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The Role of School Leaders in Creating a Learning Ecosystem Through School–Community Partnerships

A Dissertation Presented

by

Lisa DiMartino

Submitted to the Graduate School of Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

The Role of School Leaders in Creating a Learning Ecosystem Through School–Community Partnerships

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Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

Approvals:
In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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ABSTRACT

This multi-method study examined survey and interview data collected from current K-12 school leaders in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts to determine the role school leaders play in creating a learning ecosystem through school-community partnerships. This study included three research questions that inquired about the degree to which principals believe school-community partnerships improve schools, the ways partnerships are currently developed, and the identification of factors and conditions that promote or inhibit partnerships. Data was collected in three phases, including survey responses from 25 school leaders, followed by interviews with five respondents, with the final phase consisting of document reviews to inform the development of two case study vignettes. Five themes emerged from the data: providing opportunities for students, staff, and family; aligning efforts and approaches; developing and maintaining relationships; sharing resources and building capital; and establishing strong public relations. Case study vignettes were then developed with the findings from the case studies detailing the perspectives and approaches of current school leaders in terms of school-community partnerships. Findings reveal that school leaders utilize partnerships that have a clear purpose, are connected to goals of the school, and that also provide opportunities for students, staff, and the community. Additional findings illustrate that school leaders built on already existing structures and relationships to develop and maintain partnerships, as well as, use approaches that are geared toward building social capital for their school community. Further findings also demonstrate that school leaders rely on planning and prioritization strategies as important supports for partnerships and that school leaders view partnerships as mechanisms to expand the messaging of their schools.

Key words: *school-community partnerships, school leaders, learning ecosystem*

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Finally, a thank you to the school leaders who engaged in this study. It was your voice I hoped to raise through this study and it could not have been done without any of you. Thank you for dedicating your time to this study.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Current research tells us that learning and preparation for a successful life require enriched experiences that go well beyond textbooks, classrooms and the school day. In addition, there are a number of individuals and organizations that impact a student's educational experience on a day-to-day basis. Thus, the well-known proverb, "It takes a village," reflects the value of collaborative efforts in many life endeavors including education. As a result of this collaborative thinking a number of studies have been conducted to determine the effects of community involvement on student outcomes (Deslandes, 2006; Epstein, 2001; Nettles, 1991). While many of these studies have focused on implementation and leveraging of school-community partnerships, few have specifically tied their work to the concept of a learning ecosystem. The learning ecosystem, as defined by Falk, Dierking, Staus, Wyld, Bailey, and Penuel (2015), recognizes the various contributors inside and outside of the school setting that influence learning. Overall, research that has been conducted has provided limited visions of school-community partnerships resulting in few effective strategies for schools to further engage with their communities (Schutz, 2006). The issue to improve the educational experience is not to "do more" of the same thing but rather to integrate meaningful partnerships into the culture and system of schooling.

The notion of the community playing an important role in education is not a new concept, although this role has morphed over time. Dewey (1902) discussed the need to make the school the social centre, arguing that no educational system can be complete until it can address pressing social issues. Additionally, Bronfrenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory

outlined the interrelated micro-, meso-, and exo- systems that create the relationships influential to students. More specifically tied to educational systems, Epstein (2001) expanded Bronfrenbrenner's individual theory into three overlapping circles to explain overall interactions with school, family, and community partnerships. Most recently, the focus has shifted to the role networks play within the education section. In particular the Networked Improvement Communities (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu, 2015) and the ecosystem approach (Falk, Dierking, Staus, Wyld, Bailey, and Penuel, 2015) have become recognized as strategies that incorporate and value coordination and collaboration in our educational approach.

Much has been written and studied about creating partnerships in school, although much of the focus has been on reinforcing the current system with the addition of professional learning communities or collaborative communities of practice within the school setting. Less has been written on the challenges of creating collaborative communities that include individuals and organizations from outside of the school setting, such as community organizations working in partnership with local districts to affect student outcomes. Studies that have focused on community-school partnerships are often focused on the processes involved with creating and maintaining relationships with community organizations, not necessarily on the development of a sustainable, systematic approach to utilizing community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem.

Having served in various roles in the education sector over the past fifteen years, I have often been curious about the lack of a systematic approach to provide students with varying experiences beyond the "one-size-fits-all" model practiced in many of our educational settings. These standardized practices most often fail to meet the needs of our most disadvantaged students (Nettles, 1991; Katz and Tilchin, 2017). Research has shown that marginalizing others

because of the color of their skin or ethnicity can affect a person's sense of self resulting in limited access and participation (Marks, Seaboyer, and García Coll, 2015; Walton and Cohen, 2007). Our current educational system does not generally value nonconformity and non-dominant cultures. However, the impact of some community school strategies has been studied and has found compelling evidence supporting the school-community partnership as a model to improve outcomes and equity for youth (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017).

When I began my doctoral work I intended to look solely at issues surrounding the English Language Learner (ELL) population because three of my five siblings were classified as ELLs in their educational career, with this label causing them to be limited in the availability and accessibility of some school-based experiences. As I have studied and learned more about the structures embedded in our education model, I have realized that more research needs to be focused on ways to expand the current system of learning, which mainly emphasizes learning as an activity that takes place within the school walls. Falk, et. al's (2015) research, specific to STEM education, argues that "learning happens across a wide range of settings and situations across the day and over a lifetime" (p. 199). Ultimately, I believe this ecosystem concept can be applied to the education system writ large to help redefine learning to include outside of school efforts, most often provided by community organizations (e.g. nonprofit, community-based organizations that provide a variety of educational services to students), and that these efforts can provide support for all students, particularly traditionally underserved populations. In my current role as a funder in the education sector, I have provided support to a number of community organizations that are working hard and provide strong services, but the services and the organizations are disconnected from the day-to-day expectations of the school system. Additionally, the community partners bring their own definition of student needs into the process

that may or may not reflect school defined needs or designated focus areas for the time being. This study provides an in-depth review of two school principals. This research will help me, community organizations and leaders in the field understand how to create a learning ecosystem that values the expertise of both school personnel and community partners.

Statement of the Problem

The needs of our society have shifted from employing individuals for manual labor to requiring intellectually skilled workers adept at analyzing situations and problem solving (Wagner, 2003). Essentially, while the demands of the world have changed around us the structure of our schools has remained constant. We can no longer ask schools to be the sole educational providers for our students. The development of an ecosystem that can offer students different educational experiences and provide additional services to students can help address inequalities in the system (Castrechini and London, 2012). A recent report from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR) noted the City of Chicago's partnerships with nonprofit groups contributed to the City's increased graduation rate (Allensworth, Healey, Gwynne, and Crespin, 2016). Partnering with local organizations such as CityYear, GEAR Up, Collegiate Scholars, OneGoal, etc., provide additional supports to students to help them increase their grades and attendance, as well as expose them to options beyond high school. Additionally, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) identified school-community partnerships as one of several subsystems necessary to create an organizational context favorable to school improvement. The authors' concluded, "a school's capacity to partner with community services has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the supplemental resources available to

support learning" (p. 59). Although the value-add has been noted, there are a number of ideological and logistical challenges that limit the reach of school-community partnerships.

While many educational stakeholders will argue that changes are needed in the system, there has been resistance in attempts aimed at reimagining the current educational structure. Tyack and Tobin (1994) assessed school changes as, "more cosmetic than fundamental, and that remains true to this day" (p. 460). Kotter (1996) also notes, "needed change can still stall because of inwardly focused cultures, paralyzing bureaucracy, parochial politics, a low level of trust, lack of teamwork, arrogant attitudes, a lack of leadership in middle management, and the general human fear of the unknown" (p. 20). Kegan and Lahey (2009) and Kotter (1996) discuss one challenge inherent in our reliance on human capital–"immunity to change." Kotter (1996) notes, "People will find a thousand ingenious ways to withhold cooperation from a process that they sincerely think is unnecessary or wrongheaded" (p.36), while Kegan and Lahey (2009) draw our attention to our own tendencies that lead us not to change, both in personal and professional life. These challenges are evident in an education system and can stifle collaborative efforts with community organizations.

Local community organizations often more accurately reflect the community than school personnel (Schutz, 2006), with Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) finding that traditional institutions typically do not represent the demographics of the school community. Partnerships with community organizations provide students with models in which students might more strongly relate to than individuals that don't look like or have the same context as them. Studies of the strategies employed in various models of school-community partnerships have demonstrated positive impacts on student outcomes (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2013). Furthermore, the authors' noted that implementation and maintaining relationships require a great deal of capacity

and commitment on behalf of both the school and the community partners. As a result, long-term relationships may not be sustainable if the time associated with maintaining the relationships is not correlated with improved student learning. Additionally, not all community organizations are focused on academic outcomes for their participants (Schutz, 2006); these different expectations may limit a school's involvement with particular community partners.

As a result of the logistical, technical and adaptive challenges involved in establishing school-community partnerships, these partnerships are often not strategically implemented, resulting in missed opportunities to increase community involvement and local support for schools. Additionally, schools and community organizations that do not collaborate fail to increase resources, such as revenue, personnel, and materials, which can produce duplicated efforts and competition for limited funding streams. Furthermore, as the role of school leaders has shifted to relying on both managerial and instructional skills, school leaders have found competing interests for their time and attention. Particularly, with the standards-based (aka outcomes based) movement, culminating into the standardized testing movement (Wagner, 2003), school leaders have been required to focus on testing, making the tested content the most important information for all students, and test taking the most relevant skill (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wager, 2003; Wraga, 2011). These challenges often result in school leaders not exploiting school-community partnerships as an approach to create a learning ecosystem, incorporating the skills from outside of school partnerships into the day-to-day expectations of student learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of school leaders in improving school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. I am particularly interested in how

school leaders view the benefits and drawbacks of collaborations with community organizations. In addition, the study will examine the strategies school leaders utilize to develop partnerships between schools and the community. Finally, the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit collaborations between school leaders and community organizations will be explored. The case study approach will be used to test my hypothesis that the school leader is the key driver of a successful school-community partnership.

Overall, this study attempts to capture data from school leaders to answer the following three guiding questions:

- To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?
- What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?
- What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

Definition of terms

The following terms are used throughout the study. To achieve clarity in the discussion of this topic, the manner in which each term is used is described below.

- **School leader:** For the purposes of this research, a school leader refers to a building based, public school principal in an elementary, middle, or high school in Rhode Island.
- **School-community partnerships**: For this study, school-community partnerships refer to partnerships between a school and a community organization. School-community partnerships does not suggest a specific program, but rather a set of strategies employed to create partnerships between local schools and community-based organizations to

impact student outcomes. In addition, partnerships may refer to a collaborative effort between a school or district and one or more community organization.

- **Learning ecosystem**: Using language from Falk, et. al (2015), this paper refers to an ecosystem conceptually as a system where, "Learning happens across a wide range of settings and situations across the day and over a lifetime" (p. 199). In this case, a learning ecosystem has, or is putting in place, structures to support and value organizations as partners in the educational process. An example would be more strategic, integrated approaches to education across different learning settings.
- **Create:** There are a number of ways different schools and community organizations partner together. This study is interested in looking at the role of the school leader in improving these partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. In this sense, the term create refers to the structure and purpose of partnerships as part of a larger system, not as standalone programs. Thus, creating a learning ecosystem means being thoughtful about the various roles of the school and different partners to ensure that student learning needs are being met through a number of different mechanisms.
- **Community organizations**: For the purposes of this research, community organizations refer to nonprofit, community-based organizations that provide educational services to schools, including students and teachers. Educational services include before, after, and summer enrichment, remediation, and/or in-school services such as tutoring.

Significance of the study

This study will provide a base of knowledge as to the current landscape regarding the role of school leaders in improving school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. Information gleaned will support school leaders who want to collaborate with community organizations to increase the capacity of both organizations. It will inform teachers and school committees so that they may include the capacity of a school leader to improve school-community partnerships as part of their hiring and evaluation process in assessing the effectiveness of principals and other school leaders. This study has potential significance for five groups of educational stakeholders: school leaders, community organizations, national and local funders, policy makers, and school leaders preparation programs.

For school leaders, the study is intended to contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding improving school-community partnerships. This study will help school leaders better understand the role and expectations necessary to foster partnerships to support the school and community organizations in creating a learning ecosystem. It may also help school leaders recognize the value in relying on community organizations to provide certain supports to different populations that the school has historically struggled with. It may also provide them with a number of approaches to develop school-community partnerships.

For community organizations, this study can provide insight into how to be better connected to the needs and structures of a particular school. This may be useful in determining how community organizations establish and adapt different program offerings to meet the specific needs of the students they intend to serve, while also providing a rationale for policymakers to value and support the work of community organizations.

National and local funders contribute grants to a number of community organizations working in partnership with local schools and districts. This study can help inform grantmakers

interested in funding stronger partnerships, within a systems change focus. Additionally, this study can help policymakers understand the interconnected workings of the educational system and may encourage them to involve various partners in their own decision-making.

Finally, this study may help inform universities and school leadership programs to help principals receive training on identifying potential community partners as well as strategies to embed these partnerships into their learning ecosystem.

Review of the Literature

A full literature review is included as Chapter Two of this dissertation, and addresses three main areas. First, the benefits of collaboration as a strategy to increase capacity at the school and community level as well as impacts on student outcomes are addressed. In this section, different models are examined to provide context to the concept of school-community partnerships. The second area explores the development of school-community partnerships found in the literature on community organizing, presenting the role of community leaders in this work. Finally, factors and conditions that inhibit or promote school-community partnerships are examined. This section includes the role of the principal in implementing change efforts.

Benefits of Collaboration

This section addresses the benefits of collaboration to increase capacity and impact student outcomes. Essentially, the literature supports that school-community partnerships have the potential to influence both students and adults. Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017) identified community schools as "hold[ing] promise for closing well documented racial and economic achievement gaps" (p. 16). In addition, Anthony Bryk (2017) noted that improving the system as

a whole has a better impact on our disadvantaged schools than implementing individual programs and new initiatives. Additionally, Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) argue that creating a more diverse group of stakeholders, in terms of perspective and experience, can lead to exposure to new learning with the potential for growth in capacity. Finally, the developing research on the learning ecosystem (Falk, et. al, 2015), recognizes the various settings and situations learning happens in (e.g. the community), as well as the social networks that influence these settings. These differing perspectives about the benefits of collaboration are dissected to provide an overview of the literature focused on collaboration as a model for improvement.

Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2013) identified a typology of four categories of school-community partnerships: Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and a Community Development Model. School-community partnerships are practiced in a variety of designs to achieve differing purposes. Findings suggest that often community partners play a supportive role rather than one to help shape the mission and goals of the partner school (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2013). While the four models were found to impact student outcomes (e.g., achievement, attendance, attitudes, and behaviors) to a certain degree, the literature reviewed lacked empirical studies of sustained partnerships. Through a review of these models, connections are made to national and local models, such as the Coalition for Community Schools, Harlem Children's Zone, and the MET Schools.

Developing Community Partnerships

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCI) have been introduced in various communities across the United States to address disparities in outcomes, including high school graduation and college completion rates, for low-income communities and communities of color

(Zaff, Donlan, Jones, Lin, 2015). CCIs take on a variety of structures and approaches, but researchers (Zaff, et al., 2015) have identified an underlying framework to help understand how CCIs may lead to beneficial changes in developmental outcomes for youth. For example, five general features that promote positive outcomes across context of family, school, and the community were identified – caring relationships, skill building, safe and healthy environments, opportunities to make a difference, and structure and positive social norms. However, creating a supportive youth system differs from creating more and better programs. "Thus, the solution to creating a supportive youth system is not just to create more programs, but also to create opportunities that are responsive to what young people want and need to resolve difficulties in their lives and to achieve goals that they are pursuing" (Zaff, et al., 2015, p. 3). Lin, Zaff, and Gerstein (2015) also explored the role data-driven processes play in the work of CCIs, determining that "sense-making leadership is not just about convincing people that the data you hold is generally true, but interpreting the evidence, as well as the holes in the evidence, in a way that speaks to its 'lifelikeness'" (Lin, Zaff, & Gerstein, 2015, p. 59). Further examination of the role of sense-making leadership was also conducted to identify behaviors necessary to reach out to community organizations. In addition, the concept of the principal as community leader is discussed.

Factors and Conditions that Inhibit or Promote School-Community Partnerships

This final section of the literature review looks closely at access to resources, different ideologies and values between schools and community organizations, along with the role of leadership in supporting these partnerships. Moles (1999) identified five challenges to school-community collaborations, including a lack of time and resources, as well as cultural, language, and educational differences between schools and community members. Several studies have

been conducted to examine how principals allocate their time. Over the past decade the focus for many building leaders has been on instructional and change leadership approaches. A 2015 study of 300 school principals in Miami-Dade indicated that building leaders spend the majority of their time on management, administration, and internal relationships, with only a small fraction of time on external relationships (Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015). Building on strategies developed to influence internal relationships, Wenger (1998) extended the concept of communities of practice as formal or informal supports for schools as a resource for creating partnerships.

Other researchers (Epstein, 2001; Furco, 2013; Nettles, 1991) also cite a number of challenges and barriers partnerships face, with leadership playing an important role is establishing and limiting school-community partnerships (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). The concepts of power and privilege as they relate to the school and community organization are also briefly addressed. Additionally, the literature on immunity to change theory (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) and Networked Improvement Communities (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu, 2015) will be examined as possible conditions to promote school-community partnerships. Finally, this section also explores the role of the principal in implementing various change efforts.

Design of the Study

The design of the study is broken into two sections. The first sections outlines the general aspects of the design, including rationale of the choice of design selected, the selection of subjects and setting, and instrumentation. The second section is dedicated to the methodology of

the research design in addressing each of the three research questions. The section is divided into data collection and data analysis.

Rationale for the design selected

This multi-method research study is designed as a case study. According to Morse (2003) a multi-method research study includes the use of more than one data collection method, incorporating qualitative and quantitative sources. In this case the quantitative survey data will provide foundational information, with the interview protocol allowing the researcher to more deeply understand the case. In case study data collection Creswell (2013) notes "the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audiovisual materials" (p. 98). This methodology was chosen because it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of school-community partnerships, learn the degree to which K-12 principals value community partnerships and determine their level of implementation and support for creating a learning ecosystem through community partnerships.

Selection of subjects

The population studied was current, traditional school principals. A total of 902 electronic surveys were emailed to current principals in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts K-12 public schools.[1] The survey was open for a total of ten weeks, resulting in 25 respondents. Five participants then agreed to a follow up survey. Three surveys were conducted face-to-face in the principal's respective building, with two being conducted

[1] This would exclude private and parochial school principals, former principals/retired principals, and principals in non-traditional school settings such as chart schools, Technical High Schools and the MET School.

over the phone. Interviews were purposefully selected, as those sites that will best help me understand how principals use, promote, and inhibit partnerships.

Instrumentation

Data was gathered through two instruments. Survey questions were developed to provide foundational, quantitative data on the three research questions, gauging the degree in which principals believe school-community partnerships improve schools, outlining various ways partnerships are currently developed, and also identifying the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit school-community partnerships. The development of the survey instrument was informed by a literature review of past validated instruments that measure principals' behaviors, a literature review of key domains and issues around partnerships, including the literature base that addresses specifically building relationships with community organizations, and conducting cognitive interviews (Desimone & LeFloch, 2004). Through the literature review of validated principal surveys and review of key domains and issues, a 20-question principal survey was created to capture the use of partnerships. In particular, survey questions were adapted from the NYC Community Schools School Leader Survey developed by RAND (2017). The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships instrument developed in partnership between the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the National Network of Partnership Schools (2002) also provided guidance in survey development. The survey was developed so that it could be completed within 30 minutes, with little complexity in the survey (e.g. skip patterns), as an attempt to improve response rates and ease of completion for principals. Five former school principals beta tested the survey, their feedback led to final revisions of the survey tool before it was distributed to the larger target population.

An interview protocol was developed subsequently to the analysis of survey data. A thorough review of survey data provided insight into areas to further explore with interview participants. Overall, the purpose of the interview was to go deeper into understanding the reasons behind the survey questions and to highlight lived experiences of current principals. The final 13-question interview protocol served as a guide to keep the researcher focused on the research questions.

The survey and interview protocols were designed to address the research questions. Participant interviews and artifacts to the extent possible will supplement initial survey responses. All Institutional Review Board protocols required by the university were followed and adhered to.

Data Collection Process

Data was gathered in three phases. Phase I consisted of an on-line survey distributed to traditional K-12 principals in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts. Phase II data collection consisted of recording of follow up interviews with principals. Phase III entailed the collection of publically available information, such as school report cards and improvement plans.

In Phase I, an on-line survey was created through the Lesley University version of Qualtrics. Following beta-testing of the on-line survey, a link was emailed to the population of traditional K-12 principals in Rhode Island. After a low response rate was observed, the study was expanded to include principals in New Hampshire and Southeastern Massachusetts. The survey remained open for a total of 10-weeks (Rhode Island principals had access to the survey between February 5, 2018 – April 16, 2018; New Hampshire and Massachusetts principals

accessed the survey between March 10, 2018 – April 16, 2018). The majority of survey responses were collected immediately after an initial or reminder email was sent out. The email of each principal was publicly available through their respective Department of Education's Web site. An introductory email, with link to the survey, included the objective of the study and provided information for participant consent. The survey required participants to indicate their consent before allowing them to access the survey. Reminder emails were sent to all principals within two weeks of the introductory email, thanking the principals for completing the survey and reminding principals to complete the survey. A third email was sent only to the non-respondents, reminding them of the importance of their response and included a deadline for completion. In sum, three emails were sent to principals (Dillman, 2000; Dillman, Sinclair, & Clark, 1993; Schaefer & Dillman, 1998).

A total of 902 surveys were emailed out; 25 survey respondents completed the survey. The response rate was below 3%; a low response rate was predicted due to the day-to-day demands on principals and their varying level of capacity in managing school-community partnerships. In addition, while the survey provided foundational information on principals' perceptions about school-community partnerships in general, it also provided a pool of principals willing to be interviewed to provide more personal context on the topic.

Phase II of data collection consisted of follow-up interviews. Survey respondents had the ability to indicate their willingness to be contacted for a follow-up interview. Overall, ten principals volunteered to be interviewed, with five ultimately being interviewed. Due to logistical and scheduling challenges, interview participants were chosen based on their location, survey responses in general, and availability to participate in an interview. Interviews were conducted either in person at the principal's school or over the phone. Interviewees provided all

appropriate permissions and consent and could opt out of the interview at any time. In addition, interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. All data was saved on a password-protected computer, with only the researcher having access. Interviewees consisted of principals in each of the targeted areas – Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts – and were all elementary school principals. This population represented 20% of the overall survey participants.

Phase III data collection consisted of collecting publically available information once all interviews were complete. Data such as school report cards, school improvement plans, and district improvement plans were accessed on-line and downloaded to a password-protected computer. Information was obtained from State Departments of Education as well as each district represented in the interview phase.

Data Analysis

Phase I: Survey analysis. Survey results were analyzed descriptively, through the Qualtrics platform. Descriptive statistics for each survey question, exhibiting the mean, standard deviation, and sample size was calculated. Weights (such as sampling weights or weights to take into account response rate) were not created or used in the descriptive analysis. Crosstabs analysis was also run to determine any differences in responses based on the type of school (elementary, middle, or high), the location (urban, suburban, or rural), as well as the overall score calculated (low, medium, or high).

Phase II: Qualitative analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed in two phases. For Phase I, structural coding was attempted then modified to theming the data. Saldana (2016) notes, "A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in

itself, coded" (p. 198). Themes were found in the data by examining qualities such as: repeating ideas, participant terms, theoretical issues suggested by the data, and what was missing or not presented in the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, cited in Saldana, 2011p. 203). Themes were demonstrated through participants' verbatim words and phrases, allowing for principals' points of view on their experiences in creating partnerships.

Themes from each interview were entered into Atlas.ti as a basic categorization. Then, data was exported to a password protected Excel Worksheet that allowed the researcher more ease in reorganizing and categorizing themes and sub-themes. This resulted in the identification of five major themes along with the sub-themes that support the groupings and relationships within the major themes. The themes are presented in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Phase III: Case Study Analysis. After the themes were identified, the interview data from two principals, along with additional publicly available school information including school improvement plans were developed into case study vignettes. These two principals were selected as cases because they were best aligned with the research questions. Descriptive accounts of two principals' experiences with partnerships, along with findings as related to each research question are provided in Chapter 4.

Delimitations of the Study

A conscious effort has been made to investigate school-community partnerships by first targeting K-12 building based school leaders in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts. By reaching across the full K-12 system, rather than a set of grade levels, I intended to get a full range of leadership perspectives about school-community partnerships.

Participants who indicated they are currently engaged in a school-community partnership as a strategy to support some features found in a learning ecosystem were asked for permission to be contacted for a follow up interview. This process utilized the principals' perspectives to identify partnerships, rather than relying on community organizations. Explicitly relying on principals to articulate whom they consider partners and the values and benefits of these partnerships will provide a school-based frame of reference, as opposed to the point of view of community partners.

In addition, this study did not include school leaders from charter schools or vocationally focused schools. These schools typically have specific, identified partnerships with community organizations and local businesses as part of their charter or as a focus of workforce development. Teacher leaders are also not included because there is not a standard recognition of teacher leaders across the states in which the study was conducted. Nor is there a focus on parent-school relationships because of the expansive literature already developed in this area. Furthermore, this study did not focus on the role of the superintendent or district leadership positions. Overall, it is the researcher's belief that school principals are the most likely to be the individual involved in community networking and partnerships; thus the study focuses on this population.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters. This chapter, Chapter One, provides an introduction that includes the problem statement, purpose of the study, definition of terms, guiding research questions to answer the problem, significance of the study and delimitations. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the literature regarding community

partnerships and collaborative approaches in education. This chapter will discuss benefits of partnerships and collaboration, examine examples of existing school-community models, as well as explore the role school leaders play in this work. Chapter Three explains the research design, method for a case study, and the role of the researcher. Additionally, Chapter Three addresses the processes for participant recruitment, instrumentation development, and methods used for data collection and analysis. The data collected and the study findings are presented in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five will provide a summary, discussion of findings, implications, areas for future research, and final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

While there are historic examples of collaboration between community organizations and the education system, it wasn't until Congress passed the Community Schools Act in the 1970s that these efforts became part of a model to improve schools and the communities they serve. Nettles (1991) discussed the roles communities have always played in the development of students and identified community involvement as a process of social change in four areas: conversion, mobilization, allocation of resources, and instruction. The process of bringing a student from one belief to another is conversion. Mobilization refers to actions aimed at increasing participation in the educational system. Allocation suggests community entities provide resources, particularly in the form of social support and services, to children and youth, while instruction refers to activities geared toward assisting students' intellectual development and in learning the social constructs in the community. While Nettles' research indicated a connection between community organizations and schools, with the recent focus on standardized test scores, some of the fundamental differences in operating structures between schools and community organizations have come to light.

Although schools and community organizations operate within different structures and employ varying pathways and activities, according to Jehl, Blank, and McCloud (2001) the two entities share a common goal in "ensuring a positive future for children, their families, and their communities" (p. 13). It is necessary at this point to briefly examine some of the different ideological and logistical challenges faced by schools and community organizations. Most notably, schools are public institutions, owned by the government. This configuration influences

schools organizational structures and cultures, often making them large employers and key institutional players in local areas, whether or not they foster and sustain community relationships. Furco (2013) also notes that schools are resistant to partnerships with external constituents based on schools' fear of public scrutiny, burnout with numerous reforms and initiatives, and the norm of isolation that often defines the work of personnel in schools. On the other hand, community organizations pride themselves by their ability to work effectively with the community (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001), and are more focused on collective impact, as opposed to individual impact (Schutz, 2006). These differing norms influence both schools' and community organizations' views on the roles, accountability, and power valued by each group.

School accountability has become extremely visible across the country since NCLB, with the focus on the importance on standardized test scores (Wagner, 2003; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). This focus on test scores often dictates a school's emphasis on certain academic areas, which can lead to a narrow and simplified curriculum (Schutz, 2006). Accountability of community organizations in meeting their goals is not usually advertised within the communities they serve, causing an imbalance between the expectations of schools and community organizations (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001). While it is not unusual to see a school's poor performance (based on standardized test scores) highlighted in the local news, it is unlikely to see a partner who is working with that school held to the same level of scrutiny. Schutz (2006) notes that afterschool programming is often provided by community organizations and that these programs are "historically less professionalized than schools and less focused on measureable outcomes" (p. 709). Furthermore, community organizations are less focused on tested content, resulting in schools' reluctance to collaborate with efforts not directly tied to an achievement test (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003).

Finally, schools value traditional, institutional power that often is associated with resources, opposed to the people power viewed by community organizations as their source of power. Generally community organizations in low-income areas do not bring substantial resources or influence to the partnership. According to Jehl, Blank, and McCloud (2013), school structures often do not value this type of people power, which can result in schools rejecting the community as a source of capital in the larger educational system.

It is important to be aware of these differences between schools and community organizations to better understand the perspectives each entity bring with them and also, how to build on the strengths and address the limitations that are inherent in each structure. These differences will be touched upon on in the remainder of this chapter, as well as highlighting different models of partnerships currently being implemented. The goal of this chapter is to unpack and understand the literature about school-community partnerships by:

1. Highlighting the benefits of collaboration,
2. Understanding the development of community organizations, and
3. Identifying some factors and conditions that contribute to improving school-community partnerships.

Ultimately, this chapter attempts to illustrate successful school-community partnerships along with recognizing the challenges in creating partnerships and the role leadership plays in limiting these challenges. The paper has three main sections: 1) Benefits of collaboration, 2) Developing school-community partnerships, and 3) Factors and conditions that support or limit school-community partnerships.

In the first section, I provide an overview of the benefits of collaboration as a strategy to increase student outcomes as well as build capacity at the school and community level. Within this section I discuss some different models of partnerships, including the community school model. This overview is critical to understand the current literature base around collaborations.

In the second section, I explore the development of school-community partnerships by reviewing literature found in the community-organizing sector. This section looks at the role comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) have had on the education sector. I also address how sense making influences partnerships as well as present the role of community leaders.

Finally, in the third section, I discuss the factors and conditions that support or limit school-community partnerships. Leadership is a critical component of integrating partnerships in their schools and communities. The role leadership plays in creating strong partnerships is also addressed and explored throughout this chapter.

Benefits of Collaboration

Collaboration refers to the commitment to engage collectively for a common purpose. The well-know proverb "To go fast, go alone; to go far, go together" embodies the notion of collaboration, particularly in increasing capacity at both the school and community level. Some of the most common examples of collaboration at the school level are based on the community schools model concept. Blank, Jacobson, and Melaville (2012) describe a community school as

> a place and a set of partnerships connecting a school, the families of students, and the surrounding community. A community school is distinguished by an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Community schools extend the

> school day and week, reaching students, their families, and community residents in unique ways (p. 1).

In addition, Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2013) identified a typology of four categories of school-community partnerships: Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and a Community Development Model. Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017) also identified four common elements of community schools in the United States: integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practice. School-community partnerships have been suggested by some as a possible resource to expand the reach of schools and community organizations to provide additional skills for students, noting that partnerships should be used as part of a flexible, yet comprehensive, strategy, not a prescriptive mandate, with each school being mindful of their local context (Johnston, Gomez, Sontag-Padilla, Xenakis, & Anderson, 2017).

The following section is organized around the benefits of collaboration for students drawing on examples of school-community partnerships currently being implemented in the United States. Next, evidence supporting collaborative approaches as a method to improve adult capacity in schools, in both the school and community space is explored. Finally, literature about moving from traditional partnership roles, such as maintaining relationships, to using partnerships as part of a coordinated learning ecosystem is examined.

It Takes a Village: How Partnerships Work for Students

"It takes a village" is another well-known proverb of questionable origin that emphasizes the belief that it takes an entire community of different people to support children in their experiences and provide opportunities for growth within a safe environment. In the United

States, public schools are a major part of this "village" where children spend upwards of six hours per day, five days a week. As noted earlier, school-community partnerships can influence student behaviors in a variety of areas particularly in academics, youth development, and health and wellness. A number of models have created conditions that support students beyond the traditional functions of schooling. Within this section different models and their impact on students will be reviewed.

Academics. In addition to providing coordinated services for students, the community schools model simultaneously focuses on high-quality instruction (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017). One of the largest school-community partnership models is New York City's Community Schools Initiative (NYC-CS), with 215 community schools to date (Johnston, et al., 2017), has adapted the four key areas (integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership) identified earlier by Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017) to meet the unique needs of students and families in New York City Public Schools. Specifically, NYC-CS's core services are focused on expanded learning time, family engagement, attendance improvement strategies, and health and wellness programs. As a result of the initiative a number of principals recognized that their focus on partnerships allowed them to modify and enhance extended learning time and tutoring to better meet the needs of students, with some principals noting that students participating in these programs have improved their academic performance (Johnston, et al., 2017).

Another well-known model, Harlem Children's Zone, was created to provide a variety of community services designed to support children from birth through college graduation as an approach to close the achievement gap (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). A review of the model found evidence of effectiveness at increasing the achievement of the poorest minority children; with

students served by Harlem Children's Zone public charter schools typically outperform their peers at neighboring schools. Dobbie and Fryer's (2009) research suggests, "a better community, as measured by poverty rate, does not significantly raise test scores if school quality remains essentially unchanged" (p. 25). Thus, the explicit integration and coordination of services between community organizations and schools is essential.

Additionally, Somers and Haider (2012) found that the Communities in Schools Model of Integrated student supports increased on-time graduation and decreased dropouts at the high school level along with increased attendance at the elementary level. Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017) identified community schools as exemplars in implementing characteristics that "hold promise for closing well documented racial and economic achievement gaps" (p. 16). The authors note that students benefit the most when activities and programs introduced are well aligned with the instructional day (i.e., not just homework help, but content to enrich classroom learning). Strong community partnerships have been found to increase the number of students on grade level (Sheldon, 2003), increase student test scores, and increase connections to learning opportunities outside of school (Blank, Melaville, and Shah, 2003). While some community school models have demonstrated academic improvements measured by traditional sources, Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) recognize that assessment is used as a tool for improving practice and guiding professional learning. Assessment's main function in many community school models is not to rank teachers and students based on test scores, but to be a resource for identifying where students (and teachers) are struggling and to identify what is needed to make them stronger.

Academic impacts are one component of school-community partnerships, but recognizing students' needs and development are another major focus of partnerships nationally. These

components, often referred to as social/emotional and youth development, create a culture of relationships and sense of belonging for students. The next section reviews the literature on the impact school-community partnerships have on some of these aspects beyond academics.

Youth development and social-emotional learning. According to the Institute of Medicine and National Academy of Sciences (2002), "Community programs can expand the opportunities for youth to acquire personal and social assets and to experience the broad range of features of positive development settings" (p. 8). Activities or approaches that include mentoring, community-service projects, youth identity development, and establishing a sense of belonging are examples of various components geared toward youth development. In 2017, the Rhode Island Department of Education respectively endorsed a set of social-emotional learning standards defined as competencies for school and life success. The anchor standards build off the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) standards include the following five abilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The Massachusetts Department of Education had previously endorsed the CASEL standards and continues to focus on social-emotional learning as one of the department's strategic priorities. These constructs also pay an important role in youth development.

The Comer Model, developed in 1968 and still implemented across the country, recognizes that the likelihood of academic success is enhanced by a coordinated set of supports. Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam's (2017) review of literature on community schools found some studies of the Comer Model demonstrated success for children of diverse backgrounds, suggesting that with extra supports to address specific needs all students can gain the social and academic skills necessary for school success. School-community partnerships can enhance

student learning by allowing students to acquire, practice, and apply their knowledge and skills in an authentic environment, their own community. This approach creates a sense of belonging in the community for students (and their families) while also linking experiences to academic standards (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017). In 2003, The National Research Council reviewed evidence about making high school more engaging and meaningful to young people in urban schools, determining that instruction that connects to students' previous understandings, interests, cultures, and real-work experiences can make the curriculum more meaningful to them. Students who are engaged in problem solving and application of new knowledge are more motivated. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) note that adopting a culturally responsive pedagogical approach helps students and teachers to build on students' experiences and knowledge, creating classroom communities as safe places to nurture everyone's cultural identity. The authors concluded that when teachers create relationships beyond classrooms, with colleagues and the community, it strengthens student-teacher relationships in the classroom because it demonstrates the teachers' acknowledgement of the community as a vital partner in student learning.

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center ("Met"), a career and technical school in Rhode Island was created with the premise that letting high school students learn about what they are interested in, while providing strong adult support and relationships, will result in a students being prepared for life beyond school. While the school was not established as a community school model, it does have strong school-community partnerships as a key component of the day-to-day operations of the school. Using an internship model as the core academic piece of their students' experiences, the Met relies on collaboration with the community to enhance students' understanding of the world they live in and how schools can tap

into the real world for authentic learning experiences for students (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). According to Dennis Littky, co-founder of the Met:

> It is about finding the right relationship between the student and the adult, the relationship that works well for both of them. And, most importantly, teaching cannot happen in a vacuum. The community and the child's family must be included in every way possible (2004, p. 15).

This academic focus combined with these relationships establish an environment where students learn to be members of a peer group, have the ability to reflect on the work they are doing in actual work sites, and recognize the need to hone their sills and explore concepts that will be critical to their future success (outside of school). The process allows all students to be individuals and parts of the whole, augmenting all the positive things that come out of creating a respectful school atmosphere and culture. Schools have to begin taking advantage of the world as a resource for students (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). Furthermore, Eccles and Templeton's (2002) review of afterschool programs (none of which had academic instruction as their mission) found positive student effects (e.g. achievement, engagement, graduation rates, decreased behavior referrals) resulting from various programs structures that incorporated strong social support, caring relationships with adults, embedded leadership opportunities, and the generic "learning to learn" atmosphere.

Walton and Cohen (2007) cite evidence that interventions modifying conditions aimed at bolstering minority students' sense of belonging have a substantial impact on their academic performance. These findings suggest that many of the critical challenges facing minority students can be impacted through the formation of supportive environments that provide consistent and unambiguous messages about belonging, capability and value in classrooms and

schools. A 2016 study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR) found that a number of policy and organizational changes Chicago Public Schools has made over the past twenty years as contributors to increased graduation rates for all students, including partnerships with nonprofit groups to provide mentoring and supports (Allensworth, Healey, Gwynne, and Crespin, 2016). Partnering with local organizations such as CityYear, GEAR Up, Collegiate Scholars, OneGoal, etc., provide additional supports to students to help them increase their grades and attendance, as well as expose them to options beyond high school. These local nonprofits often more accurately reflect the community than school personnel, with Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012) finding that traditional institutions typically do not represent the demographics of the school community.

Influencing academic and youth development strategies are essential components of school-community partnerships, and are found in various community school models. Another major focus of community schools is on students' overall health and wellness. Many community school models include health services as part of their integrated student supports. The following section discusses the benefits of health and wellness services as part of a larger school-community partnership model.

Health and Wellness. Numerous researchers recognize the relationship between educational outcomes and limited access to quality health care and social services (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Johnston, et al., 2017; Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017). Partnership models vary in their capacity with some utilizing partnerships to make better informed referrals for students to health care providers to others operating a health clinic within the walls of a school to yet others focused on preventative and mental health services. The

underlying theory for these approaches is that comprehensive school based health care impacts students' grades, behaviors, and attendance.

Noting that many students in urban areas do not have adequate access to health care, various community school models have integrated preventive care models allowing schools to "shift from focusing solely on treatment to creating a holistic, integrated, personalized approach to supporting students that emphasize the strong connection between academic success and mental health" (Johnston, et al., 2017, p. 9-10). The NYC-CS Initiative is specifically focused on students' mental health and has incorporated these programs and supports with other academic and health supports while also facilitating the coordination and integration of services across and between various institutions, specifically schools, communities, and government. Blank, Melaville, and Shah's (2003) review of literature found that students who participated in mental health interventions had better attendance, fewer behavioral incidents, improved personal skills, increased student achievement, and a higher sense of school and home connectedness than nonparticipating students.

School-based health clinics can provide a number of services, the least of which include regular vision and hearing screening. Studies have indicated that grades improve significantly when basic vision and hearing problems are corrected (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003). Additionally, some partnerships have offered child immunizations for students right at their school, minimizing challenges for parents without health insurance, access to clinics, or the time needed to secure preventative care, to ensure students are able to enroll with limited delay. Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003) noted that students who utilize a school-based health clinic are more likely to graduate or be promoted than those who do not utilize it.

As an attempt to create a community school model with health providers, as opposed to schools, as the focal point, Rhode Island created Health Equity Zones (HEZ). The HEZs were developed to address the fact that public health resources are insufficient; in order to achieve optimal outcomes strong government-community collaborations are necessary to address the local challenges through place-based initiatives (Alexander-Scott, Novais, Hall-Walker, Ankoma, & Fulton, 2017). The HEZ initiative is founded on community engagement finding that new approaches are most likely to success if they are aligned to existing community initiatives and can leverage additional resources (i.e., money, time, volunteer opportunities, facilities). Because each HEZ operates independently and identifies their objectives based on demonstrated need, there is not statewide data available to demonstrate an impact on the various health and wellness disparities being addressed across the state. Although preliminary findings from HEZs indicate that in order to be successful there needs to be strengthened community involvement, flexible structures to adapt to evolving community needs, and achievement of immediate, specific, winnable objectives. This HEZ structure looks beyond a one-size-fits-all model of health care delivery; much like community schools look beyond the same limitations to best address students' needs in a holistic way.

The section above identifies some components of successful school-community partnerships and the impact these coordinated efforts can have on students. It is important to remember that community school models are intended as flexible structures that can incorporate different services and supports to meet the needs of students in a variety of capacities. These models should not be prescriptive, but rather adaptable to the context in which they exist. It is also important to note that partnerships and collaborations can be extremely beneficial for adults

and the organizations they work in whether they be schools or various community organizations. These benefits are touched upon in the next section.

Using Partnerships to Build Organizational Capacity

Recent research has been dedicated to examining how adults can collaborate and how collaboration and partnerships can build capacity. In this context, building capacity refers to efforts made to acquire and use relevant information to improve skills and abilities. According to a background paper prepared by the OEDC (2012), "capacity building strives to find better and more efficient ways for different actors to access and use knowledge in local educational contexts in order to achieve desired outcomes" (p. 2). Jehl, Blank, and McCloud (2001) identified four areas in which partnerships can build capacity in both schools and community organizations: developing capacity to work with families and community residents, helping school leaders think politically, increasing community leadership and participation, and building assets in the community. The authors also note that school-community partnerships can be tricky due to uneven power distribution, unclear goals, and lack of purpose. Specifically, I found the literature to support two larger concepts–encouraging diverse perspectives and harnessing social capital–as the major aspects to support capacity building. These two topics are explored further in the sections below.

Encouraging diverse perspectives. Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppesu, and Easton (2010) identified parent-community ties as an essential component for school improvement. These researchers noted that, "a coherent school community program for improved student learning requires managing a diverse array of academic and social support services and sustaining relationships with the multiple institutions that provide them" (p. 59). In further research, Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015) argued that creating a more diverse

group of stakeholders, in terms of perspective and experience, can lead to exposure to new learning with the potential for growth in capacity. Muijs, West, and Ainscow (2010) agree that diversity of participants lessens the possibility for organizations to become myopic, and closed to external influences. The authors note that collaboration can help "to cope with the complexity that surrounds and impacts on them" (p. 9). These views indicate the belief that schools alone can't provide all students the resources they need to be successful, while also recognizing that good schools are part of a larger system of forces, institutions, individuals, goals, and expectations (Sanders, 2001). School-community partnerships can provide an opportunity for schools to leverage and align services related to student outcomes resulting in an expanded vision of what schools are and who they are responsible for (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016). Much of this visioning, aligning, and leveraging work falls to adults (in schools and the community) working together with students' interests in mind.

Fehrer and Leos-Urbel's (2016) evaluation of the community school model in Oakland, California demonstrated that when schools and community partners collaborate, using a comprehensive, coherent, and committed approach the work of the two entities becomes so interdependent that it is difficult to distinguish from each other. This shared ownership can help partners carry out the business of school. The authors note that just bringing all stakeholders to the table can be an effective approach to challenging traditional roles, expectations, and norms; although specific effort and facilitation are necessary to ensure this process becomes collaborative and not just patronizing. Furthermore, by extending the role of the community partners to inside the school a deeper coherence of supports for students can be established, moving schools away from providing several different programs without any comprehensive strategy or clearly defined student outcomes.

In addition, school-community partnerships can provide an avenue for teachers to become better connected with their students and the community they live in, with Schutz (2006) arguing, "teachers, parents, and community members cannot work together effectively if they do not understand each other" (p. 726). Muijs, et al. (2010) reinforces one of the values of a diverse network as the ability to co-construct a solution to a challenge as opposed to implementing an externally developed program. The authors determine that this approach leads to active construction of knowledge and ownership, which can lead to stronger buy in and support. Just understanding the perspectives other people bring to the educational conversation is a first step, but recognizing and valuing the social capital individuals and communities have is another essential component to building partnerships.

Harnessing social capital. Partnerships can also influence social capital, and according to Hargreaves (2003) it is best accomplished through bottom up networks that can connect to schools leading to innovations that are more open to change. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) define social capital as "how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust" (p. 90). This reinforces the need for collaborating and sharing of resources across communities. As already noted, community organizations (particularly in urban areas) more accurately represent the local school population, what Hargreaves and Fullan argue is that these relationships with the schools need to go beyond the traditional models of partnering with local organizations; it is the relationships and interactions that are most important. Sheldon (2003) encourages schools to go beyond the basics when establishing partnerships; first steps such as inviting community organizations to the table are important, but, again, not sufficient for improving schools.

Bryk et al. (2010) reiterate, "It is important to recognize that relational trust among the adults in a school community does not directly affect student learning. Rather, it creates the basic social fabric within which school professionals, parents, and community leaders can initiate and sustain efforts at building the essential supports for school improvement" (p. 140). The authors take this notion of trust further by examining how relationships can help create the foundation for social capital to develop. Their definition of bridging social capital includes opportunities for community members to develop as local leaders, making connections with public and private institutions. Although Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) note that the development of social capital hasn't been established in the teaching profession, the authors do make a connection between tapping into students and families social capital with the power of increased purposeful collaboration among teachers. When you increase teachers' abilities to work together in a meaningful way short-term results are achieved. Findings presented suggest that students of teachers who reported higher social capital achieved higher math scores, and students who were enrolled in a school with greater social capital scored better even if their teacher had lower human capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Several authors have identified different strategies and approaches to help schools and districts embed practices that can help teachers and leaders be more aware of their assumptions about their students and their colleagues. For example, Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) found that when schools view parents and communities as "funds of knowledge" and value the experiences they bring with them, teachers can build stronger relationships by incorporating this new knowledge into the classroom.

Overall, the approaches schools take to create safe spaces for their students, families, and the communities they serve vary depending on their context. Jeannie Oakes (2012) encourages

educational leaders to reach beyond the school building to connect with parents and other community organizations to understand students and their families' backgrounds. Oakes continues on to note that community organizations embody a sense of collective responsibility focused on doing good for everybody's children. The challenge is for schools and districts to recognize the social capital the community as a whole has and take advantage of the resources and skills that already exist. Reciprocally, community partners benefit from collaborations as well because they learn about the schools' culture. Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Blue-Banning, and Turnbull (2015) determined that inclusive schools with a variety of partners considered the partnerships as mutually beneficial.

Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003) also note that with shared vision and strategy, partnerships can lessen the demands made on school staff, passing some of the responsibilities of high expectations and accountability onto community partners. The authors continue on to recognize social capital makes it easier to share expertise; when partnerships are part of a strategy for school reform models that are aligned with a strong community-building mindset that can influence the school and its teaching process increases the chances the reform will succeed. A study conducted by Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (2002) showed that, "strategies that result in public accountability necessarily serve to engage community members, parents, and school staff in the political arena, thereby building their skills in civic participation and raising their awareness of how to leverage power" (p. 50). Here the authors make the connection between political power and civic engagement as functions of successful community organizing to enable community capacity to act as a resource to promote school improvement. It is important to note, that while in the past decade the notion of embracing and valuing the community as partners has grown, the idea of tapping into a community's social

capital has been introduced in the educational literature since Epstein's development of interlocking circles of influence – school, parents, and community – in the late 1980s. Furthermore, in 1996, Epstein and Sanders explicitly discussed the positive influence on social networks and social capital when partnerships enable families, educators, and community members to collaborate around children's growth and development. Thus, partnerships have been identified as potential avenues to effect school-community partnerships, particularly in terms of building social capital, for over thirty years.

Overwhelmingly, the theme demonstrated above is trust–trust between the school and the community. There has been extensive work to develop relationships and relational trust in schools, but the traditional capacity in which schools and communities work to maintain relationships needs to be structured differently to build a learning ecosystem, allowing for expectations and roles to adapt to the ever changing needs of students and the context in which they exist. The next section examines the role research can play in expanding the role school-community partnerships can play in supporting schools.

The Role of Research: Moving from Maintaining Community Relationships to Building a Learning Ecosystem

As demonstrated in the previous sections, creating relationships with community partners is not a new, revolutionary concept for schools. How these relationships are used, however, have changed over the past several years and have the potential to impact the field. The developing research on the learning ecosystem (Falk, et. al, 2015) recognizes the various settings and situations learning happens in (e.g. the community), as well as the social networks that influence these settings. Traditionally, school-community partnerships have consisted of school open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and two-way communication with a variety of community

partners (Green, 2015). Researchers (Bryk, et al., 2015; Schutz, 2006; Ishimaru, 2013) have all identified different approaches that can be made to influence the larger ecosystem of learning. Specifically, this section will review the literature on networks and research-partnerships as strategies to influence and extend school-community partnerships.

Networks. Networked Improvement Communities (NIC), as introduced by Bryk et al. (2015), like any network or collaboration, requires a substantial investment of time and energy from members to make it successful. In theory, networked partners each have their unique set of goals driving their behavior. For instance, a high school principal may be primarily interested in improving graduation rates, a local business may be interested in building the readiness of the workforce, and a university researcher may be concerned about accurately predicting college success during the secondary school years. Successful networks need to find a way to leverage, energize, synthesize and catalyze the disparate contributions so every member takes away more than they contribute.

NICs are structured to increase the likelihood that good ideas and promising practices are identified, tested, and refined. As promising practices are identified in NICs they diffuse and spread rapidly as others take them up. NICs are designed to leverage collective action in the face of complex problems; this notion is connected to Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) definition of social capital. "Social capital refers to how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust" (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 90).

Bryk et al. (2015) incorporated the idea of social capital in the NIC process, by affirming, "When many more individuals, operating across diverse contexts, are drawn together in a shared learning enterprise, the capacity grows exponentially" (p. 143). Jasis and Ordoñez-Jasis (2012)

demonstrated different parental involvement approaches that resulted in creating a sense of belonging for parents and their students, while Bryk et al. (2010) identified parent-community ties to be an essential subsystem for school improvement. These authors further the discussion on social capital to include parents and community members. In this sense, NICs can foster a sense of belonging, build social capital, and address stereotype threats in educational settings. Drawing diverse populations (and points of view) together to focus on a common objective can encourage a sense of inclusivity and strengthen social ties. Furthermore, Bryk et al. (2015) argues that NICs can promote changes that impact vulnerable students and enhance their sense of belonging (p. 147).

Bryk et al. (2015) warns readers that an improvement science approach, particularly the development of NICs, requires a different role for leaders. Bryk et al. (2015) encourages leaders to establish safe space (such as NICs) in order for new leaders to arise. Although, if the NIC doesn't have the right mix of social capital their findings and recommendations may not be recognized. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) state, "Learning is the work, and social capital is the fuel. If social capital is weak, everything else is destined for failure" (p. 92). An additional challenge for the NIC structure is keeping it local and adaptable to unique systems. When large groups are charged with finding new approaches often times general solutions are raised, leaving local nuance out of the equation. For instance, tweaking a high school schedule may be presented as a generic solution to increasing instructional time without the recognition of the local process necessary to facilitate the change. Research-practitioner partnerships can help develop tools that can be used to support local innovation (Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, and Sebelli, 2011). The next section looks at these partnerships.

Research partnerships. While NICs provide a structure to establish an inclusive, collaborative, and iterative process, research partnerships provide the evaluation agenda to validate these activities. In addition, NICs are focused on scaling efforts, whereas Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, and Sebelli (2011) note the need for local actors to support scaling taking the variations of environments into account. The authors posit that design-based implementation research can be used to advance "local capacity by fostering cohesion among networks of local actors tasked with implementing change, and by creating designs for routines and coordination mechanisms that can help innovation travel readily along those networks and that themselves can travel to new contexts" (p. 334). Ancess, Barnett, and Allen (2007) also note that employing a collaborative approach to research values different perspectives aimed at producing new knowledge and new practices; "researchers do not know better, they know differently" (p. 332).

The recent interest in research-practice partnerships (RPPs) attempts to create long-term collaborations between researchers and practitioners that are centered on school improvement (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). RPPs are structured to help schools and districts investigate problems of practice and solutions to address these problems, enabling greater use of research in decision making and support cycles of continuous improvement. Penuel, Briggs, Davidson, Herlihy, Sherer, Hill, Farrell and Allen (2017) determined that "a culture of research use is one in which organization members value research for decision making, selected strategies based on evidence, remain open to change in light of evidence, and enact multiple social supports and norms promoting evidence use" (p. 4). In addition, Veigel (2000) introduced a model of research-practice collaboration to support partnerships, appreciating that these partnerships "are particularly valuable when the outcomes produced would otherwise have been beyond the reach

of any one of the collaborative partners. Well-managed collaborations demonstrate the truth of the old adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 116).

Like partnerships with community organizations, RPPs are long term and often include an open-ended partnership working on a number of projects over time. The work is mutually agreed upon, with extensive work being conducted to outline appropriate roles, responsibilities, and protocols (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). In addition, similar to community school models, RPPs take a myriad of different forms to best meet the problems of practice they aim to investigate. Thus, RPPs do not exist in isolation of the schools they are working with, forcing the research partners to navigate the difficult context of public school districts. Much like community organizations do not exist in isolation of the schools, when they are working with the same students. While, much of the research cited above is focused on relationships between schools and researchers exclusively, one of the best-known models of a RPP, The Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago, encourages participation of a all stakeholders.

CCSR has used its research-based platform to support capacity building of the district to use data, build effective strategies, and evaluate progress. This model has set CCSR apart from traditional research models used in the past to influence policy and practice (Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009). The authors recognize that the process in which ideas and findings are actually translated by practitioners and result in a change in behavior has traditionally not been a focus of researcher's attention. Research can help practitioners and decision-makers examine enduring problems by focusing on current efforts, identifying effective strategies, and providing essential feedback for improvement. This process is necessary to also build the capacity of the education

community so that research is not seen as external to reform but as a resource for ongoing development (Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009).

At the local level, Rhode Island recently launched the RI Education Innovation Research Network (RI-EIRN) in 2017 as a structure for RPPs to focus on the local challenges Rhode Island faces in education. The research network provides Rhode Island scholars and practitioners the opportunity to collaborate on local educational challenges in an ongoing action research model. Intended outcomes of this work in addition to fostering strong relationships between practitioners and researchers are to connect scholars from different disciplines as well as connect local and national research efforts.

School-community partnerships can influence collaboration, thus influence adult and student outcomes. The section above outlined some of the benefits of collaboration, while also examining the structures of some school-community partnerships. It is important to remember that school-community partnerships do not necessarily refer to a specific program, but rather to a set of strategies employed to create coordinated partnerships. The efforts that are required to develop and sustain these relationships can be as diverse and flexible as the structures themselves since all are aimed at their immediate context. The next section will review literature on some of the common practices used to create strong school-community relationships.

Developing Community Partnerships

Schools are based in communities and have a responsibility to be responsive to community needs. Often times, particularly in low-income, urban areas, there is a disconnection between the schools and the communities they serve. The practice of creating strong community partnerships is not limited to the education sector. The community-organizing field has been

bringing groups together to mobilize and act on issues they are concerned about, regardless of the sector, often times encompassing holistic or wraparound supports to provide more coordinated services across a neighborhood, city, or region (Cross City Campaign, 2002). According to Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, (2017) "community organizing builds power among members of the community, including students and parents, through relationships, leadership development, and campaigning to change school and district policies and to promote school reform" (p. 52). Khalifa (2012) argues that community-based interests often take a back seat to school interests. This may be because school interest are easily measured using traditional metrics and tools; the Cross City Campaign's study on the role community organizing plays in education reform acknowledged the challenge of measuring overall community impact. Furthermore, Khalifa reminds the reader that traditional practices and approaches are often at odds with the unique populations served suggesting a new paradigm is needed. To better understand various practices used to develop community partnerships this section will review literature on comprehensive community initiatives (CCI), how sense-making helps make meaning of partnerships, as well as reviewing the difference between school leaders and community leaders.

Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Partnerships to Impact Youth

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCI) have been introduced in various communities across the United States to address disparities in outcomes, including high school graduation and college completion rates, for low-income communities and communities of color (Zaff, Donlan, Jones, & Lin, 2015). CCIs take on a variety of structures and approaches, but researchers (Zaff, et al., 2015) have identified an underlying framework to help understand how CCIs may lead to beneficial changes in developmental outcomes for youth. For example, five

general features that promote positive outcomes across context of family, school, and the community were identified – caring relationships, skill building, safe and healthy environments, opportunities to make a difference, and structure and positive social norms. In addition, Nowell and Boyd (2014) state, "when one is in a community that meets one's needs and facilitates feeling of belonging, influence, and connection, one feels better in general about the community in particular" (p. 230). Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2013) identified community development as one type of partnerships in schools, finding that in order for these partnerships to be effective they require committed leadership that could facilitate a shared vision and each partners role, along with a comprehensive evaluation model and long-range sustainability plan (p. 662).

Thus, CCIs are similar to the community schools models introduced earlier because they are unique and responsive to specific local needs. Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) indicate that many districts have turned to community school models as part of a larger communitywide investment strategy, moving community schools from the margins into the mainstream of school reform efforts. However, creating a supportive youth system differs from creating more and better programs, much like creating supportive schools differs from creating more and better courses. "Thus, the solution to creating a supportive youth system is not just to create more programs, but also to create opportunities that are responsive to what young people want and need to resolve difficulties in their lives and to achieve goals that they are pursuing" (Zaff, et al., 2015, p. 3).

On the international stage, Australia has been exploring the best ways to meet the needs of the indigenous population, with the country outlining specific action to ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process, including to promote

high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students (Perso, 2012). This work has been ongoing and reflects the notion that strengths of indigenous children and their families are not recognized as strengths in the white, middle class world. Perso (2012) states,

> Strong partnerships between local Indigenous communities and the school not only provide staff and teachers with opportunities to form relationships based on trust, but also empower community members to engage with schools. These partnerships are central to successfully developing and implementing culturally responsive programs and strategies (p. 75)

In addition, Helme and Lamb (2011) demonstrated students from indigenous backgrounds felt more connected to school as a result of staff working in collaboration with the community to develop a shared set of values and expectations for students. In the United States, Chris Emdin (2016) refers to urban youth of color as neoindigenous, placing them in a larger context of marginalization, displacement, and diaspora. Edmin continues that "like the indigenous, the neoindigenous is a group that will not face into oblivion despite attempts to rename or relocate them" (p. 9), calling for institutions to examine the ways they replicate colonial processes and reestablish their power dynamics.

Lin, Zaff, and Gerstein (2015) also explored the role data-driven processes play in the work of CCIs, determining that "sense-making leadership is not just about convincing people that the data you hold is generally true, but interpreting the evidence, as well as the holes in the evidence, in a way that speaks to its 'lifelikeness'" (Lin, Zaff, & Gerstein, 2015, p. 59). Although Lin, Zaff, and Gerstein (2015) continue on to recognize that implementation is difficult, they believe community-based approaches can lead to better student outcomes when data is used to inform decision-making. The reality is that, like implementation, effective data use at the

community level is also difficult. In addition, the authors note that CCI must be grounded in trust between stakeholders with all participants taking responsibility to build and maintain the relationships and collective identify of the CCI.

Sense-Making: Making Meaning of Partnerships

Being able to ask proper questions can help organizations to pinpoint problems or issues they are trying to solve. When the focus is on the problem, as opposed to proposing a generic solution, the reach of what is practical and obtainable is extended. Just as there is no question appropriate for all schools to address, there is no perfect answer or program to be implemented to increase improvement for all students. Bryk et al. (2015) use the term "solutionitis" to refer to individuals' instinct to formulate a solution, based on previous knowledge and experience, before deeply understanding the problem at hand. And, often times a generic solution to a more nuanced problem won't move the needle toward success.

Coburn and Talbot (2006) remind us that individuals who work together for long periods of time develop shared ways of thinking. This shared thinking can also impact a group's ability to see beyond their own experiences when confronted with a challenge, often resulting in a preconceived solution. Weick, Sutcliff, and Obstfeld (2005) also discuss sense-making and how "situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence" (p. 409). The authors encourage readers to reframe questions from one's that are aimed at placing blame, or finding fault with an individual decision-maker's decision, to questions that help make meaning of a particular situation. When generating a problem-specific focus it is necessary to acknowledge the role sense-making plays and try to get beyond decision-making that has been effective in the past to making sense of a situation as a whole. An example of this could be offering students tutoring because they are performing poorly in a class – because it is a solution that has worked

for some students in the past and the school has a structure in place to provide this intervention – rather than look at undergirding issues related to why a student (or group of students) may not be successful in a certain environment or content area. Weick, Sutcliff, and Obstfeld (2005) continue on to point out that context is important and contributes to the sense people make of things (such as actions, people, and organizations) around them.

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld's (2005) suggestion that "increased skill at sense-making should occur when people are socialized to make do, be resilient, treat constraints as self-imposed, strive for plausibility, keep showing up, use retrospect to get a sense of direction, and articulate descriptions that energize" (p. 419), is representative of Bryk et al.'s (2015) ultimate vision of a NIC that takes a holistic approach toward generating and sharing knowledge focused on a particular issue. Again, Coburn and Talbot (2006) demonstrate that individuals who work together for long periods of time develop shared ways of thinking. Essentially they come to develop shared sense making, which can often result in relying on "solutionitis" when confronted with a problem or issue. By encouraging participation from groups who are typically viewed as outsiders (parents, community members, researchers) to be part of the NIC, different perspectives are not only involved in perfunctory tasks but are seen as contributors who have guided the development of the problem statement the group is focused. This approach can build the community's capital and vested interest in certain areas.

Furthermore, Senge (2004) acknowledges the varying perspectives inherent in sensemaking as related to leadership behaviors when creating learning organizations. Defined as compassion, Senge (2004) notes, "when they encounter behaviors that they neither understand nor condone, people appreciate that such actions arise from forces and viewpoints that are, in some sense, as valid as those that influence their own behaviors" (p. 4). This thinking is part of

a larger framework around the five principles of learning organizations – embodying new capabilities, built by servant leaders, learning arises through performance and practice, process and content are inseparable, and learning is dangerous. Specific behaviors related to leadership roles in a learning organization will be addressed in the next section.

Principal as Community Leader

Like the differences between schools and community organizations outlined previously there are differences between school leaders and community leaders (Khalifa, 2012). Community leaders are focused on the needs of the community writ large; thus while test scores may be a priority for the school leader, employment and neighborhood safety can be the larger issues for the community leader. By moving beyond the school walls, principals in urban areas may discover "that grades, behavior, and test scores are not the primary issues at the forefront of community based interests. The hope is that principals' increased community presence will help them develop and maintain culturally appropriate school and community leadership practices" (Khalifa, 2012, p. 429). It is important to recognize that school leaders are keys to access in a number of communities, with principals determining who, or which organizations, to include or exclude from the specific school community (Ishimaru, 2013).

Principals who are engaged in the community may feel a role conflict between fighting for the school or the community. Principals can often feel that being an advocate for their school does not always correlate with being an advocate of the community and vice versa (Ishimaru, 2013). Challenging the notion that these can be conflicting priorities, Ishimaru (2013) argues, "a shared conception of leadership consistent with organizing principles may begin to bridge the 'worlds' of professional control and community interest" (p. 41). Bryk et al.'s (2015) framework for improvement science also encourages a changing role for leaders. Additionally, Hallinger's

(2010) research "suggests that leadership is not by itself a solution to the 'problem' of school improvement" (p. 133), recognizing context and environment are contributors. According to Bolman and Deal (2013) leaders need to unlearn and break frames in order to be innovative. Larry Cuban (2001) also agrees that it is opportune to provide a proven solution, rather than ask a different question to get right to the heart of the dilemma. In addition, Lortie (2009) found that 'solutions' often consisted more of compromises that rarely differ from ideas in the past, and often favor what has been done in the past. While school leaders suffer from "solutionitis" so do community organizations and funders. The findings cited above can all be applied to community organizations, in addition to school leaders. Community organizations are mission driven, making whatever their focus is on the solution to all problems encountered in schools. Additionally, funders need to stop throwing money at solutions and help schools and organizations look at challenges and an opportunity to try new approaches.

Senge (1990) identified leader's new work as it relates to creating a learning organization; an organization that continuously learns and adapts. While this work is focused on companies and not specific to community leadership, some obvious parallels can be drawn. Senge's work identifies skills such as building a shared vision, surfacing and testing mental models, and systems thinking as essential components of a learning organization. Senge acknowledges creating learning organizations demands a shift from our culture that is often fragmented and detached from the community. His solution is the invention of a new learning model, one that is built on the efforts of communities of people infusing wonder and joy of learning into the changing patterns of everyday life (Senge, 1990).

Parent Teach Home Visits (PTHV) is an organization founded on the principles of community organizing to establish stronger relationships between families, schools, and the

community. The model is designed to promote a mutually supportive and accountable relationship between educators and families. The emphasis is on developing relationships based on parents' and educators' hopes and dreams for their students. According to a recent evaluation of the PTHV model, educators shifted their beliefs and actions related to families and students. The report noted, "Educators acknowledged assumptions about families and students based on the community in which they lived and because their behavior did not align with traditional conceptions of how to participate in school" (McKnight, Venkateswaran, Laird, Robles, Shalev, 2017, p. 14). This model has allowed educators to view the communities they serve from a different perspective, allowing educators to see students and their families as complex individuals, not stereotypes. Dedicating time and funding for this work has been a challenge for some communities, but the process recognizes the need to change traditional roles to establish relationships with families and the community.

Overall, the role of the leader has been altered to include creating relationships and trust throughout a larger (geographic and political) area, no longer confined to within a school building. Leaders are now expected to tap into the social capital within their buildings and the community as a whole. Additionally, Bryk et al. (2015) encourage practitioners to blur the lines between the front-line educators, system leaders, community members, policy makers, and researchers to produce a more inclusive vision for "leadership." This vision includes valuing all educators as "improvers" who are focused on advancing quality improvement and have a desire to learn how to improve. In order for this vision to become reality, there are certain factors and conditions that can support or limit school-community partnerships. These factors and conditions are addressed in the following section.

Conditions that Inhibit and Promote School-Community Partnerships

Gross, et al. (2015) identified the following school factors that promote the development of strong community partnerships: strong school leadership, inviting school culture, teacher commitment to student success, and collaboration and communication. On the other hand, Moles (1999) identified challenges to school-community collaborations, including a lack of time and resources, as well as cultural, language, and educational differences between schools and community members. Other researchers (Epstein, 2001; Furco, 2013; Nettles, 1991) also cite a number of challenges and barriers partnerships face, with leadership playing an essential role in both establishing and limiting school-community partnerships (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). This section will briefly examine practices that promote partnerships, followed by a review of identified challenges that limit partnerships. The concepts of power and privilege as they relate to the school and community organization will also be briefly addressed.

Practices that Promote Partnerships: Working as a System

The factors identified by Gross, et al. (2015) are similar to Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton's (2010) initial findings highlighting five subsystems necessary to create an organizational context favorable to school improvement – instructional guidance; student learning climate; parent-community ties; professional capacity; and leadership. In addition, Maier, et al., (2017) identified four pillars found throughout the research on community schools: integrated student supports; expanded learning time and opportunities; family and community engagement; and collaborative leadership and practice. Like Bryk, et al. (2010), Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) recognize the need for their identified subsystems or pillars to work in connection with one another to be most effective. Having several strong components is not

enough to garner improvement that is sustainable; they need to work in a coordinated manner as a system. That being said, this section will outline the roles leadership and trust, strategic organization, and monitoring progress as conditions that foster successful school-community partnerships.

Leadership and trust. Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2014) determined the role of leadership is essential in supporting school-community partnerships, with Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam (2017) specifically identifying collaborative (or shared) leadership as an integral component of community school models. Furthermore, as noted previously Bryk et al. (2015) recognize the need for a more inclusive vision for leadership. Some specific strategies to help schools build shared leadership and trust include enhancing school leadership teams to include community partners, creating broad based local coalitions, focus on learning, and visibility (Blank, et al., 2003).

School leadership teams are typically made up of adults within the school walls, with one or two parents added to the mix. To develop school-community partnerships schools have to extend their definition of school leadership to include a wider array of stakeholders. But, just including a larger reach of stakeholders is not enough, as evidenced by (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016), providing an opportunity for these voices to be heard, valued, and part of the school decision making is essential. Blank and Villarreal (2015) encourage the creation of school-site leadership teams, comprised of parents, local residents, principals, teachers, school staff, community partners, and students, who are responsible for decision-making, including planning and implementation, along with meeting community needs aligned with the school's mission. While there is no right way to build an inclusive leadership team, the purpose of the group

should be on reviewing data, assessing existing programs, identifying gaps, mobilizing community resources, and monitoring progress toward goals (Blank, et al., 2003).

Furthermore, including all staff who work with children at a school in monthly staff meetings and professional development trainings can help strengthen collaboration and relationships. Blank, et al., (2003) provided a snapshot of Elliott Elementary School's in Lincoln, Nebraska, partnership with the YMCA where school staff trained the YMCA personnel and college tutors on the school's reading program to support struggling students in a coordinated way. In addition, YMCA staff also provided training to school staff on youth development and supporting positive classroom behaviors. According to the vignette, the collaborative created consistent expectations and rules, resulting in increased instruction time for students.

Sebring and Bryk (2000) found that leaders who have a "vision in outline" of the kind of school they want and rely on parents, teachers, and community members to fill in the details. These leaders also make resources available to teachers to support them in their work, while looking for opportunities to bring parents, teachers, and other staff members into leadership positions because they recognize that change requires a collective sum (Sebring & Bryk, 2000, p. 2). Furthermore, the utilization of an intermediary entity (either an organization or a working group of key managers for multiple partner agencies) to help with planning, coordination, and management can help facilitate communication among community partners and schools (Blank & Villarreal, 2015). Involving community partners in the leadership aspects of the school gives partners a better insight into the system of schools, an appreciation of the work, and provides an opportunity for them to find effective ways to share their expertise (Blank & Villarreal, 2015).

In addition, school leaders need to be visible in the community. Much like the literature on community organizing noted, school leadership cannot be viewed as something that happens inside schools only. The establishment of local coalitions can address the challenges of this process to ensure it is not exclusionary and that all community voices are honored. While the leadership team generally functions within the school, local coalitions operate community or citywide. These community wide groups can help schools identify social capital in the community and help set the overall vision of the work.

Strategic organization. According to Blank, et al. (2003), a shared vision and strategy between community partners and schools lessen the demands on school staff because of the shared responsibility for setting high standards and achieving accountability. Additionally, the authors posit that a well-defined vision, along with a coordinated plan for activities, can determine success over failure in schools working with a number of community partners. Fehrer and Leos-Urbel's (2016) research on the Oakland, CA community school model found that strategic partners supported student learning by aligning with school goals. Specifically, the authors note that to align resources to support student outcomes required: developing and communicating shared goals; collaborating with partners so that they were included in school structures and process; and committing to a long-term relationship (p. 15).

A number of researchers (Blank, et al., 2003; Daniel, 2017; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017) also identified the importance of a school-community coordinator to oversee the process and relationships. This coordinator is an integral part of the school system and leadership in the building (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016), often fulfilling the role of connecting students and families to supplemental services (Daniel, 2017). In addition, this position is often the individual responsible for aligning community partners with curricular goals

resulting in a coordinated delivery of service (Daniel, 2017). This alignment and levering of resources is another major organizational support for school-community partnerships.

While it is not a requirement that all schools that have established school-community partnerships employ a specific coordinator, the alignment of supports has to be in place. Gross, et al. (2015) found open communication as an essential component to partnerships. Communication that occurs across all parties, and also includes listening to the needs and concerns of each other. Although, it is important to remember that information sharing is not the equivalent to collaboration. Brown, Amwake, Speth, & Scott-Little (2002) state, "A common experience in the maturation of partnerships is that they are prone to lose initial momentum, often stagnating into 'easy' roles such as simple information sharing" (p. 12). The five critical elements of a professional learning community, as defined by Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryk (2009) can help establish structures to support this work. These critical elements–reflective dialogue, sharing practices, collective focus on learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values–may serve as the foundation for structural conditions that help facilitate partnerships.

Finally, establishing long-term partnerships helps with the strategic organization. Being able to map out two or three years of supports helps encourage partners and school personnel to invest the time in facilitating relationships. By creating structured roles and responsibility through memorandums of understanding or other processes helps all parties understand what is expected of their organization. Within this plan for coordinated activities it is also important to establish how success or progress will be measured and how programmatic changes will take place.

Monitoring progress. Creating an inclusive culture focused on continuous improvement is another essential component of school-community partnerships. Maier, et al. (2017) found

that implementation of a community school model was most effective when data are used in an ongoing process focused on improvement, and the responsibility for improvement and accountability is shared by all stakeholders. Monitoring progress requires time for the process to happen as well as for expertise and systems of support and data collection to be established (Maier, et al., 2017).

Sanders (2001) also identified monitoring progress and evaluating activities as two steps to successful partnerships. Setting expectations and developing anticipated results as part of a community process can help facilitation both the timeline associated with progress monitoring along with the evidence needed to demonstrate progress (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001). School leaders play an important role is setting the tone around use of data to make informed decisions in a collaborative improvement process. Progress monitoring is also a strategy to encourage schools and communities to focus on shared results in a continuous improvement process focused on being adaptable to student needs (Blank, et al., 2003). CCSR has over time modified their approach to research to help provide a process to monitor school improvement. The organization prides itself on the role they play to: determine critical questions to examine, establish a knowledge base, and articulate findings in a way that influences policy and practice (Roderick, Easton, and Sebring, 2009).

The section above briefly touches on some strategies that can help support successful partnerships. Duffy (2003) notes that "educators and organization development specialists should not seek a 'perfect' methodology for creating and sustaining system school improvement. There is not one and there never will be one" (p. 43). This quote is applicable to developing partnerships as well. The complexity of this work cannot be overstated and there are numerous barriers that can limit partnerships before they even develop.

Barriers to Implementation: Conditions that Limit Partnerships

There are some major structural and ideological challenges that can greatly limit a school's participation in partnerships. On the structural side the most common are a lack of time, along with limited resources (i.e. available funding, skilled partners, turnover of personnel). Bryk, et al. (2010) noted, "School leaders must devote considerable time and attention to the details of program implementation; otherwise commitment ebbs, people lose interest, resources dwindle, or other problems crop up" (p. 59). But, how do principals manage these community relationships, along with the myriad of other requirements of running a school building and remaining focused on student outcomes? Over the past decade the focus for many building leaders has been on instructional and change leadership approaches. A 2015 study of 300 school principals in Miami-Dade indicated that building leaders spend the majority of their time on management, administration, and internal relationships, with only a small fraction of time on external relationships (Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015). City (2013) cites that principals need to be more creative in how they use their time; suggesting school leaders analyze their current use of time and consider how to more effectively utilize already existing time with others. The author indicates that how leaders use their time is an indicator of their priorities and values.

Building on strategies developed to influence internal relationships, Wenger (1998) extended the concept of communities of practice as formal or informal supports for schools as a resource for creating partnerships. Creating clear expectations and utilizing effective protocols can help address these challenges, at least on the surface level. The more difficult to address challenges include individuals' immunity to change and the role power plays in creating change (Brown, et al., 2002).

Kegan and Lahey (2001) and Kotter (1996) discuss one challenge inherent in our reliance on human capital -"immunity to change." Kotter (1996) notes, "People will find a thousand ingenious ways to withhold cooperation from a process that they sincerely think is unnecessary or wrongheaded" (p.36), while Kegan and Lahey (2001) draw our attention to our own tendencies that lead us not to change, both in personal and professional life. In addition, Schutz (2006) demonstrates that established bureaucratic systems, like schools, have a resistance to change particularly because teachers have seen fads come and go, making them more cautious in their motivation for new approaches.

Additionally, Perkins (2015) challenges school-community partnerships because of the hyper focus on student achievement, promoted as "the solution to school and societal ills, often without challenging conceptualization of community or purposes of partnerships" (p. 324). Schutz (2006) also demonstrates that poor families face additional barriers to participation and they don't have the capacity to overcome these barriers. High-poverty schools also generally hold a deficit-oriented view of students and their communities. This view is related to the level of power and capital that individuals envision a group of people has. If schools and community organizations don't consider the role traditional power plays in partnerships the result could be an approach to reproduce goals and values of populations deemed to have power while erasing or ignoring other members of the community. Research indicates "people with privilege tend to dominate settings where they 'collaborate' with the less powerful" (Schutz, 2006, p. 710).

One possible strategy to avoid this power struggle could be through culturally relevant teaching. While Ladson-Billings (1994) work has been focused on the classroom as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 20), this type of thinking may be

applicable to the larger community as well. For example, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) note that adopting a culturally responsive pedagogical approach helps students and teachers to build classroom communities as safe places to nurture everyone's cultural identity. The authors concluded that when teachers create relationships beyond classrooms, with colleagues and the community, it strengthens student-teacher relationships in the classroom because it demonstrates the teachers' acknowledgement of the community as a vital partner in student learning. Furthermore, in this model teachers "facilitate learning, validate learners' knowledge construction, and empower learners' individual and collective learning capacity" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 78), while always maintaining high expectations for excellence and equity.

Public Relations: Bridging Barriers with Opportunities

The annual PDK/Gallup poll (a poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools), has identified a trend over the past 40 years in which the public rate their local school that they have more experience with higher, assigning lower ratings to schools across the nation as a whole. Holding true to the trend, in 2015, 70% of parents of public school students gave their school an A or a B; nationally schools were assigned an A or B by 21% of all survey respondents. While this data might give comfort to educators in terms of their own schools, perceptions about "other" schools and communities as bad are not necessarily consistent with their local survey responses or outcomes of the school data (Decker and Decker, 2000). According to political scientist Robert Shapiro, "Americans form their opinions about their local schools through their own contact with the schools and what their children are saying. What they experience more personally, they tend to have more favorable views about. Nationally, they're developing their opinions from what they hear on the news, about the problems at schools in general" (cited in

PDK/Gallup Poll, 2015). As a result of these misperceptions about schooling, public relations within the education sector was introduced several of years ago and has become a larger focus since NCLB. Morris and Vrabel (1979) wrote about the role of the principal in public relations stating,

> The school of today must be led by a principal who can promote an understanding between the school and the community. His or her goals should be to help the school learn about the community, inform the community about the purposes, programs and needs of the school and to interpret them if necessary. The principal should involve the community in planning and evaluating school policies" (p. 52).

This sentiment is still true today, with schools continuing to focus on public relations. Carroll and Carroll (1994) suggested seizing all opportunities to communicate quality to the community as one of several strategies as a type of advertising approach of schools. In the authors' definition quality can mean a variety of things including, academic achievement, job placement, before and after school programs, community service learning, but it should be tied to how the community defines and measures quality. Decker and Decker (2000) recommend establishing key communicators to help communicate quality. Key communicators should be a diverse group of individuals, who are respected and listened to in their own networks, and who can be supportive of the school operations. According to Kirschenbaum (1999) it doesn't matter if schools achieve improvements if the community doesn't perceive improvements are occurring. He continues that by being involved with schools in a meaningful way is the only way the public will perceive the many good things occurring in public education. In addition, Kirschenbaum

reiterates, "as long as the public perceives the schools, or the suburban public perceives the urban schools, as someone else's schools serving someone else's children, commitment to universal quality education will be minimal." Community partners have been filling this role of sharing the story of the various good things happening in the local, public schools that they are deeply engaged with.

Summary

Overwhelmingly the literature displays the importance of leadership and reimaging communities as sources of social capital. Ultimately, developing and sustaining school-community partnerships takes a lot of time and attention from a variety of different people with varying backgrounds. While some (Perkins, 2016; Schutz, 2006) argue that the school should not facilitate or drive the focus of community partnerships, the literature has demonstrated the value partnerships can have on students, parents, teachers, and community when they are connected and aligned with school ideals. The challenge is to make sure the school focus is aligned with the community goals, and communicated to internal and external parties. In particular, the obstacles noted in the literature, such as a lack of time (Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015) was surfaced throughout data collection, with the data collected in this study supporting the notion of utilizing community partners as sources of public relations (Carroll & Carroll, 1994; Morris & Vrabel, 1979). Overall, based on this review of the literature it is reasonable to suggest that by initiating partnerships first at the school level they can help create structural supports that can eventually influence schools thinking to beyond traditional educational expectations and measures. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the landscape within which leaders (at the school and community level) operate is always evolving, making it

more essential that there is a shift from investigating leadership through individual traits to exploring leadership as part of the organizational system.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study focused on the role of school leaders in improving school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem through partnerships. The study sought to explore the perceptions of principals related to school-community partnerships, strategies school leaders utilize to implement partnerships, as well as identify the factors and conditions that support and hinder partnerships. The following three questions guided this case study approach:

- To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?
- What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?
- What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

This chapter discusses the design of the study by explaining general aspects of the design, including researcher methods and procedures, identification of participants and settings, instrumentation development, and data collection and analysis processes adhered to. In addition, this chapter addresses the role of the researcher in obtaining participant consent and following all expectations of confidentiality and credibility.

Overview of Research Design

The case study methodology was chosen for this research because there is a limited number of individuals who can be interviewed (school principals) and the intent is to understand how school-community partnerships are utilized as part of the learning ecosystem. The

methodology enables the researcher to explore different interpretations while gaining an in-depth understanding of school-community partnerships, learning the degree to which K-12 principals value and employ community partnerships. Merriam (1998) notes, "The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent" (p. 29).

Using a multi-method approach this case study relies on both quantitative and qualitative data. Stake (2006) notes "Cases are rather special. A case is a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb, a participle, a functioning" (p.21), with a case facilitating the understanding of a particular issue or phenomenon. For this study, the case is focused on principals at large who have experienced a partnership. According to Morse (2003) a multi-method research study includes the use of more than one data collection method, incorporating qualitative and quantitative sources. Morse (2003) distinguishes a multi-method study from a mixed method study in that in a multi-method study, qualitative and quantitative data are relatively complete on their own, and then used together to provide information on one research study. In this case, using a multi-method design, the quantitative survey data will provide foundational information, with the qualitative interview protocol allowing the researcher to more deeply understand the case. This process enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of school-community partnerships, learn the degree to which K-12 principals value community partnerships and determine their level of implementation and support for creating a learning ecosystem through community partnerships. Merriam (1998) describes case study research as the way people make sense of their work and their experiences, noting, "Research is, after all, producing knowledge about the world – in our case, the world of educational practice" (p. 3). In addition, case study is prevalent in the field of education and allows qualitative researchers to investigate and understand how people make sense of the world (Merriam, 1998).

Furthermore, Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995) acknowledge qualitative case studies as a process to gather individual's interpretations, with a necessity to recognize multiple interpretations of reality. Gibb's (2012) further asserts that case studies tend to specifically focus on phenomenon or "people doing something" and can involve studies of communities or organizations. Merriam (1998) also notes the delimiting of the object of study, or identification of the case, is the single most important characteristic of case study research. A bounded case can be reflected through the identification of a limited number of people involved that can be interviewed, or because it is an instance of some hypothesis or issue. Moreover, Merriam (1998) states, "A case might also be selected because it is intrinsically interesting; a researcher could study it to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible" (p. 28).

While the case study methodology allows a "rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" and "plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41), there are also limitations and challenges with the approach. For example, case studies are not used for generalization; they provide an understanding of the complexity of the case, not accounts of the whole. Merriam notes, "a sign case or a small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 208). Additionally, because the researcher is the primary data collector and analyzer special attention needs to be placed on the investigators instincts and abilities – further details about researcher bias are included in a subsequent section. Furthermore, the validity and reliability of case study research is sometimes questioned by other researchers. Merriam notes that these concerns "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. 200). Thus, much attention

must be placed on the processes and measurement used to for all steps in the research from developing questions to articulating findings. With the need to provide additional attention to acknowledging research bias, developing data collection and analysis procedures, and determining of findings, case study was considered the most optimal research design because, as Merriam notes, "understanding is the primary rationale for the investigation" (p. 200).

Participants and Setting

Traditional public K-12 school principals made up the purposeful sample for this study. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling refers to the fact that individuals and sites selected for study are those that can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). School building principals play an integral role in allowing access to their buildings, and their students. For this reason I focused on the role of the principal, as opposed to community partners. In addition, much of the research is focused on the benefits of partnerships (Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Blue-Banning, & Turnbull, 2015; Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001; Maier, Daniel, Oakes, Lam, 2017; Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Sheldon, 2003) but is limited in the specific role principals' play to encourage and continue these relationships. As key leaders in the education sector, it is necessary to gather the perspective of school principals to measure the degree to which they value partnerships and how they are currently supporting this work.

Participants who were current traditional, K-12 public school principals were solicited from Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts through two phases of data collection. In the first phase of data collection surveys were distributed to 259 current principals in Rhode Island. In the second phase of data collection, I included 423 principals in New

Hampshire and 220 principals in Southeastern Massachusetts. Across these two phases, ultimately, twenty-five principals completed the on-line survey. Demographics of survey respondents are included in Table 1. Ten survey respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Of those ten, five interviews were conducted. The five principals who were interviewed were elementary school principals, 4 were female, one male (additional demographic details included in Table 3). Finally, data from two principals was developed into case vignettes. These two principals are both female elementary school principals, with one serving in an urban area and one in a suburban area, and were selected as case study participants because the data collected from them provided detailed experiences and strategies for utilizing partnerships to create an ecosystem. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the population invited to participate in the study and the final participants (detailed demographic data is provided in Table 4 on page 78).

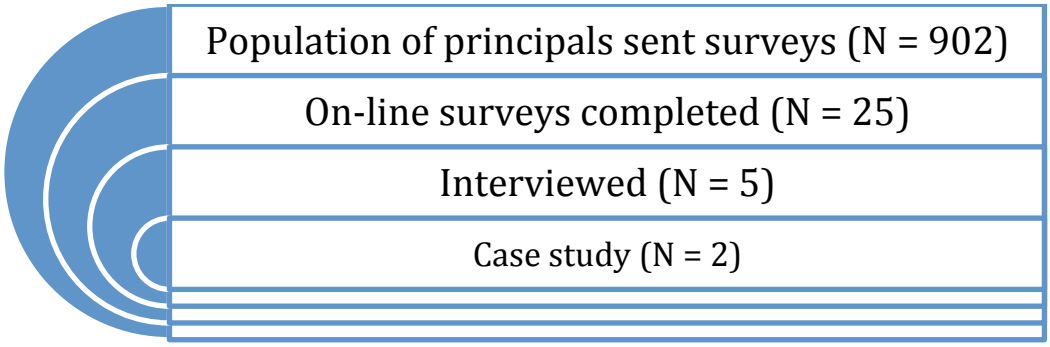

Figure 1. *Overview of winnowing of the population of the study to final participants*

Table 1

Demographics of survey respondents (N = 23)

	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Total
Elementary School	7	6	5	18
Middle School	1	0	0	1

High School	2	2	0	4
Total	10	8	5	23

Note: N = 23. Two of the 25 completed survey respondents did not provide demographic information but completed all additional questions.

Qualtrics generated scores for all survey responders, with overall scores ranging from 66 to 153, with a mean score of 114.60. The highest score any survey could receive was 168. Using these scores survey respondents were clustered into three categories of implementation: low, medium, and high. Surveys were designated as follows: low (scores up to 80), medium (scores between 81 – 120), and high (scores equal to and greater than 121). The total number of surveys that fell into each category is demonstrated below. The majority of principals scored in the medium and high range. This could indicate that individuals who were willing and able to be interviewed were more likely to imply they are currently engaged in practices to create and support partnerships.

Table 2

Implementation scores of survey respondents (N=25)

Score Categorization	Number of respondents
Low (score up to 80)	3 (12%)
Medium (between 81-120)	12 (48%)
High (greater than 121)	10 (40%)

As noted above, ten survey respondents indicated a willingness to be interviewed, ultimately resulting in five interviews being conducted. The demographics of interview participants are included below including their implementation scores. Again, the majority of principals interviewed scored in the high implementation category. Thus, principals who were able to participate in the second phase of this study appear to value and practice behaviors that are already supportive of school-community partnerships.

Table 3

Demographics of interview participants (N = 5)

	Location	Gender	Years in current school	Implementation Score
Principal A	Urban	Female	4-7 years	150 - High
Principal C	Suburban	Female	4-7 years	119 – Medium
Principal D	Rural	Female	4-7 years	144 – High
Principal E	Suburban	Female	1-3 years	129 – High
Principal G	Urban	Male	Less than 1 year	132 - High

Note: Overall, ten principals indicated a willingness to be interviewed. Letters were assigned to all principals upon additional outreach to schedule an interview. Thus, the letters assigned to the principals who were interviewed are not in alpha order because other principals were contacted prior to be interviewed but ultimately did not participate in an interview.

Instrumentation

In this multi-method study, data was gathered through the implementation of two instrumentation protocols. The quantitative data was an on-line survey of principals on their perceptions of school-community partnerships. The purpose of the survey was to provide foundational, quantitative information on principal's use of school-community partnerships. The survey was designed around the three research questions gauging the degree in which principals believe school-community partnerships improve schools, outlining various ways partnerships are currently developed, and also identifying the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit school-community partnerships. The first instrument was an on-line survey available to K-12 school principals in selected New England geographic areas (e.g., Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts). The survey instrument was developed through a literature review of past validated instruments that measure principals' behaviors, a literature review of key domains and issues around partnerships, including the literature base that addresses specifically building relationships with community organizations, and conducting

cognitive interviews (Desimone & LeFloch, 2004). Survey questions were adapted from the NYC Community Schools School Leader Survey developed by RAND (2017). The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships instrument developed in partnership between the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the National Network of Partnership Schools (2002) also provided guidance in survey development.

The survey was developed to be completed within 30 minutes, with little complexity in the survey (e.g. skip patterns), so that it could improve response rates and ease of completion for principals. The survey consisted of twenty questions. Five former school principals beta tested the survey, with the amount of time to complete the survey ranging from twenty to forty minutes. Feedback from this pilot group led me to re-phrase two questions, and modify the range of answer options for an addition question. Overall, all pilot testers noted that the online system was easy to navigate, laid out nicely with a user-friendly format, and allowed ease in returning to previous pages of the survey if needed.

The final 20-question survey was comprised of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Overall there were 15 multiple-choice questions and 5 open-ended. The first questions (1 and 2) were dedicated to providing an overview of the survey, including IRB information, and participant acknowledgement of consent. Questions 3 and 4 were focused on research question 1 (To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?). Questions 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11 were aligned with research question 2 (What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?). Questions 8, 9, 12, 13, and 14 addressed research question 3 (What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?). Question 15 was used to identify different types of organizations schools consider partners, with the next set of

questions (16-18) used to gather demographic information (grade level, location, and years in their current building). Question 19 inquired about additional participation in the follow up survey; Question 20 gathered contact information for those indicating a willingness for further participation. A full copy of the survey, along with a matrix aligning each survey question to the appropriate researcher question are available as Appendix A and Appendix D respectively.

The qualitative data was interviews with five principals, using a structured interview protocol. Gibb (2012) explains that case study design requires the researcher to be cognizant that structured and focused questions for the basis of data collection, with distinctive types of questions resulting in an in-depth understanding of the case. For the purposes of this study, process questions were utilized to gather an understanding of principals' perceptions about school-community partnerships and also how they utilized these partnerships. The purpose of the interview is to go deeper into understanding the reasons behind the survey questions and to highlight lived experiences of current principals. The interview protocol was finalized after the survey responses were analyzed. The survey was pilot tested with one former principal. In addition, another former principal provided written feedback on survey questions. The pilot testing and feedback resulted in refined questions while also providing an opportunity for the researcher to practice interviewing techniques. A full copy of the interview protocol is available in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

Merriam (1998) discusses various data collection procedures associated with case study research. The author notes that while multiple data collection techniques are used, generally one method of data dominates the study with other approaches playing a supporting role. In this

study data was collected through the use of an on-line survey and follow up interviews. The follow up interviews provide the predominate amount of data, with the surveys as supplemental information.

Phase I: Surveys

The first phase involved sending a link to the on-line survey to all principals in Rhode Island. Initially limited to Rhode Island, the study was expanded to include New Hampshire and Southeastern Massachusetts in order to obtain more data because responses were low among the principals in Rhode Island. Thus, the sampling approach was revised to also include a second phase, including all principals in New Hampshire and all principals in Southeastern Massachusetts[2]. New Hampshire was chosen as an area because of the rural identification of their schools (Rhode Island and Southeaster Massachusetts have only a few schools that would be considered rural). Southeast Massachusetts was selected because it matched the relative size of the sample in Rhode Island. Email addresses for school principals were obtained on the Web site for each respected state's Department of Education. Surveys were first distributed to principals in Rhode Island. However, response rates were low with a sample size of 8 principals in Rhode Island who completed the survey. After realizing a low response rate and desire to stay within the New England states, the study was extended to include New Hampshire and Southeastern Massachusetts. Thus, the cases (principals at large who have experienced a partnership) recruited include diverse geographic and grade level contexts.

[2] For the purpose of this study Southeastern Massachusetts refers to the 41 communities and towns served by the Southeastern Community Foundation. Communities and towns include: Abington, Acushnet, Attleboro, Avon, Berkely, Bourne, Bridgewater, Brockton, Carver, Dartmouth, Dighton, East Bridgewater, Easton, Fairhaven, Fall River, Freetown, Gosnold, Halifax, Hanson, Kingston, Lakeville, Mansfield, Marion, Mattapoisett, Middleborough, New Bedford, North Attleboro, Norton, Plymouth, Raynham, Rehoboth, Rochester, Seekonk, Somerset, Stoughton, Swansea, Taunton, Wareham, West Bridgewater, Westport, Whitman

The survey was piloted with five former principals prior to distribution to the larger sample. Pilot responses were used to revise and refine the survey questions. The revised survey was presented to the researcher's committee with the final product produced and accepted. Subsequent to IRB and committee approval, in February 2018 the survey was emailed to all traditional public K-12 principals in Rhode Island, where the survey was sent to 259 principals in Rhode Island. A low response rate was received (of 8 principals), prompting the researcher to receive additional committee approval to expand the study beyond the originally conceived geographic boundary; IRB approval was not limited to the geographic area and did not need to be reestablished. The survey was then expanded to include New Hampshire and Southeastern Massachusetts, as defined in the previous section. Surveys were emailed to 423 New Hampshire and 220 Massachusetts principals in early March 2018. The online survey was closed and did not receive additional responses after April 16, 2018.

Thus, the survey remained open for a total of 10 weeks. Rhode Island principals were able to respond to the survey between February 5, 2018 – April 16, 2018; New Hampshire and Massachusetts principals were able to access the survey between March 10, 2018 – April 16, 2018. The majority of survey responses were collected immediately after an initial or reminder email was sent out. A total of 902 surveys were emailed out; 25 survey respondents completed the survey (an additional 35 participants accessed the survey and completed at least the first 4 questions). Table 4 below provides demographic details about the surveys that were sent out, along with the surveys completed. While this study did observe a low response rate, Table 4 demonstrates the proportion of surveys completed was in line with the population being recruited. Ultimately, the majority of surveys were distributed and completed at the elementary level. In addition, the population recruited in New Hampshire was larger than that of Rhode

Island and Southeastern Massachusetts and reflected the larger number of respondents by state. Tables 5 and 6 provide additional demographic details on the twenty-five survey respondents. For the purposes of data analysis only completed surveys are analyzed.

Table 4

Demographics of survey sample and proportion of respondents by state (N=902; N=24)

	Surveys Distributed	Percent of distribution	Surveys Completed	Percent of responses
Rhode Island				
Elementary School	154	17%	6	24%
Middle School	51	6%	0	0%
High School	43	5%	1	4%
Other	11	1%	0	0%
Total	**259**	**29%**	**7***	**32%**
New Hampshire				
Elementary School	273	30%	6	24%
Middle School	64	7%	1	4%
High School	77	9%	2	8%
Other	9	1%	1	4%
Total	**423**	**47%**	**10**	**40%**
SE Massachusetts				
Elementary School	121	13%	6	24%
Middle School	46	5%	0	0%
High School	29	3%	1	4%
Other	24	3%	0	0%
Total	**220**	**24%**	**7**	**28%**

Note: N=902 surveys sent out to all public school principals in RI, NH, and SE MA. N=24 surveys completed (one of the survey respondents from RI did not provide information on grade level of school, thus, total number from RI were 8 respondents). Percentage calculation for Rhode Island includes the additional respondent in the total column.

As documented in Table 4, the survey responses that were received are proportional to the distribution by state. Overall, the majority of surveys distributed were at the elementary level, accounting for 60% of the total distribution, with the majority of surveys completed also at the elementary level, accounting for 72% of the sample. Middle school principals made up approximately 18% of distribution total, while only accounting for 4% of the entire survey

sample. Finally, high school principals and other schools made up 17% and 5% of the distribution total respectively, with high school principals providing 16% of the total survey sample, and other schools making up 4% of the total sample. Thus, while a small response rate was obtained, the proportion of respondents was representative of the total distribution, with the exception of middle schools.

Table 5

Demographics of survey respondents by geographic area (N = 23)

	Rural	Suburban	Urban	Total
Elementary School	7	6	5	18
Middle School	1	0	0	1
High School	2	2	0	4
Total	10	8	5	23

Note: N = 23. Two of the 25 completed survey respondents did not provide demographic information but completed all additional questions.

Table 6

Years as principal in current building (N = 24)

	> 1 year	1-3 years	4-7 years	over 7 years
Principal	3	8	5	8

Note: N = 24. One of the 25 completed survey respondents did not provide demographic information but completed all additional questions.

As noted earlier, elementary principals were the largest group of respondents. The majority of these participants scored at the medium or high rate of implementation. Based the high rate of medium and high scores, it appears that almost all of the principals who completed the survey have experienced partnerships they thought were effective.

Table 7

Implementation scores by grade level and location of school (N=23; N=24)

	Low (up to 80)	Medium (81-120)	High (121 +)	Total
Elementary	3	7	8	18

Middle	0	1	0	1
High	0	3	1	4
Total	**3**	**11**	**9**	**23**
Urban	0	2	3	5
Suburban	2	4	2	8
Rural	1	5	5	11
Total	**3**	**11**	**10**	**24**

Note: Twenty-three respondent indicated their grade level, twenty four respondents indicated the location of their school.

Survey responses were entered directly into the Qualtrics database. The database was password protected, with only the researcher having access to the responses. According to Merriam (1998) first the case must be set (in this case it is traditional school principals), then you "need to do some sampling within the case" (p. 65). The scoring schema established the second set of criteria needed to purposefully select whom to interview. Overall, ten survey participants indicated their willingness to participate in a follow up interview. Working within this schema, potential interviews were scheduled, representing low, medium, and high implementation sites. Additional details on the interview process are included in the next section. This was originally structured as a strategy to allow the researcher to conduct a follow up interview with at least one of each principal who falls into each category. Ultimately, due to logistical and scheduling challenges, interview participants were not chosen solely on their overall survey scores, but also based on their survey responses in general and availability to participate in an interview. Completed interviews represent only elementary school principals across rural, suburban, and urban areas.

Phase II: Interviews

For the interview protocol, there were three steps in finalizing the interview questions and protocols. In the first step, a literature review was conducted to help establish appropriate

questions. In the second step, the questions were piloted with one former principal, with another former principal providing written feedback on the questions. Once survey data was analyzed, in the third step, final revisions were based on survey findings. Interviews were scheduled in April and May 2018. Interviewees within fifty miles of the researcher were interviewed face-to-face. Interviewees over fifty miles away were interviewed over the phone. All interviews began with a review of the consent form, with each participant either signing or giving their verbal consent. Subsequent to consent being received, an overview of the interview protocol was provided then the researcher began to ask the list of prepared questions. All interviews were audio recorded, and then transcribed by the researcher. Interviews lasted between thirty-five and fifty minutes; interviews conducted over the phone tended to take less time to complete than those conducted face to face. A password-protected database was created to store all recordings and transcriptions. All data was in the sole possession of the researcher. To honor the time principals were dedicating to this process, interview questions were emailed to interviewees two days prior to the scheduled interview. This recommendation was made during the pilot phase. The final interview protocol included 13 questions.

Ten principals indicated a willingness to participate in the interview phase, although it was only possible to conduct interviews with five principals. The additional principals did not respond to multiple requests to schedule an interview. Principals who were interviewed are noted in bold in the table below. In addition, the five interviews that were conducted represented principals at the elementary level only.

Table 8

Demographics of principals who indicated a willingness to be interviewed (N=10)

Location	Years in current school	Implementation Score

Principal A*	**Urban**	**4-7 years**	**150 - High**
Principal B	Rural	Over 7 years	112 - Medium
Principal C	*Suburban*	*4-7 years*	*119 – Medium*
Principal D	*Rural*	*4-7 years*	*144 – High*
Principal E*	**Suburban**	**1-3 years**	**129 – High**
Principal F	Rural	Over 7 years	112 - Medium
Principal G	**Urban**	**Less than 1 year**	**132 – High**
Principal H	Suburban	Over 7 years	73 – Low
Principal I	Rural	Over 7 years	153 – High
Principal J	Suburban	Less than 1 year	130 – High

Note: **Bolded** rows indicate principals that were interviewed face to face
Italicized rows indicate principals that were interviewed via phone
Principals in normal type indicated a willingness to be interviewed, but ultimately were not able to participate in an interview
* Indicates principals whose data was developed into case vignettes

Phase III: Case Studies

Subsequent to the interviews being conducted and analyzed, additional publically available documents and resources were collected to provide additional information about the schools and districts the interviewees represented. Documents such as district and school improvement plans were accessed and downloaded directly from district Websites. School report cards were accessed and downloaded directly from the respective State Department of Education. In addition, information about the specific organizations that were noted as community partners were also collected through data available on the organization's Website.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), "The process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (p. 178). In this study Phase I (survey) and Phase II (interview) data needed to be analyzed. Interviews provided

both high-level data and data that was developed into case study vignettes. Publicly available resources, such as school and district improvement plans, were also accessed to develop the case study vignettes.

Phase I: Survey Analysis

Survey data was analyzed using the tools available on Qualtrics. All survey responses were entered directly into Qualtrics, with the researcher then analyzing. The majority of the survey questions (15 out of 20) were quantitative in nature, allowing the researcher to use descriptive analysis techniques to exhibit the mean and standard deviation.

Crosstabs analysis was also run to determine any differences in responses based on the type of school (elementary, middle, or high), the location (urban, suburban, or rural), as well as the overall score calculated (low, medium, or high). Because of the sophistication of Qualtrics, the majority of data analysis was conducted within the online platform.

Phase II: Interview Analysis

Interview data was analyzed in two phases. For Phase I, structural coding was attempted. Saldana (2016) states, "Structural coding applies a content-based or conceptual phase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data to both code and categorize the data corpus" (p. 97). This coding scheme can be used to categorize information for further analysis. Structural coding is a strong choice for this phase of data analysis because the analysis is geared toward identifying large segments of data that can form the basis for a more in-depth analysis across and within topics. In vivo coding was also initiated to analyze interviews, honoring participant voice and preserving participants' meanings through the analysis process. In vivo

coding allows researchers to capture the meanings inherent in participants' experiences (Saldana, 2016).

It was discovered after thoroughly rereading the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data that the codes being developed were too general and broad, leading me to theme the data as opposed to coding it. Saldana (2016) notes, "A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (p. 198). Using the recommendations from Ryan and Bernard (2003, cited in Saldana, 2011), themes were found in the data by examining qualities such as: repeating ideas, participant terms, theoretical issues suggested by the data, and what was missing or not presented in the data (p. 203). Themes were demonstrated through participants' verbatim words and phrases, allowing for principals' points of view on their experiences in creating partnerships.

Themes from each interview were entered into Atlas.ti as a basic categorization. Then, the researcher looked for how the themes were similar, different, and the relationships they have between them. Data was exported to a password protected Excel Worksheet that allowed the researcher more ease in reorganizing and categorizing themes and sub-themes. This resulted in the identification of five major themes along with the sub-themes that support the groupings and relationships within the major themes. The themes are presented in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Phase III: Case Study Analysis

After the themes were identified, the interview data from two principals, along with additional publicly available school information including school improvement plans were developed into case study vignettes. These two principals were selected as cases because they were best aligned with the research questions. A descriptive account of two principals' experiences with partnerships is provided in Chapter 4. Thus, these two cases "reveal

information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). The constant comparative method of data analysis was then employed to further compare the cases. Category construction was utilized to extract additional details from the interviews. After annotating the interview transcripts with comments relevant to the study by hand, comments and notes were grouped together. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, as cited in Merriam, 1998), "the researcher attempts to see processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations" (p. 195).

Being too focused on individual testimony, and not necessarily on the overall concepts and themes that emerge from data analysis of all participants is a challenge I attempted to address by also theming the data. In Chapter 4, data is presented and organized according to the three research questions that guide the study. Findings for each guiding question are stated and briefly explained, with implication of findings presented in Chapter 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I subscribe to Dewey's (1938) philosophy about learning being a social and interactive process, where students can thrive through experiences and interactions. Dewey (1938) noted, "the principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized in the degree in which individuals form a community group" (p. 58). While we all have individual experiences and situations, we are still part of a larger society that has an impact on these experiences, and ultimately our learning. Life experiences shape us into who we become as learners, and as members of society. Encouraging and valuing others perspectives and experiences, especially

those that are different from your own is a great challenge for many individuals. In addition, I acknowledge that learning can and should happen beyond the wall of the schoolhouse, making all experiences valuable learning opportunities. I also appreciate the structure and detail of storytelling as a way to make connections, which lead me to choose a case study design for this research. Within case study research there are some additional limitations.

As noted previously, one of the challenges of case study methodology is the potential for researcher bias. My biases result from previous experiences as well as my current role in the field as a funder. It was important to remain nonjudgmental and open to learning about others' experiences, recognizing that my experiences are not representative of others. This notion of mitigating potentially damaging effects of preconceptions that may flaw the research process is referred to as "bracketing" (Tufford and Newman, 2010). To address for this concern around bracketing, both the survey and interview tools and protocols were reviewed and piloted by individuals not involved in the final study. This allowed me to utilize trusted colleagues and former principals to determine if any language used leaned toward a certain preconceived notion unintentionally. To further mitigate this risk I relied on previous coursework completed at Lesley University. Specifically, the Qualitative Research Methods I and II courses that focused on qualitative research methods and processes. In addition to this coursework, I also further explored case study research (Merriam, 1988; Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2011, Stake, 1978). Furthermore, the development of a detailed dissertation plan approved by my full doctoral committee helped to ensure a thoughtful, ethical research study.

In addition to being a trustworthy researcher, as the key data collector and analyzer I had a responsibility to protect the rights of human subjects and ensure confidentiality of participants. All communications with subjects provided language about the study's purpose and their

participation in it. The survey and interview protocols were designed to address the research questions. All participants could refuse participation and/or stop their involvement at any time. Prior to any contact with subjects, Institutional Review Board approval was sought. Participants were only recruited subsequent to IRB approval; all IRB protocols were adhered to throughout the study.

Delimitations

A conscious effort has been made to investigate school-community partnerships by first reaching out to traditional school leaders (K-12) in selected areas of New England. This recruitment was limited by geographic area to Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts. Within this geographic area a diversity of school structures exist, particularly in terms of grade level configuration (elementary, middle, and high) and geographic context (rural, suburban, and urban). By tapping into the full K-12 system I intend to get a full range of leadership perspectives about school-community partnerships. With the intent of the study to understand the role principals play in partnerships only current school principals were solicited for participation. This process utilizes the principals' perspectives to identify partnerships, rather than relying on community organizations. Community organizations often articulate their programs as a value added experience for students, although their approach and goals are not always well aligned to building goals.

Follow up interviews were scheduled with selected participants identified through survey responses as having a high, medium, or low score related to their level of school-community partnership. Follow up interviews were scheduled either in person (for locations within a 50 mile radius of researcher) or over the phone (for locations over 50 miles from researcher).

In addition, this study did not include school leaders from charter schools or vocationally focused schools. These schools typically have specific, identified partnerships with community organizations and local businesses as part of their charter or as a focus of workforce development. Teacher leaders are also not included because there is not a standard recognition of teacher leaders throughout the selected areas of study. Nor is there a focus on parent-school relationships because of the expansive literature already developed in this area. Furthermore, this study did not focus on the role of the superintendent or district leadership positions. Overall, it is the researcher's belief that school principals are the most likely to be the individual involved in community networking and partnerships; thus the study focuses on this population.

Summary

This multi-method study relied on data collection and analysis of survey, interview, and documents resulting in a series of findings. Ultimately, twenty-five respondents responded to a request to complete an online survey, resulting in in-depth interviews with five participants to better understand the role principals' play in developing and fostering school-community partnerships. Two of these interviews were further developed into case study vignettes. Case study methodology allows "Educational processes, problems, and programs [to] be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). The next chapter will outline themes and findings from the data analysis and provide case study vignettes.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the role school leaders play in improving school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. The study explored the perceptions of principals related to school-community partnerships, strategies school leaders utilize to develop partnerships, and identified the factors and conditions that support and hinder partnerships. A case study approach was used to guide data collection and analysis. Merriam (1998) notes, "In qualitative research, a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 208). This approach takes context into account, reflecting an "empirical assessment of local decision makers' theories of action rather than generation and verification of universal theories" (Patton, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 209). Again, the following three questions guided this case study approach:

- To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?
- What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?
- What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

This chapter dissects the data and analysis process utilized to arrive at the study findings. General outcomes are presented in the following sections: survey phase, interview phase, and case study vignette. Finally, findings are presented as they related to each of the research questions presented above. In addition, a summary of the chapter is provided to highlight the overall findings.

Survey Results

As described in Chapter 3, twenty-five current principals from Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts responded to an online survey. Survey questions were developed to provide foundational, quantitative data on the three research questions, gauging the degree in which principals believe school-community partnerships improve schools, outlining various ways partnerships are currently developed, and also identifying the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit school-community partnerships. In addition, three questions were asked to gather some basic demographic data about survey respondents. The remainder of this section will review data received from the online survey, with demographic data discussed first, followed by questions related to each of the research questions.

Demographic Data

As noted previously, while a low response rate was observed in this study the population that did complete the survey was proportional to the population recruited (see Table 4, p. 78). The majority of survey participants were from elementary schools, accounting for 75% of all survey respondents. In addition, almost half of school principals who completed the survey indicated they were from a rural location. The majority of principals (87%) who responded to the survey indicated they had been in their position in the current school for more than one year, with 33% having been in the same building for over 7 years. The survey did not collect data on gender. Principals indicated a number of different types of organizations they considered partners, including public libraries, social service organizations, colleges and universities, and youth development organizations. The following tables provide detailed demographic data obtained from the survey.

Table 9

Grade levels served by survey respondents (N = 23)

Elementary	75%
Middle	4%
High	17%
Other	4%

Note: Twenty-five principals responded to the survey, two participants did not indicate their grade level

Table 10

Location of schools (N = 23)

Urban	21%
Suburban	33%
Rural	46%

Note: Twenty-five principals responded to the survey, two participants did not indicate their grade level

Table 11

Number of years as principals in current school (N = 23)

Less than 1 year	13%
1-3 years	33%
4-7 years	21%
Over 7 years	33%

Note: Twenty-five principals responded to the survey, two participants did not indicate their grade level

Table 12

Types of community organizations principals consider as partners (N = 25)

Public library	92%
Social service organizations	80%
Universities/Colleges	71%
Youth development nonprofit organizations	67%
Arts organizations	63%
Athletic organizations	59%

Note: Participants were asked to choose as many organizations that were applicable. The top choices are displayed.

Research Question One: To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?

To answer research question one about the degree to which school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools, the survey results showed that school leaders find partnerships that are associated with achieving school defined goals, impacting student learning, and providing enhanced social supports as most important. Principals also described partnerships as ways to create relationships, broaden and expand learning opportunities for students, and provide the school additional resources. Additional respondents indicated that while they thought the partnerships were important, they indicated partnerships did not provide an educational value and often took too much time, along with too many obstacles to establish sustainable partnerships. Some differences in responses were observed across different locales.

Principals scored the statement "services provided by community partners help achieve school goals" as the highest rated statement associated with research question one. On the other hand, survey respondents felt less compelled to consider community partners as professional development providers for their staff, with a mean score of 2.64. This response also demonstrated the largest standard deviation at 1.04 (see Table 13). This area reflects one of the differences in responses based on geography (see Figure 2). Suburban principals in this study indicated community partners who provided services for students were more important than those that focused on professional development for teachers. Urban and rural principals indicated higher levels of importance for adult learning for teachers, as well as services for students. The tables and figures that follow provide survey data related to the first research question – the degree to which school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools.

Table 13

Extent principals indicate the following statements as important (N=25)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
3.1 Services provided by community partners help to achieve school goals	3.32	0.80
3.2 Services provided by community partners help to achieve student learning goals	3.04	0.84
3.3 Community partners provide resources that impact adult learning in my school, including as a professional development provider	2.64	1.04
3.4 Community partners provide resources that impact student learning in my school	3.16	0.80
3.5 Community partners provide opportunities and structures to impact student to student relationships	2.88	0.97
3.6 Community partners provide opportunities and structures to impact teacher to student relationships	2.75	0.94
3.7 Community partners are a resources for impacting student relationships outside of the school (e.g. they provide opportunities and structures for students to develop relationships with individuals in the community)	2.88	0.78
3.8 Community partnerships are a resource to provide enhanced social services	3.12	0.97
3.9 Community partnerships are a resource to provide mental health services	3.08	0.95

Note: Responses are based on a 4-point likert scale with the following answer choices: Extremely, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all.

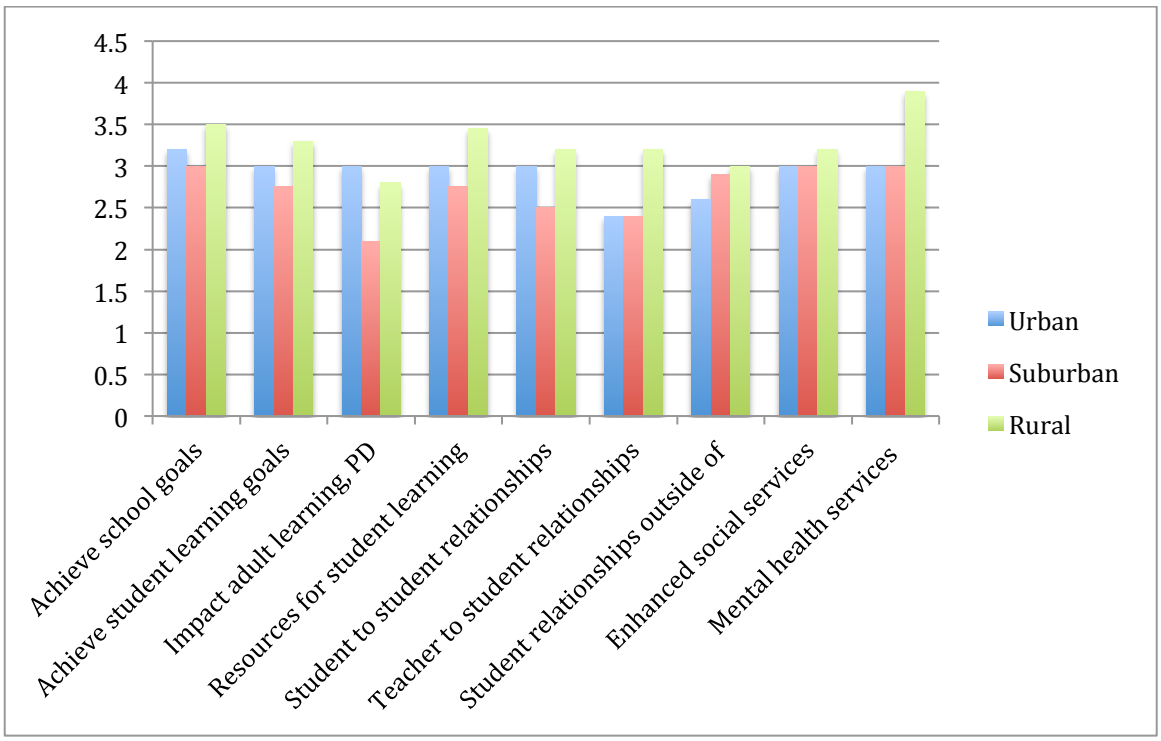

Figure 2. *Survey responses disaggregated by geographic area*

Overall, principals indicated that partnerships were important to achieve school goals and that they provide students with real-world experiences along with additional resources. The challenges of time and the many hats principals already juggle were also mentioned. In addition, differences in perceptions between urban, suburban, and rural principals were observed.

Research Question Two: What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?

To answer research question two about determining various ways principals develop school-community partnerships, the survey results showed that principals work to sustain existing partnerships with various organizations, create conditions that value and trust community partners as part of the school, and coordinate services between school and

community partners. In addition, response frequencies varied based on the location of schools, with rural principals rating their overall level of effectiveness at 2.91 (on a 4-point scale), compared to 2.60 and 1.75 for urban and suburban principals respectively.

Principals were asked to indicate the level of important and also the frequency of practice for a variety of strategies found in the research to develop partnerships. Overall, the level of importance and the frequency of practice did not vary greatly. However, when the data is disaggregated by urban, suburban, and rural schools some differences can be observed. Additional differences in responses were reflected for specific practices identified in the literature to support development of partnerships. For instance, according to participants who completed the survey, urban schools are more likely to have and utilize a policy that outlines expectations for school-community partnerships. Suburban schools in this study indicated more importance in an MOU process, but overall indicate they use MOUs less frequently than urban schools. Rural principals indicated that community partners are a valued part of the school at a higher rate than both urban and suburban principals. Areas that indicated the lowest level of importance across urban, suburban, and rural principals included providing time and funding, along with community partners having influence on developing school priorities. Areas that indicated the least practice included professional development designed to develop partnerships for principals and staff. Full results, disaggregated by geographic location of school, are included below in Table 14.

Table 14

The extent to which the following statements are important to you and to what extent they are practiced in your school (N=25)

	Importance			Frequency of Practice		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Rural
6.1 Time is regularly	2.60	2.38	2.91	2.60	1.75	2.82

	Importance			Frequency of Practice		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Rural
scheduled between school leadership and community partners						
6.2 School-level funding is allocated to community partners for services provided	2.20	2.25	2.73	2.60	1.75	2.00
6.3 School resources, such as use of facilities, are allocated to community partners for services provided.	3.00	3.00	3.36	3.20	2.88	3.00
6.4 The principal communicates the school's vision for student learning with community partners	3.20	3.38	3.36	3.20	2.25	3.00
6.5 The school has a policy that outlines expectations for community partnerships	3.40	2.50	2.55	3.20	2.25	2.45
6.6 The school has an MOU process to articulate roles and responsibilities for community partnerships	2.80	3.13	2.18	2.60	2.38	2.09
6.7 Programs and services are coordinated between the school and community partners	3.40	3.13	3.18	3.00	2.38	3.00
6.8 Students have flexibility to choose different services provided by community organizations	3.00	2.50	2.82	2.60	1.88	2.36

	Importance			Frequency of Practice		
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Rural
6.9 The schools builds consensus with community partners around school priorities	2.80	2.38	2.64	2.40	2.13	2.55
6.10 Community partners provide opportunities for students to enhance their learning	3.40	2.75	3.27	3.00	2.25	2.91
6.11 Community partners provide opportunities for remediation for students	3.00	2.25	2.27	2.40	1.50	1.91
6.12 Community partners have influence on developing school priorities	2.60	2.13	2.36	2.60	1.75	2.45
6.13 Community partners are a valued part of the school community	3.60	3.38	3.64	3.40	2.88	3.45
6.14 Community partners are a trusted part of the school community	3.40	3.38	3.55	3.40	2.88	3.45
6.15 Professional development designed to help develop community partnerships is provided for myself	3.00	2.50	2.45	2.40	1.38	2.09
6.16 Professional development designed to help develop community partnerships is provided for my staff	2.80	2.38	2.64	2.20	1.38	2.09

Note: Responses are on a 4-point likert scale, with answer choices of: extremely/most of the time, moderately/some of the time, slightly/seldom, not at all/never

Additional questions were asked about how principals currently spend their time and how they would ideally like to spend their time. For how time is currently spent respondents indicated school-community partnerships with the lowest level averaging 7% of their time. When asked how much time would be ideal, school-community partnerships increased to almost 11%, representing an increase in the amount of time, but still the lowest level of all activities. This question had a large standard deviation across all domains. No major differences were observed when data was disaggregated by geographic location of the school.

Table 15

Principals' use of time (current and ideal) (N=25)

	Current		Ideal	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Internal administrative tasks, including human resource/personnel issues, regulations, reports, school budget	28.12	14.81	12.20	6.78
Curriculum and teaching-related tasks, including teaching, lesson preparation, classroom observations, mentoring teachers	29.40	12.27	38.80	14.58
Student interactions, including discipline and academic guidance	20.48	9.96	23.00	14.28
Parent interactions, including formal and informal interactions	14.28	6.36	15.00	7.75
School-community partnerships	7.52	4.51	10.8	4.83

Overall, principals indicated using a variety of approaches to develop school-community partnerships. Some differences between urban, suburban, and rural principals in these efforts

were highlighted in the survey. For instance, suburban principals overall scored their level of effectiveness with school-community partnerships lower than both urban and rural principals.

Research Question Three: What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

Survey results associated with research question three indicate having access to resources, a clear understanding of the needs of the school, and the ability to align resources with needs through partnerships that are connected to school goals as factors and conditions that promote the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships. In addition, survey results indicate principals rely on teachers to play a role in supporting partnerships (see Table 16). On the other hand, survey results indicate factors and conditions that inhibit efforts of principals to create partnerships include time, funding challenges, and lack of district support. Respondents were also asked to select strategies that they use to promote partnerships with community organizations (see Table 17). Again, there are some observable differences in frequency when the data is disaggregated by location of school. For instance, urban and rural principals indicated partnerships as a way to promote a personal sense of belonging to the community at a much higher rate than suburban principals. While survey respondents indicated earlier in the survey that having time regularly scheduled between school leadership and community partners was in-between slightly to moderately important, respondents overwhelmingly (12 out of 20) noted time as a limitation to creating partnerships (see Table 18). Finally, principals indicated in addition to having more time dedicated to partnerships, having coordinated efforts between the school and partners as well as a clear vision from the district would help them be more effective in developing school-community partnerships (see Table 19).

Table 16

Factors and conditions that promote partnerships

Location of school	Text response
Urban	I have met with many reps. from community partners to establish relationships. The level of need is based upon the needs of students and families. The ability to contact (having a list of potential partners) is helpful, but was not available for me. I had to reach out to more groups to find more supports, based upon feedback from constituents. The need for such supports and willingness of staff to work with partners is helpful. Time to meet and plan is critical. Outlining overviews of needs and which organization or partner is available is key.
Urban	District clarity of vision to focus partnership work; time allocation to recruit, maintain and grow partnerships; adequate resources for the core educational system so that employees don't see partnerships as those entities that are taking opportunities away from them
Suburban	The factors and conditions that best promote school community partnerships is when we have teachers who have a specific interest. These teachers are often looking for resources and are able to find community partners who support their ideas. In addition, providing professional development time for teachers to explore these possibilities is critical. For these teachers, substitute teacher coverage and money to attend different events is needed. The other important aspect is giving teachers permission to invite a community partner into their classroom. This means that on a particular day, their schedule/lessons may look very different, all of that needs to be OK!
Suburban	Has to align with district and school goals/staff buy in, interest in committing to the managing of the partnerships/time needed to plan develop and evaluate the partnership
Rural	Support from district central office. Support and buy in from staff and families. Open communication with all stakeholders - this has been a very long process to educate everyone on the need for support and community partnerships. Organizational Citizenship Behavior - working to continuously create and foster a climate, which promotes teacher and student citizenship behaviors.

Note: Nineteen participants provided a response to this prompt. Selected responses provide additional details to overall survey findings.

Table 17

Strategies used to promote partnerships (N=25)

	All responses	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Promote a personal sense of belonging to the community	81%	100%	50%	90%
Awareness of different programs and services being offered	76%	80%	67%	80%
On-going planning and checking in with partners	76%	100%	83%	60%
Connection to district priorities	57%	80%	50%	50%
Creation of roles and responsibilities between the school and partner	43%	60%	50%	30%
Shared vision and mission	43%	60%	50%	30%
Goals and outcomes developed in partnership	43%	60%	67%	20%
Abundance of community partners to draw on	29%	40%	33%	20%

Note: Respondents selected all strategies that applied. Strategies are listed in order of overall selection.

Table 18 below provides additional data on obstacles that were identified that have limited partnerships with community organizations with a lack of time again being indicated as an obstacle. Additional obstacles included a limited number of partners and insufficient funding. Furthermore, there were a number of differences in frequency of responses between different geographic types. Suburban principals indicated at a much higher rate a limited number of partners compared to urban principals. Urban principals, however, cited a competing vision and mission as an obstacle to a higher degree than either suburban or rural principals.

Table 18

Obstacles that have limited partnerships (N=25)

	All responses	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Lack of time	88%	100%	100%	73%
Limited number of partners	58%	40%	75%	55%
Insufficient funding	50%	40%	63%	46%
Turnover of partner staff	29%	60%	25%	18%
Not a district priority	29%	0%	38%	36%
Competing vision and mission	21%	60%	13%	9%
Model too difficult to implement	21%	0%	38%	18%
Lack of community and parental support	21%	40%	13%	18%
Turnover of school staff	4%	20%	0%	0%
Too many partners	4%	20%	0%	0%

Note: Respondents selected all obstacles they have encountered. Obstacles are listed in order of overall selection.

Finally, an open-ended question asked participants to explain what would help them to be more effective in developing school-community partnerships. Selected text responses are included below in Table 19.

Table 19

What would help principals be more effective in developing partnerships

Location of school	**Text response**
Urban	Clarity of vision from the district; autonomy to select and develop partnerships that match the vision, mission and goals of the school, support with grant writing, time to work on the development of the partnership - articulating the goals and plans with the partners
Suburban	It would be helpful to conduct a needs assessment to see what my teachers may want from community partners and then conduct a strengths based inventory of parents of students in my school to see how both groups could work together. Another aspect that would be helpful is if there were a small group of people who

	could vet out the outside organizations that offer different programs to my school
Rural	More time devoted to collaboratively create the mission and infrastructure.

Note: Eight responses were received for this question. Reponses displayed illustrate the overall theme of responses and provide additional insight into survey findings.

Summary of Survey Data

The survey data provided descriptive data about the principals who completed the survey and was centered on the three research questions. The survey also provided foundational data that gauged the degree in which principals believe school-community partnerships improve schools, outlined various ways partnerships are currently developed, and identified the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit school-community partnerships. While this data is only generalizable to the twenty-five principals who participated in the survey, overall measures were positive indicating principals' beliefs that school-community partnerships are beneficial. Survey responses demonstrated a number of differences in frequencies of responses between urban, suburban, and rural principals. The survey helped to establish a general of understanding principals' perspectives, while the interview phase allowed the researcher to gather more specific, lived experiences of principals. This interview phase is addressed in the next section.

Interview Results

As described in Chapter 3, five current principals from Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts participated in the interview phase of this study. Interview questions were developed to go deeper into understanding the reasons behind the survey questions and to highlight lived experiences of current principals.

Demographic Data

All principals interviewed were currently serving at the elementary level, with two identifying as urban schools, two as suburban, and one as rural. Four of the interviewees were female, and had been principals in their current school for at least one year. One male was interviewed, he had been principal in his current school for less than a year but previously had served as a principal in another school in the district. Table 20 below provides additional demographic detail about principals interviewed.

Table 20

Demographics of interview participants

	Location	Gender	Years in current school	Implementation Score
Principal A	Urban	Female	4-7 years	150 - High
Principal C	Suburban	Female	4-7 years	119 – Medium
Principal D	Rural	Female	4-7 years	144 – High
Principal E	Suburban	Female	1-3 years	129 – High
Principal G	Urban	Male	Less than 1 year	132 - High

Emergent Themes

The data collected during the interview phase provided valuable insight about the role principals' play in creating school-community partnerships. Each of the five principals interviewed provided an example of a great partnership, with partnerships varying from parent groups, a wildlife conservation organization, a research partnership, local municipalities and other community organization providing student services. While there was variation in the types of organizations principals partnered with, the emergent themes identified in this section were consistent across many partnerships and do not represent only certain partnerships. The

following section identifies the themes that emerged from the interviews as they relate to the research questions. Evidence provided by principals to support each theme is also included.

Research Question One: To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?

Interview participants articulated that they believed school-community partnerships will improve schools by providing opportunities for students, staff, and community members as well as through the alignment of efforts and approaches.

Providing opportunities for students, staff, and community. Providing opportunities for students, staff, and community was identified as a theme through supporting topics including, providing opportunities (academically, instructionally, and developmentally focused) for students, professional development and learning opportunities for teachers, and partnerships that mutually benefit the community at large. Specifically, many of the principals interviewed discussed the role partnerships play in providing project based, experiential, and real world learning for students, with these approaches also seen as a strategy to engage all members within the school community. In the interview each principal described a particular partnership, a summary of that interview section is provided below to highlight the opportunities principals discussed.

Principal A explained that each grade level had a different partner to help them engage in project-based learning. Specifically, the first and fourth grades are working with a local partner to develop gardens. Partners come into the school during common planning time to meet with teachers to work collaboratively on programming before working directly with the students. Planning includes addressing standards that are being met, along with overall goals for the

project. In this sense, the partners and teachers are sharing their knowledge, then the organization works directly with the students to design and eventually harvest the gardens.

Principal C discussed a project that was intended to get kids involved in the sugaring process by experiencing the process from planning to fundraising to actually tapping trees and boiling sap. The principal noted that many of the usual partners, such as PTA and local businesses, were involved but that this project in particular brought in different parents and the opportunity to connect with other local businesses. She stated,

> I had a dad who works for [local landscaping company] say that I'm so glad that you're doing this because when I was in elementary school we planted a tree and that reminded me, or really led me on a path to be in the landscape business. And, I want that same experience for my son. And, I'm so glad you are doing something that is hands on and concrete and you are showing kids like this trade, it's something that could be a hobby or it could actually turn into a lifetime job that you actually like. And, so we got parents who really are the blue collar, work 9-5 jobs, coming in and experiencing this.

Principal D described a partnership with a local community organization whose mission is to support wildlife conservation efforts. The principal commented about the challenges of being in a rural location, and as a solution she reaches out to groups willing to come to the building and do presentations noting "Students could definitely get more experience going to the thing to see it, but if we do it right we can get just as much when they come here to us." The principal views the partnership as an opportunity to expose students to different topics while also developing relationships with the school and the community organization.

Principal E discussed a partnership with a local parent group that helps bring funding, programs, and presentations into the school. For example, the organization brings in Discovery Science, which was described as an in-school field trip where the organization comes into the school and conducts hands on projects with students. The principal noted that partnerships are connected to the school improvement plan so teachers see where activities and presentations fit into the bigger school goals.

Principal G highlighted a different type of partnership, a research partnership where the work is mainly conducted at the adult level, with the end result intended to influence student outcomes, stating "It's basically a number of people coming together to do research on how do we help kids learn math better…It's all about trying to build interventions in the school, math interventions." In this instance, the partnership is focused on providing professional development to teachers as opposed to enhancing opportunities for students.

Aligning efforts and approaches. The second theme that was uncovered in the data is utilizing partnerships to align efforts and approaches. This theme incorporated different topics such as aligning missions and visions across organizations, establishing a clear purpose, and connecting partners work to the day-to-day efforts of the school. Principals C and D did not explicitly discuss alignment of efforts in their interviews, while Principals A, E, and G spoke extensively about the need for partners to be aligned closely to the school. Selected interview quotes are included in the table below.

Table 21

Interview responses – aligning efforts and approaches (N=3)

Principal A	We are working with the partners [on] what standards are covered, and sharing in what do we want to see, what do they want to see, what are our goals. And, then we have some meetings, they come in during common planning time with our teachers and sit down and say what are your

	objectives, how can we work together to make this happen for the kids.
Principal E	I think a critical support for the community school partnerships is that you know it needs to have a purpose, a clear purpose. I think that having a clear purpose is really important because you don't want to just, you want to have community school partnerships that are really going to benefit students. Ultimately in the days end you are doing it for students. So you want it to have a clear purpose and you want it to be connected to the school improvement plan, and you want it to be connected to the overall mission of the school.
Principal G	So we have a number of community partners - here they have their own organizational purpose, we have our own organizational purpose and sometimes they, it works to meld them…But ultimately the idea is that all of it connects to student learning or student growth, student wellbeing, something that relates to kids. We don't want to get involved in a lot of things that have nothing to do with kids because that is outside of our goal.

Research Question Two: What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?

Principals interviewed noted various individual approaches they took to develop partnerships. While these processes were specific to their individual context the following themes – developing and maintaining relationships and sharing resources and building capital – did emerge as current strategies used to develop school-community partnerships.

Developing and maintaining relationships. Data collected during the interview phase demonstrated that principals focus on developing and maintaining a variety of different relationships within and across their definition of the school community. This theme was developed from the following supporting topics: building relationships with the community, creating and sustaining partnerships with different organizations, establishing trust, developing networks, relying on experts in the field, and coming to consensus. While all principals

interviewed spoke about partnerships unique to their school, each of the principals indicated some level of developing and maintaining relationships as important to partnerships.

- Principal A spoke about visiting and networking with other schools within and outside of her district to learn from and build off of their experiences in developing partnerships. As a result, her school has established a number of partnerships with community organizations, local municipalities, and schools within the district.
- Principal C recalled making phone calls to community members, including the fire chief and local business owners, as a priority for her first year as principal in a new district. She also noted, "You really need to build trust before you can really reach out to community partners" and then expanded on the timeframe stating, "it really took a full year, more than that, just to really build the relationships."
- Principal D revealed that although she doesn't live in the community where she works, she takes the time to know the people in the community and "doing so you make connections, it is really is all about just putting yourself out there and making it work. It's really a matter of putting yourself out in the community and owning it."
- Principal E discussed relying on experts in the field as an endorsement to certain partnership opportunities. Specifically she discussed a professional development opportunity for teachers that was promoted by the Southeastern Massachusetts STEM organization, and felt confident with the organization because of the name recognition and her knowledge of strong work the STEM organization has provided in the past.
- Finally, Principal G spoke about his need as a new principal to come to consensus with a current partnership to better meet the current structure of the school while fulfilling the purpose of the work. He expressed his focus on developing professional learning

communities (PLC) at the school, and encouraged the partner to create a similar process, describing the situation in the following way:

> So I wanted to make sure that they're using the same thing that we're using cause I don't want people to be confused. I said why don't you just create a PLC cause everyone is gonna be in PLCs, just make it a PLC but you have to use the same process. And, so they were fine. I looked at what they have as a process and what I was presenting as a process and kinda took, mostly took a kind of simplified version of both, so we don't get mired in people getting overwhelmed with the process and they can actually do the work.

This section demonstrates a handful of comments and statements dedicated to developing and maintaining relationships that were raised throughout the interview phase. Principals interviewed also stated that the promise of shared resources (fiscal and human) help them further develop these partnerships.

Sharing resources and building capital. A fourth theme that emerged from the data is sharing resources and building capital. This notion goes beyond funding, including topics such as, support from the district, partners being seen as part of the school community, and providing structures that allow for shared learning between the school and community partners. Essentially, developing strategies that build the capacity of the school and the partners together.

- Principal A discussed her process for incorporating the work of partners into the school building through the use of common planning time and the use of a shared planning tool to ensure coordination with community projects. This approach allows for both school personnel and partners personnel to build their own capacity, adding valuable capital across the city.

- Principal C talked about the community resources, including human capital, that are directly in and around your school. Recalling the sugaring project, she noted that local community members participated and served as experts for different stages of the project including tapping trees and boiling sap. Community partners also donated funds and equipment to assist the project.
- Principal D described school-community partnerships as a way to bring more resources and services to the school, adding that sharing the work of the school has contributed to their fundraising efforts to support more opportunities for students.
- Principal E noted that partnerships "add more, because we have more resources that way. For example, reaching out to the library we have more resources through the public library that we are able to bring into the school. Whether its books and materials or just the people…they can work with us on certain projects with our children."

Research Question Three: What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

Interviewees spoke about experiences with partnerships that allowed them to expand their reach by having a different organization (i.e. partner) help them share their story of good work happening within the school to establish strong public relations as a condition that helped them promote various partnerships.

Establishing strong public relations. The final theme raised within the data was using partnerships as a public relations strategy; using partnerships to help tell the school's story beyond test scores and highlight good work happening on a day-to-day basis. In this instance,

each principal felt very comfortable opening up their school to visitors to help them provide a more accurate picture of what a typical school day looks like in their context.

Table 22

Interview responses – establishing strong public relations (N=5)

Principal A	And, really just getting everyone involved. It's one thing there's been a lot of negative publicity in the city and things, it's like the schools stink or different ways. And, it's like no we want lots of agencies involved to see and spread the word. It's like nope, this is really good, this is what they are doing.
Principal C	We are always trying to get community involvement, come and visit us and see what we are doing here.
Principal D	Educate them on what schools offer and everything that we do. I think there is a lot of, um, misinformation. I feel there is a lot of, um, misunderstanding a about what we do and what teachers do, um, and what the kids do. And, that can pose as a barrier, I feel to making things happen. Um, so to help kinda increase community collaboration I think first and foremost we have to educate each other about what we do.
Principal E	I think that it is always kind of nice to reach out to places outside of the school because I find that people, you know, in these groups outside of the school are really interested in what's happening here.
Principal G	We celebrate [partnerships]. We're excited about it, so it's almost like advertising in a way. There is a lot of school choice around here and I don't think, if people don't know, that most of the year my child's gonna have one or two extra adults in the room because of our partnerships.

The interview phase was important to identifying the ways in which the five interviewees see their role in creating school-community partnerships. The themes that emerged included providing opportunities to students, parents, and community, aligning efforts and approaches, developing and maintain relationships, sharing resources and building capital, and establishing strong public relations. These themes influenced the selection of the two principals to be included as case study participants.

Case Study Vignettes

Principals A and E were selected to be case study participants. The selections were made based on analysis of the combined data collected from the survey and interviews, as well as review of publically available data. The data collected for Principals A and E provided detailed experiences and strategies for utilizing partnerships to create an ecosystem. Additional data used to inform the following case study vignettes was obtained from school improvement plans, and other publicly available school related documents. Furthermore, because survey results indicated differences between locales, the case study participants present two different geographic areas – urban and suburban. This multiple case study approach is presented by first introducing the cases as vignettes, then providing a cross-case analysis.

Principal A (Carrie): Building a community school model

Principal A, referred to as "Carrie" for the remainder of this chapter, serves as a principal in an elementary school in an urban area in New England with 345 students enrolled during the 2017-18 school year in grades PK-5. Carrie received an implementation score of 150 (high) on the survey conducted as part of this study. While Carrie has served as the principal for the same school over the past four years, the school just recently moved into a new space, and has designated itself a community school. Thus, the principal spoke intensely about the physical structure of the school as a strength of a community school model, noting "we actually just build our brand new school and we built it as a community school." The school was also a new recipient of a state grant dedicated to extending the school day.

Carrie described numerous community partnerships the school was engaged in, ranging from working with parents, municipal agencies, social service groups, high school students, and

other externally based partners. While the principal described these different partnerships, she also explained the intended outcomes and the value she perceived each brought to the school. From the municipality point of view, Carrie described these partnerships aimed at creating alignment in the city. For example the school is working with the Department of Public Works (DPW) to teach students about composting as a possible solution to reducing trash. The principal noted

> [DPW] have been doing some instructional time with the kids, they came in yesterday, they did a lesson with the kids how to start the vermicomposting, they helped them set up the composters, they are working with the teachers on planning the standards and things…It's like all right, we live in a city, how can we reduce our trash how can we recycle more, things like that.

For partnerships with parents and families, Carrie spoke about bringing in social service and other community groups. One group in particular is a family resource center in the city that has helped coordinate parent groups at the school to learn about what students are doing in their classrooms; since the organization already has relationships with some of the parents it has worked out well.

In addition, Carrie mentioned various community partnerships, with each grade level having a project they were working on and a partner working on it with them. Students at the school are engaged with organizations focused on gardening, sailing, and music composition, just to name a few. Regardless of the type of partnership, the principal indicated that the school focuses on "making sure we know what the purpose is for our partnerships…and trying to make sure it is curriculum based and that our partners understand it's not just willy nilly service and things like that. That there is a purpose for

it too." In addition to having a clear purpose, partnerships need to be mutually beneficial. Carrie stated, "we are still in the infancy stages with the community partners and really looking at ways we can make sure again it is beneficial for them and for us." By connecting the work of partners directly to the curriculum, the school helps to build the capacity of local partners by formally exposing them to the day-to-day workings of a school, and helping them to see where their work can be best aligned.

In order to coordinate and align partnerships at her school common planning time is utilized. All grade level teachers have common planning time every day, with some of the time dedicated to working with partners on upcoming projects of lessons. Common planning time is used as a strategy to coordinate efforts whether it is a municipality coming in to inform students about recycling through a presentation or a community partner who will be working with students over the course of the year. In addition, the development of shared Google docs has aided the communication between teachers and partners, "we are able to use Google docs as our platform to share all these projects which is nice because then we can share into our community partners." The Google docs outline project-based learning lessons identifying the grade level, teachers, community partners, common core standards being met, key vocabulary, activities, and assessments. Furthermore, teachers have been tasked with maintaining the relationships once they have been established, with Carrie noting, "We've sort of connected the teachers with [communicating to community partners], and we are asking them to kind of keep going with the connections. The Google docs is really helping because they have been able to check in to see where we're at."

Carrie envisions the school developing more student choice in the future, but because of the new building opening just this year the school has had a larger say in the types of projects they are working on. Carrie recognizes that "this year we did a little more of the initial groundwork, of just saying we know some agencies and partners that were already out there, but again we would like to open it up to have more opportunities in the future." Essentially, the school has maintained some existing partnerships and partnerships that the district has established until they can better determine their ongoing needs and establish their own process for identifying new partnerships tied to project-based learning.

The school provided all teachers professional development on both project-based learning and working with partners; Carrie considers the professional development to be a critical support to promote partnerships. She also mentioned the structure of the leadership team as having a strong influence on partnerships, noting that they are still developing their leadership team but that she would like to have community partners, along with students represented to help the team focus on the needs of the school.

Overall, Carrie credits the grant with accelerating their work with partners and project-based learning. The grant funds allowed the school to extend the day, providing the common planning time structure that has provided dedicated time for partners and teachers to come together again noting, "Each grade has a different time throughout the day and the partners have been able to come into that time and really work on projects and what their expectations are and how they can bring some help."

Principal E (Jennifer): Sustaining and managing relationships

Principal E, referred to as "Jennifer" for the remainder of this chapter, serves as a principal in a suburban elementary school in New England with 714 students enrolled during the 2017-18 school year in grades K-2. Jennifer received an implementation score of 129 (high) on the survey conducted as part of this study. Jennifer has been principal in her current building for the past 3 years.

Jennifer articulated that community partners included "different people in the community who might want to partner with us to help move programs forward" and sometimes to "enrich programs that we have here in the school." She also noted that partnerships provide more resources to the school, provide opportunities for students and teachers to make real world connections, and gives other people, including parents, a sense of what's happening at the school. While Jennifer cited having community members in the school as a positive, it can also be a challenge. The principal continued on about the challenge social media has played in terms of confidentiality, specifically in terms of posting pictures of students on Facebook and Instagram.

One group in particular that works with the school in both of the capacities mentioned above is a parent group made up of mostly parents with one teacher representative and Jennifer, who participates on their board. Other partners referenced included a local business that provided STEM training for teachers and local community organizations that conducted presentations and performances for students. Jennifer noted that the STEM training was an opportunity presented to her from one of her classroom teachers, who serves on the district's vertical science team. The principal also indicated that other teachers who serve on district level teams are considered teacher leaders and

together they are established as an informal leadership team that "definitely goes out and finds these opportunities." Thus, while the principal is the main contact for the parent organization, teacher leaders in the building play a role in identifying community-based professional development opportunities.

The principal indicated that the parent group was an existing partnership when she began at the school and that they were "part of our culture here." Jennifer explained that as a new principal part of her entry plan included meeting with all the different constituencies that were already involved in the school. She met with the parents group and "got a sense of what their purpose was, what their mission was…everything that they did was to better the students here at the school." According to the organization's Website, their mission is "to foster a sense of community within the two elementary schools and to raise funds that support teachers inside the classroom as well as programs outside the classroom. [They] support the improvement of education through literacy programs, math and science enrichment programs, art and music performances, community outreach and social activities." In this case, the organization serves almost as an intermediary between the school and other local partners with the organization inviting other partners to work in the school. One example is bringing a hands-on science organization to do activities with all grade levels. Jennifer noted this partnership was also connected to the school improvement plan because the activities address the Next Generation Science frameworks. Jennifer sets aside time in the summer to meet and plan with the organization for overall themes they will address in the coming year, along with time during the school year to determine details associated with different work. Jennifer also attends all of the events the group organizes throughout the school year. With this

parent organization operating as an intermediary, clear communication and strong relationships are necessary.

Membership on the organization tends to be limited to the number of years a student is in the building, once a child moves on to the next school the parent also moves on but the organization itself remains; making the process of building relationships an ongoing commitment. During Jennifer's first year as principal, the then Board President was in her last year. The organization had managed to raise significant funds that were originally dedicated for a play area. The scope of work developed into a bigger project than the organization could handle and eventually got moved into capital projects within the city's budget, leaving Jennifer and the organization with funds to be spent. The President and the organization wanted the school to utilize the funds for technology equipment. Jennifer worked closely with the organization to remind them that the building did not at that time have Wi-Fi installed, and that the funds might be better spent on developing a computer lab that the entire school could utilize. Jennifer was able to meld the desire of the organization and the needs and constraints of the school together toward a solution that would work for the school.

Since Jennifer's tenure at the school there has been a change in leadership at the organization, but she has worked to develop new relationships with new leadership. Jennifer described a recent situation the organization and the school worked through with a presenter they did not want to invite back to the school. In this case, Jennifer noted, "they were looking to me as a leader and they wanted my leadership to help them solve this issue…I felt really good at the end of the day when I was able to help them solve that problem." She followed with, "I think working in that capacity, it just builds a closer

relationship interpersonally with them…I feel like they can trust me and they can depend on me." In addition, Jennifer noted the experience made her reflect on the school's process of vetting partners and presenters, particularly organizations and individuals that are new to the school. Furthermore, this parent organization is indicated as a key partner in the district's strategic plan to assist with a goal around increasing parental and community support and involvement. Thus, the partnership is valued at the district as well as at the school level.

Jennifer attributes having a clear purpose and open communication with partners as critical supports for managing partnerships. Specifically, she said, "you want [partnerships] to have a clear purpose and you want it to be connected to the school improvement plan, and you want it to be connected to the overall mission of the school" and "it's like building a relationship, you know building a relationship through good communication and through trust." She also stated that the ability to prioritize your time is essential. Referring back to the example of the presenter above, Jennifer summarized her process of helping to solve that issue in the following way,

> I get up really early, I read my email early while I'm having a cup of coffee, and when I saw that email I knew bingo I am on that the minute I walk through the door. So when I got here that day, the ladies were here…I said come on in we gotta figure this out…this has to be a priority today. So, sometimes you just have to prioritize really what's important and I knew I could get to the other stuff like soon enough to make the deadline. But you know I just fit it in like I fit in everything else. There is always stuff flying at you and you know you have things on your calendar

> every week that are, that are planned and you have meetings that you had penciled in then you have those little pockets of space where you might think okay today is a great day, I have this meeting, but I know that I'll get some time here that's not scheduled I can go do walkthroughs I can visit with kids, but then if something comes up that's when you fit it in. So, it's always a balancing act.

Overall, Jennifer described a partnership with a parent organization that seems to function as an intermediary between the school and the partners. This role of intermediary requires additional levels of trust. Finally, Jennifer summarized the most satisfying aspect of partnerships as "it's just the relationships with the people that are around, I think that is what makes it really fun…it's exciting to me when I see people that are able to really, it's like they're excited to partner with us. So, it's really about the relationships."

Data Synthesis

The two case vignettes provide two different perspectives on partnerships, with some commonalities and differences across them. Insights were gathered from principals' survey and interview responses, along with district and school improvement plans and other publicly available information. These cases were analyzed and synthesized to develop the findings that are presented below, organized by research question. The findings are briefly described below, with implications of the findings being addressed in Chapter 5.

Research Question One: To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?

The case study participants articulated many benefits to school-community partnerships. Their statements are connected to the emerging themes *aligning efforts and approaches* and *providing opportunities for students, staff, and community* that were presented earlier in this chapter. Ultimately, this study identified two findings associated with this research question.

Finding 1. Principals utilized partnerships that have a clear purpose and are connected to the goals of the school. This finding is connected to the *aligning efforts and approaches* theme, supported by the interview findings and the review of literature. Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017) found that students benefit the most when activities and programs are well aligned with the instructional day, while Fehrer and Leos-Urbel's (2016) research on the Oakland, CA community school model identified collaborating with partners so that they were included in school structures and process as a strategy to developing partnerships that support student outcomes. Fehrer and Leos-Urbel also indicate that by extending the role of the community partners to inside the school a deeper coherence of supports for students can be established, moving schools away from providing several different programs without any comprehensive strategy or clearly defined student outcomes.

While the case vignettes presented earlier in this chapter present two different types of partnerships – one with a number of partners focused on project-based learning and another with a local parent group – both principals cited having a clear purpose and a connection to the school improvement plan as essential to partnerships. Both case studies took different approaches to ensure connections to the goals of the school, with Carrie working with a variety of partners through project-based learning, and Jennifer working with one parent organization to identify

other partners to provide different opportunities connected to the school. Basically, principals spoke to the importance of alignment between the school and partner in order for the relationship to be established, the actual process used to establish the relationship varied between the participants.

In addition, to improve schools you have to first know what needs to be improved. In this case, principals identified whom they partnered with, why they partnered with different organizations, and what their intended outcome was. In some cases it was to enrich opportunities for students, in others it was to provide an initial opportunity for students, and in others it was to address professional development needs of teachers. These partnerships tended to be with local partners who were aware of the needs of the larger community. Thus, these principals took context and the goals of the school into great consideration when looking for ways to improve their school.

Finding 2. Principals maintained and developed partnerships that provide opportunities for students, staff, and the community. This second finding is connected to the *providing opportunities for students, staff, and community* theme. Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003) found that with shared vision and strategy, partnerships can lessen the demands made on school staff, while also strengthening community-building mindsets. In addition, Jehl, Blank, and McCloud (2001) identified the practice of building assets in the community as a by-product of school-community partnerships. Thus, partnerships are not only implemented to influence students, they are also viewed as strategies to impact the adults involved in the process.

Carrie noted that they were still in the infancy stages with developing partnerships, but that they were looking at ways to ensure partnerships were mutually beneficial to all adults, while providing support for students. In addition, her school was engaged in developing

partnerships as part of a larger project-based learning approach. She noted that herself and the teachers focused on maintaining existing school and district partnerships until they determine students and teachers ongoing needs to then identify additional partners. In this case, the partnerships are seen as an approach to provide different learning opportunities for the school, the partners, and the students, but that there is also a desire to monitor the work to ensure that the learning happening is meeting school, partner, and student needs.

Jennifer's case illustrates the role teacher leaders play in identifying professional development opportunities, while also highlighting the influence the intermediary organization plays in bringing in partners. The example Jennifer provided about not wanting to invite a presenter back to the school was originally considered a learning opportunity for students and their families ended up also being a learning opportunity for herself and the intermediary, encouraging them to think about the process they use to identify and investigate outside presenters.

Research Question Two: What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?

The case study participants provided a number of different strategies they use to develop partnerships, and these strategies are specific to different aspects of the school, such as their schedule or their culture. Data are connected to the emerging themes *sharing resources and building capital* and *developing and maintaining relationships* that were presented earlier in this chapter. This study identified two findings associated with research question two.

Finding 3. Principals built on existing structures and relationships to develop and maintain school-community partnerships. This finding is connected to the *developing and maintaining*

relationships theme**.** Fehrer and Leo-Urbel (2016) also identified collaborating with partners so that they were included in school structures and process as a strategy that supports student outcomes. The cases support that each principal utilizes their current resources and structures to develop partnerships. For example, Carrie has incorporated planning time into already existing common planning time as a strategy to help teachers and partners coordinate and plan their work. In Carrie's case, common planning time served as the structure to support partnerships because the principal had an expectation for this time to be dedicated to strengthening partnerships, as they related to specific projects. A new structure did not need be created, the principal was able to accomplish much of the intended work of partners by utilizing this already scheduled time. This allows Carrie's school the time and the structure to develop and maintain relationships.

On the other hand, Jennifer discussed the process she used to establish and then maintain her relationship with an already existing group involved in the school. In this case, the organization was already established and had a strong presence in the school, with Jennifer noting the organization was "part of our culture here." Blank and Villarreal (2015) found that the use of intermediaries to help with planning, coordination, and management can help facilitate communication among community partners and schools. Jennifer's work with the intermediary organization supports this notion. To communicate information about different events and opportunities, Jennifer noted she would send information out via constant contact, with the parent organization then publicizing the event through different social medias. Although the structures implemented by each principal are unique to the specific school, both principals relied on already established structures or relationships to develop partnerships.

Finding 4. Principals developed or maintained partnerships by building social capital within their school community. Relationships with schools need to go beyond the traditional

models of partnering with local organizations; it is the relationships and interactions that are most important (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The researchers define social capital as "the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people [that] affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust" (p. 90). These interactions and relationships are key contributors to leading schools toward *sharing resources and building capital*.

Each principal discussed partnerships within their context of the school community. Carrie spoke about partnerships as beneficial to both the school and the partners, helping both parties build their capacity through alignment of issues. At Carrie's school the example of partnering with DPW was highlighted as a partnership that helped students understand the importance of recycling, while also helped DPW expand their reach into the community. Carrie stated, "so the PDW [director] will come in and work with us in the programming because it helps their program as well. Because, then eventually, if they can reduce the trash and increase the recycling, it's a great win-win all around." Including community partners on school leadership teams has been identified as a strategy to help schools build shared leadership and trust (Blank, et al., 2003). Carrie mentioned that the school is still developing their leadership team but that she would like to have community partners, along with students represented.

At Jennifer's school working with the parent organization as an intermediary allows the organization to build their skills in coordinating different opportunities for the school. In addition, Jennifer referred to the importance of building relationships and establishing trust with the parent organization. Because of the structure of the intermediary group Jennifer works with relationship building in an ongoing process because leadership at the organization shifts by design every several years. Creating opportunities for the principal and the organization to work

through challenges together has helped Jennifer reinforce these relationships stating, "I feel like they can trust me and they can depend on me." Both cases highlight the importance of the principals' role in developing relationships, working toward alignment and coordination, and establishing trust within their context.

Research Question Three: Identifying the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships

Research question three of this study aimed at identifying the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships. In response to this concept case study participants provided a number of approaches they use to support partnerships, while also noting some of the challenges. Data is connected to the emerging theme *establishing strong public relations* presented earlier. This study identified two findings associated with research question three.

Finding 5. Principals utilized planning and prioritization as strategies to promote partnerships. There is no one solution or strategy that will be useful to every principal engaged in developing partnerships. Duffy (2003) notes that "educators and organization development specialists should not seek a 'perfect' methodology for creating and sustaining system school improvement. There is not one and there never will be one" (p. 43). Wenger (1998) suggests utilizing effective protocols to address these challenges.

Both principals established strategies to manage the time necessary to make partnerships meaningful. Carrie provides structures and supports through regularly scheduled common planning time for teachers to engage in planning with partners connected to a particular project. This work is guided by a school generated Google doc that is shared with community partners to

ensure the groups are all on the same page as the school and remain informed about the progress of the projects.

Jennifer acknowledged that you need to be able to be flexible with your own time because issues will always come up; the ability to prioritize on a daily basis is essential. She also noted planning over the summer with the intermediary organization because there are less distractions, allowing them to coordinate a big picture for work that is intended to occur over the coming school year. Being able to determine when an issue needs to be treated as a priority is a skill all leaders should concentrate on, whether it relates to partnerships or other instructional and programmatic efforts of the school.

Finding 6. Principals viewed partnerships as a way to expand the messaging of their school. Like Finding 5, this finding is connected to the emerging theme *establishing strong public relations* presented earlier. Local school authorities and community partners have different stakeholders and have different messaging structures from one another. The accountability of community organizations in meeting their goals is not usually advertised within the communities they serve, unlike accountability structures that are publicly available for public schools (Jehl, Blank, & McCloud, 2001). Partners are not often held to the same standardized test scores as indicators of success like schools are. In both cases, the principals relied on community partners to help serve as a public relations officer for the school. Principals articulated their desire to have partners in the school to provide a different view of education than the one that is often portrayed in the media. In this sense, principals utilize partnerships to give their local community a different narrative and experience. Carrie mentioned having the school highlighted as a showcase school for a birth to three partnership, with families coming out to see the school through a different lens. And, Jennifer noted that there is a misconception of

being in a K-2 building with some individuals thinking that there isn't much going on because the students are so young. She stated, "It is super busy. You know there is a lot going on and people always think oh you're in a K-2 school and it should be pretty easy. When do you have time to dust?" Both principals implied that there are not very accurate understandings of what schools and classrooms are focused on today, and how much work happens on a day-to-day basis.

Summary

In this study of principals' perceptions of school-community partnerships, data was collected via an on-line survey with follow up interviews conducted with a selected population to provide information on principals' beliefs, experiences, and thoughts about partnerships. Survey data was disaggregated by location of school (urban, suburban, or rural) and was presented by research question. Interview data was presented as emerging themes: providing opportunities to students, parents, and community; aligning efforts and approaches; developing and maintaining relationships; sharing resources and building capital; and establishing strong public relations. Additionally, two case study vignettes were developed, and then analyzed by the research questions and connected to the emerging themes. The data resulted in six findings, with implications of these being addressed and discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Introduction

The final chapter of this dissertation includes the following topics: Summary of Study, Discussion, Future Research, and Final Reflections. The summary of the study reestablishes the purpose of the study and reiterates essential points made in the first four chapters, providing context for the discussion section. The discussion section provides additional details around the six findings, along with implications associated with each of the findings. Areas for future research are also addressed in this final chapter. Lastly, final reflections from the researcher on conducting the study and the findings that emerged are provided.

Summary of Study

The context in which school leaders operate has changed significantly in the past decade due to changing needs of our society. The evolution of the public school structure in the United States has constantly struggled with the desire to reflect local, majority values with the demand to be equitable and accessible to all students. School reform models are not new, but most approaches have been focused on implementing technical solutions (doing more of the same) to solve the adaptive challenges of providing access to all students. Furthermore, the purpose of education was originally to prepare students for "life" (i.e. work in industry) and we are now seeing it change into preparing students for college (Reese, 1995). As such, the focus has shifted from manual labor (i.e. technical skills) to college readiness skills such as analysis and problem solving. While the demands of the world have changed around us the structure of our schools

has remained constant. Communities have struggled with a loss of supports for their schools, in terms of direct funding and social supports. We can no longer ask schools to be the sole educational providers for our students. Castrechini and London (2012) indicate that the development of an ecosystem that offers students different educational experiences and provide additional services to students can help address inequalities in the system. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand the role school leaders play in developing school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. This study captured data from school leaders to answer the following three guiding questions:

- To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?
- What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?
- What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?

A literature review was conducted to ground my understanding of the already existing research, which was used to shape data collection tools and protocols. The literature review focused on: benefits of collaboration, strategies used to develop school-community partnerships, and factors and conditions that support or limit school-community partnerships. In addition, the literature review provided an overview of the different structures in which schools and community organizations operate within toward a common goal of "ensuring a positive future for children, their families, and their communities" (Jehl, Blank, and McCloud, 2001, p. 13).

The literature provided numerous benefits of collaboration in terms of student outcomes and capacity building for adults. For student outcomes, benefits included improved academic performance (Johnston, et al., 2017), extended learning time (Johnston, et al., 2017),

social/emotional and youth development support (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, 2017), and access to health and wellness services (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Johnston, et al., 2017). These benefits, taken as a whole, provide students with an opportunity to have their academic needs met through a different approach while also developing a sense of belonging for students (Allensworth, Healey, Gwynne, and Crespin, 2016) and creating a focus on preventive care practices (Johnston, et al., 2017). For capacity building for adults, benefits included encouraging diverse perspectives (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppesu, and Easton, 2010), harnessing social capital (Bryk, et al., 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) and developing relational trust (Bryk, et al., 2010). Benefits for educators include opportunities to build and share knowledge with community members while keeping the focus on local, adaptable systems.

In addition, practices and structures currently used to develop school-community partnerships were explored in the literature, such as the role of community organizing and comprehensive community initiatives (CCI). Through CCIs, practices and structures that embraced school-community partnerships included strategies that were tied to communitywide investments (Maier, Daniel, Oaks, & Lam, 2017). This coordination with larger community initiatives requires thoughtful attention to context as it contributes to the sense people make of things around them (Weick, Sutcliff, and Obstfeld, 2005), including educational practice.

Finally, the role of leadership was seminal in the factors and conditions that support or limit school-community partnerships. School leadership created a system of support, established trust, and monitored progress as necessary conditions to foster school-community partnerships (Blank, et al., 2003; Bryk, et al., 2015; Gross, et al., 2015; Maier, et al., 2017) while also recognizing the challenges inherent in these actions (Perkins, 2015; Schutz, 2006). The role of leaders now includes creating relationships and trust throughout a larger (geographic and

political) area, no longer confined to within a school building, with an expectation to tap into the social capital found within their larger school community (Bryk, et al., 2015). Therefore, school leaders are tasked with improving student performance of an ever-diverse student body. In order to accomplish this singular task, school leaders must also acknowledge the roles power and privilege play within the current educational structures (Schutz, 2006).

Chapter 3 provided details on the design of the study, including data collection and analysis procedures. This multi-method research study was designed as a case study using both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected in phases. First, an electronic survey was emailed to 902 principals in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Southeastern Massachusetts. The survey remained open for a total of ten weeks, resulting in responses from 25 current school principals. Surveys were administered and analyzed through Qualtrics. The next phase of data collection included semi-structured interviews with five principals to gain a deeper understanding of principals' perceptions about school-community partnerships, how they utilized these partnerships, and to highlight lived experiences of current principals. Interview data was analyzed through theming the data. Using the recommendations from Ryan and Bernard (2003, cited in Saldana, 2011), themes were found in the data by examining qualities such as: repeating ideas, participant terms, theoretical issues suggested by the data, and what was missing or not presented in the data (p. 203). Themes were entered in Atlas.ti as a basic categorization, then exported to a password protected Excel Worksheet to allow more ease in reorganizing and categorizing themes and subthemes. Finally, subsequent to identifying themes, additional, publically available data was collected and developed into two case study vignettes.

Study findings were briefly introduced in Chapter 4, including five major themes that were identified through the study: providing opportunities for students, staff, and community;

aligning efforts and approaches; developing and maintaining relationships; sharing resources and building capital; and establishing strong public relations. The findings are addressed in detail in the Discussion section of this Chapter.

Discussion

This section reviews findings relevant to each research question, provides implications following each finding, and provides recommendations for practice.

Research Question One: To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?

Overall, principals were positive about school-community partnerships and thought partnerships could improve schools. There were two main findings about the utility of partnerships.

Finding 1. Principals utilized partnerships that have a clear purpose and are connected to the goals of the school. School goals are specific to every school; likewise partnerships and how they are utilized are based on this local context. According to the principals who responded to the survey, partnerships were ways to: create relationships, broaden and expand learning opportunities for students, and provide additional resources. Principals strongly agreed that community partners helped achieve school goals. In interviews, principals continued to reiterate the importance of partnerships aligning to school goals, expressing the need to have a clear purpose, and have partnerships connected to the day-to-day efforts of the school. Principals noted the work they put into making the partnership purposeful and connected

to school improvement plans consists of sharing plans and approaches with community partners, finding time for collaboration, and creating defining roles for partners.

Implications for educational leaders. Implications for education leaders includes the need for creating a shared strategy, aligning with school goals, and developing long-term relationships. For creating a shared vision, I found that principals in this study coordinated efforts with community partners to support students and the school as a whole. Having a shared vision and strategy between community partners and schools lessen the demands on school staff because of the shared responsibility for setting high standards and achieving accountability (Blank, et al., 2003). For aligning with school goals, I found that principals were willing to share school improvement plans and help community partners figure out where they fit in the overall plan and direction of the school. Having a coordinated plan for activities can determine success over failure in schools working with a number of community partners (Blank, et al., 2003) and aligning resources to support student outcomes require collaboration with partners so that they are included in school structures and process, and committed to a long-term relationship (Fehrer and Leos-Urbel, 2016). Finding partners who understand the structure of schools, along with how their work is connected to standards can be a challenge. Structured staff trainings and professional development for all staff (teachers and community partners) can be used to strengthen collaboration, with these collaborative trainings resulting in consistent expectations and rules, leading to an increased amount of instructional time for students (Blank, et al., 2003). For developing long-term relationships, I found that principals created structures to maintain relationships and make connections to school goals. Establishing these long-term partnerships helps with the strategic organization in that schools and partners are able to map out two or three years of supports. Creating structured roles and responsibility through memorandums of

understanding or other processes helps all parties understand what is expected of their organization over the defined time period.

Implications for community partners. Implications for community partners include being knowledgeable about school goals and having willingness to compromise. For being aware of school goals, again I found that principals articulated the benefits of partnerships when they were connected to work the school was already engaged in. Although there has been a concern about whose interests need to come first, the school or the community (Khalifa, 2012), the principals in this study were focused on their school-developed goals as a guidepost to working with partners. There is a balancing act that must be performed between schools and community partners to come to agreement and consensus about the coordination of the two organizations (Blank, et al., 2003). By being flexible and knowledgeable about the day-to-day operations of schools, community partners may have to modify their usual process to deliver their program in a way that makes the most sense within the current structure of the school.

Finding 2. Principals maintained and developed partnerships that provide opportunities for students, staff, and the community. Data collected demonstrated that principals were supportive of partnerships that provided opportunities to impact student learning in school, while also providing staff and community members opportunities to learn and grow from one another. Schools are under increasing pressure from state officials to be accountable for increasing student achievement. With these mandates, principals may be reluctant to prioritize partnerships that may not demonstrate an immediate impact on student achievement. Examples of providing opportunities for students included exposure to real-world, project-based learning. Providing opportunities for staff and community members included expanding the

capacity of these two groups so that they could then provide enhanced opportunities for students while supporting their own professional growth.

Implications for educational leaders. Implications for education leaders includes the need to view partnerships as a whole school strategy that works together to help everyone grow and learn. For viewing partnerships as a whole school strategy, I found that principals in this study utilized partnerships to provide students with hands-on, real world examples and that they placed a value on the experiences and interactions across teachers and community partners. With a shared vision and strategy partnerships can lessen the demands made on school staff, while also strengthening community-building mindsets (Blank, Melaville, and Shah, 2003). Leadership that can facilitate a shared vision, a comprehensive evaluation model and a long-range sustainability plan is needed for these partnerships to be effective (Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson, 2013). In this sense, providing educational leaders with facilitation skills to use not only among their faculty, but also across a number of organizations that are involved in the school would be beneficial. In addition, particular attention should be placed on assuring diverse perspectives are represented and served through partnerships. Organizations, including schools, need to rely on diversity of participants to lessen the possibility of becoming myopic and closed to external forces, allowing collaborations to help one another deal with their own complexity (Muijs, West, and Ainscow, 2010). Diverse perspectives can be gained from community partners if appropriate opportunities and structures exist to support outside approaches.

Implications for community partners. Implications for community partners include being knowledgeable about day-to-day operations at the school level and having a willingness to compromise. School alone can't provide all students the resources they need to be successful (Muijs, West, & Ainscow, 2010). At the same time, community partners need to recognize that

school structures are the result of a larger system of forces, institutions, individuals, goals, and expectations (Sanders, 2001). Relationships with schools need to go beyond the traditional models of partnering with local organizations; it is the relationships and interactions that are most important (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Community partners should work to integrate themselves into existing professional learning communities in the schools they partner with. The critical elements that form a learning community - reflective dialogue, sharing practices, collective focus on learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values (Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryk, 2009) – can provide a structure to support all partners within a certain school or district. Many schools have a structure to support collaboration within the school, community partners might be successful in first embedding themselves into that structure before creating a new structure specific to their program or work. While this approach encourages school to retain power over how learning is structured it may also provide the opportunity for relationships to be made that can evolve into providing students different educational experiences.

Recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice include identifying community partners and determining how to partner with community partners. In identifying community partners, school leaders in this study established or maintained partnerships with local organizations that can be easily connected to their school improvement plans and the overall goals of the school. Data collected as part of this research study indicated that principals see value in community partners as a strategy to improve schools. Principals also indicated various types of organizations they consider to be partners, ranging from parent groups to institutions of higher education. While the data collected and literature review support creating partnerships that are mindful of local context, there are some generic types of partnership organizations that principals can pursue. Principals should establish relationships within their

school community to determine which organizations parents are already accessing and trust. Many parents rely on before and afterschool care, making initial contacts with organizations providing these services may serve helpful in coordinating approaches. Other organizations such as sports, religious, and social service organizations may be appropriate partners depending on the school's overall strategy and purpose. In determining how to partner with community partners, school leaders in this study relied on coordination with partners to extend learning for students and encourage schools to tap into local resources. In addition, principals could benefit from explicit attention to facilitation strategies. The ability to facilitate conversations across a number of different organizations, as well as across staff members would help principals ensure they are aware of how the work is connected and who is responsible for various aspects across partnerships.

Research Question Two: What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?

The various ways principals develop school-community partnerships included organizing the work into already existing structures (i.e. the school schedule), maintaining relationships with current partners, and building capital for community members. This study identified two findings associated with research question two.

Finding 3. Principals built on existing structures and relationships to develop and maintain school-community partnerships. Time is a major challenge in developing school-community partnerships. Within this constraint principals articulated finding ways to build on already existing structures and relationships to further develop partnerships. While they were not necessarily able to create more time specific to working with partners, principals used time and

relationships they already had to enhance work with partners. Thus, principals worked within their current structures to develop and maintain partnerships by using common planning time for planning between teachers and partners, working with partners who were "part of the culture" of the school, and structuring the work of partners into already existing professional learning communities. Utilizing common planning time took advantage of time already set aside during the day and allowed teachers and partners to focus on how partners could be connected to the school day. There was not a need to find additional time for the work because the block of time already existed, the principals was able to dedicate the time to supporting partnerships because they were connected to the curriculum. Partners who are considered "part of the culture" of the school required a deeper focus on relationship building. In this case, activities are not necessarily incorporated into already existing schedules, rather the focus was on developing strategies to maintain the relationship through attending events hosted by particular partners and setting aside time during the summer to plan together. In addition, fitting partnerships into already existing professional learning communities allowed the principal to streamline process to avoid confusion. This approach also allowed the principal to implement a consistent process, so that teachers and partners could focus on the work and not be overwhelmed by the process. Essentially, this data indicates that developing school-community partnerships is much more of a situational process than a systemic one.

Implications for educational leaders. There is not one way to structure time and organize the work of a school principal; the individual school context is essential. School principals need to be aware of what already exists in terms of structure and partnerships when becoming a leader – partnerships that were established prior to their tenure and also district supported partnerships. While aligning partnership work to the already existing structures of the

school makes coordination easier, it may result in less of a systemic shift to creating a learning ecosystem. In many ways, working with partners has been approached as what Heifetz (1994) would define as a technical challenge, resulting in technical solutions. I believe Heifetz would argue that these challenges should be treated as adaptive, requiring adjustments, experimentation and new discoveries to come up with different solutions. Essentially, creating aligned opportunities that reflect how students learn in different ways, beyond the four walls of the school, can be enhanced through partnerships. This notion can challenge schools to give away some of the power they hold over the concept of how and when students learn causing school leaders to investigate their own immunity to change (Keegan and Lahey, 2001; Kotter, 1996).

Implications for community partners. Just as school leaders should be aware of already existing structures, community partners also need to understand the context of the school or district they are engaged with. Community partners also need to evolve their thinking, recognizing their programs will have to be modified to meet the needs and structures of different communities. The literature supports that traditional practice and approaches (i.e. technical solutions) are often at odds with unique populations served suggesting a new paradigm is needed (i.e. adaptive solutions) (Khalifa, 2012). Comprehensive community initiatives (CCI) have been introduced as potential strategies to create a bridge between schools and community organizations (Zaff, et al., 2015), however, there is a risk in remaining program focused. Community partners should also recognize the situational context they often operate in when they are focused on creating programs as opposed to systemic approaches that can become part of a learning ecosystem.

Finding 4. Principals developed or maintained partnerships by building social capital within their school community. Partnerships exist within the context of the school

community (i.e. students, parents, teachers, community members, community partners). Interview data demonstrated that principals considered partnerships to expand the idea of sharing resources beyond just funding, including areas such as partners being viewed as part of the larger school community and providing shared learning opportunities. The data demonstrate principals' interest in expanding the human capital of their school community through developing relationships, working toward alignment and coordination, and establishing trust within their context. Human capital refers to the skills and resources community members have and can bring to the school. For developing relationships, the data supports principals networking with other principals and putting themselves out in the community. For working toward alignment and coordination, principals made connections with other city agencies to align educational information with community outreach efforts, such as DPW with a focus on recycling. This particular school was able to tap into the expertise of DPW to provide information about recycling, and the DPW was able to reach out to the community in a different way, through students. For establishing trust within their context, the data supports that principals were able to establish trust with partners when they planned together or faced a challenging situation together. The ability to work through a challenge together or determine next steps of the work allowed principals to engage more closely with partners.

Implications for educational leaders. Implications for education leaders includes the need to value the social capital community partners bring to schools while also being cognizant of the power of their role perceived by community. Numerous researchers have found value for communities when they focus on building capital (Nowell and Boyd, 2014; Zaff, Donlan, Jones, & Lin, 2015). Social capital is defined as "the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people [that] affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses

of expectation, obligation, and trust" (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 90). Principals can enhance the social capital of community members by including them on school leadership teams with a focus on building shared leadership and trust (Blank, et al., 2003) and expanding the vision of what schools are and who they are responsible for (Fehrer and Leos-Urbel, 2016). These practices can provide an opportunity for schools to leverage and align services related to student outcomes. Additionally, school leaders need to be cognizant of the level of power community members perceive they have to ensure they are considerate of the role power plays in developing relationships and partnerships.

Implications of community partners. On the other hand, when partnerships are structured to build capital "community organizing builds power among members of the community, including students and parents, through relationships, leadership development, and campaigning to change school and district policies and to promote school reform" (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017, p. 52). This approach intentionally aims to distribute power beyond the school body. In addition, Ancess, Barnett, and Allen (2007) stated, "researchers do not know better, they know differently" (p. 332), this sentiment can be applied to community partners; they do not know better, they know differently. Community partners should consider the role they play in building capital within the school. This concept is addressed further in terms of finding 6, noting that principals have begun relying on community partners to help communicate positive work schools are engaged in.

Recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice include identifying short-term needs and long-term goals, and moving the partnership mindset from short-term technical help to long-term relationships. Again, the findings of this study are connected to the research in this area that supports treating partnerships as a flexible strategy, not a mandate. Each principal

identified their own processes and procedures on how they identified and promoted partnerships. Regardless of the partner, schools need to move beyond one-off community conversations and focus on building relationships. In addition, community organizations must be willing to help bridge relationships between the schools and the larger communities in which they serve. Currently, much of the work within the education sector is focused on implementing programs. In order to truly influence learning we cannot continue to be focused on finding the right programs. Instead, we need to be focused on defining the problem we are trying to solve before looking for a new program as the solution. Some approaches that can help with this shift include: reexamining current engagement strategies, looking beyond the usual suspects as potential partners (including looking to those outside of the education sector), and reestablishing the power dynamic. In order to implement these strategies, both schools and community organizations need to honestly reflect on their current practices to provide clarity on who is currently within their sphere of influence, which populations or groups are not represented, and trying new approaches (such as moving meeting locations and requesting input on setting agendas) to make the process more inclusive to meet the needs of all students and the larger community. In addition, leaders at both the school and community level need to acknowledge the necessity to transfer power back and forth (and to others who don't often have power) based on the nature and scope of the work that is trying to be accomplished.

Research Question Three: Factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships.

Principals identified time management, ongoing planning and checking in, and connections to school goals as factors and conditions that promote school-community

partnerships. Unsurprisingly, a lack of time was noted as a major challenge to creating partnerships. Ultimately, this study identified two findings associated with research question three.

Finding 5. Principals utilized planning and prioritization as strategies to promote partnerships. There is no one solution or strategy that will be useful to every principal engaged in developing partnerships, but there are effective protocols and processes that can help establish the structure to support partnerships. Survey results indicated a lack of time as a major challenge to creating partnerships, with surveys highlighting protocols and processes to help principals either make or better utilize the limited time they have. Protocols and processes to help maximize use of time included building on already existing schedules, developing tools to monitor progress, and prioritizing tasks. These strategies were reiterated in the case study, where one principal noted use of common planning time and the development of a Google doc to help connect the work and monitor ongoing partnerships, and another principal when confronted with a timing challenge prioritized the most immediate challenge at the time, holding back on other tasks that could be completed the next day but still within their deadline.

Implications for educational leaders. Implications for educational leaders include the need to establish a sense of urgency and utilize protocols to address challenges. As leaders of the building establishing a sense of urgency is essential; it is also extremely challenging. Often the balance between being able to act without being bogged down in the technical aspects prohibits the adaptive challenge to be adequately surfaced. With too much urgency, everything becomes a priority and can cause stress that limits actual action, often resulting in nothing changing (Heifetz, 1994). While not enough urgency allows people to remain status quo with a sense of complacency and an acceptance of how things have always been done (Kotter, 1996). In

addition, by making partnerships part of the priority of day-to-day school operations can help keep the work in the forefront for both the schools and the partners.

Additionally, principals should utilize effective protocols to address identified challenges (Wenger, 1998). Being able to determine when an issue needs to be treated as a priority is a skill all leaders should concentrate on, whether it relates to partnerships or other instructional and programmatic efforts of the school. Protocols to support building a shared vision, surfacing and testing mental models, and systems thinking are essential components of a learning organization that can help to invent a new learning model, one that is built on the efforts of communities (Senge, 1990). This structures requires a shift from our culture that is often fragmented and detached from the community, and may also assist in establishing a framework for a learning ecosystem.

Finding 6. Principals viewed partnerships as a way to expand the messaging of their school. Local school authorities and community partners have different stakeholders and have different messaging structures from one another. In addition, individuals tend to make judgments on schools based on published test scores, which many schools will argue does not demonstrate the depth and breadth of work they engage in every day. This notion of community partners as public relations officers surfaced in the interviews. All principals interviewed noted the benefit of having different organizations and individuals in their school to provide a counternarrative. In the case study vignettes, both Carrie and Jennifer elaborated on the benefit of having other people in the school to see and talk about the work through a different lens. Carrie noted partnerships as a way to "getting everyone involved. It's one thing there's been a lot of negative publicity in the city and things, it's like the schools stink or different ways. And, it's like, no we want lots of agencies involved to see and spread the word." Jennifer explained

the misperceptions about her position because she serves in a K-2 school, noting, "I was an assistant principal at the secondary level for a number of years and it's really no different here. The kinds of issues that you're dealing with, it's just smaller children." Overall, principals implied that there are not very accurate public understandings of what schools and classrooms are focused on today, and how much work happens on a day-to-day basis. It seems that everyone, from politicians to parents, has an opinion of various schools they have never visited, often based on test scores, not taking into account everything that happens beyond testing. Principals can use community partners as a vehicle to share a more accurate picture of their schools.

Implications for educational leaders. Implications for educational leaders include the need to encourage different perspectives, particularly community perspectives, to help them advertise the work of schools. With increased public access and scrutiny on school improvement, school districts have and need to continue to engage in public relations approaches to help share good work happing in their buildings. Providing proactive communication, tied to the values of the community (Kirschenbaum, 1999) and carried out by key communicators (Decker and Decker, 2000), are suggestions made to help principals share work beyond academics. In addition, leaders should continue to rely on parents, teachers, and community members to help them define their vision. These leaders also make resources available to teachers to support them in their work, while looking for opportunities to bring parents, teachers, and other staff members into leadership positions because they recognize that change requires a collective sum (Sebring & Bryk, 2000, p. 2). Each of these stakeholders can then tell their narrative of the good work happening in the schools they are engaged with.

Implications for community partners. Implications for community partners include the need to help push schools beyond their own vision and find new ways to share good work happening in schools. Individuals who work together for long periods of time develop shared ways of thinking (Coburn and Talbot, 2006). This shared thinking can also impact a group's ability to see beyond their own experiences when confronted with a challenge, often resulting in a preconceived solution. Community partners can help, serving as an outside set of eyes. They also use different mechanisms to tell the story of their work. In addition, in the time of eroding trust in public institutions, it doesn't matter if schools achieve improvements if the community doesn't perceive improvements are occurring (Kirschenbaum, 1999). These improvements are based on local context and values held by the community. Community partners can fulfill this role of telling the story, not only of the good work they are doing, but how it enhances the good work the school is engaged in. Furthermore, community partners' outcomes and measures of success are not generally tied to standardized test scores, giving them more freedom and flexibility in how they determine successful work within a school building.

Recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice include principals prioritizing time to create partnerships and reshaping the role of community partners in schools. Principals spoke about the value in having community partners as public relations officers for the schools. Community partners can tell a different version of the work happening in schools, by focusing on work beyond test scores. Being able to do this requires a substantial amount of trust between the school and the partner. Partnerships do not get established overnight. One of the conditions of successful partnerships is providing the time through planning and prioritization to allow relationships to be established. In addition, the longevity of partnerships will allow the school and the partners to become better coordinated, providing opportunities to build on each

other's strengths and weaknesses. Even if community partners are solely afterschool providers, providing opportunities for them to tour the school and meet with teachers and other afterschool providers can help them be more connected to the school. This requires both school leaders and community partners to think differently about where their work begins and ends. Having knowledge about the overall goals of the school, even the ones not directly connected to a partner's work, can give community partners a deeper insight into the ins and outs of the school allowing partners to provide a more holistic picture of the work of the school. On the other hand, school leaders should also be well versed in who their community partners are, what they are working on, and how the work goes beyond community involvement efforts and is connected to larger student and adult learning goals.

Future Research

This study was delimited to focus on principals in traditional public K-12 schools in selected areas in New England. Ultimately, this study intended to gather a variety of K-12 principals' perspectives on partnerships, but resulted in having a majority of elementary school principals participate. Future studies may be structured to assure more equitable representation across grade levels and geographic areas (urban, suburban, and rural) are represented. In addition, a combination of face-to-face and phone interviews were utilized because of the distance between sites and the researcher. While this study was limited in scope, future research should be focused on examining more deeply how and why principals use partnerships. The following recommendations are provided as potential future research topics to investigate how principals can use partnerships as part of a larger ecosystem of learning. The recommendations presented are centered on methodology and then content.

In terms of methodology this study should be replicated with a larger geographic sample of principals, expanded to include other stakeholders such as district staff, community partners, and students, and focused on geographic areas or grade levels. Ultimately, this study was limited to principals in traditional settings in three areas in New England. A relatively small response rate was received during the survey phase. As an approach to ensure additional respondents it may be worthwhile to approach the local Principals' Association or State Departments of Education for assistance with distributing surveys. In addition, moving the study beyond New England may provide additional information about principals' perceptions and use of partnerships within their schools. Expanding the study to include charters, private, and other school models may also provide for additional insights to be gleaned. Additionally, a study focused on the perceptions and utilization of partnerships by other stakeholders would be greatly beneficial to provide details about how individuals in their respective roles value and support partnerships. Furthermore, a study focused on a particular geographic type (urban, suburban, rural) or grade level (elementary, middle, or high) would be informative to explore specific approaches that may be unique to certain areas or grade levels.

In terms of content, additional areas of research should include further examination of the life cycle of partnerships along with a focus on the role funder's play in this work. Much of this study was focused on measuring the value of partnership and how principals develop these partnerships. Digging deeper into the role teachers and the school community play once partnerships are established would add to the literature base on when to revisit and modify partnerships once the needs of the school have evolved. In addition, many funders require school districts to partner with other local or national partners to guide and support work designed to improve schools. Designing a study that more directly investigates the funding

streams and the requirements that are tied to different funders would provide valuable information on whom funders define as community partners and what they perceive the value-add of partnership work is.

The recommendations for future research presented above are based on the key findings of this study along with limitations and delimitations in which this study was developed with in mind. Partnerships are defined in a variety of ways by principals, but they are always personal and rely on strong relationships. This study has provided some data to better understand the perceptions principals have about school-community partnerships and the numerous ways they develop these relationships.

Final Reflections

This study has provided me with a valuable experience on both a personal and an academic level. On a personal level this doctoral experience has affected the way I approach and think about educational opportunities as well as leadership approaches. There cannot be a one size fits all approach to education because everyone needs something different. Growing up with four internationally adopted siblings that message was pretty clear to me from an early age. This experience reiterated the need for different thinking and approaches to technical challenges in education. I have pushed my thinking to move toward a systems thinking approach while constantly relying on the perspectives of individuals who are mired in the day-to-day work of education, particularly school leaders. Although my role in the field remains that of leadership without authority (Heifetz, 1994), I have become a trusted collaborator to a number of districts looking for ways to partner with community organizations and how best to initiate that process. I

am extremely appreciative of the time principals spent participating in this study to share their experiences and expertise with me.

On an academic level, this study provided me with valuable information about the role principals' play in creating a learning ecosystem through school-community partnerships. According to Falk, et al. (2015), a learning ecosystem is where, "Learning happens across a wide range of settings and situations across the day and over a lifetime" (p. 199). While much of the work portrayed was situational, not systemic, principals did demonstrate attempts to move in a more systems level approach. For example, Carrie has embedded partners into the schools common planning time structure and connected their work to the school's curriculum. Utilizing community partners in an instructional capacity during the school day can be a beginning step in providing different educational experiences for students.

In addition, this study has made me question if partnerships can or should be approached in a systems manner. Overall, the findings indicate that partnerships should be used as part of a flexible, yet comprehensive, strategy, not a prescriptive mandate, with each school being mindful of their local context (Johnston, et al., 2017). Duffy (2003) also notes, "educators and organization development specialists should not seek a 'perfect' methodology for creating and sustaining system school improvement. There is not one and there never will be one" (p. 43). This study has supported and refuted my thinking in a number of areas. First of all, study participants indicated they see value in school-community partnerships, particularly in terms of student outcomes, but also for members of the larger school community, as a source of social capital. Secondly, structural supports are created at the school level to help develop partnerships, mainly focused on the coordination of efforts. And, finally, while leadership plays an essential role in this work, much of the current approach to school-community partnerships is seen as a

technical challenge. Leaders are implementing strategies to better utilize time and align content between the school and partners, as opposed to developing strategies that go beyond traditional educational expectations and measures.

Overall, this study provided compelling data about the important role principals play in creating school-community partnerships, but that they cannot do it alone, and there is still work to be done to advance this learning into an ecosystem approach. Technological advances, through the use of shared calendars and documents, can enhance the organization and coordination aspects necessary for partners to communicate. Most surprising to me was the role principals see community partners playing in terms of publicizing a different narrative about the work of the school. While this particular finding was surprising to me, the data caused me to revisit the literature reviewed to determine the prevalence of this theme in the field. Utilizing partnerships as a public relations strategy for schools was present in the literature, requiring me to add to the literature review. Essentially, a major benefit to partnerships is the counternarrative partners can provide about the school to the broader community, with this idea supported by research in the field. Additionally, the lack of research-practice partnerships and networked improvement communities were also surprising. While much of the data did support components of RPPs and NICs in particular, the structure of these collaborations may be too rigid for principals to see how they connect to their day-to-day school operations. The literature on these concepts is fairly recent and may take time to become seen as more of a school based structure than an externally focused process.

As a funder in the education sector, I have a better sense of the expectations and challenges school leaders face every day. The role of a school principal has evolved tremendously in the past several years, and it continues to morph often without any recognition

of the increased workload and decreased support. In order to best support the field of education funders need to be more connected to the nuanced workings of school buildings, not just the general practices. Funders, school leaders, and community partners all play roles in furthering the involvement and development of school-community partnerships, with partnerships allowing schools and communities to identify challenges together leading to the co-creation of possible solutions. Establishing meaningful partnerships require the concepts of trust, power, and leadership to be reexamined by both schools and community partners, with a constant ebb and flow among the two groups. Knowing when to take the lead and when to take a backseat can strengthen partnerships allowing for more opportunities for students to learn in different ways. Ultimately, collaboration and partnerships, while difficult to develop and maintain, are important components that can lead schools beyond technical solutions to creating a learning ecosystem that values the expertise of both school personnel and community partners.

Appendix A: Letter Requesting Participation and Interview Consent Form

Good morning,

I am a doctoral candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA and would like to invite you to complete a survey that is focused on the role Rhode Island principals play in school-community partnerships. Your perspective as a principal is critical to all educational research studies. This survey will help to develop an understanding of: 1) the time principals take to foster partnerships, 2) the value principals see in partnerships, and 3) the supports and challenges associated with partnerships.

I recognize that there are multiple demands on your time, and with that in mind I respectfully ask for your cooperation in helping me complete this study. Please click on the link below to bring you to the survey. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. All survey data will be aggregated, and your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. The findings from the research will be published in my dissertation, and will become part of the repository of research on school-community partnerships as a mechanism to create a learning ecosystem.

As a follow-up, I may ask you, along with any community partners you have identified, for an interview that will be about 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Five to seven principals will be selected for a follow up interview. For interview data, pseudonyms will be used and all identifiers will be removed.

If you have any questions, please contact me at ldimart2@lesley.edu or (401) 368-1863, or my faculty supervisor Dr. Stephen Gould at sgould2@lesley.edu.

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu

Sincerely,

Lisa DiMartino

Lisa DiMartino
PhD Candidate
Lesley University
Ldimart2@lesley.edu

Follow this link to the Survey:
${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
${l://SurveyURL}

Interview Consent

Dissertation Research:
The Role of School Leaders in Creating a Learning Ecosystem
Through School-Community Partnerships

This study, designed and facilitated by Lisa DiMartino, is being conducted as part of the requirements of Lesley University's Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of school leaders in improving school-community partnerships to create a learning ecosystem. There is potential for this study to influence educators and community organizations to better coordinate partnerships to support learning. Findings of this study may inform the leadership development for principal candidates and community organization processes and procedures about how to better facilitate relationships. This case study will include surveys and selected follow up interviews. Case studies may also include data from artifacts and other relevant supplemental materials. Individual follow-up interviews may be scheduled as needed to review and confirm data collected by the researcher.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary and there is no compensation for participating in this interview. The benefit of participating in this research is to provide information useful in understanding the role school leaders play in creating a learning ecosystem through school-community partnerships. There are no known risks associated with participation in this project. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may cease participation at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.

You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at any time before or during this research. The researcher's contact information, as well as the researcher's senior advisor's and Lesley University's IRB contact information appear below. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Sincerely,

Lisa DiMartino

Lisa DiMartino
PhD Candidate
Lesley University
Ldimart2@lesley.edu
401-368-1863

Dr. Stephen Gould
Senior Advisor
Lesley University
sgould2@lesley.edu

For Participants: I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

_____ _____ _____

Date Participant's Signature Print Name

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

Appendix B: Instrumentation (Survey and Questionnaire)

This survey provides principals an opportunity to share information about school-community partnerships. Participants will be asked about the role partnerships play in their buildings to improve school, how partnerships are currently being used, and the factors and conditions that support or inhibit partnerships. This survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements are important to you as a building principal.

	Importance (Value to you)			
	Not at all	**Slightly**	**Moderately**	**Essential**
Services provided by community partners help to achieve school goals				
Services provided by community partners help to achieve student learning goals				
Community partners provide resources that impact adult learning in my school, including as a professional development provider				
Community partners provide resources that impact student learning in my school				
Community partners are a resource for impacting student relationships within the school (e.g. they provide opportunities and structures for student to student and teacher to student relationships)				
Community partners are a resources for impacting student relationships outside of the school (e.gl they provide opportunities and structures for students to develop relationships with individuals in the community)				
Community partnerships are a resource to provide enhanced social services				
Community partnerships are a resource to provide mental health services				

In the space below please explain the reasons you consider developing school-community partnerships to be of essential or slight value.

In the space below, please list the various ways you currently develop school-community partnerships.

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements are important to you and to what extent they are practiced in your school.

	Importance (Value to you)				**Frequency (of practice)**			
	Not at all	**Slightly**	**Moderately**	**Essential**	**Never**	**Seldom**	**Some of the time**	**Most of the time**
Time is regularly scheduled between school leadership and community partners								
School-level funding is allocated to community partners for services provided								
School resources, such as use of facilities, are allocated to community partners for services provided.								
The principal communicates the school's vision for student learning								

with community partners								
The school has a policy that outlines expectations for community partnerships								
The school has an MOU process to articulate roles and responsibilities for community partnerships								
Programs and services are coordinated between the school and community partners								
Students have flexibility to choose different services provided by community organizations								
The schools builds consensus with community partners around school priorities								
Community partners provide opportunities for students to enhance their learning								
Community partners provide								

opportunities for remediation for students								
Community partners have influence on developing school priorities								
Community partners are a valued part of the school community								
Community partners are a trusted part of the school community								
Professional development designed to help develop community partnerships is provided for myself								
Professional development designed to help develop community partnerships is provided for my staff								

Overall, how would you rate your effectiveness in the implementation of practices that support school-community partnerships?

Not as effective as I would like to be	Slightly effective	Somewhat effective	Highly effective

Please describe the factor and conditions that promote your efforts as a principal to create school-community partnerships. Please list as many factors or conditions you can think of.

Please describe the factor and conditions that inhibit your efforts as a principal to create school-community partnerships. Please list as many factors or conditions you can think of.

Survey Questions

- On average throughout the school year, what percentage of your time do you spend on the following:
  - Rough estimates are sufficient.
  - Please write a percentage in each row. Write 0 if none.
  - Responses should add up to 100%

a) Internal administrative tasks, including human resource/personnel issues, regulations, reports, school budget __%
b) Curriculum and teaching-related tasks, including teaching, lesson preparation, classroom observations, mentoring teachers __%
c) Student interactions, including discipline and academic guidance __%
d) Parent interactions, including formal and informal interactions __%
e) School-community partnerships __%
f) Other (Please specify: _____.) __%
g) Total __%

- In a situation you consider ideal what percentage of your time would you spend on the following:

a) Internal administrative tasks, including human resource/personnel issues, regulations, reports, school budget __%
b) Curriculum and teaching-related tasks, including teaching, lesson preparation, classroom observations, mentoring

	teachers	__%
c)	Student interactions, including discipline and academic guidance	__%
d)	Parent interactions, including formal and informal interactions	__%
e)	School-community partnerships	__%
f)	Other (Please specify: _____.)	__%
g)	Total	__%

- Which, if any, of these strategies do you use to promote partnerships with community organizations? (Select all that apply.)
    - On-going planning and checking in with partners
    - Awareness of different programs and services being offered
    - Shared vision and mission
    - Goals and outcomes developed in partnership
    - Connection to district priorities
    - Abundance of community partners to draw on
    - Promote a personal sense of belonging to the community
    - Creation of roles and responsibilities between the school and partner

- Which, if any, of these obstacles have limited partnerships with community organizations. (Select all that apply.)
    - Lack of time
    - Insufficient funding
    - Competing vision and mission
    - Turnover of school staff
    - Turnover of partner staff
    - Model too difficult to implement
    - Not a district priority
    - Lack of community and parental support
    - Limited number of partners
    - Too many partners

In the space below please explain what would help you to be more effective in developing school-community partnerships.

Additional survey questions

Please share some of the types community organizations you consider to be partners. (Select all that apply.)

- ❑ Public Library
- ❑ Social service organizations (public and private)
- ❑ Professional development non profit organizations
- ❑ Athletic organizations
- ❑ Arts organizations
- ❑ Youth development non profit organizations
- ❑ Universities/Colleges
- ❑ City municipalities
- ❑ Museums
- ❑ Faith-based organizations
- ❑ Other (Please specify: _____.)

Which best characterizes the grade level of your school?

Elementary Middle High Other:

Which best describes the location of your school?

Urban Suburban Rural

How long have you been the building principal at this school?

Less than 1 year 1-3 years 4-7 years over 7 years

You may be asked to participate in a 45- to 60-minute interview based on the results of this survey. In addition, organization(s) you have identified as partners may also be asked to participate in a site visit and interview. Please indicate your willingness to participate below.

- ❑ I am interested in participating in an interview.

Please provide contact information below:
Email:
School:
Phone:

Interview Protocol – School Leaders

Researcher Consent: Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I will be recording our conversation during this interview. Please know that all of your responses will remain anonymous and will be kept confidential. There is no compensation for your participation and you may opt out of this interview at any time.

Organizing question: To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?

My first questions are around your perceptions and beliefs about school-community partnerships.

1. What comes to mind when you hear school-community partnership?
2. What do you see as the value in a school community partnership?
3. Have you experienced disadvantages to in these partnerships? What are they?

Organizing question: What are the various ways principals develop school-community partnerships?

This next set of questions is on the specific role you play in developing partnerships.

1. Describe a great partnership and what you did to create, foster, or grow it.
    a. How did you identify an appropriate or potential partnership?
    b. Where did funding come from?
    c. What were the strengths you brought to the partnership? Were there weaknesses you were looking to strengthen through the partnerships?
    d. What were the intended outcomes of this work?
    e. How did you measure your outcomes?
    f. Was there a formal or informal process for evaluating or monitoring this partnership? If so, how was this developed?
2. Describe an effort specifically around community partnerships that went wrong and why you thought it did. In your opinion, what could have made the effort more successful?
3. What is/has been the process you've followed in creating school-community partnerships? (i.e., do you approach them, do they approach you, formal partnership agreements?)
4. What kinds of resources (time, money, facilities) does your school contribute to supporting school-community partnerships?
    a. Is the amount of support adequate, too much, or not enough?
5. How do you communicate with your staff, students, and community about different partners and what they offer? Would you be willing to share some of the documents or resources that you use?
6. Is your district in support of establishing and fostering school-community partnerships? How was this support evident?

Organizing question: What do school leaders indicate are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit school partnerships with community organizations?

These final questions are about the overall conditions that have helped or limited you in your ability to develop partnerships.

1. What are the most critical supports necessary in order for partnerships to take place? Are these supports readily available to you? Why/why not?
    a. Do you think your school's physical location supports partnerships?
2. What obstacles have you encountered that have limited your efforts to promote partnerships? Do you have thoughts on how to minimize these obstacles?
    a. Do you think your school's physical location creates obstacles to creating partnerships?
3. Please describe one or two highly satisfying experiences in developing school-community partnerships.
4. Please describe one or two least satisfying or challenging experiences in developing school-community partnerships.

Appendix C: IRB approval

Lesley UNIVERSITY

29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel 617 349 8234
Fax 617 349 8190
irb@lesley.edu

Institutional Review Board

DATE: 12/15/17

To: Lisa Dimartino

From: Robyn Cruz & Dr. Ulas Kaplan, Co-Chairs, Lesley IRB

RE: **IRB Number: 17/18 - 025**

The application for the research project, "The Role of School Leaders in Creating a Learning Ecosystem Through School–Community Partnerships" provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

Date of approval of application: 12/15/17

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.

Appendix D: Survey Questions aligned to Research Questions

The matrix outlines questions as they relate to the overarching research questions. The first questions were dedicated to providing an overview of the survey, including IRB information, and participant acknowledgement of consent.

	RQ1. To what degree do school leaders think school-community partnerships will improve schools?	RQ2. What are the various ways principals currently develop school-community partnerships?	RQ3. What are the factors and conditions that promote or inhibit the efforts of principals to create school-community partnerships?
Q3.	X		
Q4.	X		
Q5.		X	
Q6.		X	
Q7.		X	
Q8.			X
Q9.			X
Q10.		X	
Q11.		X	
Q12.			X
Q13.			X
Q14.			X

Question 15 was used to identify different types of organizations schools consider partners. The next set of questions (16-18) were used to gather demographic information (grade level, location, and years in their current building). Question 19 inquired about additional participation in a survey, with Question 20 used to gather contact information for those indicating a willingness to participate.

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