 4-day school week on science instructional time.”

Meg Bates (Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative) pointed to the connection between policy-related work and practice by saying: “Most of our studies have

the most direct implications for policy, which can then set the stage for excellent practices at educational organizations.” The Partnership for Early Education Research team “[conducts] evaluations/research for organizations and agencies with the goal of informing their policy-related decision-making”. They added: “This has primarily been done by using secondary data to examine implementation of existing programs and/or practices.” David Naff (Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium) shared how one of the ways his partnership works to inform policy is that “research reports ... typically offer itemized recommendations for policy at the federal, state, district, and university level in addition to sharing implications for practice” and Jesse Senechal (Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium) agreed that “we write the briefs with local school boards in mind.”

[2] Analyzing policies

Two RPPers explicitly stated that their partnerships analyze policies and/or advise about policies:

- “We conduct document analyses of federal, state, and district level policies related to topics that we explore in our studies. These help provide the contextual foundation for the work that we do.” (David Naff, Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium)
- “Our RPP work helps our central office leaders make decisions about policies (e.g., adding, keeping, modifying) and informs our leaders focused on policies (like the Board of Education or Cabinet).” (Anonymous)

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

[3] Sharing research findings with policymakers

In addition to sharing that their partnerships engage in policy work by producing research that can inform policy or by specifically analyzing policies, many RPPers in our group of respondents said that this happens by intentionally sharing research findings with policymakers: “Policy work also looks like sharing our research with district leaders and policymakers to inform funding and other policy mandates” (anonymous); “We meet with local, state, and national policy groups ... We present findings to policy groups, and work with them to disseminate findings. We also participate on policy panels at all levels” (Elaine Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, and David Stevens, UChicago Consortium on School Research); “Whenever we have a new research report or resource come out of our RPP we email it to our steering committee composed of representatives from each partnering district, including recommendations for distribution to school boards. Finally, when invited we share findings from our reports and resources directly with school boards and their advisory committees” (David Naff, Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium). Laura Wentworth (Stanford-SFUSD Partnership) pointed to the importance of the networks of relationships that practice-side participants in her partnership bring to the table, saying: “School district leaders and their network of relationships are routinely engaging with the school board leaders that decide on school district policies with a big ‘P’ and also central office administrators and school leaders and teachers are engaging with administrative policies with a small ‘p’.” This may point to a more indirect sharing of research findings with policymakers through the relationships and routine interactions p-side partners have with those that have policy decision making power.

[4] Working directly with policymakers

Some of our RPPers reported working directly with policymakers as part of the structure of the RPP. “We work directly with the state department of education and the school district and discuss policy and program decisions,” said Lindsay Weixler (New Orleans Collaborative for Early Childhood Research). Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg shares: “We advise policymakers with direct engagement in educational evaluation and through our expertise in youth more generally – both inform their policy contour and implementation strategies,” adding that “we don’t bring up a new bill to anyone.” Similarly, the Institute for School Partnership team shared that they “[provide] consulting services [at the school or district level] and [brief] decision makers on ‘policy’ issues that impact student learning such as course tracking practices, curriculum selection and adoption, and teacher collaborative and planning time.”

One respondent reported even more direct involvement in policy making, sharing how his RPP has actively worked to have a specific policy be implemented in the past: “Early on we initiated the effort to have computer science be a graduation requirement in Chicago Public Schools, which ended up happening” (Dale Reed from the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science).

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

How much policy-related work does your team engage in?

In terms of what percentage of their partnerships’ work falls into policy-related work, our respondents’ answers ranged from 0 all the way to 100%. Seven respondents estimated somewhere between 0 and 20% of the partnership work falls into policy-related work; four estimated percentages between 21 and 80; three estimated percentages greater than 80; and one reported their partnership not really quantifying its work this way. The Institute for School Partnership team clarified that it “rarely [sets] out to do policy-related work” since it centers its research around educators’ needs and their specific issues or problems, rather than any specific intervention, but acknowledged that policies often may impact these issues or problems as well.



WHAT BOUNDARIES DO YOU SEE (OR DON’T SEE) BETWEEN “PRACTICE-RELATED” EFFORTS AND “POLICY-RELATED” EFFORTS?

When asked about any boundaries they see between practice-related efforts and policy-related efforts in their RPP and if the boundaries are blurred or firm, our respondents gave a fairly wide range of answers, which we summarize below in four categories: No boundaries, very blurred boundaries, blurred boundaries, somewhat firm boundaries.



[1] No boundaries

Two respondents didn’t see boundaries between practice and policy-related efforts. “For us, the practice side is policy,” said Lindsay Weixler (New Orleans Collaborative for Early Childhood Research). Accordingly, Lindsay’s answer to the percentage of policy-related work her RPP engages in was one of the the three 100% answers we received: “It might be 100%. If practice does not equal policy, we should be a research-policy partnership.” In terms of how her partnership engages in policy-related work, this falls into the “working directly with policymakers” category discussed above, indicating how the structure of the partnership might affect whether and where it sees or doesn’t see boundaries between policy and practice. The Partnership for Early Education Research team saw practice and policy as different but so closely related that boundaries don’t really come into play, explaining: “When we’re conducting research with partners, our aim is to produce findings that can inform or impact our partners’ decision-making around practices and their associated policies.” The team also characterized all of their partnership work as policy-related in the sense that all their work



DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

involves “examining implementation of existing programs and policies to inform programmatic and/or policy decision-making—at the school/program level, district level, or state level.”

[2] Blurred boundaries

Stopping short of not seeing any boundaries, three respondents described boundaries as “extremely blurred” (Meg Bates, Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative), “totally blurred” (anonymous), and “very blurry” (Elaine Allensworth, Jenny Nagaoka, and David Stevens, UChicago Consortium on School Research). The anonymous respondent added “we actually always refer to it as ‘policy and practice,’” and Meg Bates elaborated: “For instance, one issue we’d like to study is access to rigorous coursework. We can study how state policies encourage greater access. We can study policies and procedures districts have put into place to expand access. And we can study specific practices within AP and dual credit classrooms that make these courses have more or less impact. It all goes together, as it should.” These respondents also assigned higher percentages to their partnerships’ policy-related work in the previous question (one of the respondents chose not to quantify the partnership’s work this way).

[3] Some boundaries

A group of seven RPPers saw some boundaries between practice and policy-related efforts, while still regarding them as somewhat blurred, often characterizing policy and practice as informing each other. As one anonymous RPPER

put it: “To me, the boundaries are blurred. I think of practice-related efforts as the direct result of RPP work, and policy-related efforts are the secondary result of RPP work - the goal of the work is to impact practice, but policy impacts can be an outcome.” Another said: “The boundaries are blurred and designed that way. Research on practice implementation informs policy improvement.” (Anonymous) In terms of his RPP, Dale Reed (Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science) shared that “[practice and policy-related efforts] are related, and inform each other with regards to school districts requiring technology education.” For Laura Wentworth (Stanford-SFUSD Partnership), “policy and practice are very tightly coupled in education. Boundaries are blurred.” The Institute for School Partnership team also considered the boundaries blurred, adding that they see themselves as boundary spanners without necessarily setting specific boundaries on the research-side of the partnership – rather, the relationship with practice-side partners may dictate boundaries in the sense that “school districts are political institutions and that the current legal climate has real implications for the work of educating children.”

An anonymous RPPER responded: “[Boundaries are] blurred, though we tend to divide it by those serving students directly (practice) and those serving students indirectly (policy).” In Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg’s partnership, team members “always take a stance that we bring research that can inform policy priorities or questions that the community has. We see ourselves as providing accessible and digestible information that informs policy making but does not advocate for specific bills or candidates.” The percentages that these

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

respondents assigned to their partnerships’ policy-related work in the previous question ranged from less than 10 all the way to 100%.

[4] Somewhat firm boundaries

Finally, three respondents seemed to draw firmer boundaries between practice-related efforts and policy-related efforts in their RPPs. “For us on the research side, I believe the boundaries are more firm but I wonder how our practitioner partners feel about these boundaries,” says Pati Ruiz (Districts Helping Districts: Scaling Inclusive Computational Thinking Pathways). Jesse Senechal (Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium) shared his thinking as follows: “The line between policy and practice is always a gray area. I found that understanding of policy depends on who you are asking within a system. As an RPP, we approach them as distinct but intertwined. We try to do bridging work.” David Naff (Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium) added: “This is not necessarily a boundary, but the structure of our partnership is such that we directly partner with central office leadership in our member school districts. Any interaction or engagement with school board members [i.e., policymakers] typically goes through them rather than us offering direct outreach. This is consistent with our goal of maintaining trusted relationships with our school districts by communicating directly with the leadership that governs our work.” This again suggests that the structure of the RPP may have a role in how members of the RPP think about practice, policy, and any boundaries between the two. The percentages that these respondents assigned to their partnerships’ policy-related work in the previous question tended to be lower: Zero and 20%.

SO... WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY WORK IN RPPs?

The thoughts and perspectives our group of RPPers shared here give some insight into how at least a small group of partnerships approach the first P in RPP and their understanding of how policy plays into it. While it’s just a small snapshot of the overall RPP space, we hope it might be helpful in understanding these big questions about practice and policy work a bit better. Here are some loose takeaways we see as coming from what our group shared:

Do RPPs do policy work?

Yes! Each RPP is different, and not all RPPs see themselves as engaging in policy work, but in our group, almost all RPPers reported their partnerships as purposely engaging in policy-related work.

DO RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIPS DO ‘POLICY’? HOW RPPS ENGAGE IN AND THINK ABOUT POLICY-RELATED WORK, CONTINUED

Why is “policy” not in the RPP name?

Maybe it is...? Our RPPers regarded practice and policy as related and informing each other at the least, and as the same thing at the most – so perhaps what “practice” really refers to includes policy-related work as well, such as: Informing policy through partnership research, analyzing policies, sharing research findings with policymakers, working directly with policymakers, and advocating for policies. The Partnership for Early Education Research team pondered that even the “research” in research-practice partnership is already tied to policy as well: “Conducting research in education is inherently related to policy. Even intervention research, at some point, will intersect with policy decisions that need to be made, either at the school/program, district, or state level.”

What does “practice” mean to RPPs?

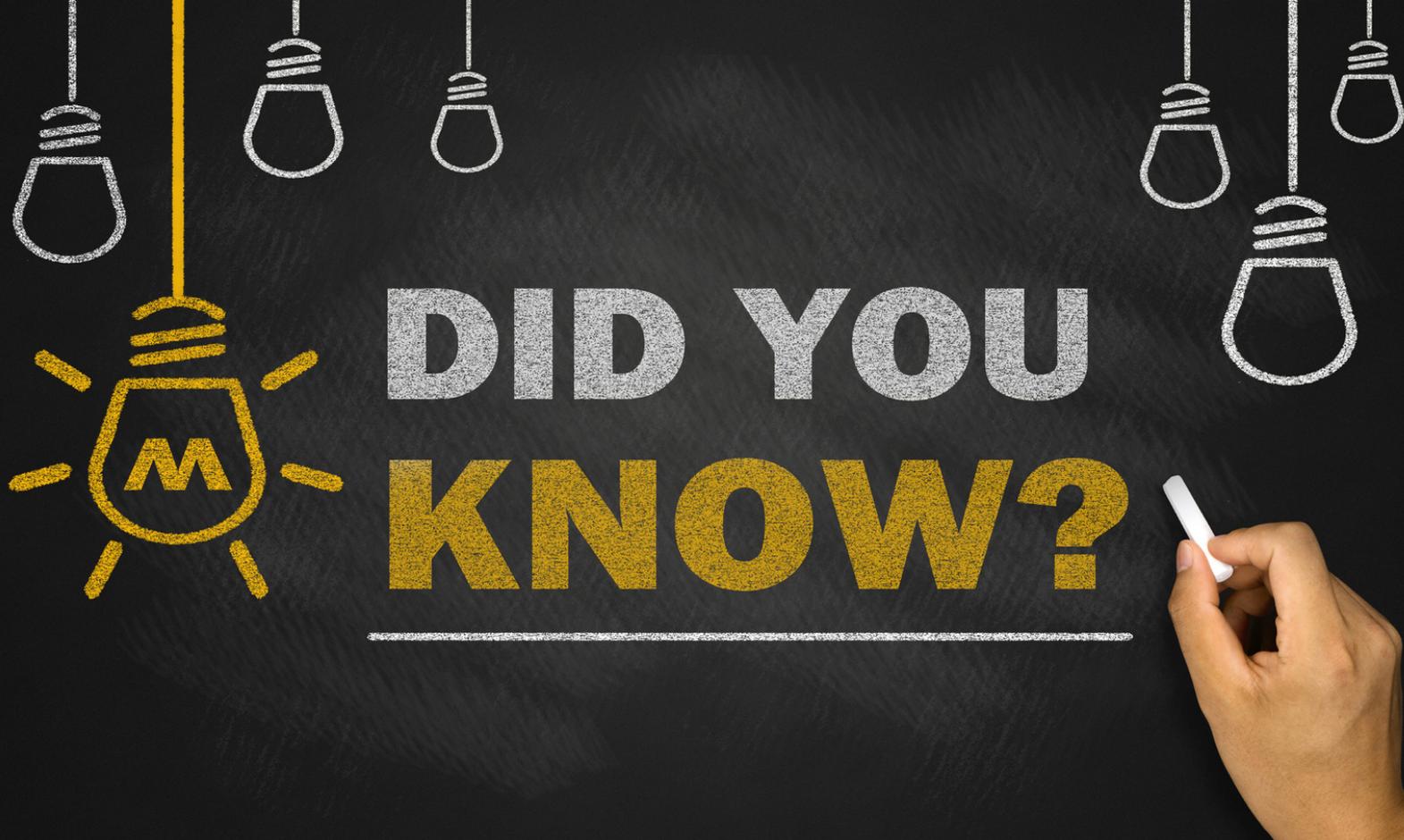
Practice means different things to different RPPers in different RPPs and contexts. Importantly, as mentioned above, our RPPers mostly do not see practice as wholly separate from policy but tend to see them as closely coupled. As Meg Bates (Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative) put it: “I understand the confusion, but, to us, policies are just a specific kind of practical use of research.” In this interpretation, policy work neatly fits under the “practice” umbrella.

Do certain factors influence how RPPs think about the practice-policy relationship?

The thoughts shared by our RPPers hinted at some possible factors that might impact how RPPs think about practice, policy, and the connection between the two. It is certainly beyond the scope of this article to deeply analyze these or to draw any substantial conclusions, but it seems likely that the RPP structure and mission impact how RPPs think about the practice-policy relationship. For example, if the RPP structure is such that university-based researchers partner directly with state-level policymakers, it seems likely that any kind of practice work is also automatically policy work, because the practice-side partners are, in this case, policymakers.

In summary, we can now better respond to the assumption of *“Policy work is not part of what RPPs do, since the ‘P’ in RPP stands for ‘practice’ and not ‘policy’,”* having gained a deeper understanding of how RPPs might situate policy-related work within the goals of their partnerships thanks to our terrific group of RPPers willing to share their perspectives on this. There are still more questions left to explore – for example, do different partners in the same RPP (such as district leaders, state-level policymakers, university researchers, community members, teachers... the list goes on) think differently about the practice-policy connection? Or how might an RPP’s thinking on this connection and its level of involvement in policy work change over time, perhaps as the political and policy context in its partner institutions changes? We look forward to continuing to explore these questions with our community and readers.

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WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING AN RPP

By Kylie Klein and Nora Gannon-Slater | American Institutes for Research

INTRODUCTION

What are the essentials for starting a research-practice partnership (RPP)? In the fall of 2022, the [American Institutes for Research®](#) conducted a landscape analysis and a series of interviews with education RPP leaders from across the country to understand what is needed to start a new RPP [1]. Our study team sought to gather diverse perspectives, interviewing RPP leaders from research-side institutions, practice-side partners in state agencies and school districts, researchers who study RPPs, and funders who have provided

grants to establish and develop RPPs. This purposeful sample included 18 individuals with extensive experience in launching and sustaining RPPs, including those who were more recently involved with launching and forming RPPs. Following semi-structured interviews lasting 45–60 minutes each, we used inductive coding to identify themes in their responses, using [Henrick et al.'s \(2017\) five dimensions framework of effective RPPs](#) as guiding organizational themes. Seven themes emerged, which we explore further below.

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING AN RPP, CONTINUED

SEVEN THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING (AND MAINTAINING) AN RPP

I. Building trust is the essential foundation for creating RPPs.

Trust, plus the efforts needed to develop and cultivate trust, were cited as the most important facets of developing a successful RPP by our group of RPP leaders. These efforts included building trust in formal and informal interactions and investing time in relationship development. This finding is consistent with the research literature on RPPs, which continually identifies trust as a nonnegotiable component (see, for example, Denner et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2019; Henrick et al., 2017; Kochanek & Scholz, 2020). When interviewees shared their perspectives on “successful models” of RPPs, their examples primarily centered on developing a strong degree of trust between RPP participants or highlighted practices requiring trust as a precondition for success, such as collaboration, mutual ownership, shared decision making, and sharing formative ideas and findings with all partners for feedback and input.

II. RPPs must be designed in response to the needs and contexts of practitioners.

Partnerships can be organized in many ways, and the design and approach for the RPP depends on the local context, needs, and goals of the participants. This finding is also consistent with emerging literature from the field (Farrell et al., 2022). As the number of RPPs expands, the field sees that having a specific “model,” such as place-based research alliances or a network improvement community (Coburn et al., 2013), is less critical than forming it to meet the goals and needs of

members of the RPP. Despite the variation in how RPPs may be designed, there were common elements that participants named as important for any RPP, no matter the structure.

Table 1. Common important elements of RPPs, regardless of RPP model / structure

The **leadership structure** should include leaders from the practice-side and the research-side as equal contributing members.

The **mission, vision, and charter** should be jointly developed and revisited across time to ensure that the RPP is meeting its explicit goals.

The **research agenda** should inform the research activities of the RPP and communicate priorities to diverse stakeholders.

Infrastructure, such as governance expectations, communication and dissemination plans, and funding (both for projects and operations), should help establish systems that enable the RPP to function.

Partnership **members** should be valued for their expertise, with practice-side and research-side partners contributing to shared leadership. Historical power imbalances should be considered and addressed within the relationship dynamics, and inclusivity should be the aim.



III. Institutionalizing partnership practices is necessary to establish and maintain RPPs.

Practices such as standing meetings, clear roles and responsibilities for all members of the RPP, and shared goals provide day-to-day stability and consistency for the RPP's members. These routines provide a strong foundation for the RPP to realize its mission, vision, and charter and can intentionally hold the partnership accountable for engaging in mutually beneficial efforts. Although particularly important to establish at the inception of the RPP, these practices also continue to play valuable roles throughout the life of the RPP. Indeed, many interviewees noted that institutionalizing these practices helped them navigate periods of uncertainty, such as leadership changes and shifts in RPP goals and priorities.

IV. RPPs need to invest in infrastructure.

Even though research is a leading activity of RPPs (Farrell et al., 2022), our interviewees noted that for research to occur and be successful, RPP infrastructure is critical. Specifically, the interviewees shared that establishing longer term systems and processes for data use agreements and research project approvals are critical to

enable research efforts to occur. Interviewees also noted the importance of investing time to collaborate on communication and dissemination plans to ensure that the activities and outcomes of RPPs are accessible to multiple audiences and to demonstrate the contributions of the RPP. Research-side partners noted the importance of having multiple and diverse types of funding to support both research activities as well as RPP infrastructure.

V. To be successful, RPPs need committed partners and leaders from both sides of the partnership who can invest time in running the RPP and who have the authority to execute decisions.

Interviewees noted that certain characteristics and leadership styles benefit an RPP, including curiosity, humility, and a genuine commitment to partnering and achieving shared goals through the RPP approach. They also named advisory boards as an important avenue for both diversifying perspectives for the RPP leadership team to consider and investing additional champions for the work of the RPP.

VI. New RPPs can benefit from planning periods, which could be as long as a year or

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING AN RPP, CONTINUED

or two. The planning period is a time to establish shared agreement and consensus about the mission, vision, and goals of the RPP and to establish the foundations of how its leaders and members will work together. Interviewees also suggested that although there is no “right model” for an RPP, newly established RPPs would benefit from talking with leaders from long-standing RPPs. This enables newer RPPs to capitalize on lessons learned and potentially avoid—or at least mitigate—common challenges that RPPs experience.

Table 2. Advice From Our Interviewees on Lessons Learned/“I wish I knew...”

Challenge	Suggested actions
Building trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish—and follow—a “no surprises rule”, meaning that there is time for advanced review of reports and findings prior to public release. • Establish expectations at the beginning and manage expectations continuously so that partners do not get frustrated by the time required to complete a project.
Demonstrating the value of the RPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For early “proof points,” focus on a few quick wins that the RPP can do quickly at the beginning. This will demonstrate the value and benefit of the RPP.
Navigating staff turnover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigate instability by having connections and relationships with multiple individuals in each organization so that if staff leave, there are still contacts and partners who have been working together on the RPP’s efforts.
Supporting use of research evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer the questions people care about. • Include end users in all phases of the research to ensure those who are affected are vested. • Conduct research with, not on, people.
Communicating with diverse audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop multiple formats and products to reach different audiences. • Ensure that publications are accessible, are timely, and use clear language (no technical jargon).

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING AN RPP, CONTINUED

Establishing data use agreements

- Recognize that the legal agreements (i.e., memoranda of understanding, data-sharing agreements) will take substantial time to finalize; start this early in the process.

Planning for sustainability

- Secure diverse funding streams to support project costs and general operating/infrastructure costs.

VII. Finally, know that developing RPPs takes time. As noted earlier, for an RPP to develop and thrive, trust must be established. Building trust takes substantial time. It also takes time to develop the routines and processes on which the RPP will rely. Some interviewees described RPPs that grew organically from other projects and partnerships and strengthened across time to become more formalized RPPs. It is essential for members from the practice-side and the research-side to be fully engaged in the process of developing the RPP; neither side can build it independently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With these essentials of starting an RPP in mind, as shared by our group of RPP leaders, how might we prioritize these? Based on what we learned, newly forming RPPs should begin with efforts to develop a strong foundation and focus on building consensus among the participants within the RPP. Following that foundational stage, the next step should be a planning year (or years) for the RPP leaders and members to coalesce around the leadership structure; the operating structure and institutionalizing practices; the mission, vision, and charter; and the development of

multiple funding streams. During the launch phase, RPP leaders and members could then focus on establishing the broader advisory and governance structures, building capacity for the partnership, ensuring the inclusion of diverse experiences and perspectives in the partnership, setting the initial research agenda, and developing and refining communication and dissemination plans.

Table 3. Phases of starting an RPP and activities to prioritize during each one

Foundational

Building consensus on the goals and aims of the RPP

Planning Year(s)

- Establishing the leadership structure
- Establishing the operating structure
- Co-designing the mission, vision, and charter
- Securing initial funding

Launch

- Establishing governance
- Building capacity for the partnership
- Ensuring diversity of expertise
- Setting the research agenda
- Creating communication and dissemination plans

WHAT YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STARTING AN RPP, CONTINUED

The leaders of the RPP will need to be prepared for the amount of time and commitment required to develop the partnership. In addition to attending to these conditions, researchers and practitioners need to embrace the spirit of RPP work. This process includes acknowledging that individually they may not have all the skills, knowledge, and capacity to lead the RPP yet, but these can be developed together across time; members can lean into their curiosity, capacity to learn, and commitment to drive the RPP forward.

Essential Conditions for Starting a New RPP

Experts in national research-practice partnerships (RPP) offer vital insights on the essential conditions to effectively plan and establish a new RPP.



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NOTES

[1] This article is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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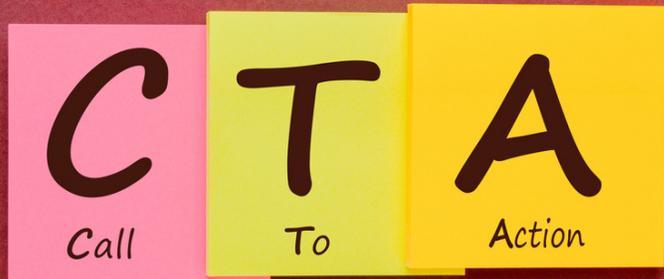
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OP-ED | CALL TO ACTION: RESTRUCTURING TRADITIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCES TO PROMOTE DIGNITY-AFFIRMING SPACES

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WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS AREN'T ENOUGH

Rigorous, equitable, and collaborative education research carries enormous potential to effect systemic change and inspire innovation in the education space. This type of research approach invites a reimagining of traditional ways, demands intentional efforts to dismantle harmful power dynamics, and ultimately, can result in research that is more fully informed, impactful, and improved. Research conferences currently play an important role in sharing and interrogating research of all kinds. Although many research conferences nowadays intend to be inclusive spaces that pursue knowledge and justice, echoing some of the very same principles that underlie collaborative education research, we argue these good intentions aren't enough: The lived experiences of those attending and presenting at conferences (and realities around who gets to do so) need to align with these intentions.

In this op-ed, we explore the nuances and complexities of this pursuit within the realm of traditional research conferences. We define traditional research conferences, entangled with White dominant power hierarchies, as scholarly gatherings that have historically been shaped by and perpetuate systems of privilege and exclusion that disproportionately favor Euro-centric perspectives in academia. Drawing on recent experiences and reflections from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2023 annual conference centered on interrogating consequential education research in pursuit of truth, we argue for a more critically conscious approach and structure to sharing research, one that not only emphasizes accountability but also actively challenges existing power structures that are heavily laden within academia, including who is represented at research conferences.

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Our aim is not to provide a definitive answer but rather to paint a path forward, stimulate dialogue, and inspire action, propelling us toward a future where the pursuit of truth is truly intertwined with the pursuit of justice. As we delve into this discussion, we encourage readers to consider their own roles, positionalities, and responsibilities in this transformative journey.



REFLECTION

We are Heather, a Black woman and Executive Director of a community-based organization, and Lindsey, a White woman and collaborative education early scholar researcher. The Network for EdWork, in which our research-practice partnership (RPP) lives, focuses on designing and implementing anti-racist educational leadership learning interventions and collaborating with educational leaders in schools to confront deeply entrenched systems of inequity and collectively build racially just schools. In April, we had our first joint presentation at AERA. Our work, titled "A Critical Qualitative Approach: Humanizing RPPs Supporting Justice-Driven Educational Leadership," was presented at a structured poster session, which Lindsey co-chaired. This presentation highlighted ways we've built trust and challenged hierarchical power within our RPP over the last four years. We used our presentation to underline the necessity of transparency, accountability, and reciprocity in RPPs and to advocate for collaboration rooted in trust.

In presenting at AERA, we hoped to contribute to and gain insights from other scholars, practice-based leaders, and community members, such as district leaders, teachers, and leaders of community-based organizations committed to equitable collaborative education research. We aspired to foster meaningful discussions around ways to disrupt racialized and politicized power structures embedded in RPPs, foster a sense of community, and learn from diverse perspectives. In an effort to create a counter-narrative to these structures within our presentation, we also invited participants to engage with the session and build upon the research we were presenting as a way of inviting this new community into our own. Additionally, we sought to examine how our practices either challenge or inadvertently uphold these structures within our partnership.

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Within the first few minutes of our structured poster session, a White man engaged Heather with an aggressive line of questioning regarding the legitimacy of our partnership and our perspective on it. This man proceeded to explain his understanding and interpretation of an RPP in a condescending manner. Concurrently, another White man witnessed this act and decided to avoid feelings of discomfort and engage Lindsey in a separate conversation.

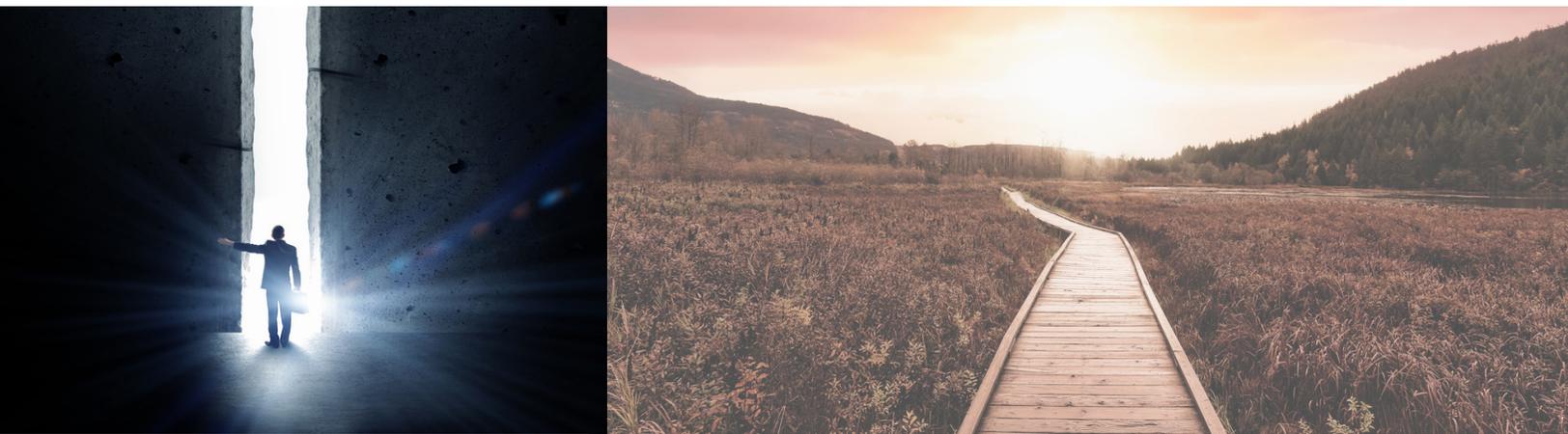
When our discussion concluded, this second man acknowledged the mansplaining and patronizing behavior displayed by the first man and stated how unfortunate it was that Heather had to experience that. Heather graciously invited him to next time use his privilege to disrupt these power dynamics. This interaction made us reflect on our responsibilities in confronting, perpetuating, or challenging power imbalances and centering racially diverse epistemologies.

To conclude the poster session, presenters and attendees gathered back together to engage in a discussion about the ways we see educational scholars and practitioners interrogating research-practice partnerships in pursuit of truth and justice. As part of this discussion, Heather shed light on the underrepresentation of practitioners in this conference environment, which stands in contrast to the conference's stated commitment to and advocacy for equitable RPPs. She advocated for broader inclusion, including the removal of financial obstacles that may hinder their participation. Furthermore, Heather questioned whether the structure of traditional research conferences and structured poster sessions perpetuates prevailing power structures that we're striving to dismantle. Additionally, she recognized that even her ability to be present as a community partner may have been based on the fact that she, too, is a byproduct of the Academy, having received her doctorate from a prestigious university. Traditional research conferences are typically structured in a hierarchical way, where a few keynote speakers, discussant, and session chairs hold most of the speaking time, and attendees are mostly scholars, which can create an echo chamber where researchers are exposed only to information, ideas, or opinions that align with their own existing beliefs or biases. This dynamic can be seen as a reflection of existing societal and academic power structures, where a select few, often White folks, hold a majority of the influence. Moreover, the concept of a structured poster session itself can be seen as perpetuating traditional academic hierarchies. Poster sessions involve presenters, usually scholars, standing by their posters and explaining their research to passing scholarly attendees. The power dynamics in these interactions can often reflect and reinforce power hierarchies where scholars critique, and practitioners who engage in RPPs are often not a part of traditional research conferences. In addition, the way knowledge is presented and discussed can often center on dominant, Euro-centric perspectives, which can marginalize or overlook racially and ethnically diverse epistemologies and ontologies. Heather, therefore, encouraged researchers to consider alternative ways of interacting, sharing knowledge, and building community with practitioners and community members at research conferences.

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After the poster session ended, Lindsey approached the first man for a private discussion. She shared how his behavior was perceived and urged him to reflect on his position as a White man in relation to traditional power dynamics. She also encouraged him to extend an apology to Heather. He thanked me for the constructive feedback, reflected on his actions, and apologized to Heather.

This incident underscores the importance of continuous self-reflection and action in our quest for truth and justice within research conferences, RPPs, and the larger educational context. It was especially sobering that this incident took place during a poster session dedicated to disrupting racialized and politicized power structures. Reflecting on the incident, as well as how we were able to respond to it in a way that brought at least some reconciliation, we strongly believe that we must question not only the conventional practices of research dissemination in conference spaces but also scrutinize our roles and identities in tackling power disparities and nurturing equitable dialogue – and that we can be successful in working towards epistemic justice.



A PATH FORWARD

We are at a critical juncture where we have the opportunity to radically rethink how traditional research conferences, including those like AERA, are organized to be humanizing sites that promote justice and address power structures head-on. Academia has long been considered crucial for the production of new knowledge. Nevertheless, how does this ideology, deciding who is suitable for generating new knowledge, reify the very issue we aim to disrupt in our quest for truth and justice in education and research? To paint a path forward, we need to make concerted efforts toward ensuring diversity and representation of practitioners in research conferences and RPP presentations and remove barriers to truly and authentically engage and center practitioners and racially diverse ways of knowing. When we refer to “practitioners,” our definition encompasses the

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“practice-side” –those working in school districts and other agencies and organizations primarily tasked with providing educational services and responsible for facilitating learning–, and the “community-side” –those working in organizations whose main purpose is to support community endeavors, as well as other community-based groups, such as families, youth, and community members. Curating research conferences that are dignity-affirming and culturally sustaining spaces is not an aspiration but a necessity. We must ask ourselves - why should we continue to reinforce these structures found in traditional conference spaces if they fail to embody these values? How can we design research conferences and facilitate sessions to be places of epistemic justice and humanizing spaces? Recently, AERA President Tyrone Howard called on researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to imagine boldly what education spaces free of racial injustice might look like. We also wonder how traditional research conferences, like AERA, might create the conditions necessary to support this call to action.

While AERA seeks to create space that will attract broad participation and explore how our work can become more relevant to diverse communities, there need to be structural changes to the way the conference is designed to adequately and effectively support this goal. Research conferences' traditional ecosystem of 'professionalism' must be examined against the backdrop of 'authenticity.' The dichotomy between these two ideals begs for a reassessment of how we view professional spaces and how we can make them more inclusive and reflective of diverse identities and experiences.

As a call to conference organizers, chairs, and presenters, being mindful and intentional about these dynamics is paramount. Facilitators can shape these spaces for research dissemination that supports the pursuit of truth and justice. Lindsey has thought about her role as a co-chair during this session, and how chairs can be proactive and curate conditions for attendees to be critically reflective of their positionality, power, and privilege. Chairs can agitate power structures by providing participants with handouts that pose thought-provoking discussion questions for them to consider, such as unpacking one's racial positionality and intersectionality. And, just as critical as 'calling on' folks to collectively be mindful of how we enter into spaces, we must also 'call people in' to conversations that promote critical reflexivity.

While we acknowledge that this article is not meant to provide definitive answers and that it is our collective responsibility to figure this out, in what follows, we provide some initial suggestions and a starting point to disrupt White dominant power structures at research conferences. To work toward this call to action, every role in the conference, from organizers to attendees, has a part to play. Here are some nascent suggestions and reflection questions for each role.

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Conference Organizers

Reflection Questions:

- Are we intentional about the diversity of our organizing committee, speakers, and attendees?
- Do we have practices and processes (time, format, etc.) that promote or hinder access and participation?

Suggested Actions:

- Include a diverse range of people in the organizing committee to ensure a range of voices are heard in planning, especially racially diverse voices and those not exclusively in the research space, such as practice-side and community-side voices.
- Consider conference mechanisms that encourage inclusion and centering of nondominant experiences and voices. For example, conference organizers could
 - Ensure diverse representation in the conference's decision-making committees, keynote speakers, panelists, and attendees. This means deliberately including individuals from nondominant groups such as different racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientations;
 - Actively encourage research submissions from individuals with nondominant perspectives;
 - Offer financial support – travel grants or discounted registration fees;
 - Provide inclusion and diversity training to all attendees that emphasizes the importance of valuing different voices and experiences and also provide strategies for disrupting dominant power structures during the conference;
 - Email attendees routine reflection questions for folks to consider regarding their racial positionality, intersectionality, and implicit bias, and
 - Establish channels for feedback that allow nondominant participants to voice their concerns or suggestions for improvement.
- Develop structures that help nondominant practitioners understand and navigate the complex systems at play at these events. For example, organizers might
 - Arrange sessions designed specifically for nondominant practitioners to clarify what to anticipate, and how to navigate and interact with the conference in productive ways;
 - Implement a program that pairs nondominant practitioners with nondominant researchers that can offer guidance and support throughout the event;
 - Host inclusive networking activities designed with nondominant practitioners in mind to gather, network, and discuss experiences, and

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- d) Encourage open dialogue about the conference experience, specifically for nondominant practitioners
- Create a code of conduct that promotes inclusivity and the disruption of power structures and educate attendees about this code of conduct.

Presenters, Chairs, and Discussants

Reflection Questions:

- How do we ensure content and presentation style are inclusive and value nondominant practitioners' and researchers' ways of knowing?
- How are we mindful of the diversity of our audience in terms of background, expertise, and perspectives?
- Do we create a safe space for challenging conversations and questions?

Suggested Actions:

- Make handouts that pose thought-provoking questions for attendees to consider, such as unpacking one's racial positionality and intersectionality. For example, presenters, chairs, and discussants could
 - Provide a handout that contains questions designed to promote reflection on one's own experiences and implicit biases. For instance – "How has your racial identity influenced your professional journey?", "How do your intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, class, abilities, etc.) shape your perspective on research?", "How might you leverage your positionality to challenge dominant power structures within traditional research conferences?", "What steps can you take to actively foster inclusivity and diversity?";
 - Create designated times and spaces during conference sessions, such as break-out sessions, roundtable discussions, or integrate an 'unconference' style gathering where attendees facilitate an open discussion based on handouts, reflection questions, or a related topic;
 - Presenters might also embed questions in their presentations that could keep the conversation going, and
 - Post-conference, attendees could receive a follow-up email encouraging them to continue to engage in critical reflexivity.
- Challenge presenters to incorporate alternate ways of knowing within their presentations. Some ideas include – a call for proposals that explicitly encourage submissions that incorporate diverse ways of knowing, encouraging presenters to create interactive sessions where attendees can engage with alternate ways of knowing via participatory activities, small group discussions, or creative activities, and inviting diverse presentation

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formats beyond traditional PowerPoint slides. This might include storytelling, scenario-based activities, or thought experiments.

- Make presentations accessible. For example, folks might avoid academic jargon, use infographics, and diagrams, or create interactive elements, or if technical terms are used,
- presenters could provide a handout or access to key terms and definitions.
- Create a designated space to foster group discussions focused on recognizing and disrupting dominant power structures within conferences.

Attendees

Reflection Questions:

- Are we actively listening and open to new perspectives?
- Do we recognize the imbalance of power and confront it?
- Are we mindful of the space we take and the voices we might be overshadowing?
- How do we engage in critical, important, and oftentimes uncomfortable conversations?
- What new ideas did you encounter in this session? What new questions did you generate?

Suggested Actions:

- Consider nondominant perspectives, especially those that challenge your own.
- Be mindful of how much space you take up in discussions.
- Actively support underrepresented voices, either by amplifying their points or stepping back to let them speak.
- Lead with curiosity and the desire to gain knowledge – a true cornerstone of learning – and withhold judgment

As a reminder, these initial ideas are not exhaustive but merely starting points, intended to spark collective curiosity, introspection, imagination, and action. The hope is for you to join us in exploring, adding to, and implementing these ideas at your next research conference, regardless of your role. Embracing these concepts and any additional ideas you've generated from reading this can transform traditional research conferences. Instead of merely disseminating knowledge, conferences can serve as powerful catalysts for change, promoting diverse ways of knowing, cultivating community, and confronting dominant structures. This approach has the potential to redistribute power, pursue epistemic justice, foster a life-giving atmosphere, and encourage critical dialogues between researchers and practitioners in the collective quest for truth and justice.

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RESEARCH HEADLINES FROM **NNERPP MEMBERS**

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

examines the benefits and risks of AI large language models in K12 public schools

COURSE-TAKING

STANFORD-SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

examines course-taking patterns in SFUSD under a math pathways reform

COVID-19

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE

examines achievement growth and trajectories during the Covid-19 pandemic

GEORGIA POLICY LABS

examines patterns of usage and effects on achievement growth for students using a virtual tutoring platform

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BOSTON P-3 RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP

examines

- professional development support for early educators during Covid-19
- the link between individual observations of pre-K children's executive function skills in context and more traditional assessments of executive function skills
- disparities in pre-K enrollment in higher-quality schools
- whether instructional alignment across pre-K and elementary school benefits every student

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE

examines

- Michigan's literacy coaching landscape
- K-3 teachers' literacy instructional practices during the 2020-21 school year
- 2021-22 retention outcomes under Michigan's Read by Grade Three law
- the effects of early literacy policies on student achievement

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

examines

- learning gains in full- and half-day 4K classrooms
- 4K classroom pedagogy

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK

examines educators' perspectives on child and family transitions into preschool in NYC

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY

examines parent perspectives on PreK

EQUITY

DETROIT PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION EQUITY & RESEARCH

examines the under-identification of students experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Detroit schools

MENTAL HEALTH

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

examines how school policies can help in suicide prevention

POSTSECONDARY

BALTIMORE EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

examines college access in Baltimore over a ten-year timespan

GEORGIA POLICY LABS

examines an initiative's impact on FAFSA completion rates

ILLINOIS WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

examines how Illinois high school seniors are making postsecondary education decisions

SCHOOL BULLYING

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

examines how school bullying has changed since the onset of Covid-19

SCHOOL CHOICE

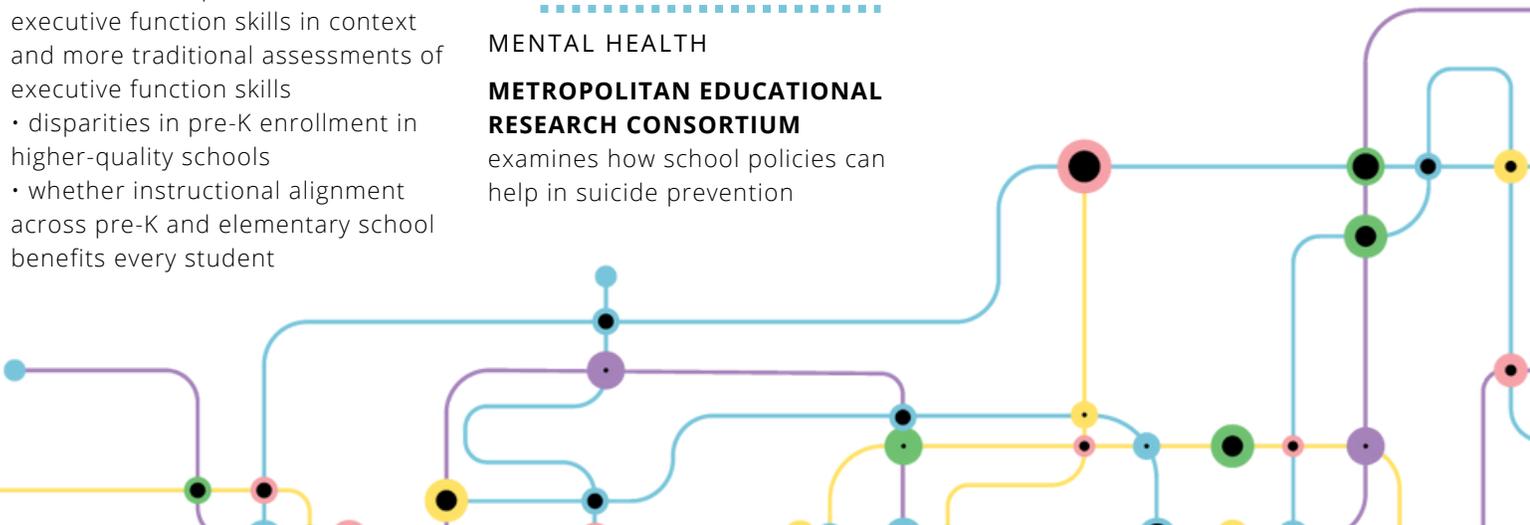
EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS

examines how families' transportation options shape school choice

SCHOOL CLIMATE

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM

examines what schools can do well to positively affect students' long-term trajectories



RESEARCH HEADLINES FROM **NNERPP MEMBERS**, CONTINUED

SCHOOL TURNAROUND

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE

examines student achievement in the first two cohorts of schools included in Michigan's school turnaround efforts

SUMMER LEARNING

TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE

examines summer learning camp enrollment, attendance, and achievement in ten Tennessee districts

TEACHERS

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY

examines
·the usage and impact of teacher licensure waivers in Arkansas
·Arkansas teachers' grading practices and implications

TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE

examines pre-k teacher experiences in Tennessee

TECHNOLOGY

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM

examines Chicago students' participation in a program offering free internet service to students in need



END NOTES

NNERPP | Extra is a quarterly magazine produced by the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP), a professional learning community for education research-practice partnerships (RPPs) housed at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University. NNERPP's mission is to develop, support and connect RPPs in order to improve the relationships between research, policy, and practice.



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NNERPP is made possible through generous funding provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, William T. Grant Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and The Wallace Foundation.

