

## Welcome to Round 4!

By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP



Welcome to the first issue of Volume 4 of NNERPP Extra! We are so excited to be kicking off our fourth round of NNERPP Extra and want to thank you for joining us. Whether this is your fourth year reading along or you are a brand-new reader – welcome! We hope this new year has been treating you kindly so far. As the world of education –and the world more

generally– continues to face tumultuous times, it is difficult to know what lies ahead. Amidst this uncertainty, research-practice partnerships continue to do important and impactful work, and continue to think about how to do this work better.

In this edition, we bring you three articles demonstrating such work:

- **Research Insights:** We highlight some recent RPP work from NNERPP members by taking you through three short vignettes of studies you might want to know about, including their impact on practice.
- **RPP Deep Dive:** We hear how one RPP promoted racial equity and healing within the partnership.
- **Extra Credit:** We take a closer look at how RPPs organize their day-to-day work, hearing about one partnership’s approach to project management and their lessons learned over time.
- **Research Headlines:** We share a roundup listing all of our members’ research from the past quarter.

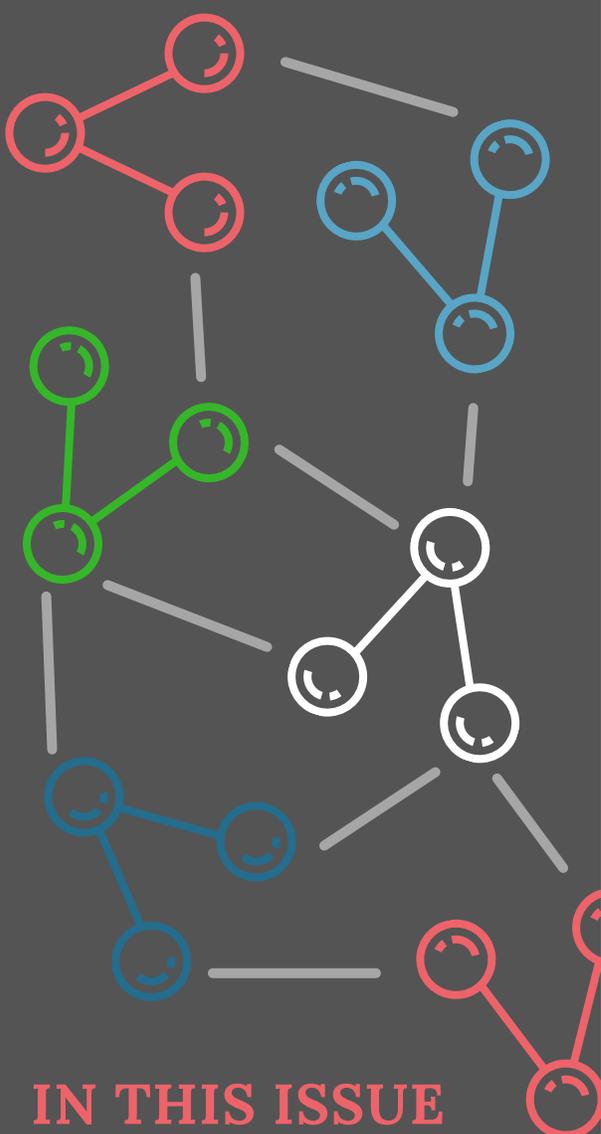
Happy reading!

### 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](http://nnerpp.rice.edu) and find us on Twitter: @RPP\_Network.



## IN THIS ISSUE

[p. 1] WELCOME

[p. 2] RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work

[p. 8] RPP DEEP DIVE

Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships

[p. 13] EXTRA CREDIT: SPOTLIGHT

Project Management in RPPs: A Look at One Partnership’s Experiences

[p. 15] RESEARCH HEADLINES

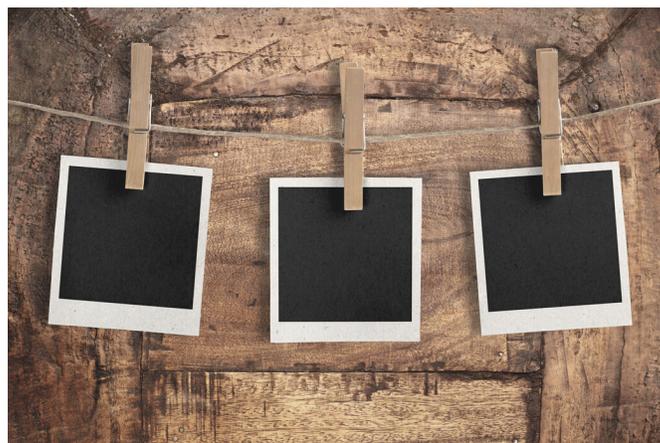
## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work

Compiled by NNERPP

We are excited to kick off Volume 4 of the Research Insights series! In our first issue in the new year, we wanted to take the opportunity to highlight some recent RPP work completed by NNERPP members. Join us as we share three short vignettes of studies you might want to know about.

### IN THIS “RESEARCH INSIGHTS” EDITION

Despite the steady growth in RPPs, there is still much to be learned about the value that RPPs offer and how RPPs can best go about doing partnership work as they seek to create positive change for all students. One way we like to examine and highlight the impactful work of the RPPs in our network each year is through the [NNERPP Year in Review report](#), which functions as a yearbook of sorts, providing snapshots of each partnership in NNERPP and the research they have conducted throughout the year. We continue to be amazed by the diversity in research topics and approaches to the work that our members undertake. Published at the end of last year, the [2021 NNERPP Year in Review](#) once again highlighted an incredible array of projects from all of our members.



In this article, we feature just three of these projects, bringing together a study each from the West, the South, and the Northeast, selected for their unique viewpoints and contributions. The studies introduced here explore a wide range of topics and represent various partnership constellations: The first study examines the overrepresentation of African American students in special education services and suspensions in San Francisco by centering African American youth as knowledge generators; the next study explores how to support parent involvement in at-home, informal STEM learning through a partnership between a museum, a research institute, and various schools in Houston; and the final study examines kindergarten outreach, application, and enrollment in New York City and outlines the lessons learned through the close partnership work with the office of student enrollment.

As different as these three lines of RPP research are thematically, there are similarities in how the three studies seek to improve education:

1. As is typical in RPP work, all studies were undertaken in close partnership with practice-side organizations. Here we highlight the range of practice-side institutions involved: schools, school districts, and a museum.
2. All three studies led to changes in practice, as outlined in the “project in practice” sections below.
3. All studies seek to address inequities across the education sector: bias and systemic racism, unequal opportunities for STEM learning, and inequities in the kindergarten application and enrollment process.

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## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work, continued

### OVERVIEW

Before we dive in, let’s take a quick look at the three artifacts we’ll examine in greater detail. In Table 1, you’ll find the partnership name and brief description of the partnership in column 1 and the title and link to each research artifact in column 2.

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

Partnership	Artifact
<p><b>Stanford-San Francisco Unified School District Partnership:</b> Stanford University and San Francisco Unified School District work together to design research that informs policies, practices, and scholarship to maximize the potential for each and every student in San Francisco and beyond.</p>	<p><a href="#">African American Family and Community Perspectives on What Causes SFUSD to Disproportionately Represent African American Students in Special Education Services</a></p>
<p><b>Teaching Together:</b> Partners include the Children’s Learning Institute (CLI) at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, the Children’s Museum Houston, and schools in the Houston Independent School District. The partnership empowers and prepares parents to engage as partners in their child’s educational support team and to support learning at home.</p>	<p><a href="#">Feasibility of Behavior Change Techniques to Increase Parent Involvement in STEM with Young Children Experiencing Poverty</a></p>
<p><b>MDRC: Lab For Equity and Engagements in School Enrollment (E3 Lab):</b> Partners include MDRC, The Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS) at MDRC, and New York City Department of Education’s Office of Student Enrollment. E3 Lab uses insights from behavioral science and human-centered design to address issues of educational equity in school application and enrollment.</p>	<p><a href="#">Kindergarten Outreach, Application, and Enrollment: Lessons Learned From a Research-Practice Partnership With New York City’s Department of Education</a></p>

### RESEARCH VIGNETTES

#### (I) SAN FRANCISCO

#### Research Questions

This study examined what influences the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) to disproportionately identify African American students for special education services and suspension. The study examined the experiences of Black students, families, and communities in SFUSD with special education and suspensions, focusing on the strategies and suggestions families of African American children have put forward to reduce disproportionality.

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## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work, continued

### Why This Study?

The overrepresentation of African American students in both suspensions and special education is a national phenomenon. Locally, SFUSD has been disproportionate in both these categories for African American youth at least three years in a row, which is why they are now required by the state to do a special plan called Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS). Using Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), which highlights how racism and ableism intersect to position African American youth as less than in thinking, learning, and behavior, this research centers African American youth who have been suspended, both in and outside of special education, positioning them as knowledge generators.

### Main Findings



African American students and families feel that educators were punitively responding to behavior, resulting in overidentification of Black youth for special education and in disproportionate suspensions. Specific educators are over-referring. There is a lack of cultural humility resulting in many educators struggling to authentically connect with Black youth and their families, as well as gaps in culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching and a fully implemented ethnic studies curriculum.

Many Black students feel disconnected and disenfranchised from school. The loss of Black families and communities in San Francisco contributes to Black youth experiencing cultural isolation within school sites and is exacerbated by educators who focus on punishment instead of connection with Black youth. Parents report feeling excluded from and uninformed about the special education and Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and their rights. Some policies and/or practices within the district such as ignoring, labeling, and not delivering on promises engenders distrust among parents and students. School leaders have not addressed parental concerns about race and racism in instruction and behavior.

The study identified cultural dissonance as a root cause of bias and systemic racism in SFUSD.

These findings led to several recommendations, including:

- Focus behavior plans on how adults behave toward, interact with, and respond to Black youth
- Require that special educators are included in all anti-racism training, ethnic studies pedagogy, and culturally responsive curricula
- Provide teacher support to investigate what works for the Black youth in their classrooms, and consult with students' other teachers in the process.
- Increase Black educators at all levels (principals, school leaders, deans, teachers, staff)
- Track which educators are over-referring Black students
- Establish professional development around recognizing bias and racism and establishing practices around this
- Give Black youth a voice in their education, schools, and district
- Create an accountability system to track how IEPs are being followed that is accessible to parents
- Build affinity spaces for Black students and families at schools with designated Black educators and staff of color

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## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work, continued

### Project in Practice

Findings were used to shape the Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services plan and Special Education Plan to respond to issues with disproportionality for Black students in special education and suspension. Some of these findings triangulated other evidence gathering and analysis SFUSD leaders conducted, and some findings were new, like the idea of having a required ethnic studies curriculum kindergarten through twelfth grade to address cultural dissonance. SFUSD leaders are making connections between these findings and general education practices to achieve better outcomes for Black students. For example, SFUSD leaders are exploring ways to regain trust by recognizing and acknowledging “how” school staff and structures are experienced, or felt, by Black students and families. If trusting and respecting relationships are built by addressing barriers and changing practices, we can interrupt disproportionate and inappropriate referrals to Special Education.

### (II) HOUSTON

### Research Questions

This study explored the Teaching Together STEM program, an afterschool family STEM event delivered at school sites by museum-based informal science educators, and to what extent parents took up the program components and found them satisfying and feasible to use. In particular, it examined three treatment conditions and their effectiveness in increasing parental involvement in their child’s informal STEM learning. The core treatment included family engagement events and text messages. Schools were randomly assigned to business-as-usual or one of three additive treatment groups to evaluate adult behavior change techniques of adding materials and parent rewards to the core treatment.

### Why This Study?

Parents play a critical role in their children’s informal, at-home STEM learning. Such home-based parent involvement is consistently linked to children’s academic outcomes. Students experiencing poverty face opportunity gaps in informal STEM learning outside of school. Additionally, parents experiencing poverty may not have time or work schedules that allow them to regularly attend school STEM events, making home-based parent involvement in STEM learning particularly important. The study explored the feasibility of the Teaching Together STEM preschool program, implemented by the Children’s Museum Houston, for increasing home-based parent involvement and reducing barriers to informal STEM learning.

### Main Findings

The Teaching Together (TT) STEM program was designed by the Teaching Together partnership to increase parent involvement in STEM learning using educational family events and text messages: The events are offered at schools and facilitated by museum-based STEM experts who demonstrate how to do STEM activities with young children during everyday routines. Participating families also receive free family admission passes to a local children’s museum and text messages with actionable information and tips for parents for supporting STEM learning at home during day-to-day activities. For this study, the RPP created three experimental treatment conditions to explore combinations of supports intended to increase parent

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## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work, continued

involvement in STEM: The first treatment group received the core components –family STEM events, museum passes, and text messages–; the second treatment group received these core components plus materials in the form of bilingual take-home STEM activity kits; and the third treatment group received the core components, plus the materials, plus monetary rewards (\$2.50 per STEM activity). The control group did not receive any of these treatments or participate in the TT program. 181 families at schools where 92% of students received free/reduced lunch participated in the study.

There were no significant impacts of any of the treatments explored in this study on home-based parent involvement in STEM; however, there were promising effect sizes for the treatment groups that included take-home activity kits along with family education events/resources. Interestingly, the most intensive treatment group that added parent monetary rewards produced short-term improvements in parent involvement that faded at a later follow-up time point. Parents did report high satisfaction with the TT STEM events.

### Project in Practice

The museum-based partners' primary implications for practice was recognizing that adding access to materials and other resources may be important when parents are experiencing poverty and have competing demands on their time for informal learning. The lack of significant impact found in this study may have been due to the limited scope of take-home materials and limited amount of time that these additional supports were provided; the reliability of the parent involvement survey might also have been impacted by ongoing pandemic disruptions. Finally, the lack of significant impact aligns with previous findings on the limited improvements that low cost techniques and interventions produce.

### (III) NEW YORK CITY

#### Research Questions

This study aimed to uncover and address school application barriers faced by families with children eligible for kindergarten in New York City as the New York City Department of Education was shifting to a new digital application platform. The study describes the lessons learned from the RPP's evidence-based intervention to encourage on-time application and from the intervention's evaluation process.



#### Why This Study?

Over the last decade, school application procedures across the United States have become increasingly centralized, digitalized, and often now offer parents their choice of schools across a district. This can provide more opportunity and efficiency to those parents who understand how to navigate new web platforms or apps to submit their applications, but can leave behind other parents who have less information regarding available schools and the process itself. Increased digitization can also make it harder for school districts to reach parents who may not have internet access or emails or cell phones registered with the

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## Research Vignettes: A Look at Recent RPP Work, continued

school district. As families' first required encounter with the school system, kindergarten application and enrollment is an especially crucial time for getting outreach right. This project therefore sought to understand and address challenges in the kindergarten application process. Lessons learned can inform policymakers looking to implement similar programs in other districts.

### Main Findings

The research found that parents got stuck in the kindergarten application process for a number of reasons, including informational barriers (e.g. information gaps regarding eligibility and requirements), motivational barriers (e.g. not submitting application on time because other aspects of life were in flux), and barriers to action, (e.g. "hassle factors" related to the online application system). Based on these findings, the E3 team designed a digital intervention to address some of the barriers that parents experienced. The intervention included a sequence of three digital components that could be folded into NYC Department of Education's existing resources and tools for outreach: an email campaign, a web-based planning-support tool, and text message reminders.

Next, the E3 team tested whether the interventions could improve application rates on a large scale using randomized controlled trials. The evaluation team did not detect meaningful differences in the kindergarten application rates of groups that did and did not receive the intervention. Data on receipt of and engagement with the digital intervention suggested that the full intervention bundle may not have reached families that likely face the greatest barriers with the application process. Nonetheless, this research offered valuable insights and lessons for the NYC Department of Education, including new knowledge on how to measure the impact of new communication and outreach and how to use real-time application data to identify segments of parents in need of different tailored outreach, insights into the barriers parents face in the kindergarten application process, and a better understanding of the families who are hard to reach via digital outreach.

### Project in Practice

From the E3 team's identification of barriers in the application process, NYC DOE discussed changing confusing jargon in the application guidance and considered having a shorter application period or starting the application period at a different time of year to make the application deadline more salient. Informed by the project's exploration of who is and is not included on outreach lists for digital communication, NYC DOE considered new ways to attract parents into its network for digital outreach. NYC DOE is working to incorporate promising elements of the intervention into tools and communications for other grades (see [here](#) for an example of ways the E3 team applied lessons learned to the middle school application process).

### CONCLUSION

These three research vignettes illustrate just some of the important work taking place in RPPs. We hope it is evident in all three examples how the close partnership between different research- and practice entities enables this work and makes it impactful in different ways. It is our hope that these brief glimpses at RPP work contribute to a better understanding of what RPPs do, why they do it, and how they create positive change in education. For additional research vignettes from many more fantastic RPPs across the country, browse our full Year in Review reports [here](#).

## Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships

By Jasahn Larsosa | Focus: HOPE



Research-practice partnerships (RPPs) make me think about cross-genre music collaborations. I'm a Black male nonprofit and social justice leader who loves art and wants to change the world. And collaborations enable some of the most meaningful, influential, and healing contributions to culture, society, and relationships. However, when not carefully designed, they can also cause harm or at least leave you feeling like you wasted your time. Remember how underwhelmed you were by the so-called "Best of Both Worlds" when Jay-Z collaborated with someone whose name shall not be mentioned? Or worse yet: "Accidental Racist", when we

heartbreakingly endured L.L. Cool J spitting bars on a Paisley number that insidiously proclaimed that Paisley was "just a white man"? (Don't go now and get that awful hook stuck in your head—you've been warned!)

RPPs are intended to solve problems through centering the experiences, voices, and expertise of impacted people through co-constructed research. But because of the power dynamic between academic institutions and community practitioners during the research process, the academic side can drown out the voices of practitioners and community so that all we experience are the patronizing tunes of Brad Paisley (I truly wish I could un-hear this horribly derisible song). This article reflects bits of my journey with my university-based research partners in co-facilitating racial justice and healing in education, including within the RPP through our partnership process. I hope to offer a few useful tips for helping other RPPs collaborate in a way that is effective and equitable so that the experience more closely resembles LL's collaboration with the Neptunes and Marc Dorsey in the cultural phenomenon Luv U Better than it does LL's collaboration on the Paisley project I wish I never heard.

### Background

Our Spencer Foundation-funded research collaborative came together to address injustices in public education systems, specifically for [Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline \(DSToPP\)](#) harming Detroit's bright youth. DSToPP is allied with the [Urban Learning and Leadership Collaborative](#). Ours is a networked, intergenerational RPP that unites two Midwestern research universities, namely [University of Michigan](#) and [Wayne State University](#), to the Detroit-based and nationally renowned civil rights and human services organization [Focus: HOPE](#), where I serve as a founding Director of Advocacy, Equity & Community Empowerment.

As a formerly incarcerated man, I identify very much as part of the community being served through this inquiry but as an inexperienced researcher felt challenged by how I fit in as a Principal Investigator (PI) in this RPP. I'm partnered with Dr. Camille Wilson, a highly accomplished Black woman full-tenure professor and Founding Director of University of Michigan School of Education's [Community-Based Research on Equity, Activism, & Transformative Education \(CREATE\) Center](#); and Dr. Rick Smith,

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## Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships, continued

a well-trusted full-tenure Professor and Assistant Dean of Wayne State University School of Social Work. The Partnership also links resident advisors from HOPE Village—the roughly 100-block residential neighborhood surrounding Focus: HOPE’s educational campus in central Detroit—and four predominantly African American, community-based action research teams composed of youth researchers, community practitioners, and additional university-based researchers. The heavy presence of university researchers in partnership with youth and community practitioners made me worry that I was not only unprepared, but also that the voice of the community might get lost.

The following sections outline my thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that RPP work between academic institutions and community organizations presents, based on my RPP journey, and the practices we found useful for promoting equity and healing in the second year of our DSToPP partnership to intentionally address potential pitfalls.

### 1. THE CHALLENGE | “This is Hard to Say”[1]

RPPs face a clash of cultures. If we’re honest, as much as research universities create great new thinkers while offering a sanctum and a range of perks for the intellectually curious, they also exist within and recreate systems of oppression that feed on our very souls. Academics enter the rat race for tenure, at times sacrificing their own wellbeing as the university demands from them instruction time; service to the institution; and most important, landmark research in an impossibly competitive environment dictating “get published or get fired!” And these demands are not equitable. Black and Latinx faculty bear the burden of this and report lower levels of work-life balance (Denson, Szelényi, & Bresonis, 2018).

Alternatively, those leading social justice and service institutions are in a race of our own, allured by the opportunity to “do good” but forced to overextend to secure funding. Community practitioners scarcely find time to evaluate programs; and in the absence of evaluation or sometimes even established program models, we must feel our way through. Invitation to an RPP presents an irresistible opportunity to attract additional resources to support existing programs and find evidence for their validity by bringing in the university to support the data work. This seems like a good deal to those of us who are doing service work and/or advocacy, are often not well versed on research, and have limited capacity to support it; however, it creates problems when academics need our support to access important data and are unable to receive it because of our limited capacity. In the absence of a clear understanding between the two sides, the partnership can become the source of frustration as academics are concerned about the completion of research and community partners experience anxiety over the threat of a tarnished reputation when unable to keep up with or meet demands. All the while, the community can experience the entire research experience like it experiences mosquitoes who “suck blood and leave” (Cochran, Marshall, Garcia-Downing, Kendall, Cook, McCubbin, Gover, 2008). But even with these tensions in mind, there is great opportunity to make progress toward healing in and through RPPs. It involves working the system.

### 2. THE OPPORTUNITY | “Do You Think I Meant to Hurt You”

There is a silver lining for partnerships that make time for each other. Being familiar with and following the principles of the Community Based Practitioner Research (CBPR) model (Bergold, Jarg, & Thomas, 2012; Dixon, James, & Frieson, 2019) is

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## Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships, continued

extremely helpful for RPPs between academic institutions and community organizations and community members, such as DSToPP. First, the power dynamic favoring the university side must become balanced so that power is shared, and the partnership benefits are mutual and well understood. All sides need each other. Issues faced by the community necessitates research and data. Services provided by community practitioners attract academic partnerships since a well-positioned community organization strengthens research proposals. Positioning community partners involves helping us understand our value for securing funding within the competitive profession of university research, and also aiding our existing budget and programs so that we have capacity to support a research partnership while more stably serving the needs of the community. RPPs are also strengthened when leaders from community organizations commit to the incorporation of research and research findings at high levels, enlisting the interests and trust of university and philanthropic communities.

In the case of our DSToPP partnership, Dr. Camille invited me to campus one afternoon to speak with her students. It was a wonderful experience, but the real reward happened when she and I went for a drink at the end of the day. During an incredibly warm and honest exchange, she shared with me the intricacies of the research profession. This conversation enlightened me on the mechanics of research universities and the tenure and promotion process, deepening my appreciation for the intentionality both she and Dr. Rick bring to our RPP. But equally important, this new understanding helped me to appreciate my organization's niche and the role I play in advancing systems change through CBPR. That bolstered my confidence and my interest in helping Focus: HOPE become a leader in RPP work; and I eagerly, confidently, and successfully pursued an additional multi-year RPP with a new university partner. The focus of this inquiry is mental health in the workforce as well as workforce training programs, which means that Focus: HOPE will introduce evidence that supports advocacy for employment and economic justice as well as the education justice we pursue through DSToPP. At the same time, the focus of the university partner is to introduce changes to the tenure process that accidentally exclude or overwhelm the practice side of RPPs (so, no more Paisley songs!).

Overall, my experience on DSToPP has made Focus: HOPE more comfortable with RPPs and my involvement is making the RPP process more seamless within academic institutions with whom we partner. You could say it's starting to feel natural, like a Hip Hop-R&B collab where you almost forget the two music genres are supposed to be distinct.

### 3. THE LESSONS I “When I Think About the Things We Did”

Of course, we have also made mistakes in our RPP, but we are intentional about learning from them through the evaluation of our partnership and our meta study. We analyze data from interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other observations to pinpoint challenges, tensions, benefits, and new opportunities for growth and continued partnership. Our preliminary findings provide helpful lessons for other RPPs:

- **Build trust across the research leadership team**—The DSToPP coordinating team (DCT) adopted a process for relationship building that includes weekly meetings as well as in-depth retreats at each other's offices (and even once or twice in my backyard). By building trust, we have been able to respond to conflicts as a team. For example, when a white team member unwittingly engaged in language containing microaggressions with youth researchers, the DCT team responded collaboratively to determine a restorative path.



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## Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships, continued

- **Orient and engage with the community-based action research teams**—Although we planned on a series of in-person events, we shifted online due to the pandemic. We designed our orientation to include space for community building as well as setting norms for community-based participatory research, anti-racist work, and working with youth researchers. When we needed to cancel our scheduled large-scale retreat, we also took painstaking efforts to meet with each member of each team and to engage each team entirely to offer supports and build relationships.
- **Engage in collective reflection to evaluate and adapt our RPP to ensure alignment with our equity-oriented and anti-racist objectives**—We are committed to maintaining an RPP team that is demographically representative of our community. To come to a collective vision, we navigated various insider-outsider dynamics. We hired an independent evaluator for surveys and focus groups to give us regular feedback on the RPP, including the selection of the sub RPPs, orientation, and our spring symposium. We reflect on this feedback in our retreats and weekly meetings, always centering the advancement of antiracist and pro-Black processes.
- **Draw upon our diverse backgrounds to honor individual and collective knowledge**—This one should speak for itself. But it is sometimes easier said than done.
- **Expand our methodologies to promote the research development of our community-based practitioners**—Our team comes with different research skills. To provide more in-depth self-reflection, we trained our community coordinator to do oral history interviews. She conducted oral histories with our resident advisory board to bring additional shape and soul to the project.
- **Disrupt the hierarchical and whiteness norms of institutions**—This has been one of the more challenging aspects of DStoPP. One of my university partners worked hard internally to eliminate boilerplate contractual language about intellectual property that would have required the products of our partner research teams (none of whom are affiliated with that university) to be claimed by it, which would have communicated to our community, youth, and other university partners, that they did not “own” the work they created.
- **Wrestle with our varying work styles and obligations**—During our first reflection retreat, we discussed our competing obligations and work styles. The community coordinator shared during one reflection that in our non-profit work, “everyone gets involved with everything” but that she got the sense that in universities, the work is more specialized. We also noted our family obligations and the way the pandemic introduced complications for managing work-life balance, including for the sub RPPs and especially the youth in school who went from in-person to online instructions and back again several times. Indeed, the youth members of one of DStoPP’s sub RPPs worked with their high school administration to adjust the times of remote instruction to improve their wellness, to change the dress code, and to eliminate suspensions to conform to state guidelines around restorative justice.

Reflecting on my experiences with our processes and journey—including through the drafting of this piece—affirms my understanding of the challenges from which we learned, the mishaps we managed to avoid, but also of my newfound place in RPPs.

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## Luv U Better: Facilitating Racial Justice & Healing Through Research-Practice Partnerships, continued

### Trust Me; From the Bottom of My Heart, Nothin's Gon' Tear Us Apart

When the “accidental racism” present in research-practice power dynamics is intentionally addressed, bringing together university-based researchers with community practitioners and other stakeholders to solve community problems has immense potential for creative healing. The “melodies” we produce, systems we create, relationships we foster, and new identities we forge through a commitment to cultivating understanding, sharing power, and altogether loving each other better make it hard to imagine how or why we would ever solve problems apart from each other.

- *Jasahn M. Larsosa is a community and social justice organizer, business and DEI strategist, and nonprofit leader. He is Founding Director of Advocacy, Equity, & Community Empowerment for Focus: HOPE, co-Principal Investigator for Community-Based Participatory Research projects addressing mass incarceration, economic justice, and mental wellness, and co-owner of Krystal Klir Communications and Black America Rising.*

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### Notes

[1] This header and the subsequent two headers are popular lines from LL Cool J’s Luv U Better in collaboration with The Neptunes and Marc Dorsey.

## Project Management in RPPs: A Look at One Partnership's Experiences

By Shauna Dunn | Houston Education Research Consortium

How do education research-practice partnerships (RPPs) organize their day-to-day work? What does project management look like in RPPs, given the many partners involved in the work and the number of research projects with different timelines that often go on simultaneously? In this Extra Credit article, we take a look at these important questions, which are not generally part of the literature on RPPs, and yet are absolutely critical for partnerships to answer. In particular, we have invited the [Houston Education Research Consortium](#) (HERC) to share their approach to project management and describe lessons the partnership has learned over time.

### HERC: A Brief Overview

Founded in 2011 under the leadership of Ruth López Turley, HERC began as a research-practice partnership between Rice University and the Houston Independent School District (HISD). In 2017, HERC's research collaboration expanded to include 10 additional district partners from the surrounding Houston area. HERC's work focuses on improving the connection between education research and decision making for the purpose of equalizing outcomes by race, ethnicity, economic status, and other factors associated with inequitable educational opportunities. To name a few of the topical areas, HERC has developed [collaborative research efforts](#) focused on school closures, student mobility, long-term English learners, and equitable access to academic programming. Currently, HERC has over 45 active projects. Its 23 staff members and multiple district partners work collaboratively to ensure effective execution and outcome of HERC projects.

### Why a Project Management Tool

As most know, a high level of collaboration across multiple partners is required for an RPP to be successful. Each of our projects typically involve a research-side team, a district liaison, and a practice-side partner. In order to enable and oversee such collaborative work, HERC needed to create a "place" where various tasks within projects could be tracked, stored, and worked on. These efforts include but are not limited to tracking meetings, documents, data requests,



project progress, deliverables, and outcomes of the research (for example, tracking how the research was used). For HERC, Monday.com, a cloud-based, customizable management platform, serves as Grand Central Station where all of these efforts connect.

### Selecting the Right Tool

HERC first selected Monday.com as its project management tool of choice in 2018 and it has proven to be very effective in supporting the work throughout the subsequent growth of the partnership. More specifically, it has allowed HERC to collaboratively oversee its work and track its output.

HERC's main criteria for choosing a project management tool included:

- The ability for project members to collaborate and access up to date information
- Ease in managing multiple project timelines and project subtasks
- Application integrations with services such as Zoom, Box, and Google Docs

For research-side team members, HERC's main goals for using Monday.com are to manage timelines, efforts, and subtasks within each project. HERC support staff can also build workflows and task boards that indirectly assist with research development. For example, the administration team tracks the onboarding of new employees, team leads engage with their members, and individuals can track their own tasks across projects. Another collaborating feature is the ability to manage users. Each project board can have unique designated users, therefore allowing research leads to appropriately manage specific project access.

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## Project Management in RPPs: A Look at One Partnership's Experiences, continued

### How Partnership Members Use the Tool

In Monday.com, each project is housed on a page referred to as a “board.” HERC can determine board access and/or what items on the board can be changed. Within a board, one can specify both the “groups” (users) that will be actively working in that board over the different phases of the project and “pulses” (tasks) that will be needing completion within a particular phase. For example, one group on HERC’s research board is “Proposal Development.” Some of the pulses listed under this group are to draft the proposal, submit the proposal for review, and submit the proposal for signature. Each of these pulses contains columns that assign responsibility, due date, and current status of the task. Although HERC has predetermined groups and pulses listed in its project template, research teams can add and remove groups that may not be relevant to their specific project. Not only can project members keep project status up to date, they can communicate with one another and even schedule meetings and upload related documents within the project board. Team members can also share this information with others outside of Monday.com by downloading selected information contained on the board into an Excel file. Another beneficial feature of Monday.com is that each HERC team member can develop a “dashboard” that allows them to see their assignments across various project boards in one place.

Within that structure, partnership members use the tool for these main purposes:

HERC project managers (based on the research-side at Rice University) use the tool to:

- Track and address scheduling challenges within and across projects
- Establish timelines and checkpoints for each project
- Manage teams and project access
- Create portfolios and other requested reports for HERC leadership and practice-side partners

HERC research scientists and analysts at Rice use the tool to:

- Update team members on progress made on their research projects
- Track and adjust timelines as needed
- Collaboratively develop products like PowerPoint presentations and briefs that share research outcomes for each project they are assigned to

- Track reviews and revisions of these products prior to public release

HERC practice-side partners use the tool to:

- Provide feedback on drafts prior to publication
- Track specific requests from researchers

HERC leadership uses the tool to:

- Track progress on any given research project
- Connect with research scientists and analysts on outstanding to-dos or any questions
- Review and approve deliverables

### Some Final Tips

To date, Monday.com has proven to be a high usage, successful collaborative tool for HERC. However, Monday.com was not an overnight success for HERC. When Monday.com was first introduced to HERC staff, user buy-in was hesitant. For RPPs searching for effective management tools, these are some lessons that we have learned in our project management journey that might be helpful:

- Spend time thinking about your top criteria in selecting a project management tool. For example, consider cost, ease of use, integration ability, and customer support to determine what will work best for your organization. Ask yourself: What do you need your tool to be able to do? How will different partnership members use your tool?
- Thoughtfully introduce the new tool and provide sufficient training. Introducing a new tool can cause anxiety and hesitancy. It takes training, one on one meetings, and constant support and assurance from project managers that any error can be reversed to help users adopt a new tool.
- Regularly evaluate how your tool is working for your partnership. Partnerships grow and change, new management challenges and needs can arise, and project management tools themselves can also change or become stagnant in the functionalities they offer. At HERC, the metric for success for using Monday.com is tracking the rate of regular use by team members and conducting one on one meetings to discuss what is working and how we can improve.

- *Shauna Dunn is Senior Program Manager at the Houston Education Research Consortium.*

## Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter

### ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

GARDNER CENTER examines  
 -- developing high quality school leaders in alternative high schools  
 -- building resilience among educators in alternative high schools

### COVID-19

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP  
 examines the experiences families of color during the Covid-19 pandemic

TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE examines  
 -- student perspectives on access and engagement in virtual schooling during the pandemic  
 -- student perspectives on school climate during the pandemic  
 -- student perspectives on their social and emotional well-being during the pandemic

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BALTIMORE EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM  
 examines how Baltimore families and children use early childhood services

BOSTON P-3 RESEARCH-PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP examines  
 -- benefits of pre-K by assessing the full range of children's skills  
 -- content-rich instruction and cognitive demand in pre-K  
 -- pre-K classroom organization and links to school readiness gains

EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE  
 examines  
 -- continued implementation and early efficacy of Michigan's Read by Grade Three Law  
 -- K-8 student progress toward learning goals in Michigan

GEORGIA POLICY LABS examines  
 -- the impact of the Lucy Calkins program on reading and writing achievement in grades K-8  
 -- the stability of subsidized childcare in Georgia

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP  
 examines how family engagement practices are related to positive outcomes for 4K students

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK  
 examines teacher perspectives on assessment in early learning

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, continued

STANFORD-SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP  
 examines association between widely used measures of classroom quality and preschoolers' skills

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM  
 examines changes in attendance rates when students enrolled in full-day vs. half-day pre-k programs

### EQUITY

URBAN EDUCATION INSTITUTE  
 examines the relationship between formal education and wages, and wage gaps by gender, race, and ethnicity

WISCONSIN EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP  
 examines school equity practices in Wisconsin

### POSTSECONDARY

EDUCATION NORTHWEST examines  
 -- early findings from ECMC Foundation's basic needs initiative to support college students' everyday needs  
 -- survey findings from ECMC Foundation's basic needs initiative

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY  
 examines the relationship between freshman GPA and later outcomes

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS  
 examines the diversity of students' experiences of school climate

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM examines  
 -- school improvement and school climate in high poverty schools  
 -- how schools in Chicago Public Schools understand and utilize school climate data

### SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS  
 examines the effects of restorative approaches to discipline in New Orleans

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## Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter, continued

### SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS  
examines the effects of restorative approaches to discipline in New Orleans

### SCHOOL SPENDING

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS  
examines salary allocation in New Orleans public schools

### STEM & COMPUTER SCIENCE

RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS  
examines model for building teachers' capacity for CS/CT integration into elementary science instruction

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM  
examines math teachers' grading practices

### STUDENT MOBILITY

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS  
examines student mobility in New Orleans

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM  
examines student mobility in Texas and the Houston area

### STUDENTS

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY  
examines academic growth by student population

### TEACHERS & SUPERINTENDENTS

EDUCATION NORTHWEST  
explores the lived experiences of superintendents of color in Oregon

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS  
examines educators' salaries by role and across racial groups

GEORGIA POLICY LABS  
examines teacher absenteeism

ILLINOIS WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE examines  
-- persistent teacher shortages in Illinois  
-- content and geographic areas with high need for qualified teachers

### TEACHERS & SUPERINTENDENTS, continued

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP  
examines how to support 4k teachers through remote professional learning communities

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM  
examines teacher retention policy coherence

REL MIDWEST  
develops a set of teacher recruitment and retention materials for district leaders

REL NORTHEAST & ISLANDS  
examines new teachers' certification pathways in New York state

TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE  
examines race and gender gaps in teacher classroom observation scores

### TOOLS

GEORGIA POLICY LABS  
creates a solution for identifying linkage keys (SILK)

### TRAUMA

ILLINOIS WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE examines  
-- trauma-informed care in Illinois education settings  
--- trauma-informed care for supporting young children in low-income families  
--- how to support the mental and physical health of youth experiencing homelessness

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## 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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