NNERPP EXTRA

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

Greetings!

By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

To our first-time readers: A special welcome to this reflective space, where we explore the intersection of education research, policy, and practice! To all our returning readers – a warm welcome back! We are excited to share with you the third edition of NNERPP Extra, featuring three new articles and our quarterly roundup of research headlines from our members.

In this edition, you'll find:

- Research Insights: We examine recent college enrollment rates across four different districts represented in NNERPP through their RPP – but the true insight is different than you might expect!

- RPP Deep Dive: We explore how RPPs can attend to issues of equity in evaluating partnership effectiveness.

- Extra Credit: We learn about one partnership's process for developing briefs that effectively engage multiple (including non-researcher) audiences.

- 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. and follow us on Twitter: @RPP_Network.

IN THIS ISSUE

What is Your District's College Enrollment Rate? …It Depends [Part I]

By Paula Arce-Trigatti | NNERPP

In This "Research Insights" Edition

Now on to our third iteration of the "Research Insights" series – which brings together related studies from NNERPP members to explore connections across research and programs and advance our collective knowledge – we are excited to respond to "reader requests" of research areas or topics that might be of interest to examine here. For this edition, we are taking a look at college enrollment outcomes across districts participating in NNERPP through their research-practice partnership (RPP), as suggested by one of our members. As it turns out, this is a popular topic among several NNERPP members, so we have plenty to dive into!

For this particular article, we explore recent work from four of our members, who partner with four of the ten largest school districts in the U.S.:

- Houston Education Research Consortium (HERC), an RPP between Rice University and a number of surrounding Houston-based school districts.

- Los Angeles Education Research Institute (LAERI), an RPP between Los Angeles based researchers and the Los Angeles Unified School District;

- Research Alliance for New York City Schools, an RPP between New York University and the New York City Department of Education;

- UChicago Consortium on School Research, an RPP between the University of Chicago and Chicago Public Schools

Why This Article

We got to work reading through each partnership's artifact (see Table 1), thinking this article would unfold fairly easily through a straightforward comparison of recent college enrollment rates for the four districts studied above.

… not so fast!

As we delved into each report, two things became increasingly clear: one, the construction of the sample differed in each study (i.e., who is included in the study), and two, "college enrollment" can be defined and measured in a multitude of ways. **Why does this matter?**

Most fundamentally, these sample and outcome definition choices matter because it means that direct comparison across all five artifacts (e.g., "What is your district's college enrollment rate?") is not necessarily possible. As you'll see below, the resulting college enrollment rates can look very different, **even within the same district for similar years**, depending on how the sample or outcome measures are defined. More importantly, these choices reflect the underlying research question each district partner was most interested in exploring. Thus, the choice to examine college enrollment rates for high school graduates rather than high school freshmen is not accidental – each sample ultimately tells a different story with different policy implications for decision makers.

The real research insight from today's piece then, reflected in the title, is that exploring a district's college enrollment rate is not quite as simple as it sounds – hence, the "it depends."

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

TABLE 1. List of RPPs + Artifacts Included in This Article

RPP	ARTIFACT
▶ HERC	• Transitioning to College and Work (Part 1: Where are high school seniors from 2006-2008 now?)
▶ LAERI	• College Going in LAUSD: An Analysis of College Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion Patterns
▶ RANYCS	• 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
▶ UChicago Consortium	• Patterns of Two-Year and Four-Year College Enrollment Among Chicago Public Schools Graduates

With this in mind, we've turned this "Research Insights" edition into two parts: In today's article (Part I), we will examine in depth how the samples across the five studies differ and discuss how these differences might matter for policymaking. In the next issue of NNERPP Extra (Part II), we will take up an exploration of how the outcome of interest, college enrollment, differs across the studies, and the ramifications of those differences with respect to policymaking. Note that as a result, in today's article, we are going to ignore any potential differences in how "college enrollment" is defined.

After taking this reading journey with us, we hope you leave with fresh perspectives on the connections between policy, samples, and student outcome definitions. And perhaps the next time someone asks, "What's your district's [insert statistic on any student outcome here]?" you might be prompted to respond with "it depends." With that, let's dive in!

Who is in the sample?

▶ HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES l SAMPLE

We start with the samples utilized in the studies from the Los Angeles and Chicago teams listed above. These reports contain samples that begin with the universe of students that only include those that have graduated from high school, i.e., "high school graduates." To be even more explicit about who is in this sample, we can take a "high school pipeline" like approach (see Table 2) that lists the key events (or possible hurdles) that students must successfully pass through in order to become the "high school graduates" that make it into these samples.

First, students must have successfully transitioned from 8th to 9th grade, which can present its own important barriers to earning a high school diploma. Factors such as transitions to new campuses, adjusting to a learning environment that includes older students, and the added pressures of performing well in preparation for college can all lead to leaks in the high school pipeline. Second, students must then have made it successfully through 9th to 11th grade to reach 12th grade. There are a variety of potential leaks that can occur during this period, perhaps too numerous to mention here. Finally, even though students may have successfully made it to 12th grade, the diploma itself could remain out of reach due to "senioritis," for example.

TABLE 2. Potential High School Events Pipeline

TO BE A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE, STUDENTS MUST HAVE:		
Transitioned from 8th to 9th grade successfully	Made it through 9th - 11th grade successfully and onto 12th grade	Completed all of the requirements to actually earn a high school diploma
A potential leak, especially for those students who must transition to a new campus altogether between middle and high school; see here, here, and here, for example).	There are a number of potential leaks that can happen here (see here, here, and here, for example).	Note that you could still make it to senior year, but then succumb to "senioritis" and fail to fulfill the requirements of the diploma. Additionally, we could also consider: (i) "On-time" graduates, earning the diploma in four years or (ii) simply "graduates," which means they might have taken longer to earn the degree.

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

Thus, conditioning the sample to include only those students that qualify as "high school graduates" will limit the student population being examined to those that successfully made it through the high school pipeline. Moreover, it will include students that may or may not have spent the majority of their high school career at that particular school. Depending on the research question of interest, this may or may not be the right sample (more on this below).

One additional distinction we can make to this sample is the choice of whether to include only high school graduates that completed their high school career "on-time" (i.e., taking four years to complete high school) versus considering graduates more generally (i.e., students that either graduated on-time or graduated within a designated time period, often within 6 years of beginning high school). Some students may take longer than four years to complete the requirements needed to earn a high school diploma, and these students may represent a fundamentally different group than those students able to complete high school in four years. Again, depending on the research question or policy levers one is interested in exploring, this distinction will matter, as you'll see in the later sections.

▶ HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES | FINDINGS

We now turn to the findings from the Los Angeles and Chicago reports, in which the sample is defined as "high school graduates" (see Figures 1 and 2). Both reports include findings for the class of 2008 and the class of 2014. Note that neither report includes samples restricted to "on-time" graduates; rather, the samples contain any student that graduated high school in 2008 or 2014.

You might be wondering why we didn't include them in the same graph, and instead, made a separate graph for each city. Because we haven't explored how each study defines "college enrollment," we actually can't be certain whether these statistics are indeed comparable. Thus, we encourage readers to take in each study separately, and moreover, visit each report to get a full breakdown on how to interpret these findings.

FIGURE 1. College Enrollment in Los Angeles: % of High School Graduates
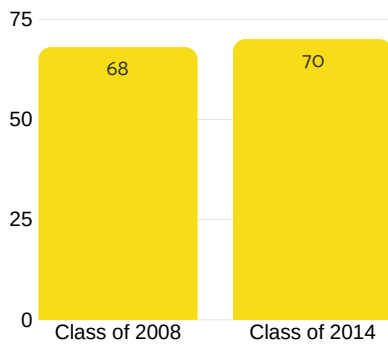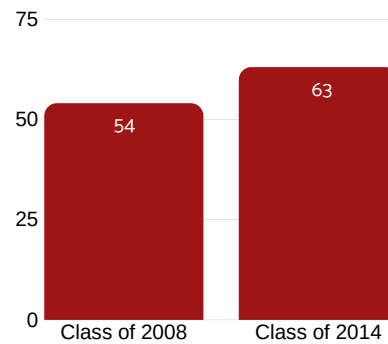

FIGURE 2. College Enrollment in Chicago: % of High School Graduates

For now, we simply note that the college enrollment rate for Los Angeles rises slightly between the two cohorts considered, while the college enrollment rate appears to experience an important increase for Chicago students over the two time periods. For more information on the why behind the findings, please see here for Los Angeles and here for Chicago.

▶ HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES | IMPLICATIONS

From a policy perspective, limiting the sample to high school graduates (whether on-time or not) makes sense if one is most interested in studying how well the transition between high school and immediate college enrollment is going. For example, a district might be interested in knowing whether students are being prepared, towards the end of high school, to actually make this transition (e.g., are district or school strategies helping students find the right college, fill out applications, participate in relevant financial aid opportunities, etc.). Note again, though, that this sample is likely to include some students that may not have spent much time in that particular school, so this will need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

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

Another common policy lever that has surfaced in the research literature is the idea of "summer melt" – i.e., students who have successfully earned a high school diploma and demonstrated an intent to enroll in college, but for a variety of reasons, do not actually enroll in college. Here we note that samples studying summer melt, however, are even more narrow than the "high school graduates" samples included here, since they only include students demonstrating an intent to attend and omit those with no intent.

In any case, restricting a sample to only those students that are considered "high school graduates" does not necessarily address the three events (or possibly four events, if we count "on-time") students must successfully pass through in order to become "high school graduates." For this reason, we might consider broadening the sample to include additional students that don't meet these benchmarks as the next two samples do, which may result in another set of potential policy levers to consider.

▶ HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS I SAMPLE

We next turn to the Houston study, which considers any student that was a 12th grader in the fall of a particular year in its base sample. If we utilize our high school event pipeline described earlier, this means that students in this sample: (i) transitioned from 8th to 9th grade successfully and (ii) made it through 9th - 11th grade successfully and onto 12th grade. In addition to its 12th grade analysis, the Houston report also looks at high school graduates from their base sample, i.e., those students that additionally earned a diploma. Note that this second sample is not comparable to the Los Angeles or Chicago studies mentioned in the section above since the starting point for each sample differs – here, we begin with all 12th graders. In the samples above, they begin with all high school graduates.

This difference is important, as we'll see below. Because the sample with 12th graders is more inclusive than reporting on high school graduates only, we would thus expect the resulting rate of college enrollment to generally be **lower**, as it reflects a portion of students that despite making it to 12th grade, did not in fact earn a high school diploma. One additional item to note specific to the Houston sample is that the study pools together three years of data rather than providing a single metric per year. This masks trends that might appear over time and speaks instead to an average for the time period under consideration.

▶ HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS I FINDINGS

Consistent with our expectations, we see that the rate of college enrollment for high school **seniors**, which includes all 12th graders in the 2006, 2007, and 2008 cohorts, is indeed lower than what is found for high school **graduates** during this same time period (see Table 3 below).

TABLE 3. Houston Study Findings

HOUSTON I College Enrollment Rate for High School SENIORS versus GRADUATES	
High School SENIORS in 2006-2008	High School GRADUATES in 2006-2008
46% (N = 27,074)	56% (N = 22,295)

▶ HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS I IMPLICATIONS

From a policy perspective, including the entire cohort of 12th graders in the sample rather than limiting it to just those that graduated high school may give you a better sense of what supports might be helpful in the final stretch of high school. Between choosing which colleges to apply to, actually applying, making sure you've taken the appropriate entrance exams (and exit exams), and continuing to

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

show up to classes (and pass them!), there are a number of reasons why 12th graders may not actually make it across the high school diploma finish line. Broadening the sample to include all 12th graders can thus help policymakers discern the extent to which high school seniors--more generally--are successfully enrolling in college.

▶ HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN | SAMPLE

Finally, the two studies with the most inclusive sample of the group (i.e., has the fewest number of restrictions for which students make it into the sample) are the two from New York City, which include this blog post and this full report. Both artifacts consider 9th grade students within a given cohort as the starting point for their samples. Connecting back once more to our high school event pipeline (Table 2), this means that, to be included in either sample, students must have: (i) transitioned from 8th to 9th grade successfully.

Where the two products diverge is in the construction of the college enrollment rate itself. To calculate this rate for 9th graders, one has to make a call about how far out to look to see if a student enrolled in college or not. By default, to enroll in college a student must have graduated high school. Intuitively, then, one might first look at how many students enroll in college after completing high school within four years of starting 9th grade. This is the "on-time" graduation rate we discussed earlier, and is how the college enrollment rate is constructed for the NYC blog post. We can also be less restrictive about who is in the sample and instead, allow for those students that might take an additional year or two to graduate high school. Another potential cutoff point might thus be to look at college enrollment for those students who graduate high school within 6 years. The findings from the NYC full report use this as the cutoff.

As we'll see shortly, this decision point has implications for what the numbers then tell us (i.e., you won't get the same college enrollment rate, despite using data from the same district, over the same time period, with the same definition for "college enrollment"). Allowing the sample to additionally include students who may have taken up to six years to earn a high school diploma will most likely result in a **higher** college enrollment rate, all other things equal. This is because the sample captures the additional students that enroll in college, even though they have a slightly delayed high school graduation.

More generally, however, because the sample now begins with students in 9th grade as opposed to those in later grades, we would expect a **lower** college enrollment rate to result overall. Previously we noted the general expectation for the college enrollment rate to be lower for high school seniors relative to high school graduates. Here we note a similar expectation: the college enrollment rate for high school freshmen is likely to be relatively lower than what we might find for high school seniors or graduates. Given that the notion of college is four years away for this group of students, this should be unsurprising. The longer time horizon from 9th grade → 12th grade → high school graduate → college enrollment may introduce greater chances of students dropping out of the pipeline, leading to lower overall college enrollment rates for this group.

What is Your District's College Enrollment Rate? …It Depends [Part I], continued

▶ HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN I FINDINGS

Figure 3 contains the findings from the NYC blogpost that uses the 4-year high school graduation rate in their construction of the college enrollment rate. Figure 4 contains the findings from the NYC full report that uses the 6-year high school graduation rate in their construction of the college enrollment rate.

FIGURE 3. College Enrollment: % of 9th graders in NYC who enroll in college by the fall after 4th year
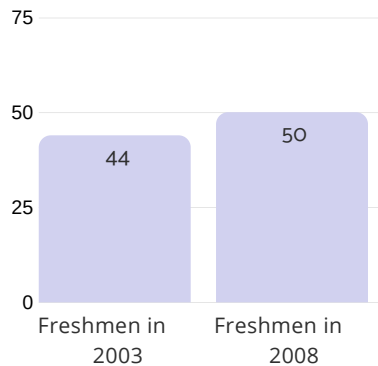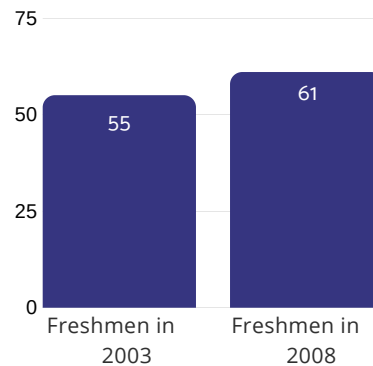
75		
50	44	50
25		
0	Freshmen in 2003	Freshmen in 2008

FIGURE 4. College Enrollment: % of 9th graders in NYC who enroll in college by the fall after 6th year

75		
50	55	61
25		
0	Freshmen in 2003	Freshmen in 2008

As expected, we see that the college enrollment rate for 9th graders when using a 4-year high school graduation cutoff point (Figure 3) is indeed lower overall than when the 6-year high school graduation rate is used (Figure 4).

▶ HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN I IMPLICATIONS

From a policymaking perspective, the choice to condition the sample on high school freshmen may allow for a greater number of policy levers to consider. If the research question of interest is more about how high school experiences contribute to college enrollment, for example, then this is the population of students that must be included in the sample.

For a terrific visualization of how selecting this sample may help frame policy considerations, we highly recommend readers take a look at Figure ES-1 from the NYC full report, which maps out the potential pathways a student from the 9th grade cohort might take to college enrollment. This graphic, together with the entire report–which introduces a conceptual framework for how to approach questions related to college enrollment–is a must-read for policymakers interested in studying this topic further.

Closing Thoughts

As we've seen in this article, a district's college enrollment rate can differ quite a bit depending on who is in the sample. Moreover, the resultant findings from a research study can also have vastly different implications for policy given the sample. We thus strongly encourage **readers** of research to first take a closer look at the conditions defining which students ultimately were included in the analysis, since it's not always clear that simple comparisons can be made on similarly labeled outcomes. Likewise, we also strongly encourage **producers** of research to carefully consider who has to be in the sample and why, especially as it relates to the needs of the end user, and clearly communicate any potential implications from these decisions.

We hope you'll return for Part II of this series (to be published in the next edition of NNERPP Extra), where we'll take a deep dive into understanding how the outcome of interest, college enrollment, is defined across the five studies, as well as the possible implications for policy. As you might have already guessed, the answer is "it depends"!

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

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes

By Erin Henrick (Partner to Improve), Steven McGee (The Learning Partnership), and William Penuel (University of Colorado, Boulder)

Two vital issues for research-practice partnerships (RPPs), as evidenced in recent conversations with NNERPP members during the 2019 NNERPP Annual Forum, are equity and effectiveness: many RPPs are working to address issues of equity, though the forms this work takes vary widely across RPPs, and many RPPs are developing means of measuring their effectiveness, though, again, the process can vary significantly across partnerships. Here we argue that equity and effectiveness are, in fact, two concepts that should be considered in tandem, in so far as an "effective" partnership is one that attends to issues of equity. In particular, we examine how RPPs can consider equity goals prioritized by their partnership using the 5 dimensions of RPP effectiveness framework (Henrick, Cobb, Penuel, Jackson, & Clark, 2017), a framework born of a study funded by the William T. Grant Foundation to develop dimensions for assessing education RPPs. During the NNERPP Annual Forum this year, we prepared and led a breakout session offering a closer look at the five dimensions and discussed with participants how each implicitly addresses one or more facets of equity. This article highlights what we discussed and learned during the session.

Defining Equity

We started the session by asking participants to write down what equity meant to them. When discussing equity as a desired goal, it is important to first clarify the term, given the many ways in which equity is understood.

The following definition consolidates many of the ideas generated in this session by participants – a diverse group of educational professionals and researchers from schools, district offices, state agencies, universities, and research firms.

>> Equity in education is allocating resources appropriately so every child has access to the supports, resources, and opportunities needed to be successful and thrive. Beyond this, equity ensures that resources are tailored to meet individual needs, build on the cultural assets of students, and are designed in such a way that all students have the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.

Defining Equity Goals

Next, we considered the equity-focused goals that RPPs have the potential to address together, arriving at three broad goals:

1. RPPs can support the development of **equitable relationships** between researchers and practitioners by explicitly addressing historical imbalances of power between the two communities and focusing on problems faced by practice organizations.

2. RPPs can support **equitable outcomes** (e.g., instruction and opportunities) for students by engaging in research that specifically investigates and addresses inequities faced by schools, districts, and states.

3. RPPs can support the development of **equitable systems** by reconceptualizing how research institutions, practice institutions, and communities work together for shared goals, removing barriers that limit progress, and building capacities for individuals and organizations to better collaborate.

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes, continued

The Five Dimensions of RPP Effectiveness

In order to examine how these goals fit within the Henrick et al. (2017) RPP Effectiveness Framework, we provided participants a brief introduction to the framework and its dimensions (see table below for a list of the five dimensions).

RPP EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK: FIVE DIMENSIONS
▷ 1. Building trust and cultivating partnership relationships
▷ 2. Conducting rigorous research to inform action
▷ 3. Supporting the partner practice organization in achieving goals
▷ 4. Producing knowledge that can more broadly inform educational improvement efforts
▷ 5. Building the capacity of participating researchers, practitioners, practice organizations, and research organizations to engage in partnership work

Although equity is not specifically named in the dimensions, in our view, the three equity goals outlined above are infused throughout each dimension. More specifically, we argue that by working towards each dimension of effectiveness, those engaged in partnership work are also, in fact, working towards the equity-focused goals listed earlier. For example, through efforts aligned with the first dimension, RPPs also support the development of equitable relationships as well. Similarly, efforts aligned with the second dimension also lead to the development of equitable relationships and in addition, support equitable outcomes. The third dimension is most closely related to supporting the achievement of equitable outcomes, while the fourth and fifth dimensions suggest engaging in RPP work might also lead to the development of more equitable systems.

We discuss each dimension's inclusion of equity-focused goals in greater detail below.

Dimension 1: Building trust and cultivating partnership relationships

When RPPs work to build trust and cultivate partnership relationships, they are also supporting the development of equitable relationships that directly address the longstanding inequities that have persisted between researchers and those being researched, contributing to the marginalization and exclusion of particular groups and voices in school improvement efforts. Partnership relationships are not merely interpersonal; they are also embedded within long sociopolitical and institutional histories that shape how participants approach educational improvement work. For example, research has underscored how essential it is for members of partnerships to acknowledge racialized tension and power dynamics inherent in partnerships and spend time building and cultivating mutual trust and racial solidarity (Vakil et. al 2016).

Additionally, RPPs have the potential (and indeed inherent goal) to "create the conditions for more democratic work" (Tseng & Kohlmoos, 2018) that shifts away from top-down initiatives towards more collaborative, inclusive educational improvement efforts.

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes, continued

Dimension 2: Conducting rigorous research to inform action

As one of the key elements of an RPP, conducting research to inform action also supports the development of equitable relationships, specifically through the collaborative research approach that integrates both researchers and practitioners. As we see it, the way research is typically produced is often inequitable, in that it does not take into account the wants or needs of practitioners, or involve them in the research process itself. In RPPs, involving partners in different aspects of research – such as defining research goals, planning data collection, and interpreting findings – can help ensure that the research conducted relates directly to the pressing problems educators face, and in the process, can also lead to more equitable relationships between researchers and practitioners.

Moreover, when RPPs design research activities to inform action (and if practitioners have a genuine voice in the problems RPPs are addressing), their focus will more likely be on supporting equitable outcomes, as most schools and districts are urgently working to reduce gaps in student learning opportunities. RPPs can design research that addresses equity issues via methods such as documenting opportunities to learn and assessing and making use of data on student experiences in classrooms and other educational settings. This approach includes using theoretical lenses to explicitly examine equity and social justice, in order to better illuminate sources of inequity. RPPs should be specific about the equity concerns on which they are focusing and align their aims and analyses accordingly.

Dimension 3: Supporting the partner practice organization in achieving its goals

In supporting the partner practice organization in achieving its goals, RPPs are also likely supporting equity-specific goals, typically those around equitable outcomes for the children they serve. Within an RPP context, this might mean providing new ways of thinking about equity and broadening conversations about what kinds of equity projects are possible with a diverse group of stakeholders. Researchers within RPPs can also provide additional supports that may be necessary when attempting to push forward an equity-specific research agenda, such as serving as a broker between different groups (e.g., district central office units or district and community groups) when goals are in conflict.

"Within an RPP context, [supporting equity-specific goals] might mean providing new ways of thinking about equity and broadening conversations about what kinds of equity projects are possible with a diverse group of stakeholders."

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes, continued

Dimension 4: Producing knowledge that can more broadly inform educational improvement efforts

Working towards this dimension inherently supports the development of equitable systems by making evidence-based information available to all, regardless of access to the resources and expertise needed to produce the research. This dimension aligns with the idea of democratizing evidence, defined as "recognizing the promise of education research as a vehicle for public engagement and educational equity. Good evidence used in meaningful ways can inform new education programs, guide teachers' day-to-day decisions in classrooms, and assist parents in advocating for their children's needs" (Tseng & Kohlmoos, 2018).

RPPs can specifically attend to issues of equity in their dissemination and engagement practices by publishing findings in a range of venues that extend beyond the research community. Research in public health has found, for example, that practitioners and policy makers can be reached more effectively via news media, social media, issue or policy briefs, one-on-one meetings, workshops, and seminars (Brownson, Eyler, Harris, Moore, & Tabak, 2018).

Dimension 5: Building the capacity of participating researchers, practitioners, practice organizations, and research organizations to engage in partnership work

Finally, partnership efforts described under dimension five can also support the development of equitable systems by orienting RPPs towards building equity-specific capacities at both the individual and system levels. Engaging in RPP activities requires change from "business as usual" for everyone involved, leading to different roles, skills, and organizational structures that "enable different stakeholders to critically appraise research and deliberate over its implications for improving education" (Tseng & Kohlmoos, 2018).

For example, through qualitative inquiry and reflection, RPPs can support individuals within the partnership in understanding how their own identities shape their perspectives and developing cognitive empathy for perspectives that differ from their own.

We acknowledge that RPPs alone will struggle to reduce long-standing inequities between research and practice institutions in the absence of support from the top of the institutions for such an agenda, but we strongly believe that RPP leaders can play a large role in the conversation.

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes, continued

>> IN PRACTICE: An example from The Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science

In what follows, we share several examples of RPP activities aiming to address equity-related goals from the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science (CAFÉCS), an NSF funded RPP seeking to support Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in providing high quality computer science experiences to every student. Steven McGee is a co-PI of this RPP, and Erin Henrick is the external evaluator of this partnership. Both presented during the breakout session described here at the NNERPP Annual Forum.

CAFÉCS promotes **equitable relationships** by focusing on district priorities and problems specifically identified by the Office of Computer Science at CPS. The RPP leadership team consists of faculty from DePaul University, The University of Illinois-Chicago, and Loyola University, educational researchers from The Learning Partnership, and personnel from the Office of Computer Science at CPS. CAFÉCS leadership team members meet weekly and describe collaborative decision-making as a hallmark of their "partnership ethos." This aspect of their partnership identity impacts how they make decisions in team meetings and goes a long way towards addressing potential power imbalances that could otherwise stymie productive collaborations among members from a variety of institutions across Chicago.

The partnership promotes **equitable outcomes** by supporting the Office of Computer Science in providing all students in CPS with a high quality CS experiences. All CPS students are now required to take a computer science course, with the class of 2020 being the first cohort for whom the graduation requirement applies. Partnership work currently underway to support the implementation of this policy includes research and co-design activities around instructional coaching in computer science, professional learning communities for teachers of the adopted Exploring Computer Science (ECS) curriculum, and analyses of student demographics and success rates for ECS and AP computer science courses.

CAFÉCS aims to support the development of **equitable systems** both within the partnership and more broadly. Within the partnership, CAFÉCS holds monthly meetings with education researchers, university computer science faculty, and the entire Office of Computer Science in CPS. This time is spent identifying problems to work on together, sharing and discussing research findings, and engaging in collaborative activities. For example, in a recent meeting, the group began to collaboratively develop a research plan for this upcoming school year that aligns with CPS's equity goals.

Outside of the partnership, one way CAFÉCS supports the development of equitable systems is by participating in the NSF-funded R+P Collaboratory led workshops for partnerships interested in applying for NSF computer science RPP funding. Sharing lessons learned and providing feedback to other developing teams helps build capacity for partnership work in computer science education across the U.S.

Attending to Issues of Equity in Evaluating Research-Practice Partnership Outcomes, continued

Where do we go from here?

As we collectively move forward in working toward equity-focused goals in effective RPPs, several crucial next steps require attention. Participants in our session at the NNERPP Annual Forum proposed the following considerations: the need for an inclusive process to collaboratively define equity, for different language to describe and measure it, for more unpacking of what is meant by success, and for community agency and voice to identify the systems in place that contain bias and to address inequitable resource allocation practices.

> **"***RPPs have the potential to productively address issues of equity that impact education today.***"**

RPPs have the potential to productively address issues of equity that impact education today. Therefore, it is critical that issues of equity receive attention, both when we assess RPP effectiveness and as we consider how the five dimensions of RPP effectiveness can support the development of equitable partnerships – partnerships that offer voice to those not currently being heard, work toward equitable outcomes for the students we serve, and design equitable systems that provide the training and resources for these collaborative activities to take place.

Additional resources: Some tools helping RPPs address issues of equity

On developing equitable partnership relationships:	On equitable outcomes:	On supporting the development of equitable systems:
An RPP Toolkit to Help RPPs Design for Equity	White Paper: How Research-Practice Partnerships Can Support ESSA Implementation for Educational Improvement and Equity: A guide for school districts, state education leaders, and researchers	Practice Guide: Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide Embracing Equity: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization
Blog Post: How to Build Equitable Partnerships	Website: RPP study on ambitious and equitable math instruction	Organization: Expanding the bench
Infographic: Building Equity in Research Practice Partnerships	Blog post: Partnership for Equity: Learning from Oakland's Full Service Community Schools	University of Washington's Equitable Parent–School Collaboration research project
Connecting Research and Practice for Educational Improvement		Chicago Beyond "Why Am I Being Researched?" Guidebook

Brownson, R. C., Eyler, A. A., Harris, J. K., Moore, J. B., & Tabak, R. G. (2018). Research full report: getting the word out: new approaches for disseminating public health science. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 24(2), 102.

Henrick, E. C., Cobb, P., Penuel, W. R., Jackson, K., & Clark, T. (2017). Assessing research–practice partnerships: Five dimensions of effectiveness. New York, NY: William T. Grant Foundation.

Tseng, V. and Kohlmoos, J. (2018). Democratizing Evidence in Education and Why it Matters. Urban Education Reform: Bridging Research and Practice Education Week Blog. https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/urban_education_reform/2018/11/democratizing_evidence_in_education_and_why_it_matters.html

Vakil, S., McKinney de Royston, M., Suad Nasir, N. I., & Kirshner, B. (2016). Rethinking race and power in design-based research: Reflections from the field. Cognition and Instruction, 34(3), 194-209.

● *Erin Henrick is Founder and President of Partner to Improve, an education research and consulting group supporting improvement and systemic change in education through powerful partnerships; Steven McGee is President of The Learning Partnership and Research Director of the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science; and Bill Penuel is Professor of Educational Psychology and Learning Sciences in the School of Education at the University of Colorado, Boulder, PI at the National Center for Research in Policy & Practice (NCRPP), Co-PI of the Research+Practice Collaboratory, and a contributing author to LearnDBIR.*

Developing Briefs that Bridge the Gap in Understanding among Researchers and Policymakers

By Jessica Holter (Tennessee Education Research Alliance) and Jeff Archer (Knowledge Design Partners)

Education researchers and those in the practice/policy space often do not speak the same language, making it very challenging to build a shared understanding around the findings and implications of important research studies. Researchers tend to focus on how a particular study advances the field, while practitioners and policymakers often want to know how research can inform specific actions to solve pressing problems. This disconnect is one reason why writing a useful research brief is so difficult. In research-practice partnerships (RPPs), where people from different backgrounds with varying types of expertise must work together to advance the aims of all partners involved, this disconnect is especially challenging – but it's also the ideal place to develop processes for briefs given the collaborative nature of the work.

At the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA), we've been partnering with Jeff Archer of Knowledge Design Partners to experiment with structures and processes that better facilitate partnership interactions to result in research briefs that are both useful and clear to all partners. One process to emerge from this work is the "Initial Interview," a structured conversation with a researcher about the key takeaways from a specific study, guided by a set of questions designed to prompt the researcher to formulate explanations meant for a policymaker or practitioner audience – such as our partners at the Tennessee Department of Education. These interviews are now a crucial step in our process of writing a non-technical research brief based on a technical paper. Here we share how this process came about and more importantly, how it's helping us engage multiple audiences with our research more effectively.

Continuous Improvement

The Initial Interviews grew out of a realization that our old process for developing briefs was inefficient, and often trying to those involved. As many RPPs do, we struggled with how to communicate research findings in ways that stay true to what the research actually says but that are also accessible and actionable to those whose on-the-ground work we aim to inform. As a result, early TERA briefs would go through endless cycles of revisions with the researchers as TERA graduate students and staff (tasked with actually writing the brief) worked to tease out the important findings and implications from the associated studies. Even still, some of these early briefs did not connect with policymaker/practitioner audiences or clearly provide the value we had hoped they would.

We realized that a potential solution to this problem was for the researcher and the author of the brief to start talking much earlier in the process. Credit for the idea goes to Amber Ravenell, a former TERA graduate assistant. Assigned to write a brief based on a new analysis by Drs. Jason Grissom and Brendan Bartanen on turnover patterns among teachers of color, Amber asked if she could speak to Dr. Grissom before creating a research brief outline. She felt that if he could clarify a few points she had questions about she'd be in a better position to summarize and support the key points (i.e., the earliest version of the Initial Interview).

The resulting brief, when published, was clear and to the point. As references to the brief made their way through social media and news outlets we were also pleased to see that the message that was picked up was often the message we intended. While we certainly wouldn't attribute all this success to the process we used to develop the brief – the research itself was noteworthy and significant – this part of the process helped get us where we needed to be, and seemed to be more efficient than what we had done previously.

Codifying the Process

Realizing we were on to something, we decided to codify the technique of the Initial Interview, working with Jeff Archer, who has been helping TERA with its communications and knowledge management since we launched three years ago. A former education journalist, Jeff understands the art of the interview. Together, we developed a line of inquiry to guide our discussions with researchers while keeping the needs of our policymaker and practitioner partners present.

We looked closely at several TERA briefs that seemed to get the most traction, reflected on what made these briefs compelling to TERA's key audiences (e.g., primarily practitioners at TDOE, but also other important state and district education leaders and policymakers), and asked ourselves and our TDOE partners "What are all the things that we need our research briefs to address?"

Developing Briefs that Bridge the Gap in Understanding among Researchers and Policymakers, continued

We reasoned that in contrast to academic journal articles that must lay out the argument for the research and detail the research process itself, what matters to policymakers and practitioners are the new insights that can help them think more productively about how to address particular challenges in their work.

Accordingly, we developed a line of inquiry for the Initial Interviews that is structured around the key takeaways that policymakers or practitioners should understand from a particular study or set of studies. To give an example, a key takeaway from Dr. Grissom's study on turnover among teachers of color is that turnover among Black teachers is especially high when they are racially isolated–that is, when they have few Black teachers as colleagues. This is an important insight for education leaders looking to diversify the teacher workforce.

Most of the guiding questions we use in the Initial Interviews are aimed at clarifying and supporting these key takeaways. For example, we ask how the researcher would explain both the research process and the findings to a non-research audience. We ask them to explain how big or small a difference is in non-statistical terms, and not just how a result should be interpreted, but also how it might be misinterpreted. We even ask them at this early point what kind of visual representation might best convey a finding to someone who's unfamiliar with statistics.

This new process also helps ensure that by the time we share the briefs, in draft form, with our partners at the state education department, we've already wrestled with how to communicate what's in them to non-research audiences. This enables our partners to focus their reactions and feedback on possible implications from the research instead of trying to also sort out its meaning.

Building Healthy Habits

In addition to helping us develop better briefs more efficiently, this process is now also guiding us in how we facilitate various conversations between policymakers/practitioners and researchers. Indeed, we have since used many of the same questions to ground other conversations outside of the brief process in ways that lead to the shared understanding we seek: Most recently, several TERA researchers presented their topline research findings to new staff at the state education department, and we made sure they addressed questions we ask in the Initial Interview as they crafted their presentations.

We do the same when we're planning new research with the department – always addressing, for example, why the topic is important to study given the Tennessee context. In this way we're building a habit of healthy and productive discussions that can bridge the gap in understanding among researchers and their policy and practice-focused audiences.

A Work in Progress

While we have made progress toward actionable products, it would be a stretch to say the answers we get in our interviews are so clear and complete that all we have to do is plug them into our brief template in order to create an excellent product. There's still lots of back and forth both among the brief author, researcher, and TERA and state department leaders as we massage the text and graphics over time. But because of the Initial Interview, we now start from a better place, and all the massaging is aimed at clarifying the answers to the questions we initially posed. Ultimately, what we hope is that this process and its supporting line of inquiry limits the times in which a researcher shares a methodology or a set of findings that may be confusing or less useful to policymaker or practitioner audiences.

Still, we have a long way to go and more to learn. With each brief and each conversation, we're continuously learning about what we need to ask, and how to ask it, to prompt the right discussion. We're improving our techniques and our tools as we go. And we are learning that we still need to better communicate what we're after, and why, to our researchers and to TERA staff and others who help us in developing briefs.

Your Ideas and Feedback

On that note, as we look to improve, we'd love to hear from other RPPs how they are addressing this challenge. What strategies do you use to facilitate conversations that build a shared understanding among researchers and their partners in your organization? What are you thinking of trying? We shared our tools at a session at the NNERPP Annual Forum this year (you can find them all here, plus the slides from the presentation we did with Jeff Archer from KDP). If you have questions or ideas about them, please let us know (jessica.l.holter@Vanderbilt.edu and jeff@knowledgedesign.org)! The more we exchange, the more we all learn how to build the shared understanding that's essential for our work.

● *Jessica Holter is Research Manager at the Tennessee Education Research Alliance and Jeff Archer is President of Knowledge Design Partners.*

Research Headlines From NNERPP Members: Last Quarter

ARTS EDUCATION
UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines the role of arts education in social-emotional development

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines student access end equity in access to pre-K programs

NYC EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH NETWORK
examines instructional leadership and coaching in Pre-K for All programs

ENGLISH LEARNERS
OFFICE FOR EDUCATION POLICY
examines English Learners in Arkansas

REL MIDWEST
examines English Learner student achievement

HIGH SCHOOL
UCHICAGO CONSORTIUM
examines implementation of centralized high school application system

POST-SECONDARY
HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
-examines role of college-prep courses in post-secondary attainment
-examines college aspirations among high school students enrolled in a college access program

REL MIDWEST
examines postsecondary pathways of Minnesota public high school graduates

SCHOOL CHOICE
EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines rates of school choice participation in Michigan

SCHOOL CLIMATE
EQUITY IMPLEMENTED
examines student experiences of school climate

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE
examines school turnaround

SCHOOL QUALITY
BALTIMORE EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines how to rate schools more equitably

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS
examines how New Orleans school performance and quality is evolving

SPECIAL EDUCATION
RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS
examines the landscape of special education in NYC

STUDENT MOBILITY
DETROIT EDUCATION RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP
-examines the association between school characteristics and student mobility in Detroit
-examines student exit in Detroit

SUMMER LEARNING
HOUSTON EDUCATION RESEARCH CONSORTIUM
examines the effects of summer school on students' learning rates

TEACHERS
EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines race and gender differences in teacher evaluation ratings in Michigan

REL CENTRAL
examines teacher mobility and attrition in Colorado, Missouri, and South Dakota

REL MIDWEST
examines trends in teacher demand, supply, and shortages in Michigan

THE TENNESSEE DEPT. OF EDUCATION AND THE TENNESSEE EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE
examine state-wide educator survey results

WISCONSIN EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP
-examines the effect of teacher performance feedback on new teacher retention
-examines the connection between the use of teacher performance feedback and student achievement

TECHNOLOGY
REL MIDWEST
studies teachers' use of technology in instruction

TRANSPORTATION
EDUCATION POLICY INNOVATION COLLABORATIVE
examines Detroit transportation program

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.

@RPP_Network   **nnerpp.rice.edu**