Title
Best Practices of P-20 Partnerships for Increasing College Access and Persistence for Under-Represented Students

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Author
Cevallos, Lynn

Publication Date
2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Best Practices of P-20 Partnerships for Increasing College Access and Persistence for Under-Represented Students

by

Lynn Cevallos

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Megan Loef Franke, Chair

The purpose of this study was to analyze P-20 partnerships in order to learn the best practices they employ to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. This study adds to the literature by reaching beyond the collaborators and decision-makers who serve on partnership committees and include the individuals at the local level who carry out the work. A qualitative study was designed to learn how all of the stakeholders involved address the challenges inherent in inter-segmental collaboration. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a cross-section of 29 participants from four partnerships in Southern California. The participants included teachers, professors, administrators, and counselors from the public PK-12 and higher education sectors. Additional data were collected from partnership meetings and site visits for each of the four partnerships. Findings from this study conclude that the three major challenges these P-20 partnerships face are: (1) a lack of trust within and across sectors, (2) a lack of time for partnership work, and (3) sustaining dynamic partnerships. Conversely, the
three best practices uncovered were: (1) structure initiative-based committees with transparent reporting systems, (2) find champions for the work, and (3) focus on student needs.
This dissertation of Lynn Cevallos is approved.

Patricia M. McDonough

Jody Z. Priselac

James W. Stigler

Megan Loef Franke, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my high school counselor who told me, “School is not for everyone and it’s definitely not for you.” Without those words resonating I doubt I ever would have sought to learn about and work in the public education system. Additionally, without her assistance I would not have been able to drop out of high school at fifteen and experience the alternative routes to college that exist.
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VITA

September 3, 1970  Born, Hartford, Connecticut

1999  B.A., Mathematics and Secondary Education
      Boston College
      Chestnut Hill, MA

1995-1996  Math Tutor
          Broward Community College
          Coconut Creek, FL

1998-1999  Substitute Mathematics Teacher
          Norwood Public Schools
          Norwood, MA

1999-2002  Mathematics Teacher
          The School District of Palm Beach County
          Boca Raton, FL

2000-2002  Adjunct Math Professor
          Broward Community College
          Coconut Creek, FL

2002-2003  Director of State Filings
          Perr & Knight
          Pacific Palisades, CA

2003-2004  Mathematics Professional Development Consultant
          University of California, Los Angeles
          Los Angeles, CA

2004-2006  Senior Program Specialist: K-12 Mathematics
          Los Angeles County Office of Education
          Downey, CA

2007  Mathematics Consultant/SAIT Provider
      New Directions for Academic Advancement
      Carlsbad, CA
2007-2010  McGraw Hill Education
          Educational Consultant
          Los Angeles, CA

2010 – 2013  College Bridge
            Founder & Co-Director
            Los Angeles, CA
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I thank my beautiful children, Mateo and Maya, who were incredibly patient and understanding for the years I worked nights and weekends on my dissertation. I remember Mateo, at three years old, trying to help me learn the GRE words I had written on flashcards. Maya, who is three years old now, sat next to me these last few days scribbling on pages in a book while explaining that she’s writing her dissertation. Thank you, babies, for all of your help.

Despite my children’s efforts, my husband, Dr. Pedro Cevallos, was the greatest help of all. I am extremely fortunate to have a spouse who has been through this process and has a passion for academic writing. Thank you, Pedro, for tirelessly listening to me talk about this project and for reading draft after excruciating draft. I am also grateful for all of the parenting, cleaning, cooking, shopping, etc., etc., you did while I worked on this project. And somehow you also managed to carve out a small social life for me – I don’t know how you managed to do it all. I am forever grateful. You are my rock.
CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background

Access to a college education is critical for improving people’s quality of life and society as a whole. On average, graduating with a Bachelor’s degree will result in $2.8 million in earned wages over a lifetime as opposed to $1.3 million with only a high school diploma (Carnevale, Stephen, & Ban, 2011). On an individual level, adults without college degrees have significantly less earning potential over their lifetime (Cheeseman Day & Newburger, 2002), higher risks of health problems and increased incarceration rates (Baum & Payea, 2005; Ross & Wu, 1996; Smith, 2004). Society also benefits from a college-educated population with a robust economy, stronger civic engagement, and lower levels of crime, poverty, and healthcare costs (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Unfortunately, college access and graduation rates for under-represented students (minority, first-generation, low-income) are decreasing in comparison to white, non-Hispanic students even though students of color constitute the nation’s fastest growing demographic (US Census Bureau, 2010). Of students who matriculate in college, 39% of both African-Americans and American Indians and 50% of Hispanics earn their bachelor’s degrees within six years compared to 68% of Asians and 61% of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The total college degree attainment rate for African-Americans is less than one-quarter (24%), for Hispanics it is 17%, and for American Indians it is 16% compared to Asians at 65% and Whites with a 44% rate (Y. M. Kim, 2011). If current college graduation trends continue, there will be shortage of 16 million college-educated workers nationally and one million in California by the year 2025 (Matthews, 2013).
**Factors that Inhibit College Access and Persistence**

There are five main elements that determine college access and persistence for all students: (1) financial resources, (2) support from significant others, (3) knowledge and information about college and financial aid, (4) academic preparation and achievement (Dickert-Conlin & Rubenstein, 2009; Perna & Kurban, 2013; St. John & Musoba, 2012) and (5) a seamless pipeline between K-12 schools and higher education (Michael W Kirst & Usdan, 2009; Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, & Usdan, 2005; Venezia, Finney, & Callan, 2007). Below, these elements are individually examined in relation to under-represented students.

First, students’ financial resources (as measured by their families’ income level) are a strong predictor of the probability they will matriculate in and graduate from college (Baum et al., 2010). Therefore low-income students, who tend to be disproportionately African-American and Latino, have significantly lower chances of attending and graduating from a post-secondary institution (Heller, 2013).

Second, support from significant others – typically in the form of parental involvement - is crucial for enabling students to enroll and graduate from college (Perna & Jones, 2013). Low-income parents in under-served communities, while they want to be actively involved in their students’ education, typically lack the experiences navigating American higher education and are poorly equipped to guide their children along the path.

Third, knowledge and information about college and financial aid (college knowledge) greatly helps students navigate the complex pathways to a post secondary degree. Unfortunately, under-represented students and their families tend to be poorly informed about the roadmap to college, entrance requirements, and the costs and methods for financing post-secondary
education (Burciaga, 2009; Kane, 1999; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Even though high school counselors would seem like the most logical professionals to work with these students and their families, two systemic obstacles in under-served communities prevent them from being able to accomplish this: their inordinately large caseloads and the fact that an average of 87% of their time is spent on other duties unrelated to college counseling (McDonough, 2004).

Fourth, academic preparation and achievement are critical to ensure students’ success in college. Unfortunately, under-represented students face disproportionately high rates of academic remediation, which greatly hurts their chances of earning a college degree. (Bailey, 2009; Complete College America, 2012; Perna & Jones, 2013).

Finally, a seamless pipeline between K-12 schools and higher education is key to helping students progress between educational segments. Currently there is a disjuncture between these systems in relation to curricula, assessments, financial processes, data systems and accountability (Brown & Niemi, 2007; Kurlaender, Jackson, & Howell, 2012).

**P-20 Partnerships**

In efforts to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students, a trend of collaborative partnerships between PK-12 and higher education institutions began in the 1980s and increased at a rapid pace across the nation (Laguardia, 1998; Wilbur, 1987; Wilbur & Lambert, 1991). In California, the P-20 partnership movement took off at the turn of the millennium (California Educational Round Table, 2007) with limited studies on efficacy (Domina & Ruzek, 2012b). While research has revealed some of the challenges these collaborative ventures have faced, very few studies have been able to describe and explain their best practices and how to replicate them. Similarly, there have been no studies to date examining
from the educators behind the scenes who carry out the partnerships’ initiatives. Therefore, it is imperative to create new knowledge about the best ways P-20 partnerships can significantly increase college access and success for under represented students.

**Selection of P-20 Partnerships**

Four partnerships in urban areas across Los Angeles and Orange counties were selected based on their size, initiatives, and years in existence. The largest one was between a large K-12 school district, a community college, and a CSU. The smallest, on the other hand, was between only one high school and a CSU. All four collaborative ventures focused on increasing college access and/or persistence for under-represented students in a variety of ways. Their years in existence ranged from one to over 20. From this sample, 28 participants were selected for this study. The selection criteria included diversity in job functions (administrators, teachers, professors, and counselors), sectors (PK-12 and higher education), and roles within their respective partnerships (collaborator and implementer).

**Research Questions**

This study is anchored by the following research questions:

1. In the perception of the P-20 partners (including PK-12 teachers, counselors and administrators, as well as higher education faculty, counselors and administrators), what are the key factors that hinder college access for under-represented students?

2. In the perception of the P-20 partners, what are the key factors that hinder college persistence for under-represented students?

3. According to the P-20 partners, what challenges, if any, hinder the development, implementation, and evaluation of their designed interventions?

4. According to the P-20 partners, what are the best practices learned from participation in their respective projects?
Research Methods

The overarching design for this project was a qualitative study with the purpose of learning the challenges and best practices of P-20 partnerships as they develop, implement and evaluate their initiatives to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. Data were collected from documents, field notes, and in-depth interviews and analyzed and coded using qualitative methods.

Significance

The findings from this research project will inform stakeholders at all educational levels and policymakers about the best practices of P-20 partnerships devised to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. This knowledge will greatly benefit society through stronger workforce development, decreases in crime, and poverty. Similarly, our nation’s most needy populations will be afforded the opportunity to earn a college degree and therefore break the trans-generational cycle of poverty.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, there are five elements that determine college access and persistence, none of which are in abundance for under-represented students. In order to develop a deep understanding of this problem, this chapter presents an in-depth synthesis of each element as well as the broader historical factors that contributed to, and attempted to alleviate, the problems. This information is presented in accordance to three major themes. First, the historical context of college access for under-represented students details issues surrounding affordability, financial aid, and academic outreach programs. Second, all five factors that inhibit college access and persistence are presented in depth. Third, the history of sector separation and school/university collaborative partnerships analyzes the disjunctures between sectors and the collaborative partnerships that emerged to fuse the systems together. Finally, the gaps in the research are identified that led to the development of this study.

Historical Context of College Access for Under-represented Students

Prior to the 1940s higher education institutions in the United States were predominantly attended by White single men, hence the title bachelor’s degree (Thelin, 2011). Census data from 1940 reveal that less than four percent of the nation’s 19 and 20 year-old college students were nonwhite. Researchers concluded that affordability was, and still is, a leading factor inhibiting college access (Baum et al., 2010; Burdman, 2005; Lane, 2009; Nidiffer, 1999; Orfield, 1992). The issue of affordability for low-income students first received national attention in the 1940s. Concerned with a double-dip recession due to the large unemployment rates of World War II (WWII) veterans, President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Servicemen’s
Readjustment Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill, into law in 1944 (D. Kim & Rury, 2007; Lane, 2009). This legislation provided financial support to veterans via (1) weekly allowances until they were able to find employment, (2) securing loans that would assist them with purchasing homes, land, and businesses, and (3) accessing college through direct student aid programs that were provided by the federal government (Lane, 2009). Kim and Rury (2007) reported, “in 1947 more than one million veterans attended institutions of higher learning, some 48 percent of a total collegiate enrollment of nearly 2.4 million” (p. 306).

Although the G.I. Bill did assist some African American WWII veterans (mainly Southerners), most servicemen were White and the law did little to change the demographic of college students in the United States. In 1940, 48% of White 19 and 20 year-old high school graduates attended college compared to 13% of African American graduates (D. Kim & Rury, 2007). In 1946, the Higher Education for American Democracy (commonly known as The Truman Report) shed light on income disparities among college students. This document concluded that students from higher income brackets were four times more likely to attend college than those from lower income brackets when student ability was held constant (Nidiffer, 1999). The statistics are compounded by the fact that minorities tend to have a higher rate of poverty than Whites. The Truman Report resulted in a massive federal government commitment to make college accessible to all; however, results did not materialize for nearly two decades (D. Kim & Rury, 2007; Orfield, 1992).

Almost twenty years later, Congressional actions occurring between 1964-1972 contributed to large gains in college access for low-income and minority students (D. Kim & Rury, 2007; Orfield, 1992). The first came in August 1964 when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) as part of his administration’s “War on Poverty.”
Concurrently, President Johnson developed the Gardner Commission to address federal financial aid in education. One recommendation that resulted was to connect federal aid to the War on Poverty programs (Thomas & Brady, 2005). As a result, two landmark acts followed that aimed to improve educational outcomes for under-served students: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 (Thomas & Brady, 2005; Wolanin, 2003). Thomas and Brady (2005) explained, “since its inception, ESEA has consistently remained the single largest fiscal source of federal support for educating vulnerable schoolchildren” (p. 51). In 1965, schools and districts received almost $1 billion in funding through ESEA.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 also authorized educational grants such as college work-study, Head Start, and Follow Through programs (Snyder & Dillow, 2011). In addition to financial support, programs such as Head Start provided at-risk students with early academic interventions. The Office of Economic Opportunity was subsequently created which housed the Special Programs for Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds, otherwise known as the nation’s TRIO programs (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). The term TRIO was coined in the late 1960s to describe three federally funded educational opportunity outreach programs: (1) Upward Bound (developed by the EOA), (2) Educational Talent Search (created through the HEA of 1965), and (3) Student Support Services (emerged from the Higher Education Amendments of 1968) (Thelin, 2011).

The TRIO programs expanded the federal government’s assistance from solely financial to include academic interventions and college counseling. Cowan Pitre and Pitre (2009) contended, “the primary goal of TRIO Programs is to provide equal educational opportunities for all U.S. citizens by increasing college readiness and developing higher education aspirations
among students from low-income, first-generation college, and ethnic/racial minority backgrounds” (p. 96-97). Similarly, HEA provided grants for post-secondary institutions but also included early intervention programs.

Both the HEA and the Title IX Amendment in 1972 created grant programs for low-income students. Specifically, the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant provided need-based financial aid for students to use at the college of their choice (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997). Fenske et al. (1997) argued that these grants (later renamed federal Pell grants), combined with the HEA, “resulted in the most rapid increase in low-income and minority students’ participation in higher education in our history” (p. 2). From 1968 to 1976, there was an increase of approximately 50% of low-income students attending private universities (D. Kim & Rury, 2007; Orfield, 1992). The access gap between Whites and non-whites almost closed during this period – in the 1960s the gap was 13% but by the mid 1970s it diminished to 0.8%. It is important to note, however, that these statistics are based on high school graduates only; the gap between White and non-White high school graduation rates still remained wide.

The closure of the college access gap for high school graduates in the 1970s returned to its previous rate of 13% in the 1980s. Several factors contributed to this. From a college affordability standpoint, two main factors were (1) the Middle Income Student Assistance Act in 1978, and (2) the 1981-1982 recession (Fenske et al., 1997; Nidiffer, 1999; Orfield, 1992). The former made government subsidized loans available to the middle class which resulted in soaring loan costs that, in turn, decreased the amount of federal grants (Orfield, 1992). The latter resulted in a hike in college tuition, which the grants did not keep pace with making loans a necessity for low-income students. Accumulating debt through loans is not an attractive or feasible alternative for many low-income families; therefore, the loans primarily benefited
middle and upper-income students (Auerbach, 2004; Burdman, 2005; Orfield, 1992). Latinos, the fastest growing minority in the United States, are particularly adverse to financing college through loans (Auerbach, 2004; Oliva, 2008).

Another factor that changed the landscape of college access in the 1980s was the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (Wolanin, 2003). The reauthorization of HEA in 1980 adopted two key concepts for eligibility in TRIO programs: (1) students’ status as first-generation college students, and (2) the consideration of students’ prior academic performance. Much like the transition of federal financial aid grants to loans, this shift expanded the reach of TRIO programs to the middle class.

The pre-1980s college access gap rates continued through the 1991-1992 recession and was exacerbated by the Great Recession of 2008. In 2010, the American Community Survey (ACS) reported that 18.6% of Whites earned a bachelor’s degree compared to 11.7% of African Americans and 8.9% of Latinos.

Factors that Inhibit College Access and Persistence

The literature outlines five major categories of predictors that determine college access and persistence for all students: (1) financial resources, (2) support from significant others, (3) knowledge and information about college and financial aid, (4) academic preparation and achievement (Dickert-Conlin & Rubenstein, 2009; Perna & Kurban, 2013; St. John & Musoba, 2012) and (5) a seamless pipeline between K-12 schools and higher education (Michael W Kirst & Usdan, 2009; Venezia et al., 2005; Venezia et al., 2007). This section provides an in-depth look at each category in terms of the effect on under-represented students.
First, financial resources (in terms of family income) play a key role in whether students matriculate in college and the type of college they attend (Baum et al., 2010). Specifically, there is a direct correlation between grant aid and the probability of enrollment in college (Perna, 2010), especially need-based aid (St. John, Musoba, & Chung, 2004) which has a larger effect on low-income students, African Americans, and Latinos compared to Whites (Heller, 2013). Receiving grants, however, was associated with Whites’ having a higher probability of matriculating in their top choice school. Similarly, receiving loans had a direct correlation in Asian Americans’ matriculation. However, neither grants nor loans were associated with the probability of African Americans and Latinos being able to enroll in their first-choice college (D. Kim, 2004). Furthermore, under-represented students’ often lack a deep understanding of the availability of financial aid and the advantages and disadvantages (as well as the criteria) associated with different types of forms of aid (Perna & Jones, 2013).

Second, support from significant others in general (Perna & Jones, 2013), and parental involvement in particular (Perna & Titus, 2005), is closely aligned with students’ decision to enroll in two-year or four-year colleges. This is mainly due to the fact that these relationships tend to offer students critical college knowledge necessary to transition from high school into higher education. It is important to point out, however, that parents of under-represented students tend to have limited involvement mainly due to the social, economic, and psychological barriers they face and their limited personal experiences with post-secondary education (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). As such, it is impossible to teach your child what you do not know yourself. Sokatch (2006), however, concluded that friends' plans to attend college are specific predictors of under-represented students’ matriculation in four-year colleges.
Third, knowledge and information about college and financial aid are strong predictors of students’ ability to access and persist in college. Unfortunately, most under-represented students and their families lack this “college knowledge” and access to the professionals that can help inform them about it. This has a detrimental effect on their college aspirations as “there is solid evidence that a lack of information and a lack of understanding about the process of applying for college and for financial aid result in sub-optimal college-going decisions” (Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin, & Pichler, 2005, p. 318). Ultimately this leads them to experience significantly lower key outcomes such as college expectations, applications, enrollment, and choices (Perna & Titus, 2005). Fortunately, researchers have concluded that simplifying the student financial aid process and providing assistance with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can greatly improve the rates of college enrollment for students from low-to moderate-incomes. Specifically, after receiving this support, students were more likely to submit a financial aid application, matriculate in college, and receive need-based financial aid (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2009). The challenge is finding individuals or organizations that are capable of providing these crucial services for free or at a low cost.

While McDonough and Calderone (2006) concluded, “no professional is more important to improving college enrollment than counselors” (p. 1705), they are most often unable to do so due to systemic barriers. Specifically, counselors nationally have on average almost 500 students on their caseloads yet are only able to spend 13% of their time on college advising. The bulk of their day instead is occupied with discipline, testing, scheduling, prevention activities (dropout, drug, pregnancy and suicide), and other administrative duties as assigned by the principal (lunch duty, tardy sweeps, bus dispatching, supervision, etc.). In some states, the ratio of students to counselors is as high as 994:1 and for under represented students it’s 1,056:1
This greatly inhibits the amount of time that can be spent advising each student on the admission processes as well as assisting them with crafting and editing their college entrance essays.

Fourth, the lack of academic preparation and achievement tends to manifest itself in the high rates of academic remediation for under-represented students (Bailey, 2009; Complete College America, 2012; Perna & Jones, 2013). The remediation problem is particularly pervasive nationally at broad access colleges since they are “the point of entry for 80 percent of four-year students and virtually all two-year students. Four-fifths of public four-year colleges and 98 percent of community colleges provide remedial courses” (Bettinger & Long, 2009a, p. 737). Specifically, 1.7 million students nationwide require remedial classes annually (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Pretlow & Wathington, 2013) and less than half of them will complete the entire sequence (Long & Boatman, 2013). This rate is significantly lower for men, African Americans, part-time students, older students, and students that matriculate in vocational programs (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Often these students experience the stigma of being labeled as not being college-ready leading to higher frustration, lower self-esteem, and ultimately higher drop out rates (Bettinger & Long, 2009b), especially at the community college level (Bailey et al., 2010). Of all students who require remediation, “fewer than 1 in 10 graduate from community colleges within three years and little more than a third complete bachelor’s degrees in six years” (Complete College America, 2012, p. 3).

In addition to the emotional price these students pay, academic remediation also results in a staggering $3.6 billion in direct costs to them and “an additional $2 billion in lost lifetime wages, since students who take remedial courses are more likely to drop out of college without a degree”(Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011, p. 1). Even students that are able to complete
their college degree are adversely affected by remediation through the accumulation of greater
debt, spending more time in college, and delaying their entrance into the workforce (Tierney &
Garcia, 2011). This problem also harms post-secondary institutions with community colleges
spending more than four times as much as four-year institutions on remediation (Strong
American Schools, 2008). Ultimately, all this has a deleterious effect on the nation and the state
of California through lower income tax revenues and an unskilled workforce (Johnson, Sengupta,
& Murphy, 2009).

The inability of under-represented students to access and succeed in college is
particularly pronounced across the largest two systems of higher education in the nation, The
California Community Colleges (CCC) and The California State University (CSU). The CCC
collectively serves 2.4 million students through its 112 colleges and the CSU educates more than
400,000 students across its 23 campuses. In the 2011–2012 academic year, the CCC spent over
$20 million on the Basic Skills Initiative 1 to offer support services (counseling, assessment,
placement, tutoring, and instructional materials) to the approximately 70% - 80% of their
students that require remedial instruction in both math and English (California Community
Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2012). Similarly, the CSU spends close to $30 million annually on
remediation and in 2012 nearly one-third (32%) of incoming freshmen needed it in both English
and mathematics, despite the fact that the University draws from the top third of California’s
high school graduates (The California State University, 2012).

Finally, a seamless pipeline between K-12 schools and higher education would enable a
streamlined flow of students through educational sectors (Domina & Ruzek, 2012b; Venezia et

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1 “The Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) was a grant funded initiative from the California Community Colleges
Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) which began in 2006 as part of the strategic planning process. The goal of the BSI
Unfortunately, there is currently a disjuncture between the K-12 system and colleges
(Hoffman, Vargas, Miller, & Venezia, 2007; McLendon, Heller, & Lee, 2009). Specifically, in
California the K-12 and higher education systems were originally connected with Community
Colleges (Michael W Kirst, 2007). Currently, however, these structures are disconnected and the
lack of collaboration and communication is a leading factor obstructing college access and
persistence (M. Kirst & Venezia, 2001; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Venezia & Kirst, 2005).

Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, and Usdan (2005) contextualized the situation:

Currently, K–12 and postsecondary education exist in separate worlds in the United
States. Policies for each system of education are typically created in isolation from each
other—even though, in contrast to the past, most students eventually move from one
system to the other. Students in K–12 rarely know what to expect when they enter
college, nor do they have a clear sense of how to prepare for that next step (p. viii).

Specifically, they argue that states need to use four policy levers to align the educational
pipeline: (1) curricula and assessments, (2) finance, (3) data systems, and (4) accountability.

First, they contend that stakeholders at every educational level must align curricula and
assessments at high schools directly to college enrollment requirements in order to ensure
college readiness (Brown & Niemi, 2007). Second, they advocate for states to conflate their K-
12 and higher education financial (Kurlaender et al., 2012) processes in order to facilitate inter-
segmental budgeting and collaboration. Third, they urge the development of shared K-16 data
systems that enable student tracking throughout the entire educational pipeline facilitating
longitudinal studies to better gauge student achievement every step of the way. Finally, they
encourage states to join their K-12 and higher education accountability systems in order to foster
collaboration between elementary schools, secondary schools, and institutions of higher
education that increase student achievement throughout the entire educational system.
History of Sector Separation and School/University Collaborative Partnerships

Increasing college access and persistence by repairing “leaks in the pipeline” is the goal of today’s P-20 partnerships. This section provides the historical context of separation and divide and details of the last 30 years of initiatives that began fusing the system back together.

According to Michael W Kirst and Usdan (2009), five major developments attributed to the disjuncture between K-12 schools and higher education since the late 1800s. These were, “disjointed curricula for grades 10 to 14; the evolution of teacher preparation programs; the detachment of community colleges from high schools; divided governance and finance; and a lack of inter-level organizational relationships.” Beginning with the inception of Harvard in 1636 and continuing for over 200 years, mainly in Northeast states, college admissions were based on prerequisite knowledge of content that mirrored the course of study at each college and not the curricula of secondary schools (Schudson, 1972). At the time, the purpose of grade schools was to prepare students for life and not for college.

The purpose of grade-school education changed in 1892 when the National Education Association's "Committee of Ten" was appointed and charged with defining grade-school curricula and its alignment to college (National Education Association of the United States - Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1894; Schudson, 1972; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009). The committee grounded their work around eleven questions. The first five were mostly logistical such as which courses would be taught at what age, to what depth, and for how many hours. With the exception of question nine which focused on pedagogy, questions six through eleven pertained to the alignment of grade-school curricula
and exams to college. Questions seven and eight specifically addressed the purpose of schooling and the differentiation, later called tracking, of students as college-bound:

7. Should the subject be treated differently for pupils who are going to college, for those who are going to a scientific school, and for those who, presumably, are going to neither?  
8. At what stage should this differentiation begin, if any be recommended?

The resulting report, National Education Association of the United States - Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies (1894), stated, “the 7th question is answered unanimously in the negative by the Conferences, and the 8th therefore needs no answer” (p. 17).

The committee’s recommendation for an academic education for all students was the catalyst for the creation of the College Entrance Examination Board and a common college entrance examination. Kirst and Usdan (2009), explained, “In 1900, for example, the College Entrance Examination Board established uniform standards for each academic subject and issued a syllabus to help high school students prepare for college entrance subject-matter examinations” (p. 5).

The efforts in the late 1800s to standardize curricular paths and alignment to higher education reversed in the early 1900s as scholars revisited the debate whether the purpose of school is preparation for life or college (M.W. Kirst, Usdan, Evans, & Valant, 2009; Wraga, 2001). Additionally, the academic curriculum proposed in 1892 was considered unattainable for many students (Tyack, 1995). A new report in 1918, called *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, was viewed by many scholars as taking a social efficiency stance toward secondary school (Wraga, 2001). The result was a differentiated approach that tracked students into college or vocational paths.
The trend back to separation between K-12 and higher education continued for the next 30 years. Michael W Kirst and Usdan (2009) found, “In the years after World War II, the notion of academic standards shared across K–12 schools and higher education vanished” (p. 7). In the 1950s, the pendulum began its swing back toward alignment with mixed success (M. Kirst, & Venezia, A., 2004). On one hand, the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act and subsequent Higher Education Act and TRIO programs brought the goal of higher education back to the nation’s forefront. On the other hand, the HEA paired with Pell Grants resulted in the nation’s largest increase of minority students accessing higher education (Fenske et al., 1997). With the increase in enrollment came an increase in the number of institutions. These efforts led to the “partnership movement” that began in the 1980s.

**The Partnership Movement**

Although an exact date to mark the beginning of inter-segmental partnerships is unknown, Wilbur and Lambert (1991) claim that the “partnership movement” took off in the mid-1980’s. According to Laguardia (1998), “the most reliable measure of the growth and development of these collaborations has been provided by the three national surveys conducted by Wilbur and Lambert (Wilbur & Lambert, 1991, 1995; Wilbur, Lambert, & Young, 1988)” (p. 169). The surveys were commissioned by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) and resulted in three publications: the National Directors of School/College Partnerships in 1988; Linking America’s Schools and Colleges in 1991; and Linking America's Schools and Colleges: Guide to Partnerships and National Directory (2nd ed.) in 1995. The data were collected from surveys mailed to the chief academic officers at every college and university in the country. The survey classified the partnerships into four categories: (a) programs and services for students, (b) programs and services for educators, (c) coordination, development and assessment of curriculum and instruction, and (d) programs to mobilize, direct, and promote
sharing of educational resources. More than 1,400 abstracts of partnership activities were received.

The term “partnership movement” was based on several changes from the 1988 and 1991 reports, which were constructed from data collected in 1987 and 1989, respectively. First, the number of partnerships grew sharply in the 1980s. In 1970, nine new partnerships formed. The number increased to 32 in 1980, then more than tripled to 114 in 1985 and more than doubled to 282 when the data were collected in 1989. Their reach also grew during this period from a focus on high schools reported in the first survey to elementary and middle schools in the second. Another factor contributing to the “movement” was a shift in the relationships. Wilbur and Lambert (1991) reported:

Most of the recently formed partnerships are local, grassroots efforts that place college and university professionals into new and very different relationships with their counterparts in the schools. These relationships are characterized by collegiality and respect, and by the awareness that the partners are acting out of mutual, enlightened self-interest. Unlike the more traditional ways in which colleges relate to schools, the new partnerships are not one-way streets; schools and colleges both gain from their participation in partnership activities. (p. 1)

The “new and very different relationships” had caught the attention of the research community, particularly in relation to programs and services for educators.

**School/University Collaborative Partnerships**

In 1975, concerned that educational research was not having an impact on classroom practice, Tikunoff and Ward (1983) proposed that teachers be included in the inquiry process instead of simply consumers of research. Their research focused on collaboration and defined the essential characteristics of the collaborative research process in the “ideal sense” as:

1. researchers and practitioners work together at all phases of the inquiry process;
2. the research effort focuses on "real world" as well as theoretical problems;
3. mutual growth and respect occur among all participants; and
(4) attention is given to both research and implementation issues from the beginning of the inquiry process.

The term “collaboration” became a buzzword in education the 1980s – so much so that Dickens (2000) published a literature review spanning two decades on the topic and claimed, “Collaboration is increasingly en vogue in the United States” (p. 21). After comparing and contrasting two decades of research-based definitions, Dickens (2000) cites Tikunoff and Ward’s definition as the model for federally supported school/university collaborations.

While Wilbur and Lambert (1991) were mapping the nation’s partnerships, a growing body of research focused on the school/university relationships within teacher education programs. This type of partnership has several titles including Professional Development Schools (PDS), Professional Practice Schools, Mastery Learning Sites, and practice schools and partner schools” (Christensen et al., 1996). The research on PDSs focuses on the type of collaborative relationship that established the partnership and uses that framework to analyze stages of development and associated challenges (Dixon & Ishler, 1992; Goodlad, 1993).

The three types of collaborative relationships that were defined are cooperative, symbiotic, and organic (Babco, 2004; Christensen et al., 1996; Dixon & Ishler, 1992). Cooperative collaboration is defined as short term, consultative, project-based, and resulting from personal relationships and not institutional affiliation. An example is a university professor conducting a professional development session at a school site. The second type of collaboration, symbiotic, includes institutional affiliation and resources from both sectors, as well as some benefit for each but results in little or change in either institution. An example is pre-service teachers’ need for the university to earn their degree and the university’s need for teachers for their research. The third type, organic, focuses on a shared vision or goal between institutions and results in change for both. Babco (2004), explained, “Unlike symbiotic
relationships, which emphasize mutual self-interest, organic relationships stress the common good” (p. 154).

Researchers used the types of collaboration to understand the evolution of PDSs. For example, Dixon and Ishler (1992) used the definition of organic collaboration from Babco (2004) and the developmental stage theory of Baum et al. (2010) to describe the development of PDSs between the University of South Carolina and the state’s public schools. The six developmental stages of collaboration used were formation, conceptualization, development, implementation, evaluation, and termination/reformation. In the end, they found an inability to achieve parity was an underlying challenge through all stages but the authors remained hopeful that the institutional change anticipated in organic collaborations would occur after the final stage. Dixon and Ishler (1992) concluded:

Although tempered by our failures to achieve true parity and significant university faculty involvement, our optimism arises from an uneven but clear movement toward these and our other goals. Stage 6, termination/reformation, is a stage of reevaluation and renewal, an opportunity for reflection, and a mechanism for preventing a return to the old ways. (p. 32).

Stage 6, the final state, and beyond was not reported in their study.

The research on collaborative PDS partnerships continued to grow through case studies designed to uncover challenges and indicators of support. Building on the work of Dixon and Ishler (1992), Christensen et al. (1996) used the findings of the case studies to extract key variables of support of successful partnerships to utilize as a framework to study six additional PDSs. The variables of support utilized were: finding common ground, commitment from top leadership, strong relationships with key individuals, time, continuing benefits, and fiscal support. They found:

A few essential factors, such as a common agenda and individuals committed to establishing strong, equal relationships, were critical to the success of our partnerships.
Although other factors (such as commitment from top administrators and fiscal support) are important, they were not the sustaining factors. In addition, struggling with parity issues and basic values and assumptions was a continual, integral part of the process. (p. 177)

Similar to Dixon and Ishler (1992), parity issues were underlying in respect to all variables of the collaboration.

The partnership movement continued to grow well beyond teacher education programs. For example, Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) conducted a study of collaborative school/university partnerships occurring between one higher education institution, the University of Rochester, and one school system, Rochester City School District. The study was an analysis of the myriad of partnerships extending from one university to one school district to “understand types of collaboration, school populations served, university divisions involved, longevity of collaborations, size of program staff and volunteers, numbers of students served, perceived goal accomplishment, quality of collaboration, institutional commitment, and help needed” (p. 479).

They identified a total of 57 unique collaborations for analysis and described:

These programs were as varied as the university’s medical school staff’s teaching nutrition and pregnancy prevention in school health education classes, the university art gallery’s conducting tours and classes for thousands of city students, arts and science undergraduates’ serving as mentors and volunteers in numerous schools, and the university’s sponsoring city school students to spend part of the summer on campus working on various research projects. (pgs. 482-483).

Although they found the participants to have a generally positive outlook on their partnership work, similar challenges were reported that spanned the 57 programs. A lack of time, financial resources and parity were the main barriers. These challenges are consistent with past findings in PDS partnerships. Extending beyond the literature on PDS partnerships, Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) concluded, “In a larger context, this study suggests that the movement toward partnerships in education and human services is no longer a social or academic experiment but
has become institutionalized” (p. 502). As school/university collaborative partnerships became institutionalized at the local level, the common challenges brought attention to the disjunctures that remain at the state level.

**The Rise of P-16 Councils**

The study of local, grassroots efforts expanded to state-level research through the mid-2000s. AAHE made school/college collaboration a key focus point of its national reform agenda (American Association for Higher Education, 1993). Additionally, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education commissioned numerous studies on the divide between K-12 and higher education. The research uncovered misalignments between curricula, assessments, and financial, data and accountability systems between the sectors (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009; The Southern Regional Education Board, 2010; Venezia, 2000). In response, P-16 councils began forming across the nation. P-16 is defined as “an integrated system of education designed to raise student achievement at all levels, preschool through a baccalaureate degree” (Rainwater, 2000). Instead of focusing on the priorities of a given sector, “the focus of a P-16 system is on what students need to become successful, rather than what institutions, administrators and practitioners need” (Rainwater, 2000).

The number of P-16/P-20 councils grew from four – Florida, Idaho, Iowa and New York – in the 1990s to 42 in 2007 (Domina & Ruzek, 2012a). In the mid-2000’s, national analyses of P-16 councils was conducted. In 2006, the Education Commission of the States published The Progress of P-16 Collaboration in the States and in 2007, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education conducted a 50-state survey of P-16 councils. The first key finding of the latter was, “State P–16 councils are becoming more prevalent, but a variety of obstacles limit the
capacity of these councils to implement P–16 policies” (Walsh, 2009). The obstacles hindering the work of the councils were often the same obstacles that hinder the local efforts, specifically the division of financial, data and accountability systems. Many of the councils also operated in a space that was neither connected at the local level nor had any policymaking authority. M.W. Kirst et al. (2009) reported, “what the state has in policymaking authority and broad vision it lacks in direct access to students and local knowledge” (p. 10). Of the P-16 councils, Walsh (2009) found, “a lack of policymaking authority at the state, district, and institutional levels also poses a barrier to P-16 governance” (p.25). Another challenge for the councils is remaining intact through leadership changes in government. At the time of this writing, California’s P-16 council had recently disbanded.

The Partnership Movement in California

With the exception of the disbandment of California’s P-16 council, the partnership movement has been growing since the 1980s. In 1983 the Santa Ana Partnership formed between Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana Community College, California State University, Fullerton, and University of California, Irvine. This was the first partnership with all four sectors of California’s public educational system working collaboratively on a common goal. Long Beach followed by joining the city’s school district, community college and CSU in 1992. After that, partnerships increased rapidly across the state. In late 2006, concerned about the decline in the state’s college preparation, attendance and graduation rates, California’s Education Round Table (CERT) “directed the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee (ICC) -- its programmatic arm -- to identify collaborative efforts in California whose goal is to enhance student preparation for college” (California Educational Round Table, 2007, p. 2). A total of 53 partnerships were identified through a state-wide survey. Eight of the partnerships were
designated as “mature” meaning they had been in existence for at least five years. These data illustrate the rapid increase in partnerships since the beginning of the new millennium.

Formal partnership agreements between higher education institutions and local school districts became a trend in the last decade. The formal agreements, generally called “promises”, “pledges”, or “compacts”, aim to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students and provide guarantees to participating students who participate in specific programs. The types of guarantees include placement test waivers, paid tuition, and/or priority registration. One such agreement, The Long Beach College Promise, was the first, and thus far the only, contract to later become formalized as a Senate Bill.

The Long Beach College Promise. The city of Long Beach was experiencing economic turbulence in the early 1990s. Major employers had left the city and the demographics were shifting to include a higher percentage of low-income English learners (Nielsen & McCarthy, 2009). In response, business and community leaders formed the Long Beach Economic Promise in 1992. Although this initiative was focused on economic development, the importance of preparing students for the workforce was an important element. As a result, CSU Long Beach (CSULB), Long Beach City College (LBCC) and Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) formed the Long Beach Seamless Education Partnership (The Partnership), to help the city’s students transition into college and the workforce.

On March 20, 2008 leaders from CSULB, LBCC, and LBUSD signed the Long Beach College Promise (The Promise) in an effort to increase college access and persistence for LBUSD students. The Promise evolved as a project of the Partnership, which began over a
decade earlier. In their Annual Progress Report (2012), The Promise summarized their goals as follows:

- Increase the percentage of LBUSD students who are prepared for and attend college directly from high school;
- Increase the percentage of LBCC students who earn degrees and/or career technical certificates;
- Increase the percentage of LBCC students who successfully transfer to CSULB or another four-year college or university; and
- Increase the percentage of CSULB students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree and/or advanced degrees. (p. 3).

In 2011, the collaboration was formalized as Senate Bill 650 and named the College Promise Partnership Act. SB 650 includes data supporting the need for the partnership and recent accomplishments. One highlighted gain is “an increase in the rate of college attainment for participating students with CSULB accepting over 80% from LBUSD” (p. 93). SB 650 includes several provisions governing the partnerships with a focus on the role of LBCC. Specifically, Article 1.5 Section 48810.5 states, “The Long Beach Community College District and Long Beach Unified School District may enter into a partnership to provide participating pupils with an aligned sequence of rigorous high school and college coursework leading to capstone college courses, with consistent and jointly established eligibility for college courses” (p. 4-5). Details of the alignment include LBCC’s required participation in the EAP, the guarantee of access to courses and the coordination of counseling for participating students.

The Long Beach Promise has received a great deal of local and national attention; even SB 650 refers to the collaboration as “nationally recognized” (p. 4). Most news articles specifically recognize CSULB President F. King Alexander, LBCC Superintendent-President Eloy Ortiz Oakley, and LBUSD Superintendent Chris Steinhauser who formally signed the Promise on March 20, 2008. However, the collaborative efforts reach well beyond the
leadership of these three institutions. Watts & Levine (2010) reported, “over the years, the partnership has grown to countless initiatives that have become a defining feature of the community and a model for communities across the nation” (p. 9). They cite the involvement of an additional 46 community organizations and institutions. Across the literature, the benefits of collaboration are cited as the key element to the partnership’s success.

Gaps in the Research

There is little research across California’s partnerships; the body that exists began just over ten years ago and focused mainly on policy recommendations. For example, Cohn et al. (2004) conducted a two-year analysis of seven partnerships throughout the state. The partnerships were selected because of diversity in their location, focus and longevity, and utilization of “eight key principles of successful partnering: shared vision, effective communication, respect for differences, ongoing evaluation, adequate resources, ongoing processes to stay relevant, an appropriate organizational model, and committed leaders” (p. 3). Although the source of these principles was not provided, they are similar to the key variables of support - finding common ground, commitment from top leadership, strong relationships with key individuals, time, continuing benefits, and fiscal support – cited by (Christensen et al., 1996) for PDSs. The purpose of the study by Cohn et al. (2004) was to identify policy recommendations to support partnerships. The five policy goals that resulted were: (1) Improve alignment across educational segments, (2) Increase incentives and resources for school-university collaboration, (3) Encourage cross-institutional exchange of faculty, staff and students, (4) Effectively use student achievement data, and (5) Strengthen accountability for student attainment of higher education. While focused on policy recommendations, the report also contained lessons learned and notable results for each partnership.
Much like the research on P-16 councils, the partnership studies also focused on policy. Over a decade ago, Laguardia (1998) stated, “Because the creation of partnerships is a relatively new development, there has not been sufficient opportunity to study their characteristics or their records of success. Consequently, there is very little knowledge of the factors that make school/college partnerships successful” (p. 170). Today Domina and Ruzek (2012a) make the claim that “although the K-16 school reform movement spurred a great deal of policy-making activity over the past decade, very little empirical research has been undertaken to assess this movement’s effectiveness” (p. 244). In response, they evaluated the effects of partnerships in terms of student outcomes. No other studies across partnerships in California are known at this time.

Assuming each local partnership evaluated their initiatives, what is unknown is whether the findings are generalizable and, if they are, in what ways. What is also unknown is whether the challenges with collaboration experienced by the PDSs in the 1980s and 1990s are applicable in today’s formal partnership models, especially since Christensen et al. (1996) concluded that educational partnerships had become institutionalized.

Another notable gap in the research is the missing voice of administrators, faculty members, and counselors throughout each sector carrying out the initiatives that were created by the partnership committees. Another similar angle was noted by Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) who studied 57 partnerships between one university and school district:

One limitation of the study is that it examines university-school collaboration from the perspective of only the university. It would be of great interest and value to do a similar study interviewing the teachers and administrators in the school district who are involved in the same collaborations. (p. 497)

Do the individuals in the district perceive the barriers to college access and persistence for under-
represented students the same as those who developed the strategies to fix the problems? Are they concerned about these issues? These are the questions this study aims to answer.

Summary

In order to understand how P-20 partnerships can best increase college access and persistence for under represented students, it is critical to contextualize the problem by reviewing the academic literature and consulting the rich historical record.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to create new knowledge about P-20 partnerships that can be used to inform future educators embarking on similar projects. Beginning in the 1980s and gaining rapid momentum at the turn of the millennium, California’s P-20 partnership movement continues its expansion with little research on best practices. To date, survey data has mapped partnerships throughout the state and studies have revealed challenges and lessons learned for select collaborative ventures. However, little is known about the transfer of challenges or best practices and even less about the educators behind the scenes who carry out the partnerships’ initiatives.

In order to construct knowledge to inform future efforts, I conducted a qualitative study of 28 individuals involved, or recently involved, in P-20 partnerships. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Questions

1. In the perception of the P-20 partners (including PK-12 teachers, counselors and administrators, as well as higher education faculty, counselors and administrators), what are the key factors that hinder college access for under-represented students?

2. In the perception of the P-20 partners, what are the key factors that hinder college persistence for under-represented students?

3. According to the P-20 partners, what challenges, if any, hinder the development, implementation, and evaluation of their designed interventions?

4. According to the P-20 partners, what are the best practices learned from participation in their respective projects?
Research Design

The overarching design for this project was a qualitative study given that the purpose was to learn the challenges and best practices (Creswell, 2013) associated with how P-20 partnerships develop, implement and evaluate initiatives to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. Merriam (1998) explained, “in contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all of the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6). In this case the goal is to learn how individuals from different sectors organically come together to work toward a common goal. To gain an understanding of this phenomenon, a cross-section of individuals spanning several partnerships will serve as the population for this study.

According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative approach is appropriate when conducting a study that is exploratory in nature. Since this study is creating a unique sub-group of partners who, as a whole, represent several collaborative ventures, I will focus on emerging themes that transcend specific initiatives or cultures within any given partnership or partner organization.

Site Selection

Although specific “sites” are not relevant to this study, specific partnerships were selected and then participants were selected from each “site.” Four partnerships were selected for their diversity in size, initiatives, and years of existence. The largest of the four involved a large unified school district, a community college and a CSU. The second largest included three schools districts (one medium and two small), a community college, a CSU and UC. The third comprised of a medium unified school district, a community college and a CSU. The smallest was between one high school and a CSU.
All of the partnerships aimed to increase college access and/or persistence for under-represented students. One focused on a district-wide comprehensive college knowledge program with a smaller alignment project between a subset of the institutions. A second concentrated on curricula alignment projects in math and English with a small college counseling component. A third focused on aligning curricula and preparing students for the college’s placement test. A fourth had several initiatives, but was mainly focused on alignment of curricula and assessments in English and math.

All partner institutions were located in Los Angeles and Orange counties. The school districts served predominantly low-income, minority, first-generation college students and were located in urban areas.

**Sample Selection**

From the partnerships described above, 28 participants were selected for this study. The goal of the sample selection was to strike a balance between sectors, job functions at their respective sites, and roles within the scope of partnership work. The job functions included administrators, teachers, faculty members and counselors. Table 1 displays participant job functions and sectors. An effort was also made to find individuals involved in different aspects of partnership work. I chose 22 participants that were included in the collaborative process and six who were not. Inclusion in the collaborative process means individuals who were invited to attend, and attended, planning meetings where decisions are made about partnership initiatives. Those not included were implementing the partnerships’ initiatives at their respective sites at the request of their supervisor.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Job Category &amp; Sector</th>
<th>PK-12</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Faculty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection and Analysis

Three types of data were collected and analyzed for this study: (1) documents, (2) field notes, (3) and interviews.

**Documents.** Document collection began in the fall of 2011. The purpose was to learn about the history and initiatives of California’s P-20 partnerships and use this information for site selection. The types of documents collected were formal written agreements between partner institutions, board reports, meeting minutes, informational brochures and flyers, news articles, and legislation. The formal agreements included details of the promises or guarantees made to participating students, the names of the partner institutions, and the effective dates for the partnership. Board reports contained evaluation data associated with the projects. Meeting minutes offered discussions about the projects that were not included in promotional documents. For example, two partnerships were excluded from this study after reading the minutes and learning that new leadership in partner institutions were not aware of the partnerships existence and had not upheld the promises to students. Informational brochures and flyers provided overview information on promises and highlighted successes. News articles reported agreement
signings and data for two initiatives. Legislation was only applicable to one partnership – a Senate Bill outlined the Long Beach College Promise.

**Field Notes.** The purpose of the field notes was to gather background information to compare to the interview data. Field notes were collected before and after each interview and during partnership meetings. Seven partnership meetings were attended.

**Interviews.** Participants involved in the four P-20 partnerships selected for this study were interviewed beginning January and ending in late April of 2013. The interviews averaged 45 minutes in duration. The protocol was semi-structured with structured questions in the beginning and end and semi-structured in the middle. Notes were taken during the interviews to organize the data according to research question. Within 48 hours of each interview the data were transcribed, coded by research question, sub-coded with summary statements, and saved for several levels of analysis. First, all data coded by research question was saved in a separate file. These files were analyzed as a whole, and also broken down into partnership, job title category, PK-12 sector, and higher education categories.

The process described above worked well for analyzing data pertaining to research questions one, two and four. Research question three asked about the challenges in the development, implementation and evaluation stages. Although plenty of data were available to answer each question, the findings that emerged spanned two or three stages. For this question I returned to the coded data, chose a word or two to shorten the summary statements, and looked for emergent findings. Once the findings were visible I compared subsets based on partnership, job title category, PK-12 sector, and higher education sector.
Implications for Practice

The findings from these data will serve to inform educators seeking to develop future P-20 partnerships designed to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. The findings will advise educators of potential challenges and suggest best practices based on the collective experiences of 28 partners. Although it is not recommended to exactly replicate any partnership, it is helpful to learn what has and has not worked in other situations in order to make well-informed decisions about future projects.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was established by the involvement of a cross-section of participants from different partnerships working toward separate initiatives. The participants’ prior partnership experience ranged from one year to approximately 20. The average for the group was five years of experience. Seven of the participants had past experience with a different partnership than the one they currently engaged in plus concurrent participation in more than one collaborative. Interview credibility in this study was established by selecting individuals I had not met or worked with prior to this project. The exception is one client from an action research project that occurred the year before this study began.

Reliability and Validity

Merriam (1998) contended, “validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (p. 199-200). In order to mitigate my biases, I thoughtfully utilized the following two strategies suggested my Merriam (1998) to enhance the internal validity and reliability of my study: (1) identification of researcher’s biases, and (2) triangulation.
My personal biases come from my personal and professional dedication to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. As an under-represented student who, statistically, should not have attended or graduated from college, I dedicated my career to this mission. At approximately the same time this study commenced, I launched a non-profit organization dedicated to the same mission. Admittedly, there were times when the participants’ responses piqued my interest from a business sense. There were also plenty of times that, through my work, I had knowledge that would be beneficial to the participant. In order to prepare for these occurrences, I reminded myself of my biases before each interview to remain cognizant of this issue. If there was information that I felt the participant could use to better support their students, I made a notation to myself to come back to it later. Additionally, comparing the results from the multiple data collection methods above will triangulate the data, helping to increase the validity of the study further.

**Ethical Issues**

First, I adhered to the Code of Ethics set forth by the American Educational Research Association (AERA). More specifically, Creswell (2013) argued, “[ethical] issues arise primarily in specifying the research problem, identifying a purpose statement and research questions, and collecting, analyzing, and writing up the results of data” (p. 63). The next ethical issue Creswell (2013) identified lies within the purpose statement and research questions. He warned, “deception occurs when participants understand one purpose for a study but the researcher has a different purpose in mind” (p. 63-64). Before every interview and partnership meeting, when asked to introduce myself I would clearly delineate my role as a researcher and the purpose of my study. I also explained my professional role and that my goal for this project
is to inform that work. In addition, every participant signed the informed consent documents clearly spelling out the nature and purpose of my investigation.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The overarching purpose of this study was to learn the best practices of P-20 partnerships designed to increase college access and persistence for under-represented students. In order to frame the discussion, the participants were first asked their perceptions regarding the factors that hinder access and persistence. This information was sought to determine if perceptions varied for different subgroups of participants. Once this groundwork was laid, the respondents were asked about the challenges they faced in their partnership work. The final questions in the protocol inquired about best practices.

The participants’ perceptions of the factors that hinder college access and persistence for under-represented students aligned with the literature; therefore, these findings are summarized instead of reported in depth. Instead, this chapter focuses mainly on the key challenges the partners reported and the best practices they learned from their experiences. The three key challenges are: (1) a lack of trust within and across sectors, (2) a lack of time to engage in partnership work, and (3) sustaining dynamic partnerships. The three best practices are to: (1) structure initiative-based committees with transparent reporting systems, (2) find the champions for the work, and (3) focus on student needs. These findings were the most representative across all partnerships in which the participants were engaged. Challenges and best practices that were heavily reported by participants engaged in one particular partnership are not included if they did not triangulate in the conversations with the data collected on the other partnerships.

The three best practices reported relate to the challenges but not in a one-to-one fashion. Rather, the best practices are activities that address two or more challenges simultaneously.
Summary of Findings of Factors Hindering Access and Persistence

When the participants were asked about their opinions regarding the factors that hinder access and persistence for under-represented students, each provided a list of causes. Although the participants were asked about access and persistence separately, the same factors often overlapped for both categories but were more heavily weighted in one or the other. As the list of factors provided is consistent with the literature, this section will provide a statistical overview of three key responses and the variations reported in terms of access or persistence.

A lack of information and support to help students navigate California’s complex public education system was the barrier cited most, accounting for a total of 79 factors reported by 93% of the participants (n = 26). In terms of access, a lack of college knowledge was perceived to be the greatest hurdle and was reported 29 times. Inequitable support for under-represented students, specifically from outreach programs, was mentioned 14 times as a barrier to access. In terms of persistence, a lack of support by college counselors to navigate California’s complex higher education system was perceived to be the key obstacle and was reported 26 times.

The second most reported impediment to access and persistence was interpersonal or intrapersonal influences, accounting for a total of 42 factors reported by 93% of the participants (n = 26). The weights for access and persistence varied. For example, external influences from a student’s family, peers, teachers and/or counselors were reported 23 times as factors hindering access as compared to 12 times for persistence. Once students transitioned from high school to college, intrapersonal influences such as motivation, self-advocacy, and culture shock were perceived to have a greater effect and reported 22 times as obstructions to persistence as compared to nine times for access.
The third key barrier reported mainly pertained to persistence. Placement in remedial courses in math and/or English upon matriculation into college was perceived as a key factor obstructing persistence by 78% of respondents \((n = 22)\). This issue was reported 42 times with a lack of academic preparation attributed 19 times and systemic factors referenced 17 times. The systemic factors were a misalignment of curricula and assessments – specifically college placement tests – and a shortage of availability of remedial courses, particularly in California’s community colleges.

In summary, the participants’ responses suggest a thorough understanding of the barriers under-represented students face in terms of college access and persistence. No variation in responses was found when controlling for subgroups – teachers, counselors or administrators - within or across sectors. The only difference noted was teachers, faculty, and counselors related barriers to stories of individual students whereas administrators discussed students in the aggregate. To best fulfill the purpose of this study, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the key challenges the participants experienced and the best practices they utilized in response.

**Challenge #1: A Lack of Trust Within and Across Sectors.**

*With [the university] being the elephant in the room, you know, there’s a hierarchy. So we had to be careful that it didn’t just fall into place that [the school district] is down here and [the community college] is here and [the university] is up here calling the shots. – HE Admin #1*

Challenges stemming from a lack of trust either within sectors, across sectors, or both were discussed by 86% \((n = 24)\) of the partners. Hierarchical structures were referenced most frequently as contributing to a lack of trust both within and across sectors. Within an organization, top-down initiatives were the leading cause of distrust. The perceived hierarchy of a tiered higher education system that is superior to the school districts was the leading factor of
district across organizations. Challenges stemming from distrust extended beyond those caused from hierarchical structures; issues rooted in racism and fear were reported in regards to additional stakeholders including parents, school faculty and staff.

**A Lack of Trust Within Sectors**

A lack of trust of individuals within one’s institution was reported by 43% of the participants (n = 12). The first signs of distrust emerged at the onset when top-level administrators required participation from mid-level administrators and faculty who had not been involved in the partnership planning process. When HE Admin #2 was asked how the partnership began, he responded, “There’s heat and politics and pressure from external forces, etc. If you [higher education presidents] want to look good when the data’s not looking good, people get worried.” He described the initial process he experienced as it “started out with meetings of the presidents of those two institutions as well as an assistant superintendent of the district to outline what we want to do and how we want to do it.” Initiatives from top leadership were common, especially in partnerships with large school districts. The resulting distrust with the decisions made by superiors was illustrated by PK-12 Admin #5 who deduced:

>You get higher-up executives – suits as people call them – throwing around ideas and sometimes they come up with things that aren’t that helpful. I just think I have some ideas that I think are great but I need to be in dialogue with teachers to test ideas out and make sure I’m not totally off base – I might be.

Eight partners reported challenges implementing initiatives that were created without teacher input and stated concerns about the goals or motives of the administrators.

A total of 16 administrators participated in this study; the remaining 12 participants were faculty members, teachers and counselors. One-half of the latter (n = 6) were directly involved
in the collaborative processes and the other six were not. The individuals who were not included either had joined the partnership after the decisions had been made or were simply not invited to participate in the meetings. In this study, the participants described four district-wide initiatives that required participation from numerous stakeholders outside of the collaborative group.

The participants who were involved in the collaborative process demonstrated enthusiasm toward the work. The six who were not expressed feelings of frustration, distrust and fear. HE Faculty #2, who was not initially involved, admitted, “I think sometimes the administration is working on an agenda when they need to involve faculty and they’re not. They dump a project on us and they’re like, ‘do it’ when we should have been involved earlier.” A similar sentiment was stated from the PK-12 sector by Teacher #1 who shared, “I’ve been on board pretty much the whole time but the goal of the partnership is still ambiguous even to me.” A lack of trust was the result of participants’ perception that the partnership was designed to benefit an individual’s career and not students’ needs.

Along the same lines, administrators from both PK-12 and higher education discussed challenges garnering trust and support from faculty, staff and parents. The most salient example was provided by HE Admin #4 who recounted the following story:

For two years in a row the pledge was that students could register first before anybody else and trust me I got faculty up my rear end about that one…I had one faculty member who was completely irate saying – and I’ve heard this said to my face – ‘you’re really racist because you won’t help the white person and you will only help the Mexican person.’ They’ve called me a lot of names – trust me.

Challenges stemming from racial perceptions were reported even when the intentions were not perceived as negative. PK-12 Admin #3 lamented, “The belief of some staff is that, although these kids are good, they’re still learning English or they’re poor. The ‘poor mijo’ thing is hard
to get through.” Difficulties overcoming adults’ and peers’ lack of trust in the abilities of underrepresented students to matriculate into college were reported by 64% of the partners (n = 18).

Undocumented parents provided yet another obstacle with their lack of trust of school and federal officials. PK-12 Admin #4 explained, “Here we have immigrants in poverty so they are a little uncomfortable going to the school site.” An example of parental fear was described by HE Admin #2 who claimed:

They don’t understand filling out the FAFSA. There’s reluctance in many cultures to share their income tax information and California in particular given the issues surrounding Homeland Security. There’s always the fear there that if a family shares that information then the federal government will swoop down if they’re undocumented and they’ll end up being deported.

An additional hurdle for parents was a lack of trust that a college education was a wise investment for their children. HE Admin #4 explains the influence of parents who did not attend college:

There is no legacy of education and that is so true of underrepresented populations. So how do you expect a parent in the community to tell their child to go to college when they didn’t finish high school? Some of them didn’t finish elementary school. All they know is, ‘hey mijo, mija, finish high school and get a job and help support the family.’

In sum, the stakeholders closest to the actual work – teachers, staff and parents – who were not included in the decision-making processes did not have trust in the decisions made by the partners and were initially reluctant to participate. In the situations where the partnership work was successful and ownership gradually turned over to the institutions, this challenge was reported to decrease.
A Lack of Trust Across Sectors

Challenges stemming from a lack of trust across sectors were reported by 64% of the respondents (n = 18). These difficulties were more deeply rooted than issues within sectors in terms of taking longer to resolve, if they were ever resolved at all. At the onset, an initial sentiment that the problems were caused by the other partner institutions was reported across partnerships and sectors. PK-12 Admin #6 recalled, “There was a lot of finger-pointing from all institutions.” The areas of blame reported for the PK-12 sector were grade inflation, a lack of academic rigor, and no college knowledge curricula. Colleges and universities were accused of utilizing ineffective college placement tests and lacking an understanding of work in the PK-12 sector. An underlying perception of a hierarchy across California’s tiered higher education system that is superior to the school districts was reported as a major cause of distrust.

The hierarchical structures in public education run so deeply that 54% of the partners (n = 15) discussed observing an initial approach that PK-12 defer to the community college, which in turn defer to the university. HE Admin #2 stated, “There’s always, whether it’s real or perceived, the perception that the community colleges are less than the university.” This perception was evident across all partnerships and sectors in this study. At the commencement of partnership work of one group, the following scenario was recounted by PK-12 Admin #3:

We showed up and there was this chart and all the barriers they had listed were things that [the school district] was doing wrong. So I came in and said, ‘you know, are you kidding me?’ So I was a little bit confrontational and said, ‘have you looked at your own internal issues?’...And I accept all these barriers that you’ve listed for [the school district] but I expect to see some from [the college]. You need to identify your own barriers.
Blame from higher education paired with top-down solutions to fix PK-12’s problems was reported as the first step in most partnerships. HE Admin #3 recalled the lack of trust she had in the school districts when first approaching the work and shared the following personal story:

I will tell you, the biggest mistake that I ever made was my first experience at bringing K-12 and university faculty together. I started out by truly thinking that the university had the answers. The solutions. And why wouldn’t they just take their medicine?

A lack of trust was reported in the PK-12 partners’ ability to prepare students for college. Another example of a failed top-down approach was a PK-12 district that was asked to replicate a remedial college writing course for high school seniors. HE Admin #1 recalled the situation:

They just kind of stumbled into it because it was new and first and, in my opinion, as an outsider looking at the English side of it, a little top down with [the college] telling [the district], here’s our syllabus, here’s our book, figure it out. Then slowing down and being like, ‘oh, they need some help’ and then some of the English people saying, ‘this is not good, we need to have a true collaboration. We need to fix this.’

Respondents claimed that trust was ultimately developed as the relationships were built and the partnerships matured but the data did not support that claim. In the previous example with the English project, the response from the college was to move forward with a new math project that was collaborative in nature. Unlike the English project, the math project required the students to take a placement test, thus removing the trust that the senior-year course was equivalent to the college remedial class.

All of the partnerships in this study contained curricular alignment projects. In the ones aligning high school to higher education, the placement tests were reported as a point of contention. Generally, the districts were not convinced that the placement tests were accurate
indicators of college readiness and higher education perceived that issues such as grade inflation and a lack of rigor in PK-12 left students unprepared for college-level coursework.

In one mature partnership whose partners claimed to have developed deep relationships and trust in one another, the PK-12 district implemented the ERWC\(^2\) for high school seniors to prepare them for college-level coursework. PK-12 Admin #6 reported, “I’ve been pushing from the beginning of the partnership the whole misalignment of their assessment systems for entrance exams and the beliefs and practices that they don’t align with the practices that [K-12] public education has.” Upon completion of the course, both the CSU and CCC partner refused to accept the course as evidence of college readiness. PK-12 Admin #6 explained:

When the CSU’s came out with the expository reading and writing course we were the first ones to pilot that as an alternate means for kids being accepted into the CSU system. And [our CSU partner] initially said that course will be prep for them to take the EPT\(^3\). We kept pushing back and saying, ‘If the kids don’t pass your entrance exam what do they do? They take a remedial course. Do they take an exam at the end of the remedial course? No they don’t. They take whatever the exam is embedded in that course.’ So my argument was, why does it matter where they take the course – on our campus or on your campus? If we have an agreed-upon curriculum and that curriculum was written by the CSUs, and there are agreed-upon embedded assessments in the course and we agree upon the grading practice then why does it matter whether they take it in their senior year or in their freshman year at the college? So we were able to push back and forth and eventually they accepted that.

After convincing their CSU partner to accept the course for placement, the community college partner still resisted. The community college eventually accepted the alternate placement but, PK-12 Admin #6 claimed, “In the meantime, unbeknownst to us, the community college did a comprehensive study of grades – our senior English grades in terms of being a predictor of college readiness.” The story is continued from the community college perspective as HE

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\(^2\) The English Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) is a full-year college preparatory English course for high school juniors or seniors developed by a task force of high school and CSU faculty.

\(^3\) EPT is the abbreviated name of the English Placement Test used by the CSU
Admin #7 confirmed that the community college conducted a research project without the partners’ knowledge and expected to find the college’s placement test to be a more accurate tool than the district’s grades. Instead he reported, “our research shows very strongly that there are many more students who are likely to succeed in college than can demonstrate that through a standardized assessment when you look at their grades.” This example demonstrates the challenges gaining trust system-wide even when the partners feel trust within their collaborative groups.

The instances described previously predominantly portray a lack of trust stemming from higher education looking down at PK-12 but the problem was reported in the opposite direction as well. Both PK-12 and community college administrators voiced concern that college and university, respectively, did not understand their reality enough to be an equal partner. PK-12 Admin #6 concluded, “I think with K-12 there were challenges in terms of not wanting to work with higher ed because they felt like they were disconnected from the real work.” PK-12 Admin #3 stated, “I just feel like school districts are under scrutiny much more than higher ed.” HE Admin #1, who works at a community college, claimed that, “[the districts] use different language, have different values, workloads, goals and identities…plus all the standardized testing that happens. A lot of our people didn’t understand and certainly the [university] people had no idea what happens at the high school level.” Both school district and community college partners perceived the university as out of touch with PK-12.

PK-12 teachers and counselors reported discomfort with higher education partners coming onto their campuses. PK-12 Teacher #6 shared that, “With teachers - a lot of times we’re in our own classroom. We like things done the way we like them done.” And even if one
is comfortable with collaboration, cross-sector communication poses its own unique challenges.

As PK-12 Counselor #2 shared:

I think the biggest challenge was that some of our own personnel in our district were intimidated that someone else was going to be telling us what to do or how to do it and maybe taking away – I don’t know if you would call it power… it was like a stigma that these were our students and they didn’t want other people involved.

This example illustrates a lack of trust in the intentions of the partners. Regardless of whether the distrust was for individuals within or across institutions, this fear of the unknown was a common apprehension.

Despite the initial concerns, every partner who was included in the decision-making process reported developing strong relationships and trust within their inter-segmental group. A challenge that remained was extending that trust beyond the closed group of individuals. The situation was illustrated best by HE Admin #1 who admitted:

There were good people in the room. It was genuine from the president on down to the mid-management deans. What was implicit, though, was an understanding of who was behind us. So we were the best and the brightest and there were a lot of numskulls behind us, you know, either at [the college] like eww they have a problem and they need to get their act together or certainly at [the university].

Compounding this challenge was the fact that the partnerships were dynamic with constant changes in participation as well as leadership at each institution. Even when trust was built for the inter-segmental partners, constant change required trust to be rebuilt continuously.

**Challenge #2: A Lack of Time for Partnership Work.**

*There needs to be a commitment in terms of reassignment, like you’re going to be reassigned from all your duties and you’re going to spend all day thinking about this. That really is what has to happen at each level.* – HE Admin #1
As the name implies, the work of P-20 partnerships is collaborative in nature. However, collaborative work is generally not the status quo within a sector let alone across multiple organizations. As such, finding the time for partnership work was cited as a major challenge by 74% of the partners (n = 21). Partnership work was the full-time job of one of the 28 participants in this study, a component of six people’s jobs and outside the scope for the other 21. Challenges related to time were reported in every stage of partnership work from development to implementation to evaluation. Additionally, systemic issues that underscored each stage of partnership work made finding time for the work increasingly difficult.

**Time to Develop Partnerships**

Developing partnerships, setting goals and planning initiatives required collaboration from high-level administrators from each sector as well as faculty members, teachers and counselors from each organization. PK-12 Admin #2 explained, “Finding the people within each organization who have the vision, capacity and skill to have the kind of dialogue that is necessary to conceptualize innovations that are productive for kids - those people are typically really busy so that’s a huge challenge.” Conversely, not including all stakeholders presented different challenges as PK-12 Admin #2 continued, “You have people in the room that are able to see eye-to-eye in terms of ideas but they’re not necessarily the ones who can pull the trigger on it - they don’t have budget authority to pull the trigger.” Finding time for cross-sector collaboration was cited as a key barrier by one-half of the partners (n = 14).

In addition to being busy, the difference in schedules and collective bargaining agreements between sectors also made coordination a challenge. From the PK-12 perspective, Admin #1 explained, “Another issue is that our teachers are strictly 7:32 AM – 3:30 PM and a lot of the times that we were available to meet the [college] instructors were not on campus.”
when meetings took place during those hours, the teachers had full loads of classes and funding for substitutes was required for the teachers to attend. As a result, teachers were seldom observed in attendance during school hours. During the four-month period that data were collected for this study, the participants reported a total of seven partnership meetings scheduled. Of these, the I attended six. Two were cancelled without notice. Of the remaining four, teachers were in attendance at one. All were held between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:30 PM.

As difficult as it was to find time to meet, additional time commitments were conveyed as challenges for the partners. First, this study was conducted when California was in its fifth year of an economic recession. In Los Angeles county, thousands of PK-12 teachers had been laid off and district administrative jobs had been eliminated. As a result it was common for PK-12 administrators to take on additional roles and responsibilities. When referring to one PK-12 partner, HE Admin #1 recalled, “…well he’s now a principal. At the time he was the Linked Learning director and the assistant principal. He had like 8 jobs.” Of the six PK-12 administrators in this study, five had new roles from the previous school year or had assumed the responsibilities of at least one additional main job function.

**Time to Implement Initiatives**

Attending meetings only accounted for the planning aspect of the partnership work. The partners explained that the majority of the work was in the implementation phase. The compounding time requirements were illustrated by HE Admin #3:

You have to show up at the meetings even when you’re really busy and everyone is overworked. That’s one of the most challenging things because everyone, especially in this last budget crisis, everyone in public education has had their jobs just mushroom. So the bigger challenge is to make it a priority to get to these meetings, to show up, to commit your institution’s time and resources, and then to deliver.
The amount of time required to deliver on commitments was outside of the official job
descriptions for three-quarters of the partners (n = 21). The challenge of partners being busy and
struggling to find time to meet was compounded when there was no accountability system for the
partnership work within an individual’s job description. In this study, accountability for the
partnership work was a component of seven administrators’ job functions – four from the higher
education sector and three from PK-12. Of the four from higher education, the work was one
person’s full-time job and a major focus for the other three. On the PK-12 side, the work was
described as a small component that averaged about one-tenth of their overall job function. The
barriers this presented were summarized by HE Admin #7 who stated, “You have competing
institutional demands and you have poorly defined roles and there are lots of reasons for this
work not to happen.” As much of a challenge as the extra work was for administrators, teachers
and faculty members were only accountable for teaching their grade-level content. From the
higher education perspective, HE Faculty #1 admitted:

The relatively few faculties who are interested in pursuing these projects are focused on
our own things going on here so this is a side project. I’m sure it’s the same with the
high school where the main focus is the students you have right there in front of you.

One PK-12 teacher shared this sentiment. The remaining five PK-12 teachers interviewed had
different perspectives because some their classes contained students participating in the
partnership projects. However, without the time to attend meetings and collaborate with the
higher education partners, all but one (n = 6) reported feeling isolated in this work. When their
administrators did not hold them accountable for the outcomes of the partnership projects, the
work required a large personal commitment of time outside of their regular school day.
Additionally, when other folks within the home organization were not involved in the partnership, getting the projects up and running fell mainly on the teachers alone. The frustration of carrying the workload alone was summarized by PK-12 Teacher #1:

Because I’m the only teacher I felt like I was swinging in the breeze a little bit. I’ve been trying with the district – I sent emails saying can I go to [the community college] to observe some lessons and have some professional development pullout so I can just go and observe what they’re doing so I know whether I’m on the right track. And I hear nothing back so I know I’m going to have to do that on my time because I want to do it. It’s still necessary but I just haven’t had the time to get there yet.

Whereas the high school teachers teaching academic college-readiness curricula conducted the classes during their regular school day, the three counselors in this study had the additional task of including parents in their informational sessions. The parent component occurred during evenings and weekends. This was difficult for both school staff and families. PK-12 Counselor #2 elaborated on the associated challenges:

It’s hard to get people to work at night. We work a lot of nights and sometimes even weekends. That’s just the nature of the beast but getting staff to work at night is a little bit tricky because of their contracts. And most of the parents – especially of the boys that have sporting events – it’s hard getting them here. It seems like it’s always the same parents showing up.

Even for administrators whose job functions included partnership work, beginning new projects required a huge time commitment. They, too, reported spending their regular work day focused on their numerous on-site projects and engaging in partnership work on nights and weekends. The day HE Admin #5 was interviewed he shared details of a new partnership project he worked on until midnight the previous day, only to return to the office for a 7:00 AM meeting. This, he claimed, was normal. He explained that from his campuses’ perspective, new projects required the largest time commitment:
The challenge initially was really most frustrating - not for me as the person that was driving the vision in my office, but for my staff. Because, as external partners, I had to convey that in year one everyone is going to be skeptical of this model. Everyone at the school site is going to say we’ve been there, we’ve done that, we’ve tried and it’s never worked. So I said we have to be prepared to do 99% of the heavy lifting in year one. If we’re not going to do that then it’s not going to work.

Based on experience, HE Admin #5 anticipated that the 99% of heavy lifting in year one would slowly wean over the next few years as buy-in slowly increased throughout the school district.

Details of the heavy lifting and the gradual support from district staff is explained by HE Counselor #1:

The challenges within the first two years were basically the coordination and organization with the high schools. So it does take a lot – that first year our office took 80 to 90% of making sure that project was fully implemented. But working with the high schools in regards to making sure it was on their master calendar, making room reservations, having the appropriate technology – so many little behind the scenes things that if you don’t do it could just mess up the entire planning. We need to make sure that the English teachers – if we are working with those classes that they have a schedule and a memo from the principal or the vice principal saying that you’re not teaching this day and you’re going to bring the kids to a library for a conference from [the college]. Getting the counselors on board was also a challenge because, in my opinion, at first they saw it as, ‘oh wow this is great’ but as soon as the following year occurred where we needed more of their participation then you get into the political stuff of, ‘oh well we have more work to do and this isn’t within our usual scope of work.’ So we’ve done this now for four years and each year, little by little, we got their involvement into practice.

Seven of the administrators who had been involved in partnership work for at least five years discussed the work as a process that evolves over long periods of time. The process was never described as linear, as setbacks were a normal occurrence, but the slow progression of success in breeding buy-in from additional stakeholders was the only sustainability model presented.

**Time to Evaluate Initiatives**

The evaluation stage was similar to implementation in regards to overcoming systemic problems that take years to solve. Whereas a lack of accountability underscored the
development and implementation stages, misaligned data systems stressed evaluation efforts.

Accessing the data needed to evaluate initiatives was cited as a key challenge by 64% of the participants (n = 18). The partners shared the strategies they used to access data and the great deal of time each strategy required. Administrators utilized approaches that circumvented legal and systemic barriers while teachers tried to maintain personal contact with past students.

The legal and systemic barriers reported were multifaceted. The main systemic issues were (1) no common student identification number across sectors, and (2) different student information systems (SIS) that cannot communicate with one another. PK-12 Admin #1 recalled the time intensive task she encountered while trying to access data:

I remember one day a colleague and I having to actually get data that arrived from the community college’s database, match it to ours and then manually search student IDs and rename each student that we could match them. It took several hours for just one group of students. We’re still struggling with how to do data sharing because we keep losing students because the change of ID and we’re not even sure if we’re tracking students correctly because of that.

Attempts to track students across different databases were common. HE Admin #7, who worked within a different partnership, presented efforts trying to bridge the different SIS programs instead of manually entering data. He explained:

The [school district] and the institutional studies here as well as the counterpart at [the community college] have been trying to work together to develop a common database in which they can start following the progress of the student and be able to use data to develop interventions. I know that [the community college] is using PeopleSoft but I don’t think [the school district] is so they’ve been trying to write a program to bridge the differences.
Aligning the data systems and attempting to correlate student data are systemic barriers. Addressing the main legal issue, FERPA\(^4\), was reported to result in additional time spent. In order for PK-12 and higher education employees to view individual transcript data for students from different sectors, they needed (1) a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the PK-12 district and each participating higher education institution, and (2) signed consent forms from students and parents so partners from each institution can view student data. HE Admin #7 shared the amount of work required to access data to evaluate a large-scale intervention for 976 students:

We have a file. We told the school district which students had opted in and they got parents to sign permission slips and then they gave us a file with all of that different stuff and then we built our computer system to interpret that. It’s a lot of work but it’s less work than having a staff person read paper transcripts and make those evaluations. It was a lot of work to set up the systems but once it’s set up its much easier. Staff resources are expensive and scarce and if this program required someone to read and evaluate paper transcripts it would not have happened.

The example above, although time intensive, resulted in a solution that the partners could utilize in the future; however, the partners reported that it took many years to build the trust needed to embark on such projects. HE Admin #3 described a partnership agreement with a school district where the partners have been able to move past the challenges to “have an MOU in place and direct access to their student information system. I have a research and evaluation team here in

\(^4\) The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."
our center and they can look at transcript information or data of any student in the district.”

When asked how that came about, the response was, “Many, many years of trust building.”

The two key challenges reported thus far, a lack of time and trust, were also reported as compound issues in the sense that it takes time to build trust. A third compounding challenge is the change inherent in partnership work.

**Challenge #3: Sustaining Dynamic Partnerships.**

_Some partnerships are so robust and there’s so much going on in so many different fronts and then leadership changes and funding diminishes or grants close out and there is not the same energy or motivation coming from the institution or the leadership to participate._ - HE Admin #3

All of the respondents described partnership work transforming over time. Setbacks resulting from change were reported by 82% (n = 23) of the respondents. Although all partnerships were different and included several dynamic elements, the types of change reported as presenting the greatest challenges were those in leadership and curriculum.

**Challenges Resulting from Changes in Leadership**

Participants used the term leadership in two ways. First, to describe the individuals engaged in the collaborative partnership meetings – as in the leaders of the partnership work. These individuals included administrators, faculty, staff, and business and community leaders. The term was also used in the more traditional sense referring to administrators such as principals, superintendents, presidents, and deans. Not all of these leaders were engaged in, or even aware of, the partnership projects. Sustaining partnership work as leadership changed was cited as a key challenge by one-half (n = 14) of the partners.
Changes in leadership negatively impacted all stages of partnership work. Five examples were provided of initiatives that were planned but fizzled out before coming to fruition when the leadership changed. An example of this was illustrated by HE Admin #2:

The hurdles really were the changes in leadership. We started with the president of [the community college] about three years ago and initiated conversations and followed up with meetings with the vice president and key staff members. Shortly thereafter the president of [the community college] left to become the Chancellor of a district and so that went slowly down. This past fall the Provost and I met with the vice president of academic affairs and the vice president of student affairs at [the community college] and tried to get some traction and create something but it’s been very hard to do. So if you don’t have solid committed leadership a lot of initiatives fall by the wayside. Again, not only did the president leave, but the vice president of academic affairs who we had been working with initially left and so we had to go work with the new VP and try to get something going.

In this example, changes in leadership prevented the partnership from forming. In another example, provided by HE Faculty #1, detailed planning occurred before a change in leadership abruptly derailed the project:

The biggest challenge came with a project that never happened…the one at Washington High School⁵. The high school split into seven pieces with seven different principals at which point it was like…<sigh>. And the other challenge was that it was hard to get this issue onto the principals’ radar screen because they just had bigger problems to deal with like graduation rates and whatnot so college preparedness was not necessarily something they could afford to do.

HE Faculty #1 shared the proposal that had been drafted collaboratively between the university and high school. As a result of the leadership changes, the project at Washington High School, like the initiative presented in the previous example, never came to fruition.

Leadership changes were also reported to have a negative impact on projects well into the implementation phase. The effects reported ranged from leaving a gap in participation that

⁵ Washington High School is a pseudonym
needed to be rebuilt to a new leader cancelling the project altogether. An example of both the underlying causes that can end a project and the effort required to bring new leaders onboard was illustrated by HE Admin #3:

You can work really hard and make all kinds of progress in terms of relationship building, program building, putting things in place and then overnight the leadership will change and you have to go back to introducing yourself. That can be so disheartening to have to constantly begin again because what follows that is a change of priority and often a new mandate. For example we — principals, superintendents, whatever - would write a grant. Between the time it was written and funded and we’d go to implement, there’s new leadership and they have new priorities – often times the old leadership is taken out because someone thinks that you need to be doing things differently so one of the things the new leadership has to do is distance themselves from the way the old leadership did it.

The time and effort required to rebuild trust and relationships was cited as a major challenge resulting from leadership changes.

Fourteen of the respondents (50%) shared stories of the time intensive efforts that building relationships with new leaders required. In addition to the time commitment, the partners reported that the bigger challenge was redeveloping a shared vision for the work. From the perspective of one district, PK-12 Counselor #2 explained, “We have a big turnover in our administrative staff at schools so a big challenge is to get those people on board because different people have different ideas about what they want to do.” Creating buy-in and a shared vision for the work was a challenge that pertained to all phases of partnership work.

According to the partners, changes in participation and administration happen often. Of the participants, 38% (n = 11) had different positions from the previous school year. The changes were reported to have a draining effect on the participants, both mentally and physically. The situation is summarized by PK-12 Admin #1 who concluded:
I’ve essentially been involved in the same project in all of these different ways because my role seems to shift depending on the leadership. It is difficult to keep these partnerships going when there’s someone new at each institution repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly. Often times my coaches and I feel a little stagnant - not because we haven’t been trying to move forward - but because there’s always a different focus with all of these different changes.

Remaining motivated was reported as a challenge for all stakeholders who participated in this work.

**Challenges Resulting from Changes in Curriculum**

Another constant change that negatively impacted the partnership work was curricula. Curriculum alignment projects were the main focus or a component of the work for 20 of the participants. Of the 20, 70% (n=14) reported challenges aligning curricula that were changing. Variations reportedly occurred at different partner institutions unbeknownst to the teams working on the alignment projects. The fourteen respondents that reported this challenge claimed that they learned of the curricular change after they completed developing the alignment projects.

The resulting confusion was explained by HE Faculty #2:

> So while we were putting together this program there’s already some sort of competing venture going on - the ERWC\(^6\). The difference is that the ERWC is geared toward high school writing and outcomes while what we had in mind is college writing and outcomes. So now we’re wondering what our trajectory should be. And then at the same time at [the community college] they’re going through some curriculum redesign so they weren’t 100% certain of their own goals and outcomes for the course. So we spent a lot of time just debating that – just debating what kind of role we should play as well.

An overall sense of confusion about the current and future curricular plans at partner institutions and how to proceed was raised by all fourteen respondents citing this challenge. When HE Faculty #1 was asked if the partners’ curriculum was changing, he responded, “I think so. The

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\(^6\) The English Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) is a full-year college preparatory English course for high school juniors or seniors developed by a task force of high school and CSU faculty.
first year [the high school] had one curriculum and they were editing that but [the community
college] was changing their curriculum so they needed to backtrack and make some changes to
make it feed in better.” When asked why the participants were not aware of the changing
curricula at the partner institutions, HE Faculty #2 surmised, “we were given our responsibility
or delegation as a group and we just operated so when other people trained for ERWC they
didn’t think to notify us about what was happening.” Through the interviews I learned about five
competing projects at institutions that the participants were not aware of.

The curricular change discussed the most was the K-12 transition to the Common Core
State Standards. Six administrators and four faculty members claimed that the transition to the
Common Core would have a large effect on their P-20 curriculum alignment projects. PK-12
Admin #5 alluded to the challenges associated with the curricular shifts. She commented, “And
here we are – we finally have a solution and then common core is forcing us to wipe that out and
come back to the table and I find that so funny.” In response to the new Common Core State
Standards for K-12, HE Admin #8 shared, “We are jointly planning 16 common core
symposiums that involves faculty from each of the institutions to come together and talk about
common core implementation.” Despite the challenges with curricular changes in the past, 36%
of respondents (n = 10) suggested the new Common Core curriculum will ultimately help with
P-20 alignment.

Ongoing challenges resulting from a lack of trust and time while weathering turbulence
within and across sectors were reported as the status quo for partnerships. Every partnership for
which the participants were engaged in included these characteristics. The best practices that
follow were reported to address at least two challenges simultaneously.
Best Practice #1: Structure Initiative-based Committees with Transparent Reporting Systems

Initially that structure was to force the work in all honesty and to keep it visible so that everyone was held accountable to move the work forward but now it’s just a way of doing work. - PK-12 Admin #6

Of the 28 participants in this study, 57% (n = 16) worked within partnerships that structured initiative-based committees with transparent reporting systems and 42% (n = 12) did not. Of the 16 that did, three-quarters (n = 12) discussed their structure and system and claimed that it helped to create accountability and build sustainability in their work. Accountability was a result of the visibility for the work that each partner provided. Sustainability followed when positive summative reports validated the projects and spread buy-in and greater participation throughout each organization. When engaged in the same partnership, individuals utilizing structural systems articulated common goals, used common language, discussed similar successes and challenges in their work, and expressed enthusiasm for the partnership. In contrast, of the 12 participants who did not utilize such systems, three-quarters (n = 9) reported not knowing facts related to the work and conveyed frustration or ambivalence toward the partnership.

The structure utilized was similar across partnerships with standing committees that focused on specific initiatives. Each committee was led by individuals who also served on an executive committee. The purpose of each group was tied to the goals for the partnership and the number of committees differed based on those goals. For example, one group had two initial goals – to align their mathematics courses across their PK-12 feeder schools, and to provide systemic college counseling to all students in grades 9-12. HE Admin #5 described that for their formation, “We have three standing groups as part of our organizational structure – we have the executive leadership group, we have the instructional leadership group, and we have the
partnership counselor workgroup.” This example had the smallest number of committees of the partners interviewed.

In contrast, another partnership simultaneously worked toward five goals at their inception. PK-12 Admin #6 explained how their group began and the structure that resulted from their initial plans:

The mayor held a three-day event and the three institutions sat down and talked about the vision of a world-class education system – what are the elements and what is hindering us from doing that right now? At the end of the three days we came up with our goals for collaborative work…so we had cross discipline teams that planned the initiatives – we had five initiatives initially including K-3 literacy, middle school reform, counseling and seamless education – that goal initially was around reducing the number of students that went on and needed remediation. We had institution leads for each of the initiatives. We had a structured oversight committee that we reported the progress of each of our groups to.

The example provided above is from a partnership that is greater than 10 years old. The participants in this group reported that their initiatives and committees changed over time. In sum, the participants utilized similar structures to engage in their work but the initiatives and goals varied greatly across partnerships and over time.

**Accountability for Partnership Work**

Whereas the participants reported similar structures, their reporting systems were quite different. The only parallel was the purpose, which was to make the work and results visible to stakeholders outside of the planning committees and to hold the members accountable for their participation. Accountability was reinforced by a reporting system that guaranteed the work would be done. PK-12 Admin #6 explained:

I really think having that structure was important because it kept us accountable to work we still weren’t totally convinced we wanted to do. It kept us accountable because we
had a public reporting mechanism that included when we met, the work that we had done, and progress we made on our goals. We had to do annual action plans around our initiatives that were reported to our boards. So they built in infrastructures to make the work very public and then the mayor showcased it so there were a lot of checks and balances that kept us focused.

Several examples of work that was showcased was provided by PK-12 Admin #6. These included flyers and brochures reporting outcomes of recent initiatives. Another interviewee from the same partnership shared a recent board report consisting of statistics, charts and graphs from a longitudinal inter-segmental study.

Participants from another group described using a less formal reporting system that instantly communicated plans throughout the partner institutions. They held monthly planning sessions and used an exit ticket to report their plans. The process is explained by PK-12 Admin #4:

I had them do an exit ticket so they had to write down all their plans and before they leave they give me that exit ticket. And I have these standardized so it has an activity, person responsible, and date. So it has everything on there and we scan it and we send it to the other superintendents and I send it to our principals…we put a date on it and who is responsible for each piece - that way it doesn’t fall apart.

Keeping the work visible and transparent meant that everyone knew what each person was doing. Participants working within structural committees with reporting systems provided details of work their partners conducted at their respective institutions and reported developing a great deal of trust and respect for one another.

**Sustaining Partnerships**

Accountability for the work was one purpose for the reporting system. The second was to convey the results of the initiatives. The participants claimed that sustainability occurred when ownership of the work transferred from the individual partners to each institution.
Reporting the successes of the partnership was reported as a best practice for transferring ownership. HE Admin #5 offered the following advice regarding the importance of reporting summative data:

Track and celebrate your success. The biggest tool that we had was when they started seeing the A-G rates go up and the enrollment go up and the excitement – people love success and they want to be a part of something successful. So if you are looking for those things and taking the time to celebrate it then what it does is – about 80% of people need the validation. And then you have about 20% of people that are just negative and put out false information. So you need the data for both – to continue motivating the 80% and to keep pushing them on and then also to shut up those 20% of haters that are out there just trying to spread false information about the program and about the model.

The advice stated above resonated when visiting partners who reported on their data. I was provided with identical data from each participant in a given partnership that reported on their progress. The participants appeared proud and excited when they discussed their results. These partners articulated clear and consistent goals. Brochures and flyers were printed and posted throughout school sites and at district offices. Two higher education partners quickly printed a board report from their computer. Information about the partnership was clearly posted for all stakeholders to see. I observed a banner advertising one partnership’s planned activities and results in front of a school site.

In contrast, I was not able to determine the outcomes of initiatives from partnerships that did not have a transparent reporting process. Information about the projects, such as brochures or flyers, was not observed at any of those sites and none of the partners were able to provide any results of their initiatives.
Best Practice #2: Find Champions for the Work

_The single most important determinant in terms of success of a partnership is it begins with committed individuals who then generate the commitment of their institutions._ – HE Admin #1

Given that one of the key challenges reported is the huge personal commitment required for partnership work, the best practice that naturally follows is finding the champions who have a passion for the work. The champions are the people who are willing to allocate resources for the projects and galvanize commitment from their respective institutions. HE Admin #1 proclaimed, “There has to be a champion, someone who’s going to say, ‘dammit we’re going to make sure this works’ and then commits themselves to making it work.” One or two specific individuals were credited with bringing partnerships to fruition by 82% of the participants (n = 23). When interviewing several participants within the same partnership, the champions were repeatedly cited by every partner. Finding the right people – passionate, committed, and enthusiastic – who are eager to engage in partnership work was cited as a necessity by 23 (82%) of the participants.

Three types of champions uncovered in this study were individuals: (1) with the vision to initiate and foster the partnership, (2) with partnership experience that can guide the work, and (3) dedicated to the mission who will carry out the work.

**Individuals with the Vision to Initiate and Foster the Partnership**

The participants in this study were chosen due to their active involvement in one of four partnerships. Each of the four partnerships traced back to one individual who was the impetus for the work. Three of the participants discussed additional partnerships they had been, or still were, actively engaged in and stated that those also began with one person. The originators reported in this study were a superintendent, college president, college vice-president, two mayors, two researchers, and three teachers.
The originators were credited with pulling together the partners and resources to initiate the partnership. PK-12 Admin #6 provided an example of a mayor providing the vision and garnering support from three partner institutions:

The mayor was very concerned about the economy and not being able to attract new businesses into the city. And so it was her vision that the only way she was going to attract businesses was by developing a world-class education system in the community. So she was the one that pulled the three institutions’ leads together and got a commitment from the presidents and the superintendent to work together as a team to build this – what she called the seamless education system. I think what helped is that it was very clear from the three institution heads that this is not negotiable. So there was support from the top and their support from the mayor and it became a way of doing the work rather than work that was dependent upon money because we had no money when we started this.

In this example, the mayor provided the vision but no budget. In another example of mayoral support, PK-12 Teacher #5 explained how the originator used past connections to fund the work:

The mayor went to a high school down in San Diego with a group of teachers, looked at [the program], came back and said okay, we want that here. So he went to the school district and the school district said that he had to raise money for it. So he went to his friends – he used to be president of [a large corporation in California] - so they chipped in $50,000 and we had the money for it and that’s how it was started.

Knowing how to gather support for the vision, whether financial or human resources, was perceived as the key role for this champion. One originator, HE Admin #4, simply claimed, “I hire phenomenal people.” The importance of enlisting the right people for partnership work, and the role the originator has in this process was explained by PK-12 Counselor #1 who asserted:

The key is finding the right leadership in the district that can get people on board. [Our superintendent] has an open-door policy and is a great communicator. He knew who to contact at each school to get people on board to create that team. So I think it’s first finding the right district leadership and getting the right people involved at each site who are a good fit – you know to get anything off the ground you need to have enthusiasm and energy. Getting those right people involved at the site – that’s key. But [our superintendent] is really the backbone of it.
In this study, many of “the right people” and the “phenomenal hires” that the participants mentioned were also interviewed. These individuals had the same qualities as the originators; they were enthusiastic, energetic, knew how to gather additional support for the projects and were not shy about asking for it. PK-12 Admin #7 shared, “When I needed something I would go straight to the Mayor’s office and say, ‘I need this from you guys – how can you support me in this?’” The level of energy required was illustrated by PK-12 Counselor #1 who claimed, “It’s a very fulfilling job – it’s very fulfilling but to make it all work it does take a lot of hustle.” He went on to describe his counterpart at another school as “just a spark plug of a person. She’s a can-do person and can do 10 things at one time…well she thinks so but I think she can do more like three or four.” The counterpart mentioned was also interviewed and was planning a parent event and scheduling student meetings during the interview.

Both groups of participants – the originators and “the right people” they brought on board, stressed the importance of developing relationships to foster partnership work. When asked the most important lesson learned from participation in the partnership, PK-12 Admin #4 definitively stated, “Establish the relationship. Big time. Get to know people and establish that foundation and relationship and friendship. I think that’s critical. Because then there’s trust, there’s familiarity, there is a can-do attitude and willingness to work together.” When the 28 participants were questioned about best practices, the importance of relationships was mentioned 66 times.
Individuals with Partnership Experience Who Can Guide the Work

The second example of champions for the work is individuals with past experience developing and implementing P-20 partnerships. Two examples of these individuals were reported: (1) experienced liaisons who assumed this as their only role in the work, and (2) internal employees whose job function is a key role in supporting partnerships.

Three partnerships opted to hire experienced liaisons at the onset to help develop and support the partnership work. PK-12 Admin #6 recalled, “We really needed the structure – we had a person who was jointly paid by the three institutions. She led the leadership team meetings and was the liaison between the three lead institutions.” PK-12 Admin #8 lauded the role of the liaison in her partnership:

One of the big successes that we’ve had is we have a university liaison so whenever we have questions we ask her and then she knows the necessary people to farm out the question to and establish that relationship. She is able to get all parties involved in one meeting space and provide the dialogue and the mediation.

Liaisons were also credited with using past partnership experiences to mentor the partners and help them develop realistic expectations for the work.

Conversely, one partnership that did not have a liaison reported the challenges they encountered getting started. HE Admin #1 explained, “We were trying to find models that worked and bring people in to help us. In an ideal situation we’d have a lot of money, an outside facilitator, and we’d hire somebody who was trained to do this.” This individual also did not have access to peers with experience developing partnerships.

In contrast, HE Admin #3 contemplated the speed at which a new partnership started up with experienced staff, as she explained, “I think it accelerated so quickly because there are three
people as part of that team that have the experience and can transfer the best practices.” Of the 28 participants interviewed, eight (29%) reported having previous experience and discussed how they applied past knowledge to their current projects.

Individuals with past partnership experience provided a long-view perspective to their work. For example, PK-12 Admin #4, who was engaged in his first partnership, mentioned the importance of relationships in terms of the benefits experienced in the present whereas HE Admin #5, a partnership veteran, extended his response to the role of relationships in terms of sustainability. He cautioned:

I think professional relationships are everything in partnerships and if you don’t take the time to build relationships then the work is not sustainable. I’m careful because it’s such a fine line between having personality driven leadership and relationships. What I mean by that is I’m very cautious because I have a very dominant personality and I do a lot of the work but I can’t let myself become the person who does it all because then if I ever move on – you don’t want to see it fall apart into rubble and that’s a challenge when you have personality driven leadership – you can make a lot of progress but once a personality is taken out of the equation everything will fall apart. So it’s really making sure that you recognize relationships matter and people matter and not build a model that exists around one or two individuals because then it will fall apart when that person leaves.

All eight participants who had prior experience developing and implementing P-20 partnerships discussed the importance of developing relationships to sustain the projects once the initial champions move on.

**Individuals Dedicated to the Mission Who Will Carry Out the Work**

The participants reported a list of individuals who had voluntarily committed time to the partnership. The champions discussed above were actively engaged in the implementation of the
work but the scope required additional support from teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, business leaders and/or school staff. One-half of the participants (n = 14) who had personally contributed their time on nights and weekends expressed that this commitment is part of their role as an educator. An example of the passion these individuals possess was illustrated by PK-12 Teacher #3 who asserted:

I think there are many people who are very saddened by the state of education and aren’t willing to put themselves on the line so this work was voluntary and it required a lot of commitment. I think if you can’t be part of the solution then you’re part of the problem and if you’re not doing anything about it then you’re contributing to not helping your students. Every time that you see an opportunity to work for students you need to be able to do it and if you don’t have it in you to do it then you’re in the wrong profession and it’s time to move on.

The champions dedicated to the mission shared this level of commitment and continued moving projects forward despite barriers. PK-12 Admin #4 shared, “We used to have a person that was the facilitator that we all pitched in and paid – but we’ve been cutting budgets so we said this is important and we need to do it ourselves.” These individuals provided examples of going above and beyond on a regular basis as if that were the status quo for their work. For example, HE Admin #4 discussed the importance of attending events at feeder schools even when it is not expected. He shared, “For middle school parent night…I have nothing to do with that and I don’t have to be there but I will show up.” These individuals reported seeking out additional opportunities to support students whenever possible.

Who are the Champions?

Of the 28 participants in this study, 39% (n = 11) self-identified as an “under-represented” student and shared their own personal story of overcoming barriers to access a
college education. Four of them stated that they only went to college because of the encouragement of one adult in their life. HE Admin #2 shared, “I had one counselor who I love dearly and she saw something in me and helped me know that I could go to college.” These individuals discussed how their past experiences influenced their current work. An example of this was provided by PK-12 Admin #3 who shared:

I’m a first-generation immigrant – first in my family to go to college. So I have this in mind at the forefront of everything I have done as an educator for the last 25 years… I came to the United States in the 10th grade and had a background in studying French so they placed me in AP French classes. Then, as an 11th grader, I took my French class at Cal State Northridge. My mom, who didn’t speak English, came with me and this really gave me the fortitude to go and find out how to enroll in classes.

This subject previously worked as a teacher and principal in a K-8 school and discussed the college-going culture and activities she created at her site. She expressed constant efforts trying to bring the students on college campuses because, from her experience, she believed “there’s something that happens when you take someone who has not had the social capital and you put them on a college campus. Connections happen and they start to see themselves as somebody who’s going to go to college.” She struggled to find opportunities for younger students to visit colleges but she believed it was necessary so she bent the rules a bit, as she described, “I used to lie to colleges and tell them I was sending ninth-graders just to send my eighth-graders. I told the students, ‘you better behave and you better pretend that you’re ninth graders because they don’t take eighth-graders.’” The participants who discussed their personal stories either stated that they worked to prevent their students from experiencing the same obstacles they had faced or they worked to provide the same opportunities that helped them overcome their past barriers.
Finding the Champions

Six of the participants had a main job function that included hiring people and finding volunteers for this work. All six reported seeking out individuals with a proven track record implementing inter-segmental projects at other institutions. Specific qualities mentioned were enthusiasm, high energy, and patience. The energy was required to get the work done and the patience to cope with the setbacks resulting from changes in leadership and curriculum.

Recruiting volunteers, especially university faculty members, was reported as being more difficult than hiring. HE Admin #3 pondered, “What makes a faculty member participate? It certainly isn’t the merits and review and tenure process with the Academic Senate here. Everyone knows that if their scholarship is excellent than these things don’t really matter.” She claimed that this is a question she asks herself often. From her experience, she shared the commonalities she had observed from her faculty participants:

I find that most faculty members who become engaged in our work either have children of their own in school and they have an understanding of the needs that are out there. Or they have students or a family member who’s a teacher. So they seem to have some relationship to the K-12 public sector. I find that a lot. Or they are social justice oriented or public service oriented – civic engagement oriented – or people with that kind of predilection.

In response to the difficulties finding higher education faculty members to participate in work within the PK-12 sector, PK-12 Admin #6 reported, “There have been some practice changes in terms of not valuing working in public schools versus research so they worked through it so that the professors were given credit for the work that they were doing in public schools.” This practice change was only mentioned once and within one partnership.
Best Practice #3: Focus on Student Needs.

If you focus on students and that is your goal then you can overcome what ordinarily would be insurmountable institutional barriers. – HE Admin #7

The partners reported plenty of difficulties inherent in partnership work with one of the key challenges being a lack of trust within and across organizations. At the onset, finger-pointing and blame were obstacles that needed to be overcome as the partners reported perceptions that the problems were caused by the other organizations. To address this challenge, changing the focus to student needs was presented as a best practice by 71% of the participants (n = 20). Student needs were discussed more than any other topic during the interviews. Overall, students were mentioned 359 times in response to questions about best practices.

The partners recommended the following three practices for remaining focused on student needs: (1) use student data to set common goals, (2) follow the student trajectory through the P-20 pipeline, and (3) change mindsets from a completion agenda to the students’ end goal.

Use Student Data to Set Common Goals

Rushing into a partnership with plans to fix a perceived problem was warned against by 46% of the participants (n = 13). HE Admin #2 advised, “The most valuable lesson learned is to listen to what the needs are and not go in thinking that we have all the answers and we can prescribe how to fix it.” Goal setting was recommended as a collaborative effort by all (n = 28) respondents. Eight participants discussed past projects where the goal had been predetermined by one partner organization and all eight, including the individuals who had initially set those goals, reported that as a mistake they would not repeat again.

The partners acknowledged that preconceived notions of a problem might be a good place to begin as each stakeholder has unique experiences within their organization that can be
useful learning experiences for the other members. A process of moving from preconceived
notions to goal setting was provided by HE Admin #6:

The first thing is to talk about everyone’s perception to see whether it is shared or not.
And then collect the differences in perceptions and take a look at the data and see
whether it’s indeed a problem or misperception – there may not be any hard data to
support it. To work together you have to believe that the common good is for the student
and not to take it on as a personal issue where one feels that one has to defend the data
here and there.

Representatives from every partnership claimed that difficult conversations were a normal part of
the work. HE Admin #3 explained, “You have to have a commitment to making difficult
decisions or having difficult conversations because a lot of times you’re not sharing good data.”
The shared focus on student needs was reported as the best practice for moving the conversations
forward and finding agreed-upon solutions. PK-12 Admin #5 illustrated how their group’s
student-centered focus balanced out difficult conversations:

They’re not easy but they’re honest discussions. So that algebra discussion - that was
interesting and it was a little heated, too – I won’t lie. But the data is the data. If 10% of
your students are scoring proficient in algebra, that’s glaring, right? It’s glaring. I think
that we all had different opinions when we first started off but I feel like there is nothing
that we can’t discuss – that we can’t figure out because there is an understanding that we
want to work together to do what’s best for the kids in our community.

HE Admin #7’s comment that “The group really looks at it through the point of view of what is
best for the student - that’s the approach.” was echoed by 71% (n = 20) of the participants.

**Focus on the Student Trajectory**

A common goal of P-20 partnerships is streamlining the trajectory from PK-college. The
literature reveals that there are many leaks in the pipeline where students exit short of achieving
their educational goals. In response to this problem, HE Admin #6 affirmed, “The most valuable piece is the students – we try to identify the gaps between institutions as a student goes from one to the next and the work to eliminate those gaps is really what it’s all about.” When focusing on the student trajectory, the partners reported an ability to identify areas where students fall through the cracks. HE Admin #5 advised, “There are always multiple places that you perceive there is a problem based on data but what to attack first has to do with what’s most important to the people who are working together.” He provided one example of an initiative with the goal to increase A-G completion rates and explained how they focused on the student trajectory to identify college access barriers for the students:

We realized there were upwards of five – I want to say eight or even more – but at least five different mathematics courses that a ninth grader could take. So there were all these different lower level math classes that students could get shuttled to that would not put them on track to A-G requirements. So what they did, in one year, is eliminated all courses for ninth grade students except, at a minimum, Algebra 1 and they had no significant difference in the percentage of ninth grade students who failed math. So I just love that example because it talks about something very specific that you can identify structurally that was a barrier for students.

Of the 28 participants, 64% (n = 18) were actively engaged in partnerships that articulated a common goal based on the students’ trajectory from elementary school to college. All of these participants presented the results of their respective initiatives in terms of the increased percentage of students matriculating in college.

**Change Mindsets from a Completion Agenda to the Students’ End Goal**

Seventeen of the participants in this study (60%) worked within the PK-12 sector. Of these, 65% (n = 11) reported the importance of changing their mindset from a completion agenda
to the students’ end goal. Completion was discussed as either completing a particular class,
grade level, or high school. PK-12 Admin #1 admitted:

Up until recent years, we really only concentrated on getting the job done in the grade
level that we were given. For me, partnering is seeing what’s beyond us – what students
actually need so that we can prepare them rather than them showing up at the doors of
these institutions and everyone saying, ‘well, you’re not ready.’ And so it’s important to
have that different perspective.

Approaching partnership work with a “different perspective” focused on students’ end goal was
a best practice shared by PK-12 administrators and teachers alike. For example, PK-12 Admin
#2 reflected, “It’s just a different perspective than one has being isolated at the high school
campus with an abstract notion of what college is. So I think the best lesson learned is that it
helps you think with the end in mind.” Eight out of the nine (89%) PK-12 teachers who
participated in this study discussed how changing their perspective to focus on the students’ end
goal had a major impact on their perception of the role they played in their students’ lives. For
example, PK-12 Faculty #3, shared that the most valuable lesson learned was:

The power of knowing the end goal for our students. Because sometimes, as high school
teachers, we’re disconnected from what the kids do after they see us. So now I think
about what I’m preparing them for. Is it just that they’ll pass my class? If they pass with
a D and get their high school diploma, then I’m not preparing them for college. Now I
think of the end goal and my motivation is there because I want our students to succeed.

The teachers discussed how their new focus resulted in curricular changes in classes beyond the
scope of the partnership projects. The two PK-12 counselors in this study discussed how their
conversations with students changed as a result of their changed mindset. PK-12 Counselor #1
explained:

Back in the days we just said, ‘hey, you’ve got to graduate’ but now it’s, ‘you’ve got to
get your grades up so you can graduate and move onto the next step with whatever you
want to do with your life but you need an education.’
The partners perceived that shifting the focus from the completion agenda to the students’ future in college and career had a profound impact on how the students viewed themselves and their future. PK-12 Faculty #5 believed that the higher education participation is encouraging to students. He claimed, “They like the status of having these institutions on our campus. They like it that colleges are interested in our school and I think the kids need that.” This subject’s perception was supported by data. PK-12 Admin #4, an administrator in the same partnership, reported the unintended consequences from changing the mindset from high school completion to college. First, he explained the counseling intervention utilized:

They break the kids into three groups and say, ‘you’re meeting A-G. You need to continue here’s your plan moving forward. This group here - you’re close to meeting so you need these two courses and then you can be in this group here. This group here - you’re not-meeting. Now we’re at a point in time that if you do this, this and this you can be meeting but you have to work really hard or at one point in time you’re too far gone but here’s the alternate route to get there.

The partners reported that the biggest challenge was changing the adults’ mindset about the “not-meeting students.” HE Admin #5 had previously designed an intervention specifically for this group and reported that the partners and the stakeholders at the school sites did not consider these students college bound. He explained the initial mindset he encountered:

When we started our model, a lot of the counselors didn’t see the value in talking to the non-meeting group. And that’s the big myth. That oh, why are you talking to not-meeting students? It’s pointless. They’re not going to change. It’s too late – there to deficient – why are we talking to them? So it was really about letting them know that they can still reboot their education at the community college even if they didn’t find success in high school.

The first step in changing the mindsets of both the adults and the students was an intervention activity implemented with the non-meeting group. HE Admin #5 described the event:
We go in with index cards and pass them out to all the juniors who are not-meeting and I told them if anything’s possible and your financial situation and your previous academic history wasn’t a barrier, where would you want to go to college? So if we could hit the reboot button on your education, where would you want to go to college? And write it down on the front. And then flip it over and if all was possible than what would be a dream job? Write it on the back of the card. And then I say on the count of three I want you to hold your cards up. One, two, three. And they hold them up and you see these gangster looking kids, you know these kids who have all given up on their education and I’m like okay I see UCLA, Cal Poly Pomona, I see Texas Longhorns. Now flip it over - I see a doctor, I see a lawyer, I see a probation officer, and I start saying it out loud so everybody’s hearing this and then I tell them okay, I’m going to tell you how you can get there. I’m going to tell you how you can reboot your education. And we show them the transfer route and the technical programs at community college. Because these kids are very vulnerable and susceptible to the proprietary colleges so we want to make sure that they know what their routes are.

Bringing an awareness of the students’ aspirations to their peers and to the adults was the first step. The second step was sharing the results. HE Admin #5 reported, “When we look at our enrollment since we implemented the pledge we’ve almost doubled the number of students going to community college from the district and it’s really this not-meeting group.” When PK-12 Admin #4 saw the data, he shared, “That’s the part that really hit me because I thought those kids may have given up or lost hope and that was renewed. That was awesome. And I didn’t anticipate that piece.”

Another example of students’ mindset changing from a completion agenda to their future goals was provided by PK-12 Teacher #5 who described the effect of a partnership that included an internship program with the Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare System:

VA loves them and they love being at the VA. So they’re actually learning something in the classroom that they are using in the real world. They’re talking to real nurses and real doctors and they can see themselves in that environment doing what somebody’s doing and they say, ‘I can do this. I know I can. But in order to do that I need to take my chemistry class and I’ve got to get into college.’
In sum, focusing on the students’ needs, trajectory, and future was reported as the best practice for overcoming a host of barriers preventing college access and persistence for under-represented students. Changing the mindsets from the completion agenda to students’ future goals was reported to have a profound affect on both the partners and the students.

**Summary**

In conclusion, the participants in this study presented a wealth of knowledge about the barriers to college access and persistence faced by under-represented students and a strong desire to improve the situation. Similarly to the students, the participants encountered major intrapersonal and systemic barriers that hindered their participation in partnership work. However, they reported that remaining focused on student needs gave them the energy to confront the obstacles while internal structures that forced the work and made it public kept them accountable to the partnership so it could ultimately sustain the challenges of trust, time and change.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

*The key is getting the people together that are all like-minded about helping students.* – HE Admin #4

Evidence in this study suggests that P-20 partnerships, at their core, are about people – under-represented students and the educators determined to help them succeed. Since the partnership movement began in the 1980s, studies have provided a myriad of challenges inherent in partnership work. At the local level, a lack of trust, time, accountability, and parity are the major barriers to inter-segmental collaboration. At the state and institutional levels, policies promoting disjuncture in curricula, assessments, financial procedures, student data tracking, and accountability systems exacerbate the challenges at the local level. Yet despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the partnership movement continues to accelerate at an unprecedented rate since its latest inception in the early 1980s.

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings in comparison to the literature on partnerships. The discussion is grouped into three categories regarding college access and persistence for under-represented students: (1) participants’ perceptions of the factors that hinder college access and persistence, (2) challenges, and (3) best practices. Finally, I discuss limitations of the study followed by areas for future research.

**Participants’ Perceptions of Barriers to Access and Persistence**

There is a wealth of research on the factors that hinder college access and persistence for under-represented students; this study was not designed to answer those questions. This study sought to look “under the hood” of partnerships to learn what happens behind the scenes at the local level. There are plenty of shiny brochures lauding the success stories and media events
publicizing high-profile leaders signing promises between institutions, but what about the silent individuals behind the scenes who carry out the daily work? Are grade-school teachers aware of the barriers to college access and persistence for under-represented students? Are college professors? Do teachers and administrators have different perceptions about the problems surrounding access and persistence? What about the people who are not included in the partnership committees but carry out the initiatives that the partners develop? I had a hunch that something interesting and salient would emerge from the data gathered from this diverse group of individuals. In the case of their perceptions of the factors that hinder access and persistence, I was wrong as those closely mirrored the academic literature. In terms of challenges, however, the participants’ role in their respective partnership affected their perception of the work.

**Challenges of P-20 Partnerships**

For the most part, the key challenges of P-20 partnerships that emerged from this study – a lack of trust, a lack of time, and sustaining dynamic partnerships – are similar to the last three decades of literature on the topic with the major themes from the past interwoven throughout. The major themes from the past report the challenges of partnerships in two regards: (1) those inherent in collaboration, and (2) those that result from policy. A lack of trust across sectors, difficulties finding time to develop and implement initiatives, and challenges resulting from changes in leadership are all well documented in the literature on collaboration. Issues resulting from disjointed curricula, assessments, financial procedures, student data tracking, and accountability systems are reported throughout policy reports. This study, however, submits that one challenge may have increased over time. Past studies reported ongoing challenges resulting from an inability to achieve parity but suggested that these issues may be improving (Christensen et al., 1996; Dixon & Ishler, 1992; Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001). Evidence from this study
diverges from those findings and instead contends that challenges resulting from a lack of parity have increased over the years with the resulting lack of trust resonating throughout every sector.

In this study, a lack of trust within and across sectors was the greatest challenge the partners reported. In many ways, the lack of trust is attributable to a lack of parity caused by hierarchical structures within and across sectors. However, evidence in this study submits that the lack of trust runs deeper than that. The participants in this study commonly discussed the mutual trust and friendships they developed with the individuals within their partnership groups. For example, PK-12 Admin #1 stated, “No one complains about meetings. We like seeing one another and it’s kind of like a family.” There was no evidence, however, that trust extended beyond the closed group of individuals. Furthermore, extensive data were collected that the partners trusted each other but not enough to extend that confidence to initiatives that would be executed by others. Two examples of this are detailed in the findings chapter.

Evidence in this study also suggests that the individuals outside of the closed group of collaborators do not trust the decisions made by the partnership group, no matter how successful the data appear to be. In addition to the evidence provided in the findings chapter, I will illustrate this point with another example. A partnership had recently made a large, systemic change that resulted in an unprecedented rate of students succeeding in transfer-level math and English classes. One aspect of the project was a guarantee to participating high school students that they would receive priority enrollment in math and English in their first semester of college; this is important because these classes currently have long wait lists due to recent budget cuts in California. Given that teachers view students individually whereas administrators and partnerships report on students in the aggregate, teachers recognize the individuals who did not benefit from initiatives. In other words, if 90% of students succeed, teachers know the personal
stories of the 10% who did not. PK-12 Teacher #4 asked, “But the expense – what about the other kids?” In regards to the partnership mentioned above with the unprecedented success story, PK-12 Teacher #4 perceived failure – the inability of the non-partnership students at the college to access their math and English courses and the detriment to partnership students who are forced to take math and English instead of electives despite a history of poor performance in those classes. He lamented, “So you are hurting two groups – you’re hurting the guys that are doing well by not allowing them to enroll in the classes they need and you hurting the kids that are not doing well because you didn’t give them any other options.”

Additionally, participants openly criticized the efforts of other partnerships. The most mature, well-known, regional examples – Santa Ana and Long Beach – received the most critiques. The evidence from this study suggests that trust deteriorates as one goes further away from their inner circle, to the point where familiarity ends.

**Best Practices**

The best practice findings are the actions that satisfied the following four key criteria: (1) addressed a policy disjuncture at the institutional level, (2) simultaneously addressed at least two key challenges inherent in the partnerships in this study, (3) aligned to the literature on successful collaboration, and (4) contributed to institutionalizing the partnership at the local level. I will utilize the following variables of support of successful partnerships summarized by Christensen et al. (1996) as elements of successful collaborations: finding common ground, commitment from top leadership, strong relationships with key individuals, time, continuing benefits, and fiscal support. To frame this discussion I will present each best practice separately in terms of the criteria delineated above.
Focus on Student Needs

Focusing on student needs allowed the participants to: (1) identify misalignments in curricula and assessments, (2) find common ground and (3) remain motivated by continued benefits.

Despite California’s attempt to align the P-20 pipeline through the adoption of K-12 standards for math and English in 1997 and the California Master Plan for Higher Education in 1960, major disjunctures in curricula and assessments persisted across the sectors in this study. The participants reported focusing on the student trajectory in order to identify leaks in the pipeline. The student-centered goals became the partners’ common ground, enabling them to develop trust through a shared focus and vision. As Christensen et al. (1996) explained:

Partnerships may develop as organic collaborations, defined as projects working on ideas or issues that are shared by both institutions and resulting in lasting, embedded changes in each institution. Key steps in beginning an organic collaboration include identifying shared needs, creating a joint vision to meet those needs, and creating a manageable agenda to satisfy the vision. (p. 170).

All of the participants in this study were engaged in organic collaborations. In contrast to previous university-school district collaborations (such as PDSs), where the focus was generally on teachers and researchers engaged in collaborative inquiry, the participants in this study instead concentrated on students and built common ground around the shared needs.

In addition to finding common ground, focusing on the students brought continued benefits to the partners and ultimately helped institutionalize the partnerships. Christensen et al. (1996) argued, “For any good partnership to continue, each side must continue to see positive benefits. These benefits motivate participants’ continued support and hard work in making sure that the collaboration is strong” (p. 172). In this study, the participants demonstrated joy and enthusiasm when discussing the student outcomes from their work. They reported that these
results kept them engaged and excited about the work. A salient example was provided from PK-12 Admin #4 who revealed the following after sharing the student outcomes from the project’s main initiative:

It’s positive work that we’re doing. I’ve seen people come together as a team and I see their enthusiasm. That validates things for me because a lot of times with the budget and all that stuff it’s negative, negative, negative and this is something that’s positive, positive. And it energizes me.

The statement above was made after sharing data demonstrating large gains in access and persistence rates that were excitedly shared. Besides enthusiasm over success rates, another continued benefit reported was the change in mindset from a completion agenda to a focus on the students’ futures. One of the most impressive benefits was the renewed hope for students who had previously given up on themselves. Another equally impressive example was the changed mindset that student grades in high school were a better indicator of success than the college’s placement test. Both of these examples resulted in massive institutional changes for the partner institutions. In terms of the most valuable lesson learned, the participants reported the changed mindset the most frequently and provided examples how this new mindset affected every aspect of their approach to their role as an educator.

Structure Initiative-based Committees with Transparent Reporting Systems

Once the student trajectory was analyzed to identify the goals, participants from two partnerships all reported using their goals as the focal point to create initiative-based committees. In addition to helping the emphasis remain on student needs, this structure paired with a transparent reporting system, was reported as a best practice because it: (1) created accountability for partnership work, and (2) fostered sustainability for the partnership.
A lack of accountability for partnerships both within and across sectors is also well documented in the literature. In this study, a lack of accountability manifested in challenges finding time to develop, implement and evaluate the partnerships’ initiatives. In contrast, participants who engaged in partnerships that utilized initiative-based committees with transparent reporting systems credited the system for keeping them responsible for the partnership work. The participants also reported that the systems helped build trust because each member’s contribution was visible.

Sustainability is another well-documented challenge partnerships face. The participants in this study described their partnerships as dynamic with changes in participation, leadership, curricula, and funding occurring often and without warning. The best practice reported for weathering these changes was to publicly report the partnership’s successes. The participants who utilized this practice reported that success breeds success and sharing the results was the best way to create buy-in and garner additional support for the initiatives. Ultimately, the partnership can only become institutionalized when it gains a majority of support of the individuals within each sector.

Find the Champions

For the majority of the participants, partnership work was outside the scope of their normal job function. Many reported working late nights and/or weekends; everyone reported that this is hard work. Given the lack of accountability and time, I was surprised at the passion, enthusiasm, and dedication that most of the participants exuded. I interviewed a lot of champions.

As reported in the findings, I encountered three types of champions. I referred to them as
originators with the vision for the work, experienced partners who guide the work, and mission-driven individuals who carry out the work. Goldring and Sims (2005) argued, “Cooperative interorganizational relationships can succeed if three types of leaders are engaged: top-level leaders, frontline leaders, and internal networkers, also known as bridge leaders” (p. 231). The types of champions that emerged in this study mirror the three types of leaders described by Goldring and Sims (2005).

The evidence in this study also contends that people should not be forced to engage in partnership work. A few of the participants reported that their supervisor claimed the work was voluntary, but in reality it was mandatory. One person claimed that a colleague quit because the workload was too burdensome. This person also revealed that they were looking for another job for the same reason.

The evidence in this study also suggests that the partnerships would not exist if it were not for the champions. These individuals brought vital resources such as money, experience, and time. Within each partnership, it quickly became clear who the champions were and which category they represented. These individuals were credited with garnering the support of their respective institutions, which was key to institutionalizing the partnership.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were three noteworthy limitations to this study: (1) the narrow geographical area of the partnerships, (2) the specific type of under-represented student served, and (3) restricted participant population within and across partnerships.

At the onset, this project began as an action research project between one high school and one university to collaboratively create a senior-year math class that would simultaneously
prepare the students for the university’s placement exam and the first college-level math class. To inform that project, I reached out to math colleagues around the state who were engaged in similar work to learn the challenges and best practices they experienced. These efforts piqued my interest about the larger challenges and best practices of P-20 partnerships.

One member of my original action research team was engaged in another partnership with a large urban school district. Not yet aware of the ICC’s survey of California’s partnerships, I followed that lead and interviewed 11 participants from that collaborative. I found a second partnership through an internet search and a third by cold-calling. The fourth was the original action research team. The resulting population consisted of participants from a limited geographical area spanning Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Given the narrow geographical area, the second limitation was the lack of diversity in the under-represented students served by the partnerships. Most would be categorized as low-income, minority, first-generation college students and given that this study focused on two densely populated urban counties in Southern California, the majority of the students served were Latinos followed by African Americans.

The third limitation was the participant population. Two concerns arise from this sample: (1) all of the counselors in this study were engaged in the same partnership, and (2) finding additional participants mainly through recommendations. In two partnerships it was evident that everyone involved in that collaboration had been recommended as a potential participant so there was no detectable bias there. In another partnership I used teacher contacts, again avoiding bias from the partners. However, in one partnership I only interviewed champions that were recommended by the partners. This may have resulted in a biased sample.
Areas for Future Research

Several intriguing questions arose tangential to this study. These involve the students the work centers on, the participants who drive the work, and the programs or initiatives implemented.

The first suggestion for future research involves the students who are the focus of this work. The literature on school reform spans topics such as policies, practices, curricula, assessments, but rarely focuses explicitly on the students. In this study, concentrating on the students allowed the partners to identify the leaks in the pipeline. What is missing is a deeper look to learn when the students began to slip and what the root causes were. How did the partnership affect individual students? Did students who were successful under their respective partnership share certain characteristics or circumstances? What about the students who participated in a partnership but were not successful?

The second suggestion is a deeper look at the champions. I was able to learn a little about these individuals but my protocol was about the partnerships and not directly about the people themselves. What characteristics do they share? How long can they sustain the work? What unique challenges do each type - visionary, experienced/liaison, mission-driven – face? What factors motivate them to engage in and persist in this work?

The third suggestion is an evaluation of a successful inter-segmental program replicated by a different partnership. How is buy-in achieved? Does it take more or less time to scale-up? What challenges were similar and what different difficulties arose?
The last suggestion is to compare specific initiatives - focused on math, English, or counseling - across partnerships. What barriers are unique to each? What best practices are applicable for each?

**Conclusion**

Evidence from this study suggests that P-20 partnerships are inherently all about people. By the time that close to one-half of the interviews were completed, I began anticipating that future responses to questions about lessons learned and advice would involve the phrases, “it’s all about the relationships” and “focus on the students.”

The importance of relationships evolved as the project progressed. I began viewing the relationships as a web connecting partnerships, initiatives and knowledge. As partners took new jobs at different institutions the relationships followed and new partnerships were forged, reportedly at a much faster rate.

Another factor that contributed to the web metaphor was the overlap of partnerships. The school districts, community colleges, CSUs and UCs all have distinct service areas. In this study one CSU was simultaneously engaged in three different partnerships: (1) CSU-school district, (2) CSU-school district-community college, and (3) CSU-school district-community college-UC. The partners from this example transferred their experiences from each collaborative to the other two, allowing the partners to continuously learn from additional examples.

The web metaphor for partnerships has been used before as Domina and Ruzek (2012a) argued:

By creating a dense web of interconnections between school districts, local colleges and universities, and other community members, the Santa Ana partnership not only created the necessary conditions for a sweeping change in curricular policies, it also facilitated a
series of interactions that attempts to turn that policy change into a lasting reform. (p. 263-264).

The evidence from this study and the argument above suggests that inter-segmental policy reform is emerging from initiatives at the local level with a growing cadre of like-minded individuals enthusiastically leading the charge.
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