# NNERPP | EXTRA

Delivering fresh ideas from the intersection of ed research, policy & practice

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# **IN THIS ISSUE**

### [p. 1] WELCOME

### [p. 2] RESEARCH INSIGHTS

What is Your District's College Enrollment Rate? ... It Depends [Part II]

### [p. 9] RPP DEEP DIVE

The Importance of Expanding Educational Research Partnerships with Community

### [p. 13] EXTRA CREDIT: HOW TO

The Value of Engagement: How to Set Up and Facilitate an Effective Partnership Meeting

### [p. 15] RESEARCH HEADLINES

# Happy Holidays!

By Paula Arce-Trigatti I NNERPP



Welcome to the fourth issue of Volume 1 of NNERPP Extra! We are so happy to start off the holiday season with this issue, which marks the end of our first year of this magazine. It has been an exciting journey thus far and we can't wait to see what year two brings!

For this issue, we selected the compass imagery on the left to signify the greater clarity we have around the purpose and direction of this magazine. A compass is also an apt metaphor for the world of research-practice partnerships: While there are no simple step-by-step GPS instructions for how to do this work, there are plenty of important principles that can guide us – some of which we highlight throughout this magazine. Here's to always finding true north, even when the RPP journey gets hard!

In this edition, you'll find:

- Research Insights: We continue our examination of college enrollment rates across four different districts represented in NNERPP through their RPPs, this time focusing on what 'college enrollment' means across the different research projects.
- RPP Deep Dive: We explore why it is important to include and actively partner with the community in RPP work.
- Extra Credit: We learn about recommendations for setting up and facilitating an effective partnership meeting.
- Research Headlines: We share a roundup listing all of our members' research from the past quarter.

Happy reading, happy holidays, and see you next year for Volume 2!

#### NNERPP I Extra Online

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

### About NNERPP

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

By Paula Arce-Trigatti and Nina Spitzley I NNERPP

### In This "Research Insights" Edition

This "Research Insights" edition builds on "What is Your District's College Enrollment Rate? ... It Depends [Part 1]" in our previous issue, where we look at 5 research artifacts on college enrollment outcomes across four school districts participating in NNERPP through their RPPs (see Table 1 below for a list). As we examined the five reports on college enrollment, two things stood out: One, the construction of the sample (i.e., who is included in the study) differed quite a bit in each study, and two, the definition of "college enrollment" varied as well -- leading to college enrollment rates that might not lend themselves to direct comparison.

LE 1. List of RPPs + Artifacts Included in This Article	
	ARTIFACT
ERC	• Transitioning to College and Work (Part 1: Where are high school seniors from 2006-2008 now?)
AERI	College Going in LAUSD: An Analysis of College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion Patterns
ANYCS	How Have NYC's High School Graduation and College Enrollment Rates Changed Over Time?
	NYC Goes to College: New Findings and Framework for Examining College Access and Success

### TAB

In Part I, we explored in greater detail how the samples across the five studies differed and discussed the implications of this for policymaking. We did include a look at the college enrollment rates for each of the sample constructions. However, we could not yet confidently conclude whether rates across studies with similar sample constructions could in fact be compared, as we had not yet considered how 'college enrollment' was defined.

Patterns of Two-Year and Four-Year College Enrollment Among Chicago Public Schools Graduates

### Why This Article

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Here, in Part II, we turn to the various definitions of college enrollment across the five studies and address the potential ramifications of these differences for policymaking. Only after considering both the sample constructions and the definitions of college enrollment across the studies can we conclude which --if any-- of the studies we might be able to compare directly.

To help us with this assessment, we propose a simple graph as a tool (see Figure 1) to visualize where the studies fall with respect to the sample construction and the college enrollment definition. On the x-axis of the figure, we display the sample construction range, which was the focus of



Part I of this series. In particular, our sample construction ranges from 9th graders to high school graduates; specifically, 9th graders, high school seniors, high school seniors that are also high school graduates, and all high school graduates, whether they graduated on time or not. On the y-axis of the figure, we display two college enrollment possibilities, 'immediate' or 'delayed.' Specific definitions for what we mean by 'immediate' and 'delayed' to be discussed in the following sections.





FIGURE 1. Graph of How the Studies are Distributed Along Two Dimensions, by SAMPLE CONSTRUCTION ONLY

For now, we can place the studies only along the x-axis, or sample construction dimension. By the end of the article, we will be able to place them vertically as well -- giving us the complete picture about if, and how, some of the studies align. As seen in the figure above, the two New York City studies are based on cohorts of 9th graders in their sample construction and therefore fall at the left end of the x-axis. At the other end of the graph we find the Chicago and Los Angeles studies, whose samples are based on high school graduates. Finally, there are two samples included in the Houston study: 1) high school seniors (placed toward the right end of the x-axis but not as far right as Chicago and Los Angeles), and 2) high school seniors that are also high school graduates (placed at the far-right end of the x-axis, along with Chicago and Los Angeles). Note that we include an asterisk next to the Houston 2 sample construction because although it includes "high school graduates," similar to Chicago and Los Angeles, the Houston sample additionally is conditioned on high school graduates that were high school seniors on a given date, a constraint that is not included in the Chicago and Los Angeles and Los Angeles.

As evidenced by the five studies included here, college enrollment is a topic of particular interest to school districts, and by extension, RPPs. School district leaders and decision makers, researchers, and parents enrolling their children are just some of the groups who might want to know a particular district's college enrollment rate and compare it to other districts. However, both for readers and for producers of research, it is important to carefully consider who is included in the analysis and how outcomes are defined before making simple comparisons even on similarly labeled outcomes. We hope to demonstrate these connections between samples, outcome definitions, and policy implications here -- let's get started on Part II!

### What Does "College Enrollment" Mean?

### I. IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT

It is perhaps a common expectation for students who finish high school to immediately enroll in college -- that is, the very next semester following high school graduation. Three of the reports define college enrollment in this way -- students who enroll in college the fall semester after graduating high school: The Houston study, the New York City blog post, and the Chicago study (note that the Chicago and Houston studies additionally examine delayed enrollment, discussed in section II).

Although it may seem straightforward to simply measure the number of students who immediately enroll in college post-high school, there are a number of additional choices students can make when deciding where to enroll, and these choices might matter for policy considerations: for example, students can choose to attend part-time or full-time, go to a 2-year or 4-year institution, and select from a public or private college. Although several of the studies provide findings related to these additional distinctions, we will limit the discussion here to overall college enrollment rates and focus exclusively on the different time to enrollment windows examined across the reports (i.e., 'immediate' or 'delayed'). We mention these additional variables here to keep in mind when determining the comparability of college enrollment statistics more generally. Finally, note that we limit our discussion to enrollment only, and do not consider persistence or actual degree attainment, which are additional outcomes of interest one could consider.



Defining college enrollment as 'immediate' will limit the number of students considered as enrolled, since only those students who enroll right after graduating high school are counted as enrolled. Some students may still enroll in college, but might do so a semester or more later; these students would be considered non-enrollees using the immediate enrollment definition. The choice to define college enrollment in this way should be considered carefully depending on the research question of interest or the policy levers one is interested in exploring. For example, if one is interested in studying the impact of school supports on college enrollment, immediate enrollment as a definition makes the most sense, given that later college enrollment

decisions are likely to be influenced by a greater number of factors than schooling supports alone. If *any* (or *ever*) college enrollment, within a specified time of high school graduation (e.g., within 6 years), is an important indicator of post-high school success, then immediate college enrollment may not be the right definition for the study.

Even among the three studies listed here, which all examine college enrollment in the fall following high school graduation, we must keep in mind that findings might not be directly comparable, since the construction of the sample differs across the studies: As discussed in greater detail in Part I of this series, the Houston study includes any student that was a 12th grader in the fall of a particular year in its base sample and additionally then also examines high school graduates from their base sample; the New York City blog post considers 9th grade students within a given cohort as the starting point for their sample, and the Chicago report contains only high school graduates in its sample. These are very different starting points and will affect the reported college enrollment rates. Another difference to keep in mind is how the studies define 'fall enrollment,' which can differ depending on both the data source and coding decisions. We don't detail these here but encourage readers to visit each report for information on data sources used and coding decisions made.

### IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT I FINDINGS

Figure 2 shows the overall college enrollment rates for Houston (we include the rates for the two different samples examined in the study), New York City, and Chicago, with college enrollment defined as "enrolled immediately after high school graduation." Note that these rates are the overall rates and do not distinguish between the various categories described earlier (i.e., part-time versus full-time, 2-year versus 4-year, private versus public).

We place these findings along the same "Sample Construction" continuum we defined earlier in Figure 1, with 9th graders on the far left-hand side and high school graduates on the far right-hand side. Because these results are not directly comparable given the sample constructions, we do not include the numerical findings on each bar; rather, we invite you to focus on the patterns of the bars themselves.





From the figure above, notice that the enrollment rates for high school **graduates** in Houston and for high school **graduates** in Chicago for similar years are almost identical and higher than the enrollment rates for **12th graders** in Houston and **9th graders** in New York City. This confirms what we might expect to see given these different constructions of the samples. The freshmen sample is the most inclusive of the group, so we would expect a relatively lower college enrollment rate overall. In comparison, the sample of high school graduates in Houston and Chicago are restricted to only those students who have already successfully mastered all steps in the high school pipeline, which, relative to the 9th grade sample consists of a very different set of students. We thus would expect to see higher rates of college enrollment rates for these sample constructions.

### ▶ IMMEDIATE ENROLLMENT I IMPLICATIONS

From a policy perspective, defining college enrollment as immediate enrollment following high school graduation may provide information on how well high schools are preparing students to continue on to college. For example, results from research questions using this outcome might inform district efforts that range from helping students navigate the college application process to preparing students for the rigorous college curriculum.

### **II. DELAYED ENROLLMENT**

Next, we turn to the studies that allow for a longer time window in which students can enroll in college. The Los Angeles report includes students who enroll in college within one year of high school graduation, while the New York City full report extends the time frame even further, and includes students who enroll in college within 5 semesters of expected high school graduation. Both the Houston and Chicago studies included in the previous discussion of immediate college enrollment also examine enrollment within six years of high school, so we include those two here as well.

For all of these reports, we might expect college enrollment rates to be relatively higher than what we observed from the previous studies using immediate college enrollment as the cutoff. However, we still must consider the construction of the sample in each of these studies. As detailed in Part I of this two-part series, the Los Angeles study and the Chicago study include only high school graduates in their samples. When examining delayed college enrollment, the Houston report limits its 12th grade base sample to those students who graduated (note that due to the different starting point, this sample construction is not the same as the sample

construction for Los Angeles and Chicago). The NYC report (like the NYC blog post discussed previously) includes the entire freshman cohort (note that the NYC report looks at college enrollment rates of freshmen who finish high school within six years, while the NYC blog post looks at college enrollment rates of freshmen who complete high school within four years).

Knowing now that none of these studies share the exact same sample construction and the exact same definition of college enrollment, we can say with confidence that a simple comparison across reports is not possible. We do think there is still value in engaging in a discussion of the relative difference in rates, taking into account these two different dimensions of the research, however, and so take that up next.

### DELAYED ENROLLMENT I FINDINGS

Figure 3 shows the college enrollment rates from the studies that examine delayed college enrollment (i.e., college enrollment that occurs within 2 semesters post-high school to college enrollment within 6 years post-high school). Once again, we use the "Sample Construction" continuum defined in Figure 1 to place the findings, do not record numerical results on the bars, and will focus on the patterns instead. Note that comparisons across the studies cannot be made -- with the exception of the two bars for Los Angeles (enrollment for graduates in 2008 versus enrollment for graduates in 2014) and the two bars for New York City (enrollment for freshmen in 2003 versus enrollment for freshmen in 2008). In both cases, the results come from the same study with the same sample construction and definition of college enrollment, respectively. For both of these pairs of studies we see that college enrollment rates increased over time.



FIGURE 3. Delayed College Enrollment, by Sample Construction

An additional observation we can make from this figure is that enrollment rates for the widest definition of college enrollment (i.e., the longest time frame: 6 years) and a narrow sample construction (i.e., high school graduates) are the highest bars from the group of studies, as we might expect. This group of students has not only completed the entire high school pipeline, they have also been given a generous time window within which to be considered "enrolled."

Finally, we can also compare findings within the two studies that examined both immediate and delayed enrollment: Chicago and Houston. In Figures 4 and 5, we see that widening the definition of college enrollment resulted in much larger college enrollment rates for both Houston and Chicago, respectively.



### DELAYED ENROLLMENT I IMPLICATIONS

From a policy perspective, expanding the definition of college enrollment to include a longer time window in which students can enroll in college may be beneficial to understanding the overall tendency for students to pursue higher education post-high school. Perhaps more importantly, by capturing non-traditional, but increasingly more common, pathways to and through college, such as delayed and interrupted enrollment, more students' journeys to enrollment are included and acknowledged. These additional pathways might otherwise be missed, especially when focusing the study only on students who enrolled immediately post-high school. The choice of how wide or narrow to allow the definition of college enrollment to be in a given study will depend on the research question of interest, as well as the policy levers one is interested in exploring.

### **Closing Thoughts**

We've now come full circle in this two-part series, examining both the construction of the initial samples used in the five reports we examined (i.e., Part I) and the varying definitions of college enrollment employed throughout the studies (i.e., Part II). In Part I, we observed a range of sample choices across the studies, with some studies sharing the same sample constructions. Despite these similarities, we could still not be confident of the comparability of the findings given the potential differences in the definitions of college enrollment across studies. In Part II, we confirmed a number of different definitions for college enrollment. Generally speaking, these definitions fall into two categories: immediate enrollment and delayed enrollment.

We now turn back to the graph we introduced (Figure 1) at the beginning of the article to help us visualize how the studies compared across the two dimensions identified: sample construction and enrollment definition. Figure 6 now shows the placement of the studies we've examined in this series along both axes/dimensions. The now-completed graph confirms what the previous sections have suggested: No two studies examined in this article can be directly compared, because no two studies share both the same exact sample construction and the same exact definition of college enrollment. The Chicago and Houston studies come close in their examination of delayed college enrollment, but ultimately the sample constructions are not exactly alike (i.e., the Chicago study examines graduates, while the Houston study examines graduates out of a 12th grade base sample). The two New York City studies, which seemed to closely align in the partially filled-in version of the matrix, are now in two different quadrants altogether.



FIGURE 6. Graph of How the Studies are Distributed Along Two Dimensions

As highlighted throughout this two-part Research Insights series, each sample construction and college enrollment definition in the featured studies offers unique insights into particular questions and policy levers of interest. Indeed, the choices made in terms of these two dimensions reflects not only the priorities of the practice-side partners, as we would expect in studies produced in partnership, but also the very practical matter of being limited to certain questions given the data sets the teams have access to. It is thus not a given that findings from studies that pose similar research questions would be easily comparable.

There is, however, an argument to be made for constructing common samples and defining similar college enrollment outcomes: districts would be able to ask each other "What is your district's college enrollment rate?" and get a clearer sense for how their students compare to similar districts. So rather than a resulting discussion of "It depends," districts might instead have the opportunity to engage in a meaningful discussion of promising strategies, policies, and interventions they have tried in their contexts. Until then, we hope this series serves as a roadmap of sorts for how to navigate studies with uniquely constructed samples and locally defined college enrollment outcomes!



• Paula Arce-Trigatti is Director and Nina Spitzley is Program Administrator of the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP).

### The Importance of Expanding Educational Research Partnerships with Community

By Sarah Winchell Lenhoff (Wayne State University I Detroit Education Research Partnership), Larry Simmons (Baber Memorial Church I Brightmoor Alliance I Every School Day Counts Detroit), and Christine Bell (Urban Neighborhood Initiatives I Every School Day Counts Detroit)

By definition, research-practice partnership work is concerned with bringing together those that typically work in isolation – education researchers and education practitioners – to collaboratively solve and address pressing issues in education. Additional partners can include community-based organizations, parents, youth, and other members of the community; however, RPPs that actively partner with the community throughout the entire research process are still a rare find. Here, we outline how our Detroit-based partnership partners with the community from conception to evaluation through community-based participatory action research – and why it is so important to include community voices in the work.

The Detroit Education Research Partnership is a collaboration between the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), Wayne State University (WSU), and the Every School Day Counts Detroit coalition, as we work toward the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism within the district from nearly 70% in 2017-18 to 15% by 2027-2028. Our partnership uses a continuous improvement approach to studying the most pervasive problems in Detroit schools and co-constructing potential solutions through collaborative disciplined-inquiry. We combine the principles of collaborative problem-solving research with a research-practice partnership framework to support the use of research evidence in designing solutions to instability and disengagement in school.

Organized as a networked improvement community, our partnership team generates research to identify root causes of absenteeism in Detroit; identify problems of practice and policy related to addressing absenteeism; and develop and test solutions to those problems. This approach embodies our theory of organizational improvement, which is that organizations like school districts get better by establishing **systems** that allow them to learn from their own practice, problems, and adaptations. In this way, the Detroit Education Research Partnership supports each of our institutions in becoming their own "R and D" labs by collaboratively establishing the routines, tools, and processes to learn and then studying the effectiveness of both the processes and their outcomes.

### Absenteeism as a multifaceted problem

Over the last three years, we have learned a lot about absenteeism in Detroit and how to reduce it. Through our quantitative research, we have earned that students who are mobile, new to a school, or who live in neighborhoods with higher asthma rates are more likely to be chronically absent. And we've replicated studies from other cities that have found that students who are chronically absent one year are much more likely to be chronically absent the next. These findings have informed how school attendance teams are analyzing their data and identifying students for support, earlier on in the year.



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# The Importance of Expanding Educational Research Partnerships with Community, continued

We have also learned that students with the highest attendance in Detroit are concentrated at the city's "commuter" charter schools and district application and exam schools, traveling longer distances than other students to get to school. This

suggests that high attenders have access to resources such as reliable transportation or a social network that can support them in getting to school.

Our latest research has demonstrated that solutions in schools will only go so far. Barriers to school attendance emanate from the deep structural inequalities built into our cities. Compared to other large cities, Detroit has the most challenging conditions for going to school, including concentrated poverty and high rates of asthma,

I School staff are eager and able to address attendance barriers such as student motivation and lack of knowledge, but they find it much more difficult to address structural barriers such as lack of transportation and housing instability – which is where community-led solutions come in.

crime, unemployment, and residential vacancy. Detroit also has the third coldest average temperature of all major U.S. cities, which has a huge impact on attendance, since the city and school transit systems are under-resourced and cover only a fraction of students. An estimated 40% of Black Detroiters do not own a car.

Findings from the first year of our developmental evaluation of DPSCD attendance initiatives suggest that school staff are eager and able to address attendance barriers such as student motivation and lack of knowledge, but they find it much more difficult to address structural barriers such as lack of transportation and housing instability – which is where community-led solutions come in.

### Early community efforts



In one of the first coordinated efforts to reduce chronic absence in Detroit, pastors in Brightmoor piloted a community-led project to use church vans to pick up students and take them to school for one semester in 2013. The initiative worked, and students who were picked up got to school more frequently. Yet, the effort was unsustainable. First, it was expensive. Without the economies of scale of a school system, the pastors couldn't reach all of the students who might benefit. Second, there was no formal evaluation of the initial success of the program, which made it difficult to raise additional funds or demonstrate to city or district officials that transportation interventions were needed. In Southwest Detroit, communitydevelopment organization Urban Neighborhood Initiatives was likewise working to reduce absenteeism through connecting organizations that were working on the issue, parent and youth listening sessions, information campaigns, and youth out-of-school programming.

These early efforts led to the creation of Every School Day Counts Detroit, a coalition that grew to include philanthropic, community, and school partners collectively focused on how to use their resources and expertise to reduce absenteeism. In 2017, Wayne State researchers, who had separately begun a study of absenteeism in Detroit Public Schools, joined the group. Collectively, the coalition determined a research agenda that would combine the study of school-based problems of practice and solutions with a deeper investigation into how community members and city policymakers could improve the conditions for school attendance. Our growing collective understanding of the complexity of the problem of absenteeism motivated us to expand our community-based research this school year.

# The Importance of Expanding Educational Research Partnerships with Community, continued

### Active community partnership

With the support of the Skillman Foundation and the Brightmoor Alliance, we are now piloting a community-based participatory action research project (where university researchers will support community members to identify problems they believe impact school attendance and pilot and evaluate interventions) in the neighborhood of Brightmoor, where 54% of its nearly 1,500 students were chronically absent in 2017-18. Brightmoor has a strong cultural history and was a thriving working class community of single-family homes during Detroit's boom years. Like other areas in the region, it lost population over the last 30 years and suffered from divestment and blight. Nearly all of Brightmoor's residents are Black and economically disadvantaged. Over time, many of the neighborhood's schools were closed, leaving only one traditional public school within its 4-square-mile boundary.

With our community-based participatory action research, we will work in partnership with the Brightmoor Alliance and community organizing group 482Forward to answer these new research questions: 1) What community factors are associated with strong attendance among Brightmoor students, and how can community partners build on those strengths to design interventions to reduce absenteeism? 2) How



does a collaborative approach to participatory action research support the development of community-led solutions? 3) What community-led solutions are associated with improved attendance in Brightmoor?

### The key role and strengths of community in social problem-solving

Chronic absence is a symptom of issues at home, at school, in community, and in policy. Parents and schools can't solve the root causes of chronic absence alone. Therefore, community must play a key role in supporting the efforts of parents and schools as well as addressing issues that are within our span of control or influence. Our community has and should continue to support the efforts of messaging the importance of attendance. This is particularly important in Detroit because of our high rates of student mobility. When community drives the messaging no matter the school, students and families hear the same consistent message.

### Community brings a unique perspective to the work of social problem-solving.

Community brings a unique perspective to the work of social problem-solving. Our Detroit community has and should continue to address issues in the neighborhoods like ensuring that students have safe routes to travel to and from school. Community has and should continue to provide mentoring and high quality after school and summer programs, like our partner Urban Neighborhood Initiatives, with its youth employment and after-school enrichment program in the Springwells neighborhood. Community has and needs to continue to organize to address policies at the school, state and federal levels that create barriers to students being at school everyday all day. In our work, community is a resource of solutions and perspectives that is missed without their inclusion in the effort from conception to evaluation. Rather than the object or subject of our work, community is a key partner. Complex issues like chronic absence demand that we all collectively work on multiple different pieces of the problem simultaneously so that we can see transformational results.

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# The Importance of Expanding Educational Research Partnerships with Community, continued

### Challenges in community partnership work

We know this work won't be easy. We have already encountered challenges, such as convincing all decision makers, both in households and the system, that just 2 days missed a month is significant, that average daily attendance hides the severity of student attendance, and that there are things that can be done at all levels to reduce it. To address this challenge, we have created a roundtable of principals from our community schools, conducted workshops and trainings with national leaders, lobbied school board and philanthropic leadership about chronic absence and pushed an awareness campaign to inform everyone of the issue. Addressing the challenges of poverty requires broadening our coalition and finding new ways



to elevate the roles of employment, trauma, crime, housing, and environment, as strands making up the braid of issues that contribute to chronic absence. Getting the attention of system partners has been challenging since most think this is a "school" problem. Our challenge is to use research to elevate the importance of this issue for all decision-makers in the city, and to help them see how their work may impact whether students can get to school.

### In closing

The problem of absenteeism and disengagement among Detroit students must be solved. Every year, we graduate nearly 10,000 students. They do not have time to wait for us to figure it out by ourselves; we must have as many voices as it takes to make the transformational change that our children deserve and are counting on us to deliver. It won't be solved in silos, where the institutions that serve children are disconnected or at odds with each other. We believe that starting from a place of partnership, collaboration, and learning together is the only way forward to reducing chronic absenteeism, and ultimately creating the stable and engaging schools our students deserve. We are actively seeking additional partners as we broaden the work and the reach of our efforts.

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# The Value of Engagement: How to Set Up and Facilitate an Effective Partnership Meeting

By Felicia Hurwitz and Joanne Pfleiderer (Mathematica: REL Mid-Atlantic)

The concept of "engagement"-using strategic, resourceful information to connect with people, and create meaningful interactions over time-gets a lot of attention these days, as organizations try to cut through a lot of noise and build relationships in a meaningful way. At the Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic (REL Mid-Atlantic), our mission includes creating collaborative partnerships with our stakeholders, which include school districts, state departments of education, teachers, principals, and others. To improve academic outcomes for students, our goals include ensuring that partners are fully engaged in the REL's work so that they take positive actions to achieve their objectives. We've found that following a few key steps when setting up partnership meetings can ensure successful engagement, bringing stakeholders together to learn about, strategize, and tackle important issues. Here we describe recommendations, organized as a series of key guestions and answers, for setting up meetings to engage members of a research-practice partnership effectively.

### 1. Why Hold A Partnership Meeting?

Stakeholders' time is valuable–many organizations are trying to reduce the hours spent in meetings–so providing a compelling reason to meet is a critical first step for success. In our partnership meetings, we empower members to come together to discuss and develop common goals, including possible shortand long-term outcomes that motivate the use of REL Mid-Atlantic research and technical support. Make sure there is a valid reason to get together, and set a purpose for each meeting. For example, a partnership might decide to meet to discuss updates on a shared research project.

### 2. How Should We Determine a Meeting Topic?

First of all, name a meeting organizer to establish priorities for the meeting. The meeting organizer should seek out pressing issues in advance from members. Use a variety of channels to seek input--for example, send emails to the group or schedule individual phone conversations with partnership members. The end of a meeting is a good time to request suggestions for future gatherings. Select a topic that is of interest to the majority of members.



We've found that meeting topics of general interest include:

- Updates on a project that one or more members of the partnership are working on
- Discussion of a high priority challenge facing multiple members of the partnership (e.g., how stakeholders in different states and districts are addressing chronic absenteeism)
- A summary of what the research literature says about a topic of interest to all members in the partnership

Once a topic is identified, it's time to promote the meeting! The organizer should develop an agenda, share it in advance, and ask for additions to it. Sending a calendar invitation to members can also promote interest and ensure that it is on everyone's schedule. Ask the group to invite additional colleagues who might be interested in the topic as well.

### 3. What Strategies Help Ensure An Effective Meeting?

>> Consider inviting an engaging guest speaker. Find an expert on the meeting topic and ask that person to do a short presentation and lead a discussion. The meeting organizer or another partnership member can prepare questions in advance and facilitate the dialogue to involve the group in active discussion.

>> Make sure the right people attend. Include stakeholders who are interested and can take action in the future to address highprofile issues. Invite members to bring along other interested staff from their organization. The meeting organizer can reach out to partners in advance to help them decide whether to invite colleagues or other stakeholders. To generate a lively discussion, a range of people who are knowledgeable about and interested in a topic can help each other generate ideas. Consider the mix of roles represented and try to balance contributions from practitioners as well as researchers.

# The Value of Engagement: How to Set Up and Facilitate an Effective Partnership Meeting, continued

>> Meet in person if possible, in a central location. Face-to-face conversation can enhance the quality of a meeting. The meeting content (discussion plans, presentations, etc.) should be both interesting and compelling enough to make travel worthwhile. In-person meetings of half a day work well when travel is required, while no more than two hours is a good length of time for virtual meetings.

>> Appoint a note taker. Decide who will be taking notes and how you will share them after the meeting so everyone has access (for example, taking notes on a shared Google document or emailing minutes after the meeting). Allow attendees to suggest additions for the notes after they are circulated to make sure all important content is documented.

>> Vary the meeting format. Many meetings are passive experiences where one or two people talk and everyone else listens. When introducing a discussion topic, consider giving everyone a few minutes as you start to share their top successes or challenges. Build in opportunities—for example, a series of three survey questions interspersed throughout the meeting—to energize the team. People also appreciate an opportunity to get out of their seats and move around—we have used a "gallery walk" at some REL meetings for participants to highlight and discuss relevant work on posters set up throughout the space.

>> Host a dry run with presenters. The practice session can take place virtually. Make sure you have a meeting facilitator to run the presentation and discussion. Presenters should draft discussion prompts in advance to engage participants. Make sure each presenter knows how long you would like them to speak (i.e., 15 minutes, 30 minutes) as well as the time allotted for discussion. The facilitator should time each presentation and suggest cuts if the presenters take more than the allotted time during the dry run.

>> Pay attention to the room set up. Make sure the meeting space accommodates group discussion. For example, have meeting participants sit around a table or across from each other. Avoid classroom-style setups where participants sit in chairs all facing the presenters. Find a space that is comfortable–for example, not too cramped, hot or cold, dark or bright.

>> Make time for everyone to interact. Start with a chance for attendees to introduce themselves and their organizations, and include time, such as a coffee hour before or after the scheduled meeting, for networking—one of the most valuable and overlooked aspects of meetings. For meetings that are longer than 2 hours, build in time for short breaks (at least 15 minutes) so people can check their messages, use the restroom, etc.

### 4. How Can We Avoid Common Challenges?

>> Be ready to redirect. If a presenter or participant gets off track, the meeting facilitator should be prepared to jump in and redirect the conversation. For example, the facilitator might ask a question that reorients the participants to the meeting goals, or suggest that an off-topic remark or question can be discussed during break.

>> Be mindful of time. The facilitator should ensure that the presenter and participants stick to the times allotted in the agenda. Plan enough time during the Q and A to address questions during the meeting. In addition, consider holding up number cards to indicate the minutes left for the allotted presentation. the facilitator should help move things along, for example, by saying, "in the interest of time, let's move on to the next topic" or "we have time for one more question about this."

>> Use engaging presentation materials. Be sure that PowerPoint slides are not too numerous or overwhelming. Too much text can make it hard for participants to focus on the content and the speaker. Use figures and graphics that are easy to read and visually appealing. Share any written materials (e.g., slides) with attendees after the meeting.

>> Make sure your technology works impeccably. During the dry run, practice using projectors, remotes, laser pointers, and other devices. Make sure you have appropriate cables for connecting and charging laptops and other devices. Have a backup plan–i.e. paper handouts or presentation saved to a Google or thumb drive. Arrive early and arrange access to the meeting space for setup and practice. For virtual meetings, practice with the web conferencing tool in advance to make sure the content is visible to participants and presenters are audible.

### 5. What Should Happen At The End Of The Meeting?

Congratulations! You made it through a successful partnership meeting. Now it is time to plan for the future. Before everyone leaves, build in time for feedback. A short paper-and-pencil exit survey can be an easy way for everyone to provide anonymous input. Invite participants to share what they think worked well as well as what they think could be improved. Solicit ideas for topics and guest speakers to invite to upcoming meetings. Finally, send an email to attendees to thank them for attending and encourage continued discussion on the topic. Use this email as an opportunity to share meeting materials (e.g., presenter slides, meeting notes, and other resources that were shared or recommended) and solicit additional ideas that attendees come up with after the meeting adjourns.

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# **Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter**

### ATTENDANCE

DETROIT EDUCATION RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP -examines contextual barriers to attendance -examines factors associated with high attendance

### MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

examines how attendance patterns in middle school are related to school climate and academic achievement

### COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

GARDNER CENTER examines system-, school-, and student-level outcomes of community schools work in Oakland

### EARLY EDUCATION

### MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

-examines the transition to kindergarten -examines quality of instruction in Madison 4-year-old kindergarten

### NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK

examines factors impacting the recruitment and retention of male teachers in early childhood education

REL MID-ATLANTIC develops on-track indicator for reading proficiency

REL MIDWEST examines kindergarten entry skills in Illinois

### **ENGLISH LEARNERS**

UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM explores long-term trajectories of Chicago English Learners

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

MADISON EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP predictive power of teachers' report card comments

### **POST-SECONDARY**

HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM examines who applies to a Houston college access program

#### SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

REL MID-ATLANTIC examines disproportionality in school discipline

### SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

REL NORTHEAST & ISLANDS reviews instruments for measuring SEL skills

### **STUDENTS**

OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY examines Arkansas' 2019 NAEP results

### STUDENT MOBILITY

PHILADELPHIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM examines student mobility and dropout in Philadelphia

### TEACHERS

REL CENTRAL

examines associations between middle school Algebra I teacher qualifications and student math achievement

#### **REL NORTHWEST**

examines barriers limited certificated teachers face in becoming fully certificated

# WISCONSIN EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

examines intersection of race, relational trust, and teacher retention

### TURNAROUND

### EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE

examines the first year of implementation of Michigan's Partnership Model of school reform

# **End Notes**

NNERPP I 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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