

**Creating School/University Partnerships to Enhance Leadership Preparation and School
Success: Sustainability Factors, Barriers, and Benefits**

by

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Abstract

Over ten years ago, universities and colleges were mandated to form partnership with their surrounding k-12 school districts as part of the redesign of educational leadership preparation programs for the purpose of strengthening educational leaders in schools and increasing student achievement. Programs revamped under those guidelines have been through at least 8 years of collaborative activities. Many educational leaders produced by the newer program have matriculated to graduate, been placed as assistant principals, advanced to be principals and are impacting schools as the educational leaders. The investigator in this study examined the efforts of one university to form partnership with its neighboring school districts. The researcher sought to discover the facilitative or impeding factors in maintaining strong partnership and measure the beneficial outcomes of the partnership.

Social connections have been created by the involvement and commitment of the leaders and members. The sustainability and growth of the partnership relies upon the efforts of all those involved, but especially those of a clinical educator. Beyond the necessary human relationships and contributions, there has been the facilitating factor of open and regular communication to minimize or overcome the potential hindrances of funding, time constraints, proximity, number of partners, changes in staff members, and/or resistance to engage, so the partnership can thrive as an entity for moving all stakeholders toward one or more important outcomes. The noted benefits of this partnership include: higher quality leadership students, data to inform program curriculum, job placement opportunities for graduates, professional development

opportunities/increased resources, professional networking, increased achievement in k-12 students, and an increase in quality of instructional leaders.

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Though it is cliché, no other description does justice to my experience than to refer to it as a journey. I would say that this is a beautiful culmination of what has been an awesome, educational career. It is almost breath-taking to me to allow my mind to wonder through the years of educational experiences I have had and the people who have molded my life along the way. I am keenly aware that what I have learned and from whom I have learned has shaped who I am.

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CHAPTER I. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Accountability efforts in most states and the nation are putting public schools under extensive scrutiny (Ujifusa, 2014). Publicized poor math and reading scores over the last decade or more seem to give attention to student achievement which in turn spurred a revised accountability model for K–12 education (Murphy, 2001). The requirements within the newest law in which this study occurred ask that school districts be at or above proficiency level in educational markers such as graduation rate, standardized test scores, and college and career readiness standards (Alabama Accountability Act 2013- S. Res. 2013-64:HB-84, 2013). State law-makers created criteria for improved student achievement in schools where an abundance of learners are not succeeding when measured by the new standards (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001). One of the most important elements in student and school success is the quality and type of leadership in the school. Actual classroom instruction is the only school-associated cause of improved student learning that surpasses the relationship of strong leadership on student learning (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Walhstrom, 2004; Reames, 2010). This makes it imperative that school leaders have the skills, abilities, and attitudes needed to provide effective leadership.

Many administrator preparation programs were not adequately training principals who could lead enhancement in teaching and learning. In the past, grooming of school leaders was heavily loaded with foundational coursework, a small amount of developmental topics, and

occasional technology courses. The duties of a school leader have morphed from managerial in nature to those of an instructional specialist and collaborative team builder. Today's principals must be, not only knowledgeable, but proficient in sharing or distributing leadership duties among school staff to promote instructional leadership aptitude (Shelton, 2010).

This shift in educational leadership role is connected to expanded accountability mandates at the national and state levels which brought with them increased expectations regarding what schools must accomplish in terms of student learning and academic outcomes. As a systemic emphasis on standards-based accountability became the nationwide focal point, revised standards for educators naturally evolved (Lashway, 2003). Prior to this change, recruitment and preparation programs for those interested in becoming educational leaders were not aligned with the newly enhanced anticipations. The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) put forth a set of goals in their efforts to help educators meet the changing demands. SREB established as Goal 9: "Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance—and leadership begins with an effective school principal" (SREB, 2006, p. 1). More recently, many states have adopted the restructured 2008 ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) standards. These updated guidelines are anchored in practices connected to improving student achievement and to supporting school leaders in making necessary changes in their leadership approach and in enhancing student learning and school success (The Wallace Foundation, 2009).

As a response to the call, several colleges and universities were invigorated to revamp the design of their educational leadership programs (Shelton, 2010). Among the needed criteria, according to Shelton (2010), were: a reflection of statewide leadership standards, an integration of effective leadership practices and real-world problems, an emphasis on instructional

leadership, an integration of theory and practice, authentic school-based experiences, evaluations of mastery of content knowledge and skills, an evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and a creation of partnerships between universities and school districts.

A Request for Proposals was issued by the Wallace Foundation to restructure the principal preparation programs in universities and colleges in which eighteen states were awarded grants (The Wallace Foundation, 2005). Although Alabama applied and was not chosen to receive a grant to assist in the restructuring endeavor, the governor called together the Governor's Congress of 2004 to address the need for educational reform to improve school leadership in the state. Integrated efforts from the State Superintendent of Education and the Governor's Congress on the Redesign of Instructional Leadership Preparation Programs established a conduit for change (Reames, 2010).

The Congress members were chosen from educators and legislators from throughout the state, as well as representatives from the Southern Regional Education Board. The members were made aware of their mission to improve school leadership in the state and were assigned to serve on five Task Forces (Reames, 2010). From the suggestions of these committees a report was generated and submitted to the Office of the Governor and the State Board of Education for approval. The report included important expectations of new instructional leadership candidates to complete a program covering all Standards for Instructional Leaders. As part of these newly proposed guidelines, there was a requirement that all programs engage in K-12/university partnerships to guarantee the program stay grounded in reality and that there be a good balance of theory and practice (Fry, Bottoms, O'Neill, & Walker, 2007).

Upon approval of new standards and curriculum guidelines, an invitation to pilot the new aspects of the design was extended to all the colleges and universities that had educational

leadership preparation programs. Applications were made by 13 institutions to be included in the pilot project. Of those, four institutions were chosen as redesign pilots for the state. As part of the redesign effort, each of the pilot universities partnered with one or more public school systems in their region. This study looks at the labors of one university and its surrounding school districts to form partnerships with which to strengthen and/or improve leadership in schools.

Statement of the Problem

When universities were mandated to redesign educational leadership preparatory programs to include partnership activities, the guidelines for accomplishing such a request were not explicit. Though the College of Education at Landmark University (pseudonym for the university studied) had previously utilized partnerships with area K–12 school districts, none existed specifically for the purpose of enhancing school leadership quality. Some factors acted as catalysts and others as barriers as the two organizations strove to merge ideas to establish common goals and collaborate to structure a “new” program. Since implementation, the partnership has evolved and sustained.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the creation, implementation, and sustainability of a university/school partnership focused upon enhancing educational leadership preparation. There was an examination of the factors that contributed to the creation and sustainability of the partnership and an exploration of what factors hindered the processes. There was an investigation to identify the outcomes and benefits of the initiative for the individuals and organizations involved. The researcher sought to explore if the effects of the partnership were

being realized as intended and find where this partnership fits on a typology of partnerships continuum.

Context

Landmark University, a pseudonym for the subject university, is located in a small southern town with a population of 53,380 in 2015. The surrounding school districts are predominantly smaller, rural-area school systems. An advisory council was formed as the answer to a state mandated requirement to involve partners in the major program redesign of all university and college principal preparation programs. The council began with seven neighboring districts that became partners as part of the university's leadership preparation program redesign in 2005. Since then, eight additional districts have partnered with the university.

The research was conducted in the summer and fall of 2015 which is eight years after the first, formally established, K–12 partnership focused on strengthening leadership preparation and impacting student achievement in K–12 schools was formed at this institution. Since systemic changes take 3–5 years to be completely incorporated (Fullan, 2008), it is not only appropriate, but perhaps optimal timing to evaluate the effectiveness of this partnership process.

Research Questions

The study addressed three questions:

1. What served as facilitators to the creation, implementation, and/or sustainability of the partnership as perceived by partnership participants?
2. What factors do partnership participants perceive as hindrances to the development, implementation, and/or sustainability of the partnership?

3. What benefits, improvements in educational leadership preparation, and/or student achievement outcomes have been realized through partnership involvement as perceived by partnership participants?

Conceptual Framework

The case study is based on the typology for innovative partnerships identified by Bruce G. Barnett and his associates (2010) to include: 1) independent agencies, 2) vendors, 3) collaborative, 4) symbiotic, 5) spin-offs, and 6) new organizations. The typology is organized on a vertical axis with the most simple at the top and progressing to more complex towards the bottom. The level of complexity is based upon the amount of interdependence the organizations have. The researcher sought to compare the perceptions of those involved in this partnership with the types of innovative partnerships described by Barnett et al. (2010). A brief description of each type of partnership in this conceptual framework is given below.

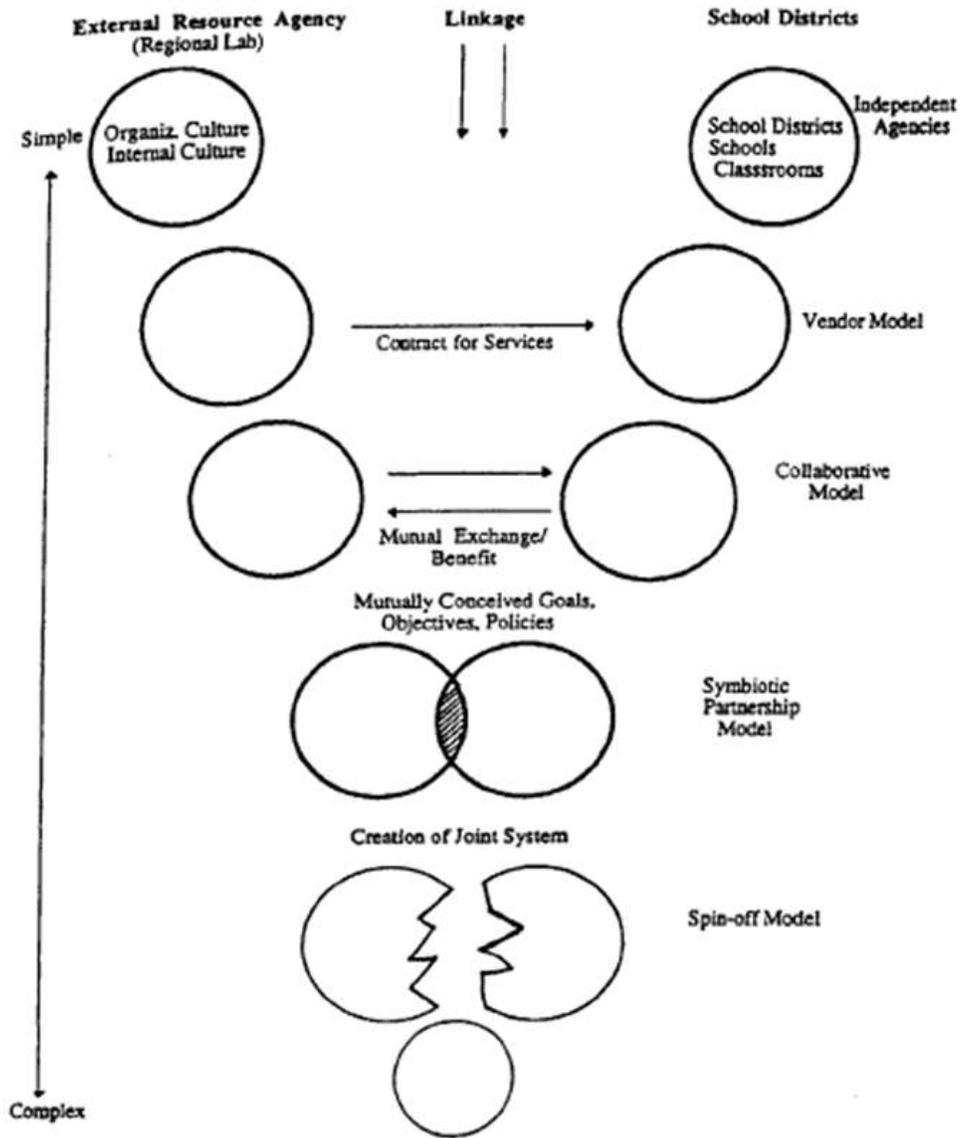
Independent is when no partnership is created. The school system and the educational leadership program would remain independent and autonomous. Each would operate the own organizations and utilize their own resources to achieve their goals.

Vendor Model is an exchange of goods for services. Once the terms of the agreement/contract have been fulfilled, the agreement ends.

Collaborative Model is the most familiar model of partnership. This model is more advanced than the vendor as the interdependence of the participating parties become more complex. Each partner stands to benefit from the collaboration but the purpose, goals, and duration of the partnership are less defined than in previous types of partnerships. They do have the greatest chance for success and sustainability due to their heavy reliance upon previous trust proven in past relationships.

Symbiotic Model is one that progresses beyond mutual gain to compounding gain as it evolves from an existing collaborative model. In this model, deeper trusts have been established from past collaborations. Barnett et al. describes symbiotic partnerships as strongly reliant on the people involved and their relationships.

Spin-off Model happens when a partnership acquires so much force that it forms a new organization. This may occur because of a newly desired purpose and goals or be a politically motivated decision.



From Barnett, B. G., Hall, G. E., Berg, J. H., & Camarena, M. M. (2010). A typology of partnerships for promoting innovation. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20, 10–36.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Creation of a New Organization

Methods

Because this study looked at the perceived experiences of those that participated in a university/K–12 partnership, a qualitative methodology was selected for this study. One of the primary functions of a case study is to capture the complexity of a single case in the naturalistic

setting (Creswell, 2007). With case studies, emphasis is placed on the object of the case (Stake, 1998), in this study, the university/school district partnership. What, how, and why something is happening are questions explored using qualitative research which entails thorough investigation to glean a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). This researcher used the participants' experiences and stories to give expression and awareness to the perceptions and meanings they have constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More exhaustive details of the collection and analysis processes are given in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

There has been very little research done to explore the development and sustainability of school/university partnerships in educational leadership programs and the degree to which they are fulfilling their intended purpose to inform and improve school leadership practices. The subjects of this study are in the ninth year of partnership activities which should allow adequate longevity for implementation and sustainability processes to be studied (Fullan, 2008). Gaining insight into the development and implementation processes, the effectiveness of the partnership practices and the barriers and facilitators to the initiative should be of value to other educational leadership graduate programs and to anyone seeking to create similar partnerships in other fields.

In addition, as future challenges arise to be met by district school leaders, it will be helpful to have a deeper grasp of how joint ventures with universities may be capitalized upon as valuable resources to them. This research will add to the literature on this topic and should serve to inform the educational leadership field.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that narrow the scope of a study. The following were delimitations of this study:

1. The study only investigated the partnership of one university with its neighboring school districts.
2. Subjects included only university and school district personnel that were available to provide information about the partnership process.
3. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Assumptions

The researcher made the following assumptions regarding this study:

1. Each participant is an active member, or was an active member, of the partnership process.
2. Participants were comfortable enough to answer all inquiries about the partnership process truthfully.
3. Participants were familiar enough with the partnership process to answer the inquiry questions.

Definition of Terms

Educational Leader – refers to the lead administrator in a school or district who has gained the needed skills to effectively lead a school/system by completing a preparatory program and holding leadership certification from the state department of education.

Leadership Coach – A position coined by the partnership that refers to someone in the K–12 school district that mentors graduate leadership students during their clinical internship at the district school.

Leadership Preparation Program – refers to an educational plan of study which prepares graduate students for degrees/certifications in educational leadership.

Partnership – an alliance of resources and expertise between organizations (Barnett, Hall, Berg, & Camarena, 2010, pp. 14–15) to achieve a mutually desired outcome, one that is not likely to be realized without the involvement of both agencies.

Transactional Leadership – A (managerial) leadership style that focuses on rules, procedures, and job descriptions to accomplish the organization’s goals and expectations (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Transformational Leadership – An (instructional) leadership style in which the leader seeks to inspire and empower members of the organization to focus on a common vision and to take ownership of the change process through a collaborative approach (Sergiovanni, 2007).

University/K-12 Partnership – defined for the purpose of this study as the partnership between a higher education leadership preparatory program and local, K–12 school districts.

Summary

This chapter presented an introduction to the study, its purpose and the context, the conceptual framework of the study, research questions investigated through the research, the significance of the inquiry, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions of key terms. The next chapter is a review of the literature examining the foundational background information and current practices of school leaders to affect student achievement, an inspection of some benefits, facilitators, and barriers of school/university partnerships that are pervasive in literature, the appeal for a redesign of leadership preparation programs, and an account of how a university interpreted the redesign model, incorporated researched, best-practices in their design, and implemented the newly reconstructed preparation program. Chapter 3 provides the design of the study, description of the participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the data analysis design. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the results of the data analysis. The final

chapter, Chapter 5, contains a summary of the researcher's findings from this study, discussion about the discoveries, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate creation and development of a partnership program between an educational leadership program in higher education and K–12 school districts, which focused on enhancing leadership preparation and school success. The school/university partnership was part of the state-wide redesign process for principal preparation programs in Alabama’s universities and colleges. The researcher sought to determine which elements of the partnership act as catalysts, what barriers the partnership has encountered, and what the beneficial outcomes of the partnership are. Specifically, the researcher was interested in any perceived benefits of improved educational leadership and/or higher student achievement in the partnered K–12 school districts.

This chapter presents a review of the literature related to university/school partnerships as a pathway for change in the methods of principal preparation and in turn, its potential effects on student learning and student outcomes. The research done on model school leadership preparatory programs underscores the profound impact that K–12 school districts can have in the development of the programs to more effectively prepare graduates ready to lead schools (Orr, King, & LaPointe, 2010).

There are five sections in this chapter. In the first section the researcher provides a historical context of the evolving paradigm of school leaders and their importance to student learning outcomes. Section two deals with suggested practices for improving educational

leadership preparation. In the next section, the researcher provides a review of the use of partnerships in education toward improving leaders in schools. Section four reviews the call for redesign of principal preparation programs in universities and colleges with reference to the importance of utilizing partnerships in that redesign process. Finally, an account of how Landmark University, the study university, interpreted the redesign model, incorporated research of best-practices into their design, and implemented the newly designed preparation program completes the literature review as section five.

The Importance of School Leaders on Schools and Student Outcomes

Changes being requested for leadership in our schools developed from reform efforts in American education. Condemnation of the quality of American education programs and the impact they had on student outcomes was spawned from many accounts of education that stressed a lack of quality and dismal student performance (Marzano, 2003). For example, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Council for Excellent in Education, 1983) outlined a plea for restructuring American schools. Likewise, the *Leaders for America's Schools* (National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987) described the need for reform in the preparation of school leaders in America.

Serious inquiries by the public about the effectiveness of schools were further highlighted by landmark legislation and significant court cases. Much of our nation was at odds about educational opportunities for children of color. Four state level cases emerged from unsettlement over the idea of legally segregated schools in our nation which included *Belton v. Gebhart* (Delaware), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (Virginia), *Briggs v. Elliot* (South Carolina), and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (Washington, DC). This struggle was the central focus of a class action lawsuit filed in Kansas in the fifties (Rossell, Armor, & Walberg, 2002). Once

the class action lawsuit made it to the Supreme Court, the four previous cases were added to it (Bryant, 2015). In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decision in *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS) et al. (Brown v. Board of Education)* was one of the first, and perhaps the most significant, turning points in American education. This landmark decision denounced the idea of “separate but equal” and opened the doors for school integration (Wiles, 2005). However, the full integration of Blacks and Whites into equal educational facilities and opportunities continues to be a struggle today.

Nearly fifty years following this focus on assuring that all races have a right to high quality education, No Child Left Behind (2001) provided provisions that EVERY child is entitled to accessibility to the same educational opportunities as all other children and that ALL children should be prepared to enter college or the workforce upon leaving school. This legislation was an effort to level the academic arena for all populations in educational settings, but had language specific to addressing the protection of students with disabilities. Although additional accountability legislation has continued to be implemented at the state and national levels, this goal remains elusive and achievement gaps between whites and minority children continue to be a major issue (Bryant, 2015).

As scrutiny of American education grew, the state and federal governments have become increasingly involved. Federal spending on education increased at an explosive rate from the mid-1960s until early 2000s (McCluskey, 2004). More recently, the trend is to hold school districts to a higher accountability to perform and to examine strategies that produce desired results (Marx, 2006). Guidelines have been tightened causing states to compete against each other for available funding. To be eligible for government financial support, states are required to create and implement new policies related to low performing schools, often requiring districts

to terminate current school leaders and employ new ones (Center for American Progress, 2010). State legislative action has created a priority for higher student achievement in schools where many students are not meeting the new standards (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). With heightened concentration of accountability for successful student outcomes and the responsibility to ensure that schools perform being placed upon school leaders, principals are being asked to consider their role as leaders in a new way.

The Effects of Leadership in Schools

School boards are faced with the challenge of hiring talented, well-prepared leaders to guide schools during these times when public schools are under high levels of scrutiny and high expectations are placed upon them. Encouraging high standards of teaching and rigorous goals for student success through change initiatives is fundamental for current school leaders focused on school improvement (Orr, 2006). In addition, thousands of schools will be opened in response to unprecedented enrollment increases and migration toward charter and small schools, generating a need for more principals prepared to lead them (Harris, 2006). With this new synergy around accountability and growth in numbers of available positions to be filled, comes an opportunity to closely examine the meaning of educational leadership and train an improved group of leaders that will be prepared to craft higher-performing schools (SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program, 2009).

Effective instructional leadership has been shown to be the basis for successful teaching and learning in schools (Graham, 2007; Levine, 2005). Leaders are in the positions to have substantial constructive effects on student learning (Waters, Marzano, & McNully, 2003; Young, Crow, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009), second only to classroom teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004). Researchers have been able to identify a particular set of skills school leaders need to possess

and practice that have the potential to favorably impact student achievement (SREB, 2009). In the past, investigators had failed to clarify how certain abilities directly relate to desired outcomes, making it difficult to capitalize upon the information (Donmoyer, Yennie-Donmoyer, & Galloway, 2012). This fact was long ago addressed by Hallinger and Heck (1996) who wrote, “Although at the hortatory level there is little disagreement concerning the belief that principals have an impact on the lives of teachers and students, both the nature and degree of that effect continues to be open to debate” (p. 6).

Near the start of the new millennium, Fullan (2001) purposed, “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community” (p. 50). This declaration definitely places responsibility for student outcomes on school leaders. Principals need the capacity to grasp and anticipate changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, then use this information to inform decisions about providing professional development, policy formation, technology needs, and available resources that are congruent with the needs of the school, community, and district (Graham, 2007). Current trends of higher standards as measured by student achievement scores, the dispersal of decision making in schools, joined with the push for school-based leadership, places increased accountability upon the school leader (Harris, 2006).

Characteristics of a Successful School Leader

Scholars and political leaders have debated about what identifies a school as being successful or a leader as being effective and by what measure to confirm that. High-stakes learning situations have been created by officials at state and national levels. This has inherently placed pressure on school districts that perform poorly on standardized testing and caused a rise

in public inquiry (Kohn, 2004). Current school leaders face the contemporary tasks of improving tests scores while maintaining all the traditional tasks of running the school smoothly and being attentive to the needs of students, parents, and other stakeholders (Fullan, 2007).

Among the most prominent type of leadership strategies employed are transformational and transactional. Transformational leaders share decision-making and leadership with other administrators, faculty, and staff about effective curriculum development and instructional practices (Sergiovanni, 2007). Transactional leaders concentrate on providing a safe, environment favorable to learning through daily management of the school's resources. They tend to concentrate on "running" the school rather than fostering environments for discovery and learning.

Striking balance between leading and managing organizations has become the emphasis in describing what it takes to be a strong school leader. Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) offered this bifocal manifestation of leadership,

Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about established agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions. Our general definition of leadership highlights these points: it is about direction and influence. Stability is the goal of what is often called management. Improvement is the goal of leadership. But both are very important. One of the most serious threats to stability in a school district is frequent turnover in the ranks of superintendents, principals, and vice principals. Instability at the school level often reflects a failure of management at the district level. (p. 9)

The most effective way to achieve success for the students, the school, and district is for the principal to be a strong instructional leader and manager (Fullan, 2007). This description of leadership recognizes the goal of leadership as school improvement and student success. It is important to remember however, that while leaders must strive to assure that their schools are fostering student success, the school leader must also satisfy accountability requirements imposed by state and federal guidelines to improve student achievement, school leaders must also strive for efficiency in budgeting; curriculum and staffing decisions; acquiring and utilizing meaningful and timely data; promoting purposeful professional development; and securing sufficient resources (Shelton, 2010).

As previously noted, principal leadership does not impact student outcomes in a direct way (Cotton, 2003). Instead, the principal's interaction with teachers and other staff members to create a positive learning environment is an important leadership skill that has great impact on student outcomes, indirectly. The principal's influence is a fundamental element in providing the school climate and quality instruction needed to reach the set goals of the school (Pepper, 2010).

Principals' Indirect Influences on Student Achievement

While there is an extensive body of literature examining the impact and role of quality teaching on student learning, just a decade ago, Hallinger and Heck (1996) found it challenging to locate published articles, dissertations, or conference presentations to analyze when undertaking their review of post-1980 studies on this topic related to school leaders, locating only 38. About a decade later, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found only 27 studies published between 1978 and 2006 to include in their inquiry about the impact of different forms of leadership on student achievement.

More currently, Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) outlined several “paths” from which leadership guidance could lead to positive student outcomes. In their study, these researchers suggest that variables ranging from decisions made about class sizes to the creation of professional learning communities are potential leadership skills that play pivotal roles in effecting the degree to which students achieve. Within their “pathway” model, these researchers seem to purport an almost, non-exhaustive list of skills every effective school leader needs to possess. School leaders that cause positive change have a vision, grow their staff, and fortify school culture. While striving to satisfy accountability requirements imposed by state and federal guidelines to improve student achievement, they additionally are striving for efficiency in budgeting, curriculum and staffing decisions, acquiring and utilizing meaningful and timely data, promoting purposeful professional development, and securing sufficient resources (Shelton, 2010).

The four avenues by which school leaders affect student achievement named by Leithwood and his associates (2010) are coined the Rational Path, the Emotions Path, the Organizational Path, and the Family Path. Each includes details of some of the practices of school leaders that have influence on student achievement. The Rational Path is purported to be based on the general knowledge and skills of school personnel about core teaching and learning, problem-solving skills, and applicable leadership practices (Robinson, 2010). Correlations and the effect size of many factors on student learning have been examined and can be selected by leaders in their efforts to have the greatest effect on student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010). Many classroom-level factors such as immediate and informative feedback, reciprocal teaching strategies, teacher-student relations, and classroom management have large effects on student learning. In comparison, some district-level factors are shown to have more significant effect

sizes (Hattie, 2009). Two standout school-level influences reported were academic press and disciplinary climate.

Leithwood, Patten, and Janzi (2010) describe schools with strong academic press as places where administrators and teachers set lofty, but attainable goals and believe in the abilities of their students to succeed. These leaders provide resources, put structures into place, and apply their influence to inspire students to persevere and hunt academic success. A few studies have acknowledged that promoting school-wide professional development, creating and sharing common goals, setting high expectations, and being open, positive, and supportive are ways to likely increase the academic press of a school (Alig-Mielcarek, 2003; Jacob, 2004).

Shifting from the traditional focus of classroom discipline to looking at the effects of the broader disciplinary climate on students is supported by several studies (Ma & Willms, 2004). This climate is formed by school-wide and community features. Flexible reactions by leaders to disciplinary events and the involvement of different stakeholders in creating school-wide behavior plans are suggestions for improving the disciplinary climate of schools (Leithwood et al., 2004). A more encompassing body of evidence specifies that “the principal is the most potent factor in determining school climate” and that “a direct relationship between visionary leadership and school climate and culture is imperative to support teacher efforts that lead to the success of the instructional program” (Benda, 2002, p. 5).

Two emotions are incorporated in the Emotions Path conceptualized by Leithwood and associates (2010), in their model. Collective teacher efficacy, also known as collective confidence, is evident as teachers accept responsibility for their student’s learning, become committed to community partnerships, and have a strong sense of ownership in school decision-making (Leithwood et al., 2010). Some practices that influence the collective efficacy of a group

are creating opportunities to master the skills needed to do whatever is expected, exposure to others performing the job well, and nurturing feelings of support (Bandura, 1997). Leaders can promote these conditions by supporting pertinent professional development, connecting their staff for purposes of networking with others who have had similar challenges and providing collaboration opportunities among staff. In addition, other ways that leaders may improve the collective efficacy of their teaching staff are transformational leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Some of these practices are: offering individualized support to staff members, showing respect, validating concern for personal feelings, upholding an open door policy, and appreciating staff opinions and viewpoints.

Instructional time and professional learning communities were selected by the researchers to represent the third path of the model in their study, the Organizational Path. Optimizing instructional time in schools has not been supported by much direct evidence except in the leadership practice of buffering (Crow & Weindling, 2010; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005) which is done to protect the efforts of teachers from internal and external distractions. Scholars purport to have identified a much larger effect size for professional development (0.62) on student achievement. A major contributor to the large effect size may be teachers' interrelating as a professional community of learners. Principals who support the work of PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) are described as leaders that are supportive and not directive (Tschannen-Moran, 2009), providing guidance for the goals and visions for professional development, scheduling and guarding PLC meeting times, and committing other resources (Mullen & Huntinger, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

The fourth path of the model described by Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010), the Family Path, is based on the hypothesis that factors that can be changed about student's families

(alterable variables) explain differences in student achievement significantly more than do the uncontrollable characteristics of their home life. Adult support for school work at home and access to a computer at home were the two variables originally studied through this lens of the model (Dunmay, 2009). Leithwood and his colleagues found five studies where researchers reported evidence of principals' skills, behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes influencing the school's learning culture. Some of the leadership characteristics cited as having an impact on student achievement are the ability to make parents feel welcome at school (Baker, 1997) and building a sense of trust and sharing between staff and parents by being detailed, clear, and logical (Belenardo, 2001).

In another study, researchers reported that principals who continually communicate high expectations for performance have a positive impact on the school and school achievement (Nettles & Harrington, 2007). Grissom and Loeb (2009) examined the relationships of principal characteristics and school effectiveness. These researchers discovered that student achievement is influenced more by principals' effect on teachers' environmental situations than the content knowledge or teaching skills of the teachers. The authors of the study further attest that principals and teachers identified three actions that promote improved instruction: setting and conveying high achievement goals for the school, continually surveying the professional development needs of the staff, and providing frequent times for teachers to collaborate. The ideas of indirect influences of the principal on student learning seems to be further confirmed by these researchers. One very interesting study by Clark, Martorell and Rockoff (2009) indicated that the amount of experience a leader has is a factor improving school performance.

The findings from this increased body of knowledge about the indirect and direct impact a school leader has on school and student success resulted in a recognition of the need to points to

incorporate new instructional leadership standards and skills into a school leader's preparation. This led to a movement redesign to preparatory training for educational leaders (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Educational organizations begin to rethink what needed to be included in an educational leader's groundwork experiences to equip them to meet the challenges of a new day of accountability in which success for all students is a primary goal (Condon & Clifford, 2010).

New Standards Emerged

New guidelines for the actions of strong school leaders have morphed from the research that has been conducted and from changes in the context of schooling (Condon & Clifford, 2010). School leaders are being required to foster an environment where all students are exposed to rich, research-based instruction and all educators are responsible for student learning and success. These new recommendations are being referenced in such widely accepted standards as the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC; 2008). The ISLLC Standards comprise six areas of professional practice for principals:

- Setting a widely shared vision for learning
- Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
- Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- Collaborating with faculty and community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
- Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
- Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural context

Such practices as aligning the ISLLC Standards with state principal professional standards, requiring all principal candidates to obtain a certain cutoff score on a standardized instrument that has been validated against ISLLC Standards, and requiring principal preparation programs to exhibit and support the correlation of program elements in meeting ISLLC standards have led to the incorporation of these “new” standards into the licensure/certification process in many states (Condon & Clifford, 2010).

Pathways to Better Leadership

“Before we can redesign schools, we must redesign the programs that prepare school leaders” (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001, p. 6). Attacks on classic educational leadership programs over the years have been extensive. Some of the criticisms have been that these programs have: (a) limited recruitment to identify leadership potential; (b) used few significant selection criteria for entry into programs; (c) have provided ineffective pedagogical techniques; (d) set low performance expectations; (e) do not provide meaningful experiential opportunities for students; and (f) have few programmatic linkages with local school districts (Kelley & Peterson, 2000). This led to a widespread call for a transformation in the methods of preparing educational leaders including reconsidering program components, and assuring collaborations among K–12 and university stakeholders in education in designing and delivering programs to prepare school leaders.

The Need for Changing How School Leaders are Prepared

A comprehensive study of educational leadership university preparation programs was conducted by Levine (2005). He surveyed graduates or current enrollees of a university-centered educational leadership program. These participants were asked to list the coursework they had taken in their preparatory program and to deliberate about the quality of their program. Nine

classes were found to be in common among 80% of the respondents. Some of these courses were: “instructional leadership (92%), school law (91%), educational psychology (91%), curriculum development (90%), research methods (89%), historical and philosophical foundations of education (88%), and the school principalship (84%)” (Levine, 2005). Sixty eight percent of the respondents found the courses valuable, but were critical of educational school programs, overall. Remarkably, Levine reported that almost “nine out of 10 survey respondents (89%) said that schools of education failed to adequately prepare them to cope with classroom realities” (p. 28).

Another flaw underscored by research has been that traditional principal preparation programs have been plagued with the practice of recruiting and selecting leadership candidates for their programs who are not necessarily qualified and are missing some potential talent that should be cultivated (Hess, 2003). It appeared that university leaders were handicapping their programs by using applicant selection criteria such as grade-point average, letters of recommendation, and interviews, which have seldom been determined to be good predictors of leadership success (Murphy, 2006; Quinn, 2005). These and other criticisms led to looking at alternatives to traditional preparation programs in universities. Shelton (2010) lists efforts from twenty-five states passing legislation to back preparation of effective school leaders. The laws appropriated funding for such endeavors as principal training academies, instructional leadership institutes, and outstanding leadership recognition awards. These kinds of efforts helped to lead to changes in university programs.

A promising trend began for the improvement of university principal preparatory programs in the application of the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards as a resource for course decisions and program practice (Quinn, 2005). In a report

prepared by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)-sponsored blue-ribbon panel, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, *Leaders For America's Schools* (1987) recommended that state policymakers base administrator licensure procedures on defensible claims about what prepares an individual to commendably lead a school (Hale & Moorman, 2003). To ensure higher performance expectations for school leadership candidates, states are migrating toward performance-based licensure systems by elevating standards and mandating administrators to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in order to receive licensure (Shelton, 2010).

Many institutions responded over the last decade to the mandates states were placing on preparatory programs by redesigning their principal preparation programs. Several of the revamped programs have graduated a few cohorts under their “new” curriculum. Phillips (2013) at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, studied five programs that exemplify the efforts of five states at reforming preparation. The states studied were: Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida, and New Jersey. One of the research questions being examined was: To what degree did program redesign reflect emerging empirical research guidelines on the characteristics of quality educational leadership programs? The study of these cases revealed that each institution’s redesign meets the criteria set forth by Orr and Pounder (2011) at select benchmarks. The researcher does assert that many of the efforts of these programs were sidetracked as all five had state department personnel turnovers and drastic budgets cuts (Phillips, 2013). These kinds of findings raise questions about how to sustain such newly re-aligned preparation programs for principals, barriers to the success of the programs, and how the barriers might be overcome.

Important Elements of a Principal Preparatory Program

Leaders for America's Schools (1987) report reviewed a six-phase history of administrator training in the United States. In the first phase, the “happy amateur” was used to describe the administrator as being very informal and the leadership style based entirely on one’s personal experience as a teacher. The second, third and fourth phases were named the “education capitalist,” “business manager,” and “school executive.” These phases saw the emergence of the first official, university-based administrators training programs. Degrees were granted and state licensing in educational administration made its debut. The fifth phase in the progression of administrator training came after The Great Depression. Scholars began to emphasize human relations to balance scientific management in administrators. The final phase is theory-based curricula. In this phase the emphasis was on theories of leadership, with little emphasis being placed on theories related to critical theory and issues such as liberation, and equity (Jacobson & Cypress, 2012). The emphasis was on understanding the theories of leadership, not on understanding the practice and the environment in which it takes place. “This schism between research and practice was an important factor in the ensuing calls for reform in public education in the United States.....” (Jacobson & Cypress, 2012, p. 220).

Incredible gains have been made in understanding which elements of university-based leadership preparation programs are correlated with effective leadership practice (Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca, 2012). Graham (2007) prepared a summary comparison of the standards developed by four influential groups in the field of leadership preparation: the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAESP), and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The researcher displayed how

these four sets of standards identify the issues currently facing educational leaders. The issues included were: strategic leadership (vision and goals), instructional leadership/staff development, management of the learning environment, political and community relationship, legal issues, and diversity/ethics/special population needs. This summary is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

A Comparison of How Standards Identify the Issues that are Facing Educational Leaders Today

Standards	ISLLC	NCATE	NAESP	SREB
Strategic leadership (Vision & Goals)	Visionary leadership	Visionary leadership	Set high expectations	Focused mission
Instructional leadership/staff development	Instructional program conducive to student learning, professional growth	Effective instructional program, positive culture, professional development	Content and instruction aligned with standards, multiple data sources	Implement good instructional practices, professional development
Management of the learning environment	Collective management of the organization	Manage resources; safe, efficient, & effective environment	Student and adult learning centralized	Acquire and use resources wisely, time management
Political & community relationship	Collaborating with families, and mobilizing community resources	Collaborate with families and the community	Engage the community to created shared responsibility for learning and success	Parent partnership. Support from district, community, and parents
Legal Issues		Influencing the larger context		
Diversity/ethics/special population needs	Responding to diverse community needs	Ethical leadership; success for all	High expectations	Create an organization where all students count

Orr and Pounder (2011) asserted that eight of the “more, well-substantiated ...effective leader preparation program features” are as follows:

[S]tandards-based program content, program coherence, candidate selection, authentic, active-learning instructional processes; in-depth internship and clinical experiences: cohort-based structure; ongoing and rigorous performance assessment; and a critical mass of faculty with a balance of theory and practical knowledge who engage actively in teaching, research, and university-school-professional association collaboration. (p. 36)

With all this new information and guidance, many colleges and universities engaged in redesigning preparation programs to utilize these new research findings and to create programs more effectual for the school leaders they are preparing (Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca, 2012). One such institution to undertake a redesign initiative, the University of Buffalo, had a long-standing reputation of being exemplary as manifested by the 1981 honor of being named the nation's most outstanding certification program by the American Association for School Administrators (Jacobson & Cypress, 2012). The task force assembled for this redesign project outlined a shift in the programs curriculum to prepare "leaders" whether they were hired as administrators in the future or not. Their newly created program was designed to promote students to lead by learning to:

- Articulate and clarify their educational beliefs, values, and visions;
- Focus on the teaching-learning process to develop their ability to lead instructional teams;
- Encourage and demonstrate risk taking and flexibility;
- Encourage and demonstrate an appreciation for diversity and a commitment to equity;
- Use critical reflection and thoughtful inquiry as constant components of practice;
- Act in ways that are informed by the outcomes of systematic inquiry and moral deliberation;

- Understand and facilitate a change process for creating and implementing a collective vision of school improvement;
- Promote the involvement of the wider community in education;
- Develop professional and personal support systems and networks. (Jacobson & Cypress, 2012, p. 17)

These objectives became the underpinning of their new program, retitled the Leadership Initiative for Tomorrow's Schools (LIFTS). Many of the tenets of their redesigned leadership preparatory curriculum seemed to foreshadow the report of Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen (2007), as they gave research results from a study of eight exemplary leadership development programs. They purported the following common elements that contributed to the success of the programs: research-based content, curricular coherence, field-based internships, problem-based learning strategies, cohort structures, mentoring, and collaboration between universities and school districts (Jacobson & Cypress, 2012).

The Influence of Collaboration in the Field of Education

Educational alliances first gained fame over thirty years ago as school districts reached out to companies for monetary backing and assistance to buy programs and equipment (Grobe, 1990). Programs such as the Adopt-A-School Program (1981) founded by Dr. Ruth Love, were instituted to connect corporations to neighboring schools (Smallwood, 1987). The goal of this program was to solicit more support for a school or school district by inspiring industries to “adopt” them. The platform was successful in many larger communities and eventually earned national distinction (Grobe, 1990).

A concentration on improving the status of teaching in public schools to a more professional level led to suggestions for the need to make more meaningful connections between

school districts and universities (Glickman, 1993; Kochan, 1999). Goodlad (1991) published a trilogy of research he and his partners (The Goodlad Network) had conducted on American education. It was in the third volume, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools*, that he revealed his linchpin for incorporating school system/university collaborations into teacher preparation reform. He constructed "Centers of Pedagogy," resembling teaching hospitals for medical students. Goodlad's idea for centers where teacher interns could be mentored by veteran educators to more adeptly learn and improve their craft was similar to suggestions coming from the work of The Holmes Group report of 1990, *Tomorrow's Schools: Principles for the Design of Professional Development Schools*.

The emergence of professional development schools (PDSs) was a prominent product of the movement toward school-university collaborations. PDSs were designed to improve the quality of education by pairing the resources of local schools with those of neighboring institutions of higher learning (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Holmes Group, 1990). Most school-university undertakings tended to be one-sided endeavors, but PDSs focused on the mutual benefits to both the school and the university (Goodlad, 1993; Su, 1990). Researchers looked to explore what the overall perceived benefits to these educational endeavors were. Kochan (1999) reported that there were three major benefits to PDSs collaborative efforts perceived by PDSs participants: improved clinical experiences for teachers, teacher education program enhancement, and teacher self-renewal. With the creation of professional development schools, questions came from educators about a set of standards that would define what establishes an ideal partnership between a district school and a college or university. Investigators have acknowledged dynamics that have the potential to result in prosperous school-university partnerships (Lewison & Holliday, 1997). Researchers assert that these factors include: building

trust among members, common goals or focus on a single issue, sharing responsibility, sharing or equalizing power, changing partnership goals, strong commitment to collaboration, ongoing communication among members, and rethinking traditional roles (Lewison & Holliday, 1997; Starlings & Dybdahl, 1994).

The impact that relationships between teacher education programs and K–12 schools has had on the field of education has been documented in various ways. Findings suggest that teacher preparation can be strengthened when future teachers are given opportunities to experience real-world classroom situations in which to practice the strategies of the profession and be continually supported by mentors from the university and district schools (Barnhart et al., 1995). In addition, the collective capability and creativity of all partners can encourage a sense of renewal and enhance student teachers' classroom experiences (Kimball, Swap, LaRosa, & Howick, 1995).

School-university partnerships help everyone involved in four ways purported in *Partner Schools: Center for Educational Renewal*, edited by Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris, and Black (1995). These are: 1) improving student learning, 2) strengthening teacher education, 3) promoting professional development, and 4) supporting collaborative inquiry among participants. The professional development school model was built around National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards. These standards are highlighted by various teacher education professional organizations and explain partnerships in terms of explicit outcomes which mirror the benefits of partnerships cited in *Partner Schools: Center for Educational Renewal*. These outcomes are: 1) improvement of student learning, 2) preparation of educators, 3) professional development of educators, and 4) research and inquiry into improving practice (Teitel, 2003).

The Use of Partnerships

Fisher and Duncan Fisher (1997) described a partnership as collaboration among people who work in different organizations or different subdivisions of the same organization to achieve goals by pooling intellectual, social, cultural, and financial resources. Reasons for forming a partnership are diverse and the goals may be founded in whether it was formed by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. If institutions are mandated to collaborate and regulated by outside entities when doing so, it may diminish their internal drive to cooperate or form trust with one another. However, if a partnership is formed voluntarily or the partners recognize the potential mutual benefits and collective goals, more internal rewards are fostered (Higher Education Report [ASHE], 2010). Partnerships are challenging to organize and sustain no matter how admirable the goals might be. They are foundationally built upon people, values, and all the interactive processes between humans and organizations (Grobe, 1990).

Forming Partnerships

The degree of energy, obligation of resources, and strength of connections and interactions of various partnership ventures can be very wide-ranging (Barnett, Hall, Berg, & Camarena, 2010). Jenkins (2001) posits that the most operative partnerships are regarded as having a high level of commitment among their group members. Looking at partnerships over a more extended period, Breault and Breault (2010) discovered they become much more viable and effective if there was an environment of equal esteem and trust among all participants.

Partnerships as a means to control resources and capitalize on talent has become highly regarded by institutions as a viable method of addressing increasingly challenging concerns (Russell & Flynn, 2000). However, categorizing types of partnerships to study how and to what degree they are most useful to institutions has proven to be a difficult endeavor (Barnett et al.,

2010). Researchers suggest that partnerships evolve through phases as a response to the interactions among the people involved and the circumstances under which they operate (Barnett et al., 2010; Grobe, 1990). An eight-stage model illustrating the progression of partnership development is offered by Trubowitz (1986). The stages are outlined as:

- Stage I (Hostility and Skepticism): Partners learn about one another, recalling previous negative experiences with partnerships.
- Stage II (Lack of Trust): Trust and confidence in one another's expertise and capabilities begin to develop.
- Stage III (Period of Truce): Mutual participation in a joint project is initiated.
- Stage IV (Mixed Approval): Early successes are recognized and those not participating are removed from the project.
- Stage V (Acceptance): Partners acknowledge and celebrate mutual benefits of the project.
- Stage VI (Regression): Changes in staff, funding, and resource allocation challenge the direction and stability of the partnership.
- Stage VII (Renewal): The transfusion of new people and ideas regenerates the partnership.
- Stage VIII (Continuing Progress): Partners maintain their commitment and involvement, expecting the nature of the relationship to change over time.

The fluid nature of partnerships necessitates that they be conceptualized by utilizing various category schemes based upon the type of involvement, structure, and impact being sought by the collaboration (Barnett et al., 2010).

Exploration of partnerships has led to recommendations that should be considered when deciding to form a joint venture. The fundamental decision in embarking on the creation of a collaboration is whether or not it is the best tool for answering identified questions and accomplishing acknowledged aims (Tushnet, 1993). Understanding the rationale for entering into a partnership is essential to a successful foundation for it. Some recognized motivators for members choosing a partnership format are to gain more of the market share (serve more people); to improve the products and services being provided; to create efficiencies in the processes; and to create a stronger, more sustainable bottom line (Moroney & Boeck, 2012). Participants can experience additional rewards when partnerships are in continuing education settings. According to Moroney and Boeck (2012), further perceived benefits to educational collaborations are opportunities to work with colleagues from other institutions, boosting the prestige of programs, compliance with institutional mandates, and satisfying certain political agendas. The use of partnerships in educational environments has expanded in recent years, leading Barnett et al (2010) to conclude that, “partnerships are currently seen by many as the ultimate cure for all of the ills of education” (p. 10).

Improving School Leadership through Partnership

At the close of the 20th century, many in education were at a new place with respect to collaborative efforts. The concept of partnerships was so revered that it was manifested through federal mandates in statutes like the Higher Education Act of 1998 and in 2000, with the re-authorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act; P.L. 89-10 (Barnett et al., 2010). Arguments were made that enhancements in educational leadership preparation required interconnected work between universities, practicing administrators, professional organizations, and state-level policy makers (Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002). Many calls to reform principal

preparation programs stressed the need for school/university partnerships (Fry et al., 2007; Shelton, 2009; Young & Kochan, 2004). Considering the views of those from the K–12 arena as guidance for educational leadership preparation was viewed as an avenue for better understanding of the needs in K–12; promoting a better balance between theory and practice; fostering opportunities for real field-based experiences; and preserving the foundation of the program in the school district environment (SREB, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Norton, 2002).

Engaging in practical dialogue about necessary knowledge and actions for leaders can lead to a substantial impact over time in increasing student learning (Goduto, Doolittle, & Leake, 2008). Those in academia have noted that many leadership programs have been revised to include partnership between school districts and universities for preparing school leaders (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr, 2006). Some universities have initiated partnerships with school districts to strengthen programs and provide greater relevance to the work in schools (Glasman, Cibulka, & Ashby, 2002; Whitaker & Barnett, 1999). In part, these partnerships have been established to react to the escalating concerns of a shortage of candidates for the principalship (Whitaker, 2003). Numerous features of partnership model programs include the practice of cohort learning, seeking district advice on curriculum and instruction; engaging in on-site delivery of courses; employing district practitioners as instructors; engaging in joint selection of candidates; and using practitioners in formal mentoring endeavors (Whitaker & Barnett, 1999).

There have been a number of criticisms in the past about the lack of research in school administration, especially in leadership preparation programs (Rielh, Larson, Short, & Reitzug, 2000). A review of the literature on educational leadership divulges a small number of

documents precisely concentrated on the use of school/university partnerships (Kochan, 2010; Reames & Kochan, 2013; Whitaker et al., 2004). In 2006, the Southern Region Educational Board (SREB) sought to answer questions about the progress of partnership incorporation into newly redesigned school leadership preparation programs. SREB researchers had previously identified four essential conditions for creating programs that focus on preparing principals who can improve schools and student achievement. One of the four core conditions was:

Formal university/district partnerships are established for designing and implementing a leadership preparation program that is based on a shared vision of school leaders who have the essential knowledge and skills to improve schools and student achievement.

(Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2006, p. 26)

Under this condition, there were four indicators established for measuring the fulfillment of the condition. The indicators are as follows:

- The partnership is formal, definitive, and institutionalized.
- Candidate screening and selection is a joint process.
- The program is customized to meet district needs.
- Resources and conditions support candidates' success. (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2006)

The findings of SREB included this statement about the role of partnerships in the preparation of school leadership programs:

States will know their preparation programs are substantially redesigned to prepare principals who can lead schools to higher levels of student achievement when ...

[u]niversities have developed partnerships with local school districts that involve working together to recruit, admit and support a pool of well-qualified candidates and to design

and implement a program that ensures aspiring principals master the essential knowledge and skills needed to lead changes in school and classroom practices in a district context.

(SREB, 2006, p. 69)

Benefits of University/District Partnerships in Leadership Preparation

Educational partnerships are created for an assortment of reasons including: to effect educational reform, to maximize use of resources, and to achieve a shared goal or vision (Higher Education Report [ASHE], 2010). Partnerships of educational leadership preparation programs and schools supply a suitable and esteemed situation for meaningful and authentic learning to occur (Ledoux & McHenry, 2008). Social-learning theorists have encouraged collaboration among learners as mutually beneficial and important for development (Ledoux & McHenry, 2008). “At the core of educational reform are the beliefs that current systems are ineffective in obtaining desired levels of student outcomes and partnerships provide a means to achieve these goals,” (ASHE 2010, p. 4). Coalitions close the divide between universities and schools by improving preparatory education and by fostering changes in K–12 and higher education milieus (Kochan, 1999).

University leaders, district personnel, school-based leaders, and others have important roles to play in the planning and implementation of a quality internship experience (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2007, p. 44). Partnerships allow positioned learning through cooperative work activities (Chin, Bell, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2004). Stakeholder collaboration leads to theory and practice becoming more closely connected (Burton & Greher, 2007). Undertakings between university and district representatives provide benefits to the districts, universities, interns, mentors, students, and schools.

In a study by Whitaker et al. (2004), leadership students acknowledged the importance of collaborative efforts as they were surveyed and identified the following advantages to a partnering arrangement: networking among districts, learning about policies and practices in other districts, and hearing diverse views from different district administrators. Collaboration is the process by which participants who see the world from different viewpoints can seek solutions that reach beyond their individual perspective. “Collaboration transforms adversarial interaction into a mutual search for information and for solutions that allow all those participating to insure that their interests are represented” (Gray, 1989, p. 7).

From a practical standpoint, institutional goals, state mandates, and the scarcity of resources are factors that make collaborative efforts compelling (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007). Simply stated, institutions benefit from sharing resources (McCord, 2002). State legislators and agencies shun duplicate state spending in education and favor steam-lining efforts (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001). The school district may rely on a university to provide certain expertise or professional development they might need. Universities search for settings for field-based experiences for students, situations for research, and for future students (Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran, 2011). This fulfills one of the key tenets of partnering that each of the partners cannot achieve their goals on their own: the joint venture forms a situation for maximized benefits to everyone involved (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2010; Reames & Kochan, 2013).

Barriers for University/District Partnerships in Leadership Preparation

Barnett (1995) offered a theory of possible obstructions to partnership establishment. He recognized cultural, regulatory, and personal barriers that accompany joint ventures. Cultural differences between schools and universities can cause tensions to escalate (Kochan, 1999; Shinnars, 2001). Shinnars (2001) describes cultural clash and turf protection as conditions that

impede progress and he emphasizes the need to integrate strategies within the partnership to promote flexibility, patience, and the breaking down of preexisting stereotypes. The perceived status differential and contradictory reward structures are working norms between the institutions that are in contrast and have potential for creating cultural barriers (Restine, 1996). Other “cultural barriers” mentioned by Barnett (1995) are differing visions, philosophies, and assumptions about the partnership and discrepancies in language or terms used between the organizations.

Some researchers have warned about the pitfall of misunderstandings in procedural matters. Regulatory barricades are encountered when opposing policies and governance exist between the partnered institutions. These directives may come from outside state or federal agencies and not be at the discretion of either partner participant (Barnett, 1995). Creating official written agreements (Memorandum of Agreement, MOA or Memorandum of Understanding, MOU) that define the roles, responsibilities, and authority of each member can assist in diminishing this type of stumbling block (Melville, Blank, & Asayesh, 1993).

Concerns over personal barriers, apparent in research, often accompany new joint venture projects. To avoid jeopardizing the sustainability of a partnership, transparency must be given to the precise ways in which the responsibilities, power, time demands, devotion, and support needed for each contributor will be affected (Barnett, 1995). University-school district collaborations experience success when they have well defined goals, organizational structures, and equality among the partners (Browne-Ferrigino & Sanzo, 2011). Grobe (1990) stated it like this:

Ownership [needed by the partnership for survival] will not develop if the partnership does not meet the needs of collaborators, if it does not benefit all parties, if partners do not trust one another and if they are not allowed to share in the decision making. (p. 33)

Additional warnings of potential hindrances come from studies on the professional development school model. These researchers indicate that partnerships require significantly more resources to sustain than traditional preparation programs (Breault & Breault, 2010). Partnerships absorb a tremendous amount of time and energy from staff (Kochan, 1999). Added responsibilities can lead to concerns affiliated with reward structures in the tenure and promotion process of university faculty. Time-consuming work with partner school districts hampers advancement towards promotion and tenure (McCarthy, 1999). Publications are required for promotion, yet the results of partnerships are usually not considered publishable research (Kersh & Maszta, 2008). To encourage the engagement of university faculty in activities that build and sustain a partnership, there is a need to restructure university faculty incentives and reward processes to reflect innovative partnership involvement (Boyer, 1990; Rhodes & Bellamy, 1999).

Alternative solutions have been suggested to address concerns of time constraints. University administrators hiring “clinical” staff in higher education has evolved from partner-school relationships (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow, & Stokes, 1997). The use of clinical faculty as liaisons can significantly offset the additional demands being placed on other higher education faculty (Zeichner, 2010). The concept of Clinical Faculty Associates (CFAs) developed from the work of the Holmes Group in *Tomorrow’s Schools of Education* (1995) as it defined what it perceived as necessary modifications in faculty roles and responsibilities, calling for the establishment of “clinical professorships”(Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Birrell, 2004).

Not much literature exists about the use of a clinical educator for the purpose of connecting theory to practice in the training of educational leaders.

Another concern that has been divulged in the literature about partnership obstacles is that of commitment from those in the highest administration roles. “School-college partnerships hold significant promise for renewal and improvement in education but must be vigorously supported and advanced by top leadership at public school and college levels” (Essex, 2001, p. 736). Sustained attention from leaders is critical to the life of partnerships. Leadership for this kind of project includes verbally and visibly supporting the initiative, enticing others to be interested and involved, committing necessary resources, and enforcing accountability upon the staff for results (Grobe, 1990). Support of the partnership may weaken when administrators and other leaders resign or transfer and their replacements do not have the same level of commitment to the goals of the partnership (Edens, Shirley, & Toner, 2001).

Lugg (1994) asserts that a lack of commitment by institutional leaders to financially ensure continued success of the relationship is one of the major factors inhibiting to partnership growth. Careful attention needed by administrators to ensure that resources and costs are shared and sustained can be diverted by the leaders’ unfamiliarity with the concept, differing resource and expectation levels, preferential treatment of one partner over another, and different organizational cultures and policies (Dorger, 1999).

The absence or mishandling of certain features of partnerships can diminish their effectiveness. All players in the collaboration need to closely inspect the tactics that work best to ensure partnership success and sustainability (Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002). Participants of partnerships become disillusioned when consensus is reached prematurely; a common vocabulary is not established; partners argue about their status within the collaborative; the

working group becomes too large; or a broad representation of faculty, students, and practitioners is missing from discussions and decision-making processes (Restine, 1996). Time must be allowed to build relationships and to permit the dynamics of the partnership to manifest and adjustments to be made (Stephens & Boldt, 2004).

Sustainability of University/District Partnerships in Leadership Preparation

Educators have sought to understand what factors facilitate the initiation and achievement of strong, collaborative relationships and the sustained maintenance of these arrangements. Many educational joint endeavors are in early implementation and are in continuous developmental stages (Grobe, 1990). Upon reviewing data gathered from these young partnership efforts, researchers claim that coordinated services with certain types of provisions and situational support have positive effects on educational institutions (Grobe, 1990; United States Department of Education, 1995).

A major enabling factor for the formation and sustaining of alliances is the quality of the relationship between the university and the school district partners (Dallmer, 2004; Lefever-Davis, Johnson, & Pearman, 2007). Time and energy are necessary to develop and maintain relationships among stakeholders, which is vital to the success of partnerships (Breault & Breault, 2010). Building a climate of trust is paramount for honest dialogue to occur throughout the process. All parties should be aware of the others' circumstances and be willing to work for mutually favorable outcomes based on the partner's situations (Dallmer, 2004; Lefever-Davis et al., 2007). Goodlad (1991) recommended that partnerships be created with members intentionally considering the interests of all stakeholders. According to Moroney and Boeck (2012), the most essential relational aspects of a partnership are:

- Open, clear communication
- Commitment to fairness
- Flexibility—responsiveness
- Understanding each other's measures of success
- Common vision
- Shared values
- Trust
- Positive personal relationships.

Grobe (1990) acknowledged a dozen actions for establishing and maintaining successful partnerships. His list included:

- Involve top-level leadership in decisions
- Develop programs that are grounded in the needs of the community
- Create an effective public relations campaign
- Establish clear roles and responsibilities of each partner
- Employ strategic planning and develop long-term goals
- Utilize effective management and staffing structures
- Ensure that shared decision making and local ownership occur
- Provide shared recognition and credit for all personnel involved
- Commit resources that are appropriate and well-timed
- Provide intensive technical assistance
- Create formal written agreements
- Be patient with the change process and gradually expand the involvement of others.

The Principal Preparation Redesign

Nearly three decades ago, different educational groups such as the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEAA), the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and other public school administrator organizations asked for a re-design of educational administration programs (Whitaker, King, & Vogel, 2004). As described in previous sections of this literature review, there has been much concern about the lack of meaningful experiential opportunities for potential leaders in educational preparation programs. Talks, within these national groups have focused on the need for a shift away from customary management-style content and lecturing for preparation practices to more authentic course work and field-base experiences (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). It was agreed that aspiring school leaders needed opportunities to apply the concepts and theories taught in the classroom to real-world situations. The purpose of such active learning is “to challenge students’ assumptions about the role and capacity of educational leadership and to enable them to incorporate new knowledge, skills, and capacities into their working repertoire” (Orr, 2006, p. 495). Additional research supporting this idea found that the length and quality of field-based internships have been linked to the advancement and success of leadership students (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Orr & Barber, 2007).

Although there have been accusations that there has not been a preponderance of state-level data to back criticisms of principal performance (Briggs, Cheney, Davis, & Moll, 2013; Phillips, 2013). Many states passed legislation mandating changes to university-based leadership preparation programs aligning curricula with national and state standards, collaborating closely

with school districts, and increasing opportunities for field-based experiences of students were new requirements of many state mandates for redesigned preparatory programs (SREB, 2006).

Partnerships Included in the Redesign

Another redesign theme to evolve within many of these legislative mandates was concerned efforts to connect universities and colleges of preparatory programs with local school districts where the newly trained principals would be working. Roots for the concept can be found in literature about Professional Development Schools (PDS). As previously discussed, PDSs were formed to improve the quality of teaching in schools. Researchers began to examine the benefits that PDSs collaborations had upon improving the quality of school leadership preparation (Tilford, 2008) Although many colleges and universities self-identify as involved in PDS efforts, little published empirical research exists on the specific role of principal leadership or improvement within this framework.

A major idea behind the creation of PDSs was to afford educators opportunities to apply the learned knowledge and skills from their university coursework to real-world, genuine situations and local building experiences (The Holmes Partnership, 2007). Collaborations between higher education and local districts were thought to be able to create a more seamless transition from education learner to practitioner. It was believed that best practices could be shared among many stakeholders as opposed to good practice occurring in pockets of isolation. Many of these ideas appear to align with some of the deliverables being requested by those urging for principal preparation reform. Tilford (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of how principals make sense of their role in Professional Development Schools in an effort to gather information for practitioners and researchers to use in developing a framework for enhancing principal development. In this study, the researcher found that when those involved in

collaborative efforts were asked to compare blending practice to theory reported that it is convenient to connect the two realms. The clinical practice became a part of, rather than apart from the foundational theories.

Core Conditions Require Partnerships

Applying aims similar to those of the PDS movement, SREB put forth a set of redesign conditions for forming school/university partnerships within educational leadership preparation programs through their University Leadership Development Network. These guidelines list characteristics and actions in which universities should engage in order to effectively redesign preparatory programs and assign primary responsibility for tasks to specific groups. Of the ten components, six are the joint responsibility of the Leadership Program Design Team and District Partners (SREB, 2002). The procedures described and assigned as collaborative efforts include:

- creating an advisory board who meets regularly, planning field-based learning experiences to apply research-based knowledge
- customizing the preparation program to individuals based on their past experiences
- providing faculty, practicing educators, and others with broad, researched-based knowledge, and redesigned university leadership preparation with emphasis on school-based learning
- contributing staff time and expertise to design, develop, and field test training modules that are, at least in part, school-based
- supporting school districts in identifying potential leaders with demonstrated leadership ability, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and a proven record of high performance

SREB identified four core conditions that represent a combination of ideas gained from five years of research and development work in the field of principal preparation, including reviews of literature, focus groups with exemplary principals, interviews with expert panels, benchmark studies of progress in redesign in SREB states, and lessons learned from supporting redesign efforts in 11 universities participating in the SREB University Development Network (SREB, 2006). Core Condition one: University/district partnerships for principal preparation. It is defined as:

Formal university/district partnerships are established for designing and implementing a leadership preparation program that is based on a shared vision of school leaders who have the essential knowledge and skills to improve schools and student achievement.

(SREB, 2006, p. 26)

The group went further to specify four indicators for the first Core Condition. Their four indicators are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Four Indicators for First Core Condition of Redesign—SREB

Indicator	Tenants
<p>Indicator 1.1</p> <p>The partnership is formal, definitive, and institutionalized.</p>	<p>There is a written agreement signed by the university president and district superintendent defining how the entities will work as partners in the preparation of school principals.</p> <p>The agreement defines how university/district partners will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) create a shared vision and program design that meets the needs of the district; b) develop criteria and a process for recruiting, selecting, and supporting the most promising candidates; and c) conduct high-quality field experiences. <p>Implementation of the partnership is a priority in both organizations, as reflected in their missions, program plans, staff assignments, and budgets.</p>
<p>Indicator 1.2</p> <p>Candidate screening and selection is a joint process.</p>	<p>The university and district have jointly established and implemented criteria and processes for screening and selecting promising candidates for admission to the preparation program. The selection criteria emphasize expertise in curriculum and instruction, a record of raising student achievement and prior leadership experiences.</p> <p>Implementation of the screening and selection system is continually monitored, evaluated and improved.</p>
<p>Indicator 1.3</p> <p>The program is customized to meet district needs.</p>	<p>The university and district partners work together to assess local needs for improved student learning outcomes and to incorporate district and school data, state and local standards, adopted curriculum frameworks, current change initiatives and school reform models, and assessment and accountability processes into program goals, course content and field experiences.</p>
<p>Indicator 1.4</p> <p>Resources and conditions support candidates' success.</p>	<p>The university and district allocate and pool resources to provide candidates the support and conditions necessary to successfully complete the leadership preparation program, including such things as release time for course work and field experiences, tuition assistance, learning materials, and expert mentoring and coaching as needed to master essential competencies.</p>

As part of their redesign, all university programs in Alabama, where the study was conducted, were required to establish formal partnerships with school districts (SREB, 2010).

Restructuring the Leadership Preparation Program of the University

Much national attention about the need for every school to have a strong instructional leader was drawn by the Wallace Foundation (2005). Their work supported that of SREB, as well as the efforts of many states, in improving school leadership. Germinating from those efforts was an amplified appreciation of the essential characteristics of quality school leader preparation programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) acknowledged measurements of program quality by isolating a list of conditions that closely reflect the reforms pursued by the state in which this study occurred, in the redesign of its university preparation programs: university-district partnerships, greater selectivity in choosing future leaders, more rigorous course work, connected with field-based learning and residency experiences, more rigorous residency experiences, effective mentoring, and cohort structures for all students.

Redesign Model Created

Additional commitment to redesigning instructional leadership preparation programs throughout the state came as the governor brought together the Governor's Congress on School Leadership (GCSL). The Congress was led by the governor and then State Superintendent of Education. Committee members were from K-2 school districts, universities and colleges, the State Department of Education (SDE), and other various stakeholders. These members were appointed to form five task forces and charged with developing recommendations (Reames, 2010). Areas with which they were assigned:

1. Standards for Preparing and Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders
2. Selection and Preparation of School Leaders
3. Certification of School Leaders
4. Professional Development to support Instructional Leadership

5. Incentives and Working Conditions to Attract and Retain a Quality Principal in Every School

From the suggestions of these committees a report was generated and submitted to the Office of the Governor and the State Board of Education. The report included important expectations of new instructional leadership candidates to complete a program covering all Standards for Instructional Leaders. Deliverables of the program would be knowledge, abilities, and performances for the following eight areas: planning for continuous improvement, teaching and learning, human resource development, diversity, community and stakeholder relationships, technology, management of the learning organization, and ethics (ALSDE, 2006; Reames, 2010). Acceptance from the governor and approval by the state school board of the recommendations initiated a chain of actions. All colleges and universities that had educational leadership programs were mandated to redesign them based on the newly approved standards and requirements. Lead universities were chosen to complete a redesign model to meet approval expectations by 2008 and all other universities by 2009 (ALSDE, 2006). The state department of education was given the oversight responsibilities for the redesign initiative.

Restructuring of educational leadership programs was to be implemented in two phases. A pilot project phase would be conducted in which a few colleges would create model programs that would inform others who would later be undertaking the project of redesigning in their own institutions. The second phase was for all colleges to redesign their programs once the pilot projects were completed. Landmark University was one of four institutions chosen to receive a pilot grant of \$25,000 and required matching funds of \$25,000, some of which could be in-kind. Once selected, a purposeful decision was made by the university to align the foundational assumptions guiding their work with those underpinning best practice (Reed & Kensler, 2010).

Partnership Committee's Vision

It was a mandate of the state model that the leadership preparatory program be redesigned and distributed in partnership with school districts. The subject university's original model included working with seven, mostly small and rural, school systems. Since its inception, four additional school districts have joined the partnership. Past relationships with the partner school districts and established trust aided in facilitating the partnership structure (Kochan, 2010). The university had at least one staff member that was actively affiliated with partnership efforts with all seven original partner school districts. Many of the leaders in these districts were students or graduates of the university. The university has had a commitment to preparing its graduates to participate in building community relations and university/school district partnership provisions are congruent to those efforts (Kochan & Reed, 2006).

The Use of an Advisory Council

Partnerships may be distinguished from similar arrangements in that:

Partners form a mutually rewarding relationship with the purpose of improving some aspect of education. The relationship must be based on the identification and acceptance of compatible goals and strategies. In addition, the partners should respect the differences in each other's culture and style, striving to apply the best of both worlds to achieve established goals (*Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands*, 1986, p. 12-13).

Researchers advocate for the engagement of leaders from both institutions to ensure the success of the school/university partnerships (Kochan, 1999). Toward this end, an advisory council was developed to aid in the redesign efforts of the university. Members of the council

included superintendents, district and building-level administrators from the school systems, state department of education personnel, educational leadership faculty, the department head, and the college dean. The council members attended training sessions provided by the State Department of Education (SDE) where models created by others and pertinent information and support were shared.

During the development phase, the entire group met once a month. Four groups were created – Curriculum, Admissions, Evaluation, and Partnership – as subcommittees to address these specific areas and met additionally to develop the redesigned program (Reames, 2010). As tasks were completed by each subcommittee they were brought back before the whole committee for approval. Assignments spanned over an eighteen month timeframe and included designing and writing the new curriculum, creating new syllabi, developing the assessment and admission processes, and determining the working structure of the partnership (Kochan, 2010).

The primary responsibilities of the partnership committee were to form memoranda of agreement and to cultivate structural arrangements that would permit the design of a program that was jointly owned, implemented, and evaluated (Kochan, 2010). The decision was made to develop an entirely new curriculum, including course structures, materials, and evaluation processes, in collaboration.

..... foundational assumptions included issues such as the importance of employing adult learning theories, grounding theory in authentic practices in all courses, embracing collaborative partnerships as a means of improving [the] work by utilizing [the] collective wisdom and experience, and focusing the combined energies of students, faculty, and K–12 partners on resolution of barriers that impede effective student achievement. (Reed & Kensler, 2010, p. 569)

The time requirement for this endeavor became demanding due to the availability of university staff to work when partner personnel were available. After-hours and on week-ends became commonly scheduled meeting times. Due to the laborious nature of the redesign effort, the provost of the university gave an unusual approval to suspend all masters and doctoral program admissions until the redesign was completed (Kochan, 2010).

A completed plan was submitted to the state department of education by the university. A pre-review team consisting of members of the state department of education, personnel from SREB, and external reviewers from other schools and universities was sent to conduct an on-site pre-review and provide feedback and suggestions about the plan. The university made revisions based on the pre-review, submitted a final plan, and underwent a final on-site review process. The redesigned program was approved by the state in December, 2007.

Implementation of the University/District Partnership

Since the redesign approval, the educational leadership program of the university has grown to partnership with 15 school districts. A clinical supervisor has been hired to work with the schools, engage students in extensive action research, field-based experiences, and internships, and meeting and enticing partners to serve on the advisory council (Kochan, Reames, & Patrick, 2011). The advisory council meets at least bi-annually to provide thoughts and specific knowledge for the continued growth of the program, to share feedback on members' roles and functions in the group, and in which ways these responsibilities and the meetings might be enhanced. Innovative arrangements such as institutes provide an environment for students, district-based partners, and faculty to learn together. The belief is that if participants learn together they are better able to change their views about each other's roles and responsibilities,

heightening opportunities for prolific collaboration through greater reverence and gratitude (Reed & Kensler, 2010).

Reed and Kensler (2010) examined the purpose and efforts regarding six aspects of the redesigned program: Foundation-based programs, Values-based admissions, Zero-based curriculum development, Practice-based learning experience, Community-grounded culture, and Outcome-based accountability. In looking at the community-grounded culture piece, they relay stories of a university where “individualism, autonomy, and separation reign supreme” (Murphy, 2006, p. 3). The team had decided in the redesigning process that it was critical to divide the K–12 leadership and higher education administration programs and faculty, to foster a greater attention on preparing school principles. Intentional efforts were made to regularly meet and discuss programming issues.

Efforts were also made to further develop the relationships with school-based partners (Brooks, Havard, Tatum, & Patrick, 2010). Each cohort of program candidates was assigned a capstone research project on a topic chosen by the Local Educational Agency (LEA) district partners. The Capstone is presented by the students in a conference style forum to interested educators for the purpose of informing district partnered leaders and others of the current research findings on the topic. Summer and Winter Institutes were launched for learning together and increased interaction between faculty and school-based partners. The advisory council meetings each semester are to emphasize and celebrate the contributions of all partners throughout the year and allow for partner networking. These activities are strides toward removing the walls of isolation and embracing a culture of collaboration (Reed & Kensler, 2010).

Table 3

Literature Matrix Summary of Major Contributors

<p>The Importance of School Leaders on Schools and Student Outcomes.</p>	<p>The Effects of Leadership on Student Outcomes</p> <p>Marzano, 2003 Graham, 2007 Levine, 2005 Leithwood et al., 2004 SREB, 2008 NCLB, 2001 Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001</p>	<p>Characteristics of a Successful School Leader</p> <p>Fullan, 2007 Seashore-Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010 Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010 Kohn, 2004 Pepper, 2010 Shelton, 2010</p>	<p>Principals’ Indirect Influences Schools and Students</p> <p>Benda, 2002</p>	<p>New Standards</p> <p>Condon & Clifford, 2010 ISLLC, 2008</p>	
<p>Pathways to Better Leadership in Schools</p>	<p>Need for Changing How to Prepare School Leaders</p> <p>Hess, 2003 Levine, 2005 Quinn, 2005 Shelton, 2010 UCEA, 1987 Orr & Pounder, 2011 Phillips, 2013</p>	<p>Important Elements of a Principal Preparatory Program</p> <p>Graham, 2007 Cooper & Boyd, 1988</p>	<p>Collaboration in the Field of Education</p> <p>Grobe, 1990 Kochan, 1999 Holmes Group, 1990 Goodlad, 1993 Teitel, 2003 Barnhart et al. 1995</p>		
<p>The Use of Partnerships</p>	<p>Forming Partnerships</p> <p>Breault & Breault, 2010 Monorey & Beck, 2012</p>	<p>Improving School Leadership through Partnership</p> <p>Barnett et. al., 2010 SREB, 2010 Kochan & Young, 2004</p>	<p>Benefits</p> <p>Burton & Greher, 2007 Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001</p>	<p>Barriers</p> <p>Restine, 1996 Kochan, 1999 Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002</p>	<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Goodlad, 1991</p>

Principal Preparation Redesign	The Inclusion of Partnerships into the Design Whitaker, King, & Vogel, 2004 Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011 Burton & Greher, 2007 Tilford, 2008 Hale & Moorman, 2003	Core Conditions required Partnership SREB, 2006 Young, 2010			
Restructuring the Leadership Preparatory Program of the University	Redesign Model Created Darling-Hammond et al., 2007 Reames, 2010	Committee's Vision Reed & Kensler, 2010 Kochan & Reed, 2006	The use of an Advisory Council Kochan, 2010	Implementation of University/District Partnerships Kochan, Reames, & Patrick, 2011 Brooks, Havard, & Patrick, 2010	

Conclusion

This chapter is a review of the literature pertinent to the factors which influenced the formation of a university/K–12 school districts partnership created for the enrichment of the educational leadership preparation and improvement of student achievement. The importance of school leaders on schools and student outcomes, pathways to better leadership in schools, the use of partnerships in education, the principal preparation redesign, and restructuring the Leadership Preparatory Program of the university was examined. Methodology for this study is discussed in Chapter 3, the findings are presented in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 contains discussion, implications, a conceptual framework comparison and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

An initial step in determining the appropriate methodology to study the effectiveness of a program is to decide the measures for judging the processes and/or the outcomes (Guskey, 1999). It appears that there is difficulty in crafting and planning evaluations on the effects of university/district partnerships to enhance school leadership and student outcomes due to the intricacy of principal preparation programs filled with fluctuating, integrated, and, at times, conflicting interests of different participants and stakeholders (Ross, 2010). Research can be additionally obscured by the broad variations in content, strategy, and methods of delivery in principal preparation programs (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). The researcher intended to provide insight into the factors that hindered and facilitated the creation, implementation, and sustainability of a university/school partnership focused upon enhancing educational leadership preparation, and to identify the outcomes and benefits of the initiative for the individuals and organizations involved.

The framework of this case study was based on the types of partnerships identified through the work of Bruce G. Barnett and his associates (2010): 1) independent, 2) vendors, 3) collaborative, 4) symbiotic, 5) spin-offs, and 6) new organizations. The researcher sought to compare the perceptions of partnership participants with characteristics described in this model. A more detailed explanation of the conceptual framework for this study is given in Chapter 1.

Research Design

The researcher approached the research questions utilizing qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are idyllic for explanations of why and how phenomena occur, central patterns of association, and the range of their effects, including inferences of causality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher used naturalistic inquiry to gain a detailed understanding of the unknown (Creswell, 2007).

A case study design was chosen to examine the partnership endeavor. Case study is a research design that can be used to deepen knowledge related to multiple types of phenomena and allows for a holistic and meaningful investigation of characteristics of a bounded system. This study design can provide rich descriptive illustrations of what is actually happening in the program and analysis of this depiction can provide plausible explanations for those events or outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

A purposeful sample technique was used to gather data from the participants involved with the partnership. Participants were chosen based on their knowledge of and involvement in the partnership. The sample included university faculty and staff, school district administrators, school district field-based coordinators, school-level leadership coaches, and leadership students. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Creswell (2007) stated that “reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing a good-quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape” (p. 209). These field notes were used to develop codes and ultimately the major themes that emerged through the transcribed interviews.

Individual interviews and focus group discussions are considered strong sources of data for case studies because they deal precisely with the study topic (Yin, 2003). Far-reaching knowledge can be discovered by the interviewing process in case study research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Open-ended interview items were used in this study to provide the researcher the opportunity to delve into the topic in a manner that spawned an all-inclusive understanding of the sample participant's perceptions related to the partnership program between the educational leadership program at Landmark University and its surrounding school district partners.

For additional qualitative data collection, the investigator also observed partnership activities and reviewed documents created by Landmark University for implementation of the partnership program, documents created by the state as guidance for redesign of the principal preparation programs in the state's colleges and universities, and status and/or summative reports of the partnership program. Creative data collection methods such as these are suggested by Creswell (2007) for those conducting case study research. Yin (2003) encouraged multiple forms of data collection including documents and archival records as a way to attain an in-depth, holistic view of the case.

Data Analysis

As qualitative data were collected by the researcher to code the information into meaningful and manageable chunks of data. This analysis consisted of scripting thoughts and impressions while the researcher was engaged in the analysis of the data. Data analysis occurred continuously throughout data collection as the researcher attempted to identify emerging themes and patterns, as well as flesh out anomalies and contradictions (Creswell, 2007). This continuous analysis allowed for objectivity by binding the research process closely to the data.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three questions:

1. What served as facilitators to the creation, implementation, and/or sustainability of the partnership as perceived by partnership participants?
2. What factors do partnership participants perceive as hindrances to the development, implementation, and/or sustainability of the partnership?
3. What benefits, improvements in educational leadership preparation, and/or student achievement outcomes have been realized through partnership involvement as perceived by partnership participants?

Assumptions

1. Participants in the case study were open and honest in their feedback and reflections.
2. Transcripts of interviews were accurate.
3. Realities are constructed by social actors.
4. Social relations are often more important for understanding behaviors and attitudes than other background factors such as age or gender.
5. Reality is subjective.
6. Meanings, constructed by social actors, can only be discovered through close interaction between the researcher and respondents.

Setting

The setting for the study is Landmark University, a major research institution located in the south and predominantly surrounded by small, rural school districts. The educational leadership program offered through the College of Education at Landmark is a master level degree. On average, eleven candidates earn a Master's in Educational Leadership from the

university each year. Currently, six full-time faculty serve the department. There are now fourteen partnered K–12 school districts. Seven are city school systems and seven are county school systems. The closest system that is partnered is the school district of the city in which the university is located. The farthest district to be in the partnership is a county district 80 miles southwest of the university’s location.

Table 4

Partner Districts that Contributed to Data for the Study

Pseudonym	Distance from university	Student Enrollment	Year Joined Partnership
Powell City Schools	39 miles	6,948	2008
Franklin County Schools	26 miles	2,938	2007
Jones City Schools	1 mile	7,843	2007
Tanner County Schools	26 miles	3,787	2008
Moseley City Schools	7 miles	4,337	2007
Sager County Schools	38 miles	3,595	2008
Givens City Schools	34 miles	1,931	2008
Black County Schools	21 miles	2,213	2007
Casady City Schools	67 miles	2,852	2013

Researcher’s Position

The researcher/investigator is a doctoral program candidate and school employee in one of the partner districts affiliated with the partnership program. At the time of this study, the investigator was named as field-based coordinator for the district-school partner for whom he is

employed. However, the researcher was not an active participant in the partnership prior to the initiation of the study and did not supply any data for it.

Participants

The participants for the study included university faculty and staff, school district administrators, school district field-based coordinators, school-level leadership coaches, and university leadership students. Two key informants were utilized throughout the study. One was a university faculty member who was extremely involved with the development of the partnership and one who was an integral part of the implementation of the partnership. All participants were chosen due to their involvement and knowledge of partnership purpose and activities.

Credibility

Having a prolonged engagement with the case and the participants is a widely accepted technique of forming credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This method allows the researcher to get familiar with the contexts of the study which develops into an understanding of the phenomena in various circumstances (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher can determine what information should be included as the focus of the study (Creswell, 2007). The explanation of these contexts is highly coveted by the case study researcher (Stake, 2005). Prolonged engagement was achieved in this study by the researcher engaging in partnership activities, interacting with participants at multiple points throughout the study, and working closely with key informants that are closely tied to the partnership development and implementation over an extended period of time.

Once the researcher identified themes and contradictions that emerged, the researcher triangulated the data. Triangulation is a process that helps to ensure that the reported findings

are true reflections of the perceptions of the participants. Credibility was added to this research through the triangulation of data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). The validity of the findings was further strengthened by the member checking process. The researcher shared the findings with a sample of participants to ensure that findings were congruent with the actual information provided in the interviews. The new information could then be used and applied as knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2010).

Ethical Conditions

There is an obligation by the researcher in a research design that includes qualitative methods to protect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informants. By the nature of the process, case study research is always obtrusive. Participant interviewing and surveying invade the life of the informant to some degree and sensitive information is frequently revealed. This was of particular concern in this study where all of the participant's positions and organizations are highly visible and the sample size is comparatively small.

The following safeguards were employed to protect the participant's rights:

- 1) the research objectives were communicated verbally and in writing so they could be clearly understood by the participants (including a description of how the data would be used);
- 2) written permission to advance with the study as designed and communicated was received from participants;
- 3) a research exemption form was filed with the Institutional Review Board;
- 4) the participants were informed of all data collection instruments and procedures;
- 5) verbatim transcripts and written interpretations and reports were made available to the participants;

- 6) the participant's rights, interests, and wishes were considered priority when choices were made regarding reporting the data; and
- 7) the final decision concerning participant anonymity rested with the participant.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. Findings from this single case study may not be generalizable elsewhere since it deals with the perceptions, knowledge, and experiences of only one partnership. The researcher can never know if the case investigated is representative of the greater population of similar situations.

A limitation in this study is the position role of the researcher in the partnership organizations. The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research. In this study, the researcher is an employee of one of the district school partners and serves as the field-based coordinator to the partnership with the university. One of his assigned duties is to attend advisory council meetings of the partnership.

This allowed access of partnership activities to the researcher, but increased the risk of bias and concern that the participants might not feel comfortable openly sharing information "in house". A system of checks and balances was put into place to reduce the chances of bias and to increase the trust and reduce concerns of the respondents. The researcher used field notes during the research process, continually reviewing these notes to detect any evidence of bias and as a guide during analysis. Interview sessions were scheduled during convenient times and at convenient locations for the participants. The researcher provided a copy of the interview protocol during the interview session to ensure transparency to the participants concerning the data being collected.

As is customary in qualitative data collection and analysis, the researcher used explicit, detailed accounts when combining the interview data. The researcher also practiced triangulation by using multiple data sources including document review and data from interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a final safeguard, participants were asked to review their interview data to provide clarity and to assure that the researcher was not introducing bias into what was said. Additionally in the analysis process, the researcher continued the analysis until saturation occurred. This was the largest factor in determining sample size (Mason, 2010).

Significance of the Study

There has been very little research done to explore the development and sustainability of school/university partnerships in educational leadership programs and the degree to which they are fulfilling their intended purpose to inform and improve school leadership practices. The subjects of this study were in the eighth year of partnership activities which should allow adequate longevity for implementation and sustainability processes to be studied (Fullan, 2008). Gaining insight into the development and implementation processes, the effectiveness of the partnership practices and the barriers and facilitators to the initiative should be of value to other educational leadership graduate programs and to those who are seeking to create similar partnerships in other fields.

In addition, as future challenges arise to be met by district school leaders, it will be helpful to have a deeper grasp of how joint ventures with universities may be capitalized upon as valuable resources to them. This research will add to the literature on this topic and should serve to inform the educational leadership field.

Summary

This expressive qualitative case study is an investigation of the partnership formed between a university and fourteen of its neighboring school districts for the purpose of enhancing the educational leadership program and to increase student achievement in the district schools. The setting for the study is Landmark University, a major research institution, located in the south and predominantly surrounded by small, rural school districts. The participants for the study included the university faculty and staff, school district superintendents, school district field-based coordinators, school-level leadership coaches, and university leadership students. Multiple data sources were collected and analyzed including interviews, meeting documents, agendas, and reports and guidelines generated by the university and state. Chapter 4 will present the results and findings of the researcher for this case.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The focus of this study was to gain insight into the creation, implementation, and sustainability of a university/K-12 school districts partnership intended to improve educational leadership preparation and by association, increase student achievement. There was an examination of the factors that serve to assist the creation, implementation, and sustainability of the partnership and an exploration of what factors hindered the processes. Additionally, there was an investigation to identify the outcomes and benefits of the initiative for the individuals and organizations involved. The researcher sought to explore if the effects of the partnership were being realized as intended and to find where this partnership fits on a continuum of typology of partnerships (Barnett et al., 2010).

Data were collected through individual interviews, a focus group, review of primary document sources, and researcher observations. Seventeen participants contributed to the data through these interviews and focus group discussion. Of the partnership participants from whom data were gathered, the thirteen individual interviews included three superintendents of K–12 school districts, three field-based coordinators of K–12 school districts, three assistant principals/leadership coaches in K–12 school districts, one high school principal, four university staff members (three faculty members and one clinical faculty member), and the one focus group discussion was with four leadership program graduates (two currently administrators, one a lead teacher, and one continued classroom teacher).

Data Sources

List of Data Sources

Individual Interviews	Pseudonym	Position to the Partnership
Interview 1	Mrs. Alpha	Field-based Coordinator
Interview 2	Mr. Beta	Superintendent
Interview 3	Dr. Gamma	Superintendent
Interview 4	Dr. Delta	Superintendent
Interview 5	Dr. Epsilon	Principal
Interview 6	Dr. Zeta	Assistant Principal/Leadership Coach
Interview 7	Ms. Eta	Assistant Principal/Leadership Coach
Interview 10	Mrs. Sigma	Field-based Coordinator
Interview 13	Ms. Chi	Field-based Coordinator
Interview 8	Dr. Theta	University Faculty
Interview 9	Dr. Rho	University Faculty
Interview 11	Dr. Tau	University Faculty
Interview 12	Dr. Phi	University Faculty

Focus Group	Pseudonym	Position to the Partnership
Focus Group Respondent 1	Ms. Iota	Leadership Program Graduate
Focus Group Respondent 2	Ms. Kappa	Leadership Program Graduate
Focus Group Respondent 3	Mr. Lambda	Leadership Program Graduate
Focus Group Respondent 4	Mr. Mu	Leadership Program Graduate

Documents Reviewed:

The following documents were retrieved from the university Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology department. The researcher looked through the notes to analyze meeting agendas and calendars, staff meeting minutes, anecdotal records, artifacts, and status reports pertaining to the partnership planning, implementation, or evaluations of sustainability.

Themes and commonalities to the research questions were looked for in the documents.

- Governor's Congress on School Leadership, Final Report, May 11, 2005
- Governor's Congress on School Leadership: Educational Leadership Preparation Redesign Grant Proposal, November 2, 2005
- Principal Preparation Redesign Initiative, Meeting Agenda and Session Notes, January 20, 2006 & April 27, 2006
- Lead Redesign University Retreat, Agenda & Notes, Birmingham, AL, February 8-9, 2006
- Instructional Leadership Redesign Program Review Materials & University Redesign Visiting Team Agenda, August 27-28, 2007

- Meeting Notes from Governor's Congress on School Leadership II, 2008
- Instructional Leadership Program Status Report, Landmark University (pseudonym), March 22, 2013

Researcher Observations:

1. Advisory Council Meetings, January 20, 2016
 - Partners chose Capstone Presentation topic
 - University faculty gave reports on program happenings and conferences
 - District leaders shared developments in each district
 - A special presentation by a partnered district administrator on an alternative learning high school that his district created and implemented
 - Networking conversations
 - Introduction of new clinical educator hired

March 11, 2015

- Discussions of acceptable procedures for having university leadership students request permission to observe, interview, or collect data in school districts
- District leaders shared developments in each district
- University faculty gave updates on programs and conferences of interest
- A celebration of a district staff retirement, conversations among members, and refreshments

2. MEGA Conference, School-University Partnerships mini-session
Mobile, AL, July 2015

- A presentation of how a university and its surrounding school districts are partnered to ensure quality clinical experiences for the teacher intern students
- A question and answer period for audience participants to ask specific questions about the partnership program

Biographies of Participants

Respondent 1 Mrs. Alpha Field-based Coordinator

Mrs. Alpha served as the Director of Federal Programs in her city school district. She was named a field-based coordinator for the partnership. In that role, she attended advisory council meetings and kept her superintendent abreast of partnership activities. She is currently an Assistant Superintendent in a school district that is not a member of the partnership.

Respondent 2 Mr. Beta Superintendent

Mr. Beta is the superintendent of a partnered county school district. He attends advisory council meetings and participates in many partnership sponsored activities and events.

Respondent 3 Dr. Gamma Superintendent

Dr. Gamma is the superintendent in a partnered city school district. She attends advisory council meetings and has participated in some partnership sponsored activities.

Respondent 4 Dr. Delta Superintendent

Respondent 8 Dr. Theta University Faculty

Dr. Theta has retired as a faculty member from Landmark University. She was Dean of the College of Education at Landmark during the development of the partnership. She was very instrumental in the developmental processes for the partnership as a lead for that committee. She served as a faculty member for a number of years after the implementation of the partnership. During this time, she attended advisory council meetings, promoted and attended many partnership sponsored activities and events, and contributed to the partnership through researching, advising, and teaching.

Respondent 9 Ms. Iota Graduate of Redesigned Leadership Program

Ms. Iota is a recent graduate of the leadership program since the redesign to include partnership activities. She is currently a lead teacher at a middle school in her partnered city school district.

Respondent 10 Ms. Kappa Graduate of Redesigned Leadership Program

Ms. Kappa is a recent graduate of the leadership program since the redesign to include partnership activities. She is currently teaching at an elementary school in her partnered city school district.

**Respondent 11 Mr. Lambda Graduate of Redesigned Leadership Program
Assistant Principal/Leadership Coach**

Mr. Lambda is a graduate of the leadership program and now serves as assistant principal at a high school in one of the partnered city school districts. He has the immediate oversight of graduate leadership interns in his school, mentors the interns as their leadership coach, and acts as a liaison between the university and the student interns. He is currently working on his doctoral degree from Landmark.

Respondent 12 Mr. Mu Graduate of Redesigned Leadership Program

Upon graduating from the leadership program, Mr. Mu was hired as an assistant principal in one of the schools of a partnered county school district. Currently, he is employed as a graduate assistant in the Office of University Outreach at [Landmark] University.

Respondent 13 Dr. Rho University Faculty

Dr. Rho is a university faculty member and is involved with the partnership through attending advisory council meetings and participating in many various partnership sponsored activities and events. She was instrumental in the curriculum redesign for the leadership program at the university.

Respondent 14 Mrs. Sigma Field-based Coordinator

Mrs. Sigma serves as the Curriculum and Testing Coordinator in her partnered city school district. Her district had gotten a new superintendent just prior to her interview. Her previous superintendent had predominantly handled partnership meetings and activities himself. Mrs. Sigma has attended partnership sponsored activities. She is knowledgeable of the partnership presence in her district and uses aspects of the partnership in her district responsibilities.

Respondent 15 Dr. Tau University Faculty

Dr. Tau is a current university faculty member. She was not on staff at Landmark during the development or implementation stages of the partnership. However, she has been very involved with partnership activities since her hire. She attends advisory council meetings and many other partnership sponsored events. She is active with using the partnership to inform her research, teaching, and advice.

Respondent 16**Dr. Phi****University Faculty**

Dr. Phi was hired as the clinical faculty to aid in the implementation of the partnership as part of the newly redesigned leadership program at Landmark. Her job responsibilities and duties required her to be immersed in partnership related activities. She planned, set-up, and attended all advisory council meetings for the partnership. She also attended many various other partnership related activities and events. In addition, one of her primary roles was to coordinate clinical experiences for leadership student interns in K-12 school district settings. She worked closely with partnered school districts in the placement of these university students.

Respondent 17**Ms. Chi****Field-based Coordinator**

Ms. Chi is the Special Education Coordinator for her partnered county school district. She is a graduate of the redesigned leadership program at Landmark and was previously hired as an assistant principal in her district before being promoted to the central office administration position. She has not attended advisory council meetings as a field-based coordinator, yet. However, because of her experiences as a graduate student, she is familiar with partnership related activities. She is also very knowledgeable about the administrative make-up of her district and how that might relate to the partnership.

Overview of the University/K-12 Partnership

In 2005, when the governor's congress released its report on the redesign of educational leadership preparatory programs in universities and colleges, Landmark University set about adhering to the deliverables of the mandate. In an unprecedented move, the university closed their program for two years and did not take any additional candidates for the Master's program in educational leadership. They formed committees to address the different demands of the

redesign and utilized stakeholders from different organizations to inform the work. The four collaborative committees were: admissions, curriculum, partnership council, and evaluation.

The groups met on a regular, continual basis over the two-year planning of the redesign. It is worthy of recognition in acknowledging the enormous amount of time devoted to careful and purposeful planning of the redesigned preparation and the role the partnership would have in its implementation and growth. If the long, planning process is not indeed a facilitator for the success of the partnership, it is undeniably a catalyst to all of the factors that facilitate the partnership. One product example of how the planning process ties into the other aspects of partnership facilitation is an evaluation instrument for committee meetings. Measures were incorporated to ensure that all partnered stakeholders had voice in the development of the procedures and content for the new program. Surveys were used to evaluate committee member participation and content inclusion.

The partnership council committee used to create a partnership between the program and the surrounding district K–12 school systems developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that established the role and responsibility expectations for both the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and the university partners. Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) were signed by the district superintendents as part of the procedures. A mission statement was created from the redesign initiative and goals for the partnership were developed through collaborative efforts. Two major accomplishments were desired from the inclusion of partnerships into the overhauled program: improved educational leaders to graduate from the program to serve as administrators in district schools and student achievement would improve in district schools due to the new leadership.

Findings

This is a presentation of the findings from the data collection sources. Individual interview responses, focus group discussions, reviews of primary source documents, and researcher observations were included to develop the findings of the facilitating factors, barriers and outcomes of this partnership. The results are shared in detail in this chapter of the study.

Facilitating Factors

During the research investigation, several aspects developed as perceived causes for the successful creation, implementation, and sustainability of the partnership. Two large overarching categories in which to organize these factors are human/relational factors and structural factors. These perceived causes separated into five major themes. Three of them, social connections, involvement and commitment of district partners and leaders, and involvement and commitment of university partners and leaders were placed in the Human/Relational category. Two themes: open and regular communication, and the use of a clinical educator were placed in the Structural Factors category. Each of these is discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Human/Relational Factors

The data revealed three factors that tie-in closely to human qualities and characteristics. The researcher discovered that social connections, the commitment of the district leaders and partners, and the commitment of the university leaders and partners had an impact on the creation and implementation phases of the partnership and continue to have a significant role on the growth and sustainability of the partnership.

Social connections. One of the most often recurring themes from the research data dealt with the human relationships previously formed prior to the official onset of partnership activities and the opportunities to nurture more social networking that is afforded by the

partnership. A massive 69% (10 of the 13) of school district and university respondents gave examples of this catalyst to the partnership process. During interviews, participants talked of how these social connections, past and present, foster an attitude of shared vision, trust, dependability, and camaraderie. From the interviews, one superintendent, Mr. Beta said,

The buy-in to begin with was because of relationships. Relationships with Dr. [Rho], relationships with Dr. [Phi]. That if they were involved in it, it was going to be pretty good. So what peaked my interest in the beginning was the relationship with those two individuals. And as you know, relationships in anything are important.

He continued to explain how important his perceived relationships with two of the university faculty members were in facilitating his involvement with the partnership.

I knew Dr. [Phi] and Dr. [Rho] would be involved in something that had tremendous potential, just because I knew those two individuals. I knew that they were the kind of leader that knows the way, shows the way, and goes the way. And I knew that they were the kind of leaders that would create a vision for what they wanted this partnership to be. People buy-in to the leader before they buy-in to the vision.

Another superintendent of a local partnered district, Dr. Gamma, concurred,

I think, personally, in my leadership role, something that has helped me were these relationships that were easily formed....I've never reached out to any of them, that they didn't respond.

She further commented,

I think relationships make it easier to communicate, and because I am involved, they know that I care.

Dr. Gamma completed her idea by stating,

Knowing they're there and open and willing to give their time.

Yet another district partner superintendent, Dr. Delta, agreed with her colleagues,

The different individuals from the university have all taken the time to get to know my district, to get to know me.

She clarified,

I think [the university staff] invested a lot of time and I think they have a vision for where they want it to go.

She completed her line of answering for this topic with,

The people. They have the right attitude. They've got the right vision.

Additional admonishment for the growth of social relationships out of the partnership and their influence on partnership facilitation came from other levels of district school system personnel.

Mrs. Alpha, a field-based coordinator from the district, central office level, stated,

One of the things I have noticed is the camaraderie that it [the partnership] builds between the school district and the college.

Dr. Zeta and Mrs. Eta are assistant principals/leadership coaches involved with the partnership.

Dr. Zeta shared,

I would say that it's the people who are involved there. Less because of working here, more because of having been involved with [Landmark] University. More because I really like Dr. [Phi].

Dr. Zeta had more to say,

You're very much in a trusting relationship where you're building this relationship to make the schools better. You trust them to come in and help when you need it. That's a

strength to be able to call on the phone the people there [at the university] and that they maintain relationships with us.

Her counterpart in a neighboring district, Mrs. Eta, relayed a similar themed story of the role relationships has played in her partnership experiences. She explained,

The relationships are extremely important. I depend on and value my professors and I appreciate the education that I received from [Landmark].

Similarly she said,

.....because of my relationship with [a university faculty member and [Landmark University], I contacted her to ask her if she would come in as a consultant and help us with our professional development.

Though she professes to be very satisfied with her relationship with university staff, some concerns were expressed about the importance of the social aspect of the partnership by Dr. Zeta.

She relayed,

It's the relationships that they get out and build with the people. And I would venture to say that wherever I go, I would want them as my people.

She warned,

You're [the university] going to have to keep building those relationships and keep good contact to make sure you're keeping your [school] leaders invested in their people.

She opined,

The tricky part for them will be, for the university (staff), is to not step on the toes of the higher ups [district administration].

Details outlining the influence of social networking upon the partnership development, implementation, and continuance came from the university staff, as well. Professors spoke of the human relations impact during the creation stage of the partnership.

Dr. Theta shared,

We had shared goals and a vision for what the partnership could accomplish. We were both looking for a stronger curriculum that was going to be based more in schools with the reality being that we would have more principals and leaders, that the leaders coming out of the program would be more, well prepared. So that was a benefit for both. We would have a better curriculum. They would have better candidates. I think other goals were just building a relationship where the research that we were doing could impact the curriculum of the schools or the leadership of the schools, and what was going on in the schools could impact our curriculum.

She also explained,

When I first came here as a faculty member, I called every superintendent. I think there were about eight of them nearby, and I asked if I could come see them and I asked if I could get to know about their system, and I spent a day with each one of them. After that, they knew me, I knew them.

Dr. Rho, also a professor, had this to say about one of her colleagues from the university:

[Dr. Theta] had been [building relationships] for years. She had done it as a professor. She did it through [a university outreach program] when she was the director there. She did it as associate dean. She did it as dean. So they see [Dr. Theta] walk in the door and they light up.

Another professor and colleague, Dr. Phi, agreed,

Of course they all knew [Dr. Theta] and knew what [Dr. Theta] stood for. She was the Dean at the time. And [Dr. Omega] was so instrumental in getting [the partnership] started. It was [Dr. Theta]'s idea and [Dr. Omega] did the leg work. It was good that so many people from the districts knew them.

She further spoke to her own responsibilities to create relationships in the beginning processes.

She recalls,

That was probably the biggest thing when I first got here was to establish those relationships with principals and assistant principals and [to determine] what schools were strong in which areas.

She added,

I still had contacts from when I was here, back in the mid-90s. I was the assistant principal at [a local elementary school], so I had my [local district] people that I already knew. Of course, I knew [a couple of superintendents of surrounding school districts] and I just spent a lot of time getting to know others. It helped that I've always enjoyed talking.

Some university staff commented about the status of the human/social aspect of the partnership and gave thoughts about its role in the growth of the partnership.

Dr. Tau explained,

We professors really need to invest in those advisory council meetings. Both having them and making sure they're designed in a way that's engaging and allows people to deepen their connection with each other. Then design institutes each semester that are attractive and beneficial to our partners, and that our partners make the effort to be present at that and they make it a priority to be there.

She further elucidated,

I feel like our partnership is a real partnership. It's not just a rubber stamp on paper partnership, and there are plenty of people who have shared with me rubber stamp on a piece of paper examples of a partnership. So I'm proud that ours is real, and we care about cultivating it, and we're asking the questions and are interested in how to improve it. We certainly have opportunities for that and we have a strong foundation to work on.

One college professor, Dr. Rho, supposed,

We're reaching out and trying to get other partners and they've not been contacted by us before, so the relationships are still growing and will always be growing.

She further concurred,

I agree that all of the professors need to be out there [in the districts].....That's one of the reasons we like to teach [our university classes] out of the [district] schools.

Another college professor made additional claims about the state of the partnership collaboration efforts and concerns for nourishing those collaborations. Dr. Theta reported,

We have created stronger ties with our school systems. I think we're seen as a place you can come if you need help and expertise, so I think that's been good. I think it's helped us just in terms of the way people see us and our program. I think there have been more people who have suggested to [others] that they come to [Landmark] if you're going to get your degree. I think it's helped with recruitment.

She reiterated her perception of how critical the relationship element of the partnership to be as she gave this caution,

It is very important that the faculty is engaged and the faculty is part of the relationship, not somebody that just shows up at the meetings or teaches the classes and it can't just be

the clinical educator. The clinical educator is supposed to be the bridge person.... I think this could be a real danger and serve as a barrier to our success if it starts becoming a situation where the clinical educator is considered the contact to the partnerships and the rest of the faculty does not have a personal relationship.

Involvement and commitment of district partners and leaders. A second theme for cultivating the partnership that manifested is having buy-in from the partnered district school system leaders.

The district leaders being dedicated to staying active and believing in the purpose of the partnership was prevalent in interview responses. Additionally, program design reports and meeting notes exist to document that district leaders had input into developing a mission statement for the partnership, setting goals to be jointly accomplished and contributed to the procedures and requirements for selecting educational leadership candidates for the preparatory program. Moreover, MOAs between the university and district were signed by each partnered district leader (typically the superintendent) that spelled out the roles and responsibilities of both the school and the university parties involved. Documents also show where district partner representatives share in course delivery. District partners have been members of leadership panel discussions, guest presenters to classes, or co-taught program courses along with the university faculty.

Forty-six percent of the district school and university respondents deemed buy-in from the district school leaders as vital to the success of the partnership. Mr. Beta is a superintendent in one of the district partners and expressed these thoughts:

It's a natural environment for us to play in because we want those things for our children, for the kids in 'this district.' We want it for our teachers and our future leaders because

they can help us in preparing to be better as adults in this system.... We'd be crazy not to take advantage of..... that partnership with [Landmark] University. It'd be ludicrous for us not to be.

He went on to further report his degree of dedication to the partnership by stating,

As the superintendent, I have not pushed that off on other staff members. Although the primary point of contact has been the curriculum and instruction director, I have also been extremely involved myself... The buy-in for me was relatively easy. What I had to then do was convince folks that 'hey, there's a real benefit here for us'.

Another superintendent in a surrounding partnered district, Dr. Delta, said,

If it's not important to the superintendent, it's not important to the schools in the system.

She further explained,

If we [superintendents] don't see a cost benefit, it may not be important to us.

She expounded on the importance of the partnership by saying:

They [the university] sold it the right way because you can either win people over when you go in with a new idea or people can say 'I'm way too busy to add one more thing to my plate.' So they sold it the right way. They have structured it so that it is such a benefit to people who are partners that people who weren't partners in the beginning, like us, said 'I need to be a part of that'.

Dr. Delta goes on to expound on an element of the partnership that she feels is a particularly good reason for her buy-in as a superintendent,

We promote their [leadership] program. I go out and recruit people to go into their [leadership] program because I want to build capacity within my own school system and I know [Landmark] has a good program.

Another resounding endorsement for the involvement of district leaders came from an area principal in one of the partnered districts. Dr. Epsilon stated,

It all starts with [top] leadership. If that's a point of emphasis, then it'll be a point of emphasis for all of us. We understand now that it is critical to make sure the leaders of all schools are instructional leaders, and our superintendent understands that, so the more he can be plugged into an institution that develops leaders and have voice in that, the better our kids will benefit. The more the kids will benefit.

He went on to say just how crucial he thought buy-in from district leaders is:

The most important thing is the willingness of the school leadership, on our side and the university side, to work together because they're a university that will help any system in the state. It's not just about those that are a few miles away. So their vision, I know is to reach out to everyone everywhere. I think the most important factor is do we have leadership buy-in from our superintendent, from our principals, in working and partnering with [Landmark].

Mr. Lambda, who is a graduate of the educational leadership program at Landmark and now an assistant principal/leadership coach in a high school of one of the district partners, spoke about the leader in his building having confidence in partnering with the university:

The principal at the high school [where I am employed] had received his doctorate through the program at [Landmark] University. So just kind of a testament to what kind of people the program produces and having an idea of the activities and preparation already outset, it helps and is beneficial.

The university staff members also perceived a high level of commitment from district leaders. They cited various reasons for this perception. Dr. Rho, a university faculty member,

credited district partners during the development and implementation of the partnership by stating,

I think there was a lot of support from the districts. They knew it [needed] to be done, and they were interested in helping.

Another university faculty member, Dr. Theta, addresses her perceptions of district involvement while the partnership strives to sustain and grow. She opined,

I think the memorandums of agreement have helped because they lay out what you're supposed to do and what the agreement is. If you can get the new superintendent engaged in signing that, at least you can get a commitment even if they can't always come [to partnership meetings and activities]. The other thing that's helped is having the district level coordinators who tend to stay and tend to be consistent.

Involvement and commitment of university partners and leaders. The next theme to emerge garnered equally as prevalent comments. Much was said about how dedicated the university partners are, and have been, to supporting the activities of the partnership for the purpose of improving the district schools. Three of seven district partner members and three of four university members spoke of the importance of the dedication of university faculty and administrators.

Dr. Epsilon, a principal, complimented university staff with this statement,

One thing to me that's very reassuring, particularly through the [University Outreach Program] is I see them active in our leadership. Every winter, they sponsor our district principals' meeting. They hold a luncheon at [a nearby hotel and conference center]. We have speakers. So I see them not as just wanting to send interns and clicking off objectives so they can meet things [quotas], but they reinvest themselves back into our

schools by working with us, providing a time and a place for a meeting and being plugged in.

In another response he recounted this accolade,

When I see them reaching out to us in more than just a university capacity that tells me they want to be plugged into our schools. That's very exciting because they want to be connected. And I'll tell you another thing that's inspiring about that, is that I see these same faculty members at the state principals' summer conferences ... and that is important because members of the faculty, when they plug into the principals there, they get to talk to us, they get to know about our issues, and when I see that, that inspires me to be an active partner back with them and whatever needs they have because they're not just in a stereotypical fashion sitting at the university doing a job that's separate from schools. They're actively seeking involvement in what we're trying to do in the schools across the state. That's not just here in our school, but all schools. That's exciting because they're going out beyond.

In a similar statement, Dr. Epsilon said,

So they are active participants in our schools, not just this school, but all the area schools by way of the principals and the connections there, and that's big.

In similar statements, Dr. Zeta, an assistant principal/leadership coach in a partnered district school concurred,

.....they care enough about our schools to invest all this time....they care about our kids enough to figure out what we [all] can do to help.

Comments from the university staff were claims of their own involvement and hopes to see the district schools improve through partnership efforts, as well as, tales of the support that

the partnership has received from many other university leaders, staff, and faculty. One university faculty member, Dr. Tau, conveyed:

I hope that the partners will find more and more value from our [graduates]...that the institutes that we provide our students become a service that is highly valued and looked forward to, because I think it's mutually beneficial. My hope is that we continue to really listen to what our partners say about what's needed in their districts and that we bring that information into our coursework and into our outreach efforts.

She further suggested as good practice for university staff,

All of us [university staff] as members of the educational leadership team should show up at those meetings and be fully engaged in those meetings and be fully invested in those meetings.”

Dr. Theta is a former dean and faculty member who described some of her involvement, as she assumed extra responsibilities, in the early stages of the partnership. She remembered,

I was the dean, and actually, I was the director of the grant [for the program redesign] at the time, so I was very involved in the development piece. Later, I became a faculty member so I was involved in the implementation piece. I headed up one committee. I headed up the committee on the partnership itself. That's the one that developed the memorandum of agreement and decided about the structure of the partnership.

In addition to personal dedication to promote the vision of the partnership, university personnel made statements about the commitment of university administration to the collaboration efforts that they have experienced over the course of the creation, implementation, and growth of the partnership. Dr. Theta continued,

When I was dean, the provost was very supportive. The provost was so supportive that he allowed us to have a year, maybe two years, without taking new people into our master's program [during the redesign of the program] so our faculty would have time to meet and plan and revise the curriculum. Now that was unheard of. He also gave us funding for a clinical educator. So having support at the top really helped us to get going. I don't know how important it is once you're moving, but it was really important in the development stage and it is important in the implementation stage at the departmental level.

Dr. Rho is a faculty member at the university and gave this insight into why administrative support is important to the onset success of the partnership,

Having [Dr. Theta] as the dean I think was instrumental because we were able to get our hands on resources.

Both Dr. Rho and Dr. Theta are university faculty that spoke about the current department head at the university. Dr. Rho felt,

Our department chair is very supportive in cultivating the partnership and values it.

While Dr. Theta expounded,

Our department head is very supportive of this program, and the department head has continued to support having a clinical educator. She comes to the advisory council meetings when she can, and she's a presence. I think that's very important."

Structural Factors

The design structure of the partnership and its processes became an obvious facilitative factor. Two themes emerged from the analysis of the collected data: open and regular communication and the use of a clinical educator. Evidences of these were common in the

interview data, the focus group discussion, the documents related to the planning initiative, and in the researcher observations.

Open and regular communication. The open and regular communication between the participants and an accompanying sense of shared goals, mutual benefits, and equitable input into the partnership processes was a topic that occurred throughout the collection of data for this study and became the fourth theme. The theme was pervasive in the redesign meeting agendas and notes, the redesign initiative partnership committee reports and participant interviews. The frequency of correspondence and inclusion of all partners to participate in the planning, designing, and implementation suggests to the researcher that the creators of the partnership valued the contributions of all partners and afforded opportunities for the continual expression of ideas. From the observations, the researcher gathered that phone conversations and email exchanges among partners are occurring with a good deal of frequency. The ease and reliability of the partners to be able to contact each other with questions and ideas and receive quick responses and support for what they needed was discussed in many of the interviews. During interviews one superintendent, Mr. Beta, said,

They listen, we listen. It's a partnership; it's not just a piece of paper.

He acclaimed,

Sometimes you could say [worry] about partnerships that 'well, it's hard to get them to respond when we ask them something.' That's not the case and it's never been the case here [with this partnership].

He boasted,

I mean I can call, or text, or email [some of the partners] and I'm going to get an answer within just a few minutes if they're in town. You know, if they're traveling, I'm going to get it within a couple of hours.

He reiterated his point with,

But I have never heard anyone, in our meetings say, 'look, I'm having difficulty getting... communicating with you [other members].' That just doesn't happen.

Another district leader, Dr. Epsilon, agreed with his assessment of partnership communication. He claimed,

To me, one of the primary strengths [of the partnership] is the strong communication between [Landmark] University and the schools.

University faculty, Dr. Phi, relayed,

When it is that easy for us to pick up the phone and contact each other without hesitation; that says a lot. When [district partners] are that comfortable with the situation and have no problem communicating.

Some of the responses from participants gave details to specific examples of how input, feedback, and communication are utilized by the partnership. Partner superintendent, Dr. Delta, mentioned a couple of ways she perceives that districts have been included for the purpose of informing partnership decisions. She first talked about,

They've gotten feedback from the partners to say 'how can we make this better, how can we make this better work for you, what we'll bring us closer together', all those kinds of things.'"

Later she spoke of,

Their [university] interviewing process involves us [districts]. When they're bringing on new staff, they get us to come, and have dinner, and talk, and get a feel. I think they're looking for somebody that doesn't just have the knowledge, but somebody who really fits in, who's the best fit for what they're trying to accomplish....See, they give [the partners] buy-in into who they hire. It is kind of a safeguard.

A clinical faculty member at the university, Dr. Phi, described,

A couple of times we have divided the [advisory] council back into committees that were originally formed for various purposes within the partnership to re-look at the vision of the partnership and if that was being followed and actualized.

Several categories of participants mentioned the meaningful inclusion of partner members from the opposite organization for the purpose of their organization being better informed through increased collaboration with partners. A district superintendent, Dr. Gamma, shared how she invites input from university partner participants,

I have included [the university] in some of the community involvement and when we developed our strategic plan. I had a superintendent's advisory committee for a while. I had a facilities planning group as we were looking at the new high school and I include people from the College of Education in those groups.

Similarly in recognizing the value of university staff's input into district operations, Dr. Epsilon, speaks of the importance of these types of dialogues to him, as a principal. He said,

Well, those kind of partnerships only come open when we have good communication and shared needs and visions between the two institutions.....and I also understand the vision that is wanted by the university and us because we share that I think, and being on the same page and knowing the product [leadership graduates] that's turned out.

He continued,

We analyze data, we make decisions based on data. So, I want to make sure I hire people who have that understanding, and the educational leadership department understands that and prepares [graduates] in that.

Opinions about ways that open communication feeds into shared input and collaborative goals that have facilitated and might continue to facilitate a stronger, more valuable partnership also came from these discussions on communication. One such comment came from an assistant principal/leadership coach, Dr. Zeta. She advised,

Schools need to change year after year. What the community needs, and what our kids need, and what our teachers need, all that changes. As long as the university is willing to change with us.

Another assistant principal/leadership coach, Mr. Lambda, who also matriculated through the redesigned leadership program at [Landmark], shared,

Any capacity in which the partnership could branch out to meet specific needs of districts would always make it more valuable. Each district has needs that the university may not be aware of unless we share that with them. For example, I know we are weak in the area of special education. We have to be able to communicate that need we have. Then, we could tap into the resources of the university to help us improve that area.

Another student graduate of the program, Ms. Iota, brought out,

I have heard some people say they didn't know what to expect once they graduated.

What they studied in classes wasn't all there is to running a school. But my cohort was one of those cohorts where we would sit down with a list and ask the professors any questions. I feel like the courses prepared me to ask those [right] questions.

A professor, Dr. Tau, offered,

I'm hopeful that we can find a formula or rhythm for these institutes that make them of interest and value to our partners. Those kind of conversations need to take place in the advisory council meetings.

She later added,

Some members of that master's cohort that presented on RTI (Response to Intervention) have done consulting work with area districts they have been hired where they are responsible for RTI at their schools. So I do think there's evidence that the partners benefit from our listening. We hear what they say and we actually act on it to the best of our ability.

The use of a clinical educator. There were several times when the value of having a clinical educator to be the bridge between the K-12 districts and the university was brought out during this study. Most of the district respondents (11 of 13) talked about having a relationship with the clinical educator in one capacity or another. All four university staff partner members who participated in interviewing brought out points about the use of a clinical to facilitate partnership processes. An enormous (88%) participant response made the clinical educator the largest subject find from the interview and focus group data. The design initiative for the partnership documents included plans for a clinical educator to be hired as a liaison. Lastly, the researcher observed the clinical educator as the coordinator of the advisory council meetings and witnessed her in a facilitating role.

From the university staff's perspective, they noted how the clinical educator fits into the whole schema. Dr. Theta said,

That's why having a clinical educator has been so helpful because there is somebody who can be out in the field and has the time.

Though she cautions,

I think all of that is part of what will facilitate or what will hinder [the partnership]. That [clinical hire] and [university] faculty have to see it [partnership growth/sustainability] as their responsibility. It's their responsibility. It's not just this person (clinical). The new hire [clinical] has to see it as a shared responsibility and not just try to covet it. That's a delicate balance.

Dr. Rho shared,

I think our needs of a clinical in terms of what their responsibilities are, we have a better idea now of what they need to be doing over what we knew [when the partnership started].

She went on later to say,

They [the clinical] should be managing the internships. If there's not enough people to teach courses, to avoid hiring an adjunct, they should be asked to teach a course here and there. I think the clinical should really be in charge of partnership development. That's what one of their primary focuses needs to be.

Dr. Tau, another university professor, commented on what she perceived the role of the clinical educator to be. She claims,

It [job description] explicitly says that this position is the face of our program and a primary job responsibility is the cultivation of the partnership. That's very explicit and critically important to have somebody organize and take the lead on making sure that we have the advisory committee meetings each semester and that those are designed in a way

that's engaging and informative and helps all of us who show up and are present at those meetings.

She also shared,

I think that the clinical provides an opportunity to, in our practice, link theory and practice. Educational leadership is an applied field. It's not a theoretical field, and so we as professors, and me as an individual, I feel that I believe this deeply that theory is important and that we have to help our students connect theory to practice and see how theory can inform practice and therefore make practice better. The clinical provides a vehicle for that connection to be very strong and very real.

The clinical educator, Dr. Phi, spoke about her own perceptions of what the role of the clinical educator was to be. She recalled,

The two primary goals that were expressed to me were to establish a new cohort because the program had been shut down for 2 years and we didn't have any students in the program. So being able to go out to the systems and start recruiting was critical.... We depended on field-based coordinators to identify students with strong leadership potential. Kind of like, 'grow your own'. We hoped to help them grow their own. The other thing was just to get out there and meet people [from the district school systems]. You got to get out and be able to talk and listen to what they say. Sometimes it's just socialization and sometimes it is 'what do you all need and this is what we can do for you'.

Some of the university faculty had thoughts about how the utilization of a clinical educator builds trust with the partners, gives a face to the partnership, and allows a member of the university organization to virtually become a member of the district school organization.

Dr. Rho explained,

If you have a clinical person who is responsible for [facilitating] those relationships, they [K–12 district leaders] do get approached, they do get to meet with them, and partnership trust begins to build.

Another university colleague, Dr. Tau, expressed,

That clinical position is absolutely critical to our program. We could not be a program that invests in our partnership without our clinical professor. I just don't think we could do it, and the clinical is the face of our program in the school districts. Because the clinical is there regularly supervising interns and in different partner school districts every single week and frequently, multiple times a week depending on the time in the semester. That clinical becomes a member of sorts of our partner school districts, and people recognize her and know her, and she knows them.

Hindrances or Barriers for K-12/University Partnership Growth or Sustainability

During the analysis of the data for this study, several factors were identified by participants as impediments for partnership growth or sustainability. These views of possible hindrances to the progression of the partnership delineated into two major categories, Human/Social-Emotional and Physical/Structural. These categories and the themes within them are presented in detail in the section that follows.

Staff changes, resistance to engage, the need for more effective communication, time constraints, number of partners, and districts proximity to the university were offered by interview participants to explain what the partnership must overcome to expand to its fullest potential, or at least for it to continue to exist.

Human/Social Emotional Related Barriers

Some impeding factors are social behavior elements of the partnership. Things that are influenced by human nature or impact emotional aspects of the partner participants fall into this category. From this study, three themes were included: staff changes, resistance to engage, and a need for more effective communication.

Staff changes. The coming and leaving of personnel received a get deal of blame for potentially slowing the growth or stifling the partnership. Nearly 62% of the district and university participants interviewed (8 of 13) perceived staffing turnovers as a hindrance to partnership sustainability or growth. Some participants spoke about changes in district leadership. Mrs. Alpha, a field-based coordinator at the central office level, had this comment,

We have had a change in leadership in my district...and our new leader has more of a connection to some of the other colleges and I think this could cause partnership with [Landmark] to go by the wayside.

Mrs. Alpha further expressed,

That's probably the biggest barrier...because if it's not important to the boss it's not important. His unfamiliarity kind of minimizes [Landmark's] presence in our district and gives other colleges more of a preference. So that has been disenchanting.

Dr. Delta, a superintendent, offered this advice,

It probably wouldn't hurt to re-sell it to superintendents. It probably wouldn't be a bad idea because the turnover in the superintendency is phenomenal right now. The lifespan of a superintendent in [this state] right now is two years.

Mrs. Eta and Dr. Phi, representing different sides of organizational membership, K–12 districts and the university, respectfully, gave specific examples of interruptions in partnership progression caused by workforce changes in their perspective organizations. Mrs. Eta detailed,

But I will say too, that my superintendent.....we've just had a change of superintendence. So there could be.....not that there's a breakdown with the partnership, but it could be that change causing that [a break in communication].

Dr. Phi remembered a recent change in personnel,

I went out to meet with the interim superintendent and got to know him. Now, they have named someone else as superintendent. That means a 're-sell' to that system. [The new superintendent] does have background with the partnership but it's just a common courtesy to go back in and reestablish that rapport since he is now in that position.

Turnovers in staffing, especially in leadership, of the districts was not the only personnel concerns expressed by the interviewees. Variations in personnel at the university were also discussed by some of the research participants.

One of the district leaders, Dr. Zeta, expressed,

I guess the [university] faculty turnover might be a concern.

She deepened her thoughts with,

....at some point, these [university staff members] are going to retire. This faculty will change and it already has changed. If I don't meet the new people or build some type of relationship with them now, to know that I can trust them. How will I know that I can depend on them or go to them?

Dr. Theta is a retired university faculty member. She spoke about staff consistency within the partnership and elucidated,

At the university, [Dr. Omega] and I were very close to many of the superintendents.

She's left and I've left, and many of the superintendents leave, so then you've got another layer. That kind of change happening in systems makes it difficult.

Dr. Epsilon is a principal from a partnered district and gave advice about how he would like to see fluctuations in university staff handled. He detailed,

I always like to know when new staff members come on board, so one thing I might recommend is when they [the university] have new staff members on board, contact the area schools and bring them around, or have them come to our winter district meetings. That might be a good thing.

Several comments came from a long-time university faculty member, Dr. Rho. She talked about overall personnel revisions in both organizations and how those modifications in staffing affect the partnership. Dr. Rho opined,

It's the personnel, the coming and going of the personnel that's a barrier. The coming and going of the personnel at the university and at the school districts, and it's going to continue to happen. Since I've been at [Landmark], we've had two presidents and four provosts, different deans and department heads.

She added,

All of this goes back to establishing a relationship with these schools systems, and having trust in that. And how do you have trust in a relationship where one day that person is not there anymore?

She summed up her views with,

Things change. Some of your superintendents leave. And [university] faculty members leave. You start over.

Resistance to engage. Just as participants viewed commitment and involvement in the partnership as a facilitating factor, all three superintendents that participated in the interviews also spoke of some resistance to engage and viewed this as a perceived barrier to partnership development. They acknowledged some type of opposition to commit by some of the involved district members and some individuals within their own districts. Dr. Gamma and Dr. Delta talked about a focus on the partnership at the superintendency level. Dr. Gamma admitted,

I really don't know that I can think of or say any obstacles or barriers that have really kept us from doing. Just our own selves. It could be we are victims of our own success. It's that we are doing well, so we continue to plot along like we're doing, and we need to reach out.

Dr. Delta concurred,

Maybe they don't have a vision for where their schools need to go, or maybe they're happy with status quo.

Mr. Beta discussed resistance from those that are not in higher administration, but in the school level in his district. He thought,

When it trickles down to teachers and future leaders, it's a little bit harder to convince those people because their plates are full.

He continued,

.....it could be viewed as 'well, here comes another program that's going to take time away from me with the children that I need to be teaching.' And so you have that to overcome.

He concluded his thoughts on the idea,

The buy-in takes a little longer at that [school] level than it does at the central office level, at the superintendent level. But in the end, it's been worthwhile because we know something that will help us get to where we want to be that we didn't know 5-8 years ago.

Of the other district interview participants, two respondents joined the superintendents in comments about district resistance. A central office level administrator, Mrs. Alpha, gave a specific example of a lack of focus she experienced in her school district. She explicated,

The goal of the partnership... you know, what is the true goal of the partnership? I don't think all district partners, especially the new leaders, fully understand what the partnership is worth to the district or what it was established to do. So, I think the goals should be re-established and make sure everybody knows those.

An assistant principal/leadership coach at a partnered district high school, Dr. Zeta, shared her thoughts about two areas causing stumbling blocks to the effectiveness of the partnership on school district success. She spoke of antagonism she perceives to have experienced from her district leaders and struggles with follow through, at her school, with one of the major tenants of the leadership program curriculum. She started,

They [district leaders] take offense to when people want to take a look at what they're doing and tell them, 'well this is what's good about it and this is what you need to improve on.' They look at that as a negative. I think they almost have to go through all these programs to see it's not meant to be negative. It's just the facts, and these resources are out here to help you. Take advantage of them.

She added,

And I would say in [this district], right now, that would be another weakness we have.

We are not data driven at all. I know the university is big on data decisions and we still resist that for some reason.

Two university staff members expressed concerns about a lack of participation from different partnership members. Dr. Rho articulated that she worries when she doesn't see enough full participation from members of the university.

I see that as weakness right now, in our program. A superintendent needs to see [that it is important to everyone on the university side].

Dr. Tau communicated,

I would love to see more attendance at the institutes, but maybe we need to make the institutes more attractive to our partners, and so that's a puzzle. Because it is free PD, it's free access.

Need for more effective communication. Strong communication developed into a theme as a promoter for partnership creation, implementation, and sustainability. A lack of effective communication among partners became prevalent during data analysis as a possible prevention for partnership progression. The comments about communication were from 6 of 17 overall participants, from both organizations in the partnership, and dealt with many aspects and levels of information exchange among all involved members. The perceptions speak to the frustrations of partners to decide when, how frequently, and to whom notifications should be given and how effectively that information is being distributed to all involved parties.

From the university, Dr. Phi surmised,

Another barrier might be communication, at times. We know our partners get numerous emails. We may send something out and ask them to distribute it to teachers because we

never ask for a distribution list for the whole school system. So just them knowing when the email is something important that they really need to open up in a timely manner and get distributed.

One superintendent, Dr. Delta, agreed with this assessment,

I mean they [the university partners] could improve with the communication to everybody. Maybe if they sent out a monthly newsletter or just something to say okay, 'Don't forget every December the Winter Institute and every July we have Capstone', that kind of thing. Something like that would probably be beneficial because it'll keep things fresh in people's mind.

She confessed,

Communication may be a barrier because if somebody sends me an email three months ago and I read a date, I go ahead and put it on my calendar, but a lot of people aren't like that.

Furthermore she expounded,

Occasionally we do find out about some things a little too late to be able to take advantage of a certain meeting or a certain professional development opportunity or something like that, so that could be a barrier.

Some of the remarks were more global and implicated the highest level of the organizations or the entire organization. From one of the district school systems, Ms. Eta said,

I think [Landmark] needs to reach out to the districts more.

Contrastingly, Dr. Gamma, also from a district school system, claimed,

We (the districts) may not be reaching out enough.

Dr. Rho, a university faculty member, thought,

Relationship building over the years has not been as easy with some districts. Some of the more rural districts have not had the same level of communication with the university.

Other comments dealt with specific incidences of communication breakdowns. School district participants shared that a breakdown may be occurring as information is moving down from one level of the organization to the next. From one assistant principal/leadership coach, Dr. Zeta, claimed,

One [barrier] is communication. I think a lot of times that we [in the schools] don't know what's going on, or what's been said, or what's been told, or what's happening.

She explained,

....people from the central office.they go to these things, but they don't come back and report to us what happened.

She finally concluded,

We're missing that big time here. The communication part. So we never hear back about what's going on, or what's going to happen, or how we need to function.

Another assistant principal/leadership coach from a neighboring district, Ms. Eta, shared,

I think coming and being present and sharing that information would be valuable, not only at the Central Office, but I think they [university partners] need to come to the school.

Ms. Eta eluded to the fact that, because of a communication interruption within her district, her district might have an unawareness of what they are missing. She relayed,

But as far as barriers, I really think it's the communication. Communicating our needs, because I really think there's a lot more [Landmark] could offer that my [district] is not taking advantage of.

Her colleague and counterpart from a different school and district, Dr. Zeta, concurred,

I would say another barrier here would be the publicity for it.....advertising it, letting people know about it, and saying.... ‘This is something you can get involved in’. We have got to do a better job of that.

Physical/Structural Related Barriers

Factors of the partnership that are inherent to the partnership by its make-up, design, or nature that acted as obstacles for growth or sustainability are considered physical barriers. Those revealed in the study of this partnership are time constraints, the number of partners with regards to scheduling and serving them, and the partner district proximity to the university.

Time constraints. Widespread discussions developed throughout the data analysis concerning the time commitment needed to cultivate the partnership. Anxiety about time demands appeared in nearly 62% of the district and university participant interviews. The conversations were from both groups but were slightly most prevalent in the comments of the university faculty. However, the subject of whom they perceive is feeling the strain of time burdens was evenly credited to both the university staff and the K–12 school district personnel. They believe everyone to be under great time demands. Two superintendents, Dr. Delta and Dr. Gamma, and two district administrators, Dr. Zeta and Ms. Chi, discussed how the district schools are challenged to find time to utilize partnership activities to fidelity. Dr. Delta said,

They [district school employees] are already so overwhelmed, that they just can’t see that doing one more thing is going to take any more of these things off of them.

Dr. Gamma explained it,

It’s the age-old, time, for some people. I think, ‘when is the best time?’ I don’t like to take teachers away from classrooms or administrators away from the schools.

Dr. Zeta surmised,

Sometimes finding time in your schedule to accommodate all the programs of the partnership to fidelity can be a challenge.

Ms. Chi similarly responded,

You can't implement all the things you would like to, just simply because of the time and all the other hats you wear. You can't devote all the time you need to one particular area.

University faculty deliberated upon the traditional expectations placed on them and the additional workload created by efforts to cultivate partnership ties and activities with the K-12 districts. Dr. Theta detailed the faculty's workload like this,

Time and responsibilities that each group has at the university is so demanding. You still have to research, you still have to teach classes, you still have to take care of your service responsibilities here.

Dr. Rho shared comparable thoughts,

Those things that are required of us, don't leave a lot of time for us to be out spending time in school districts cultivating the partnership. It's just a really hard part of our job description. It's not explicitly part of our job description, and there's not a reward system for that.

She further explained,

I would love to be involved in going out and working those partnerships myself, but it's not my job and it's not my role. College professors do not get any perks for going out there and doing that. It's not recognized as part of our tenure system so we are not rewarded for spending time on partnership relationships.

The university partners also acknowledged the extreme amount of time required by district partners to operate school systems on a daily basis. Dr. Phi relayed,

Superintendents are so busy. So from each system, we asked for a field-program coordinator to share the responsibilities with the superintendents. The idea was to have an additional person in the district to depend upon when the superintendent had to be dealing with a hundred other things. That is the person I went through to set up those [advisory council] meetings and placing interns into the schools.

She further expressed,

Our district school partners are just extremely busy and we realize that and try to respect it. Respect it in setting meeting times and places, planning events or activities, or anything where we are asking for their time.

Dr. Theta agreed,

At the school level, [they have] got hundreds of kinds of things demanding their time. So it is difficult to have people in both situations available enough to keep the partnership going.

There were remarks about how using time is a challenge for all partnership participants and thoughts on the need to find avenues to alleviate that obstacle. University faculty member, Dr.

Theta expressed her ideas,

It's difficult to get everyone together all at once. I think we could be getting a little bit more strategic in terms of using things like conferences. We could probably get more involvement if we would start thinking of something like that. I mean you could have an online meeting periodically. Then more people could come.

Another university faculty member, Dr. Tau, stated,

I would say I think time is a barrier, and it's so sad to me to feel that way. I think time is a barrier for our partners and I think time is a barrier for us. Everybody has very full plates, and it's challenging to prioritize partnership cultivation and partnership activities.

She additionally commented,

But I feel like the attendance [to the partnership sponsored institutes] could even be better, and that's some of our [university staff] responsibility, and it's some of our [K-12 district] partners' responsibility to be willing to give time to come to those. Time is a really challenging one.

Dr. Tau continued with a suggestion,

I think that we need to make sure that we schedule a convenient time for everyone to attend advisory council meetings every semester.

She later offered,

One strategy we are trying is that we took it [partnership sponsored institute] out of December so it's before Thanksgiving, which means it's a less holiday-oriented time, so maybe that will open it up [for attendance].

Number of partnered districts. Perhaps closely related to time concerns, a theme of scheduling activities and being available as it relates to partnership size (number of school districts in partnership with the university) emerged from the analysis of interview data. All comments related to this refrain were made by university staff when verbalizing thoughts on fostering more active participation from everyone involved. In contrast to these concerns, a review of documents revealed that the planning committee was open to allowing any school districts to be participants of the partnership that were interested in joining. There were no plans to restrict the size of the partnership by limiting district membership. The interviews afforded

some newer, interesting, and sometimes conflicting views on the matter. One university faculty, Dr. Rho, guarded,

I don't think [the partnership] is too big. I think what you have is a partnership that is extremely strong.

Another faculty member, Dr. Theta, is more cautious about the size of the partnership as she expressed,

I don't know if it's too large, but we get disappointed when not everybody participates. Maybe we need to think about how feasible it is to have that many partners be really active and engaged because of resources on both ends.

She later rephrased her view,

One thing is we have so many partners, and not all of them are active and perhaps we need to think about whether it's even feasible to have that many and have them all actively involved. That may be something we need to think about.

She clarified,

Maybe we do need to look at the number of partners as a barrier to active engagement of all partners. It's not a barrier to those partners that want to stay involved and engaged, but maybe it's too much to expect fourteen different coordinators to be able to meet on the same day and one clinical educator and even the faculty to be out in the districts and serve them as an in-depth resource.

Dr. Phi is a faculty member that offered her opinions about how to handle the number of participants and not allowing the size of the partnership to become a hindrance. Dr. Phi said,

If we were to implement the idea of every [university] staff member taking a few systems to be their primary responsibility, which would work out much better. But it's not realistic to think we can effectively serve fourteen systems.

Proximity of partners. Of the participants interviewed, the district representatives acknowledged that they believed the location of a school system district partner in relation to the location of the university could be important to the success of partnership activity. However, none of them perceived that their district, specifically, had experienced any hindrances due to geography. Superintendent of a neighboring K–12 district, Mr. Beta, thought,

I think a major barrier could be proximity.....we're 20 miles away, so proximity is not a barrier for us.

Correspondingly, Dr. Gamma, another local superintendent, agreed,

The proximity is not an issue for us, but I could see if I lived or worked in [some further districts] that could be an issue.

The principal at a high school approximately seven miles from the university campus, Dr. Epsilon, summed it as,

I think geography is key, but not the most important thing. We're very blessed because of geography.

A central office administrator from one partner district, Mrs. Sigma, praised,

The University is, in many ways, coming to us. At one point, [Landmark] classes were meeting at our central office and now at our high school. It gives students a local place to meet to pursue more education.

The university interview participants spoke to some of the challenges that have evolved, for both the university partner members and the district partners, by additional district school

systems that are located somewhat further from the university being invited into the partnership.

Dr. Phi explained,

The past 2 years we have had a [cohort from 50 miles away] so we actually go [there] to teach [university courses]. And last year we had a cohort [30 miles in a different direction] because the majority of the students were from over in that direction, so we met there. One semester I would drive to [one county] one night and drive to [a different county] the next night. It doesn't sound so bad, unless you are driving late at night on some of those little back roads.

Dr. Theta said,

When you have that many [partners], you're traveling quite a bit and logistically from their point of view and our point of view, that makes it a little tough.

Dr. Tau connected,

Distance is tied to time because driving a far distance takes more time so it makes it harder. The proximity is challenging.

Dr. Phi, also from the university, was in harmony with Dr. Tau's comment. She said,

Geographic barriers is one of the biggest problems. Because now we [the partnership] have grown.....So the travel time and asking [district partners] to come up for meetings is not very realistic sometimes.

Dr. Phi further disclosed,

The original seven [partnered districts] were more localized. The one that is probably the farthest [80 miles] has not been active.

The university staff shared recent discussions and their lines of thought on reducing proximity/geography as a limiting factor for the partnership. Dr. Rho offered,

I believe the district's proximity to the university is still a factor today. We've talked about running the advisory meetings through [some distance technology method] so people could be 'in the room' without having to travel to [the university's] campus or another district.

Similarly, Dr. Phi shared possible solutions,

I think we need to look at some kind of ways of helping people involved [in the partnership] without having to be physically present for some of these meetings. I think that's real important. Also, I don't know how feasible it would be to have some of these mini-conferences and presentations from [partnership activities] in other locations that are away from [Landmark]. Maybe do them twice. Maybe something like that would help other people to access a little bit more.

Funding

Discussion of financial support was somewhat less prevalent in the interview data, directly. The subject harbored some recognition with the interviews of two university faculty members and three K-12 district representatives. The views of the district participants were not urgent, perhaps due to costs not being as visible to them. The realization that funding is critical to the life of a partnership was more in line with the comments from the university participants. One university member, Dr. Rho had several comments that relate to financial aspects of the partnership. She enlightened,

Another barrier to all of this [partnership development] has been the financial stuff that went on in the recession. The state department was supposed to be giving [the university] money every year to help sustain this program. They knew it was expensive when we

created it. Well the [financial] bottom drops out, and we [the university] don't get the first payment, and we haven't seen one since and there's no talk of that.

Dr. Rho went on to warn,

The clinical salary comes from soft money within this department and is at the discretion of the department head. If something were to change with the availability of that money, the clinical position could be at risk.

She elucidated one additional, possible, economical obstruction to partnership growth. She revealed,

Another barrier I think of, and it's a financial barrier, is some districts are more funded than other districts and that has an impact on participation choices and priorities for that system.

Dr. Phi was another university partner that recognized the potential impact of funding on the partnership. She shared,

Little stipends for guest speakers, refreshments for meetings, and incidental type things are needed that most people might not think of. More money could strengthen or expand the program, too. Just think of all the things that could happen if we had a little more of a budget with which to work.

In congruence with the sentiments of university partners, Dr. Delta, a district superintendent eludes to district leaders being forced to prioritize their choices due to funding strains. She shared,

In [this state], we are so underfunded, most school systems are understaffed on the administrative side, and people wear a gazillion hats.

Another superintendent, Dr. Gamma, agreed about participation being tied to the dependency of the district upon financing programs. However, she expressed a belief that her district was not being hindered by that factor with this partnership. She opined,

It's not financing, that's usually part of our problem. But in this case, it's obviously free [to districts].

In addition to these examples from district leaders, a local high school administrator connected changes (barriers) to some specific programs with which she had been affiliated to a lack of financial resources to sustain those programs. Dr. Zeta told,

I'm not sure why we don't have the AP Consortium this year but I suspect it has to do with funds to support it. I know that's why we don't have the BICS (Building Individual Capacity for Success) program anymore. Money can be an issue.

She added,

That program [BICS] in particular had plenty of money. It was majorly funded. But once it runs out, then it's over.

Outcomes of the Partnership

The researcher sought to determine what the benefits of these two organizations having formed a partnership have been as perceived by those involved. Most outcomes would be mutually beneficial to both involved organizations by the nature of the partnership design. The researcher chose to organize these themes into categories by those with more specific effects on the university program and those more directly beneficial to the K–12 school districts. The results are reported in two major categories as related to the organizations in partnership: benefits to the university and benefits to the K–12 school districts.

Benefits to the University

There were two mentioned consequences of the partnership that were believed to more greatly affect the university: a higher quality leadership student for their program, a stronger leadership program curriculum, and political protection for the program. They will be discussed in this section. All 100% of university faculty perceive benefits that the university receives from being in partnership with neighboring school districts.

It should be noted, these two identified outcomes were intended goals set forth by the redesign initiative during the formation of the partnership. Through the analysis process of the interview data the researcher found evidence of these themes and they were further supported by a review of curriculum guides and the program status report.

Higher quality leadership student. A specific example about partnership involvement improving the quality of the leadership program candidate came from Dr. Theta. Her accolades were,

We have a higher level of student coming to [the university leadership program] because [districts] are helping to make those selections. Our selection committee is composed of someone from the [district] schools, so they also help decide who's going to come in and who isn't. Our selection criteria was established through this [partnership] group. So, I think the selection criteria is stronger. We look at that [selection process] periodically and that gets modified as needed.

This participant's assessment of the strengthening of the candidate for the program is well documented in the program status report (2013). More strict criteria for acceptance into the instructional leadership program is detailed in their Admissions Handout. There is an Admissions Portfolio Checklist and an Admissions Rubric used by the university and the district

partner members in which they jointly evaluate the application portfolio, recommendations, a writing sample from the candidate, and an interview of the candidate.

Also found in the status report is a detailed strength as perceived by the clinical educator. She describes how districts have evolved to respect the interns from the program so much that they request them. She believes this is due to the increased quality of the intern. She supported her theory by referencing examples of quality work products that the interns have generated during some of the internship experiences in the districts. The products included: created data charts, aligned math curricula with CCRS (College and Career Readiness Standards), created PowerPoints for professional development based on school needs, created and implemented management professional development, analyzed assessment data and created displays, updated safety plans, assisted with master scheduling and in iNow (the student attendance/discipline state tracking program).

Data to inform program curriculum and research concentration. The university faculty reported about the amount of information that can be gained from the partnership and used to inform decisions about the leadership program. One faculty member, Dr. Theta shared,

It makes the job of the university professor a lot easier. We did some research on this and we found that not even 10% of Ph.D. programs have an advisory council. Not even half of Ed.D. programs have advisory councils. Very few have partnerships. Somehow they think that it's extra work. To me, you can't have a good education program without having a very strong connection to the [K–12] schools because things change every day. A new requirement comes down, and if you're not aware of that, how in the world are you going to be able to prepare people for the job they are about to face? And how are you as an educator going to really understand or even have the knowledge to put into

your curriculum if you don't know what the core curriculum is? You don't know what's happening at the state department if you don't know what's happening down the street in your school system that you're working with, that your students are going to, that [students] are graduating from and are coming to [Landmark]. So I just think it's essential. I don't understand how you could operate without doing this.

Her assessment is supported by Dr. Rho who said,

I think that our program is strong because of these partnerships. It was meant to be. This is how it should be, and it had never been that in the past. What I want to see is the partnership continue to develop.

Dr. Rho went on to say,

One primary goal of forming this partnership was to strengthen [Landmark's] leadership program. Though most of the programs have shrunk across the state, ours is much stronger. The candidates are stronger, the classes are smaller, we get to know them much better, we are able to keep up with it, and the program is much stronger.

In agreement, Dr. Tau, revealed specific benefits for the university to improve the curriculum for the program and the faculty's concentration for research efforts that she perceived,

For faculty, I think we get access to the current trends in practice, and I think that's valuable for informing our coursework. Also, I think to some extent, we get the opportunity to do research in our partner districts, and mostly our doctoral students would reap that benefit.

Job placement opportunities for program graduates. A byproduct of attending a university educational leadership program that is partnered with K–12 school districts would

appear to be that the graduates would be more marketable. If the districts were to need candidates for hire, they would look to the university student pool of graduates to fill those positions. The researcher delved into data for evidence of hiring trends related to the partnership and this does appear to be the case in this partnership. Responses that supported this theory came from eight (62%) district partner representatives. Dr. Delta said,

It [the partnership] has increased our applicant pool for our leadership positions. With us being a part of this partnership, the people who are going through the program know about us [our district], so they will apply for our jobs.

She went on to give a more specific example of career advancement in her district. She cited,

[Evelyn Register], who went through the program, was our assistant principal last year at [Scotfield] High School. We just hired her to move to be a principal at [M.C. Holt School]. I mean, she certainly has such a background in instructional leadership because of what she did at [Landmark].

Dr. Epsilon, a principal, spoke about his hiring patterns and the longevity of his hires. He reported,

The most quantifiable data, I would think, would be the opportunities to hire the candidates that leave [graduate]. Not to say that I wouldn't look at other candidates. I do. Other schools have wonderful programs, but I'm familiar with [Landmark]. I trust the recommendations of the professors there.

His personal example of longevity and dedication to hiring within the partnership was,

Oh yeah. Well, I've been here five years, and I've hired one assistant principal only in that time, and he's been with me four of the five years, so the longevity is there. And the other two [assistant principals] are graduates of [Landmark's program] as well.

Dr. Theta, an assistant principal/leadership coach praised,

They're [the university] very good at trying to find matches for jobs and promoting their people. I would say that's definitely a strength of the program.

She gave her personal example of helping,

There have been many interns that came through here that I would call and help when they went to interview. I would talk to the principals that I knew and help them get jobs there.

Another assistant principal, Ms. Eta, relayed her hiring experience as a graduate of the program,

I went through the program myself as a student. Prior to my graduation, I presented professional development at one of the schools that [is] partnered with [Landmark] University....due to that, when a job became available [in that district], I sent in my resume, was called for an interview, interviewed, and got the job....They [our district] just hired another AP (assistant principal) last year and he's a graduate of [the program]. There was an AP there [in the district], when I came on board, who had gone through the program as well. So there are a lot of connections to [Landmark's] program.

A recent graduate of the program, Ms. Iota, discussed some career advancement opportunities other than becoming a principal or assistant principal that developed from the program. She told,

I have taken on some extra things, like our curriculum team. I'm lead teacher this year which was a change. Some of the people from my cohort have gone into some more administrative roles. One of our cohort members has now been hired as our instructional technology coordinator at our central office.

A district administrator in a partner school system, Mrs. Sigma, had this to share about the connection between hiring and the partnership,

I even starred some of the others while they were completing their presentations, so later on down the road, they may be a fit for [our district]. If I've seen them in some of those meetings and partnership activities then I can connect their names when they submit an application.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of an integration between hiring/advancement opportunities and graduating from the leadership program at the university came from Ms. Chi, a central office coordinator in a partnered district. Ms. Chi reported,

We have 4 out of 11 slots for principal or assistant principal filled by graduates of the leadership program at [Landmark] University....Not only do we have people placed at the school level, but also at the district level. We now have two people at the district level that came through the program. It's all because of the way we view things and do things influenced by the way we were taught at [Landmark].

Benefits to Partner Districts

In essence, when district schools improve in leadership, in scores, in methods or strategies, in processes, or in facilities, education wins as a whole. However, some outcomes of the partnership efforts more directly impact the district school community and its immediate members (administrators, teachers, students, and parents). Of the features deemed to be most beneficial for the K–12 school districts, attention to delineate the data resulted into four themes: a higher quality of educational leaders, an increase in student achievement, professional networking, and professional development and available resources. These are discussed in detail in this section.

Higher quality of educational leader. The researcher probed to discover if there are any perceived ideas that a better caliber leader is being produced since the partnership has

formed. Many thoughts were shared pertaining to this concept from the perceptions of both district personnel and university staff. Participants expounded on why they professed this claim. A central office administrator and field-based coordinator for the partnership, Mrs. Alpha, supposed,

One thing that I would consider that potentially improved the leadership skills of the leadership candidates in our district is the opportunity [through the partnership] for them to network and to see other like-minded professionals that have similar work standards.

Mr. Beta and Dr. Gamma gave superintendents' perspective on the topic. Mr. Beta asks,

Where would we be if we didn't have a resource that we could turn to with aspiring leaders or folks that we identify with leadership potential to help us create a skill set in those individuals that will be of benefit to us in the future? And it is especially critical.....to rural systems because it is hard to recruit leaders to rural systems. You almost have to grow your own.

Dr. Gamma imparted,

Our top candidate for an assistant principal position that's in our county is a [Landmark] grad, went through the master's and the Ed.S. programs. One of the things that really stands out about that person to us is their knowledge of instructional leadership.

[Landmark] has really tailored their program for instructional leadership which is very appealing right now.

One principal of a local high school shared several thoughts on seeing a better candidate for hire emerging from the newer designed educational leadership program that the university created to include partnering with local K-12 school districts. Dr. Epsilon communicated,

That's the beauty of this partnership I think is that I'm not just hiring assistant principals, I'm hiring school leaders. That's the difference. I want instructional leaders on campus, and [the university staff members] do a very good job of making sure it's about instructional leadership, it's about the students, not just about the traditional principal in the past who would have the keys to everything and take up tickets at the football game. It's about making sure that instruction is key.

He explained,

I know that they're not going to let someone who is sub-par continue throughout the program. They make sure to send good candidates, and they graduate strong candidates, and that's very reassuring because ultimately I want to hire those people.

Then shares,

Well, the primary strengths I think are the communication and knowing that the candidates they send to us are very strong in the end. All three of my assistant principals are [Landmark] University graduates.

He concluded,

They're here, and they do a wonderful job. They've been equipped very well. I don't have to worry about if they know this or that. I don't worry because they know what's going on. And furthermore, I see longevity because we have a number of people on staff here who have gone through the educational leadership program who are faculty members, not in the office. But they have been trained, and that helps them to also understand my side of education when we have to make decisions on personnel, on budgeting, on whatever it may be. They have an understanding of it because of their training at [Landmark].

Two assistant principals/leadership coaches shared personal experiences that they have had in their respective districts about how educational leadership under the direction of the partnership has led to positive changes in leadership methods. Ms. Eta confessed,

I know that's the primary [reason] they hired me is to be an instructional leader. I was able to take what I learned from my program [at Landmark] and the expertise that I gained there to apply to the teaching and learning in our school.....I know they were not utilizing data, but yes, I would say now we are collecting that data, and we are making changes, and we are making decisions based on that data. We are having curriculum summits where we are working on pacing guides. We are working on our curriculum guides with our teachers and we've put in some benchmark assessments and different things like that. That's something different we brought to the district from our education [through Landmark's leadership program]....”

Dr. Zeta described some leadership interns she observed/coached in her high school,

Now instructionally they become so much more, sound going through the administrative program.”

She talked about a particular student intern that worked at her school prior to attending Landmark,

He became so much more instructionally driven just completing [Landmark's] program.

Ms. Kappa, a recent graduate of the leadership program, claimed,

We were on the cutting edge of everything coming out, so I think my principal and assistant principal really appreciated it, and I just got to share my knowledge with other teachers and things like that.

Mr. Lambda, another graduate of the program, boasted,

Well we had strong leadership training experiences. Also, the classes, the mock interviews and observations helped us to be better prepared. As a matter of fact, I did one of my observations at the high school where I am now an administrator.

The university faculty reported informally surveying the subject of leadership quality with district partners. Dr. Phi alleged,

I keep in contact with every graduate that goes out into a school [as a leadership hire]. Not with just the student, but also with the person they're working with. But my information is all qualitative feedback.

She recalled,

When we did the program review, I did send a [survey] out to the principals who had hired our graduates as assistant principals. We did not get a very good [return] but what we did get [back] was all very positive.

Dr. Rho gave examples of feedback from district partners,

The superintendent in [one partner district] told us that. He said, 'I look to [Landmark] [for a pool from which] to hire my people because of the [quality of the] program.' We have had success in [another local partner district]. Just about everybody they've gotten in administration is from our program.

Dr. Tau, from the university, had comments about the goals of the partnership to lead to effective leaders. She explained,

One thing I hope the partners get out of it, is that they get effective leaders. I hope they feel like they have a voice in what our leaders are learning in our courses. When we have advisory committee meetings that work really well, then we have designed opportunities for the partners to tell us what the trends are that they are most needing help with, what

they want their leaders to be learning, what we should be paying attention to and helping to build capacity for. So we've done that in the past, and I hope the partners really value that.

Then she tied in,

I hope the partners feel that they get high quality leaders from our program, and I think we're seeing a strong number of our students be hired for high level administrative jobs, especially in the last two years it seems like it's just really taken off. I hope that our program has a reputation that those leaders are well prepared and very effective.

A review of the existing documents exposed evidence that supports the theme.

Increased Student Achievement

Since another hoped for outcome of the program redesign and partnership endeavor was to improve student achievement, the researcher wanted to explore if any evidence exists that programs supported by the partnership or the redesigned, leadership program with curriculum changes informed by partnership activities, are perceived of as being related to enhances in student achievement in district schools as a result of the partnership and/or in schools where program graduates have been hired as educational leaders. Some interview participants reported numbers that they perceived as evidence to somewhat empirically support results of the partnership. A local superintendent of a partnered county K–12 district, Mr. Beta, stated,

Just take an example; [Reddock] School, a K–12 school down on the end of the county. When you look at what they're doing from an instructional standpoint, from leadership strategies, from teaching strategies, from learning strategies, they have improved. If you reference schooldiggers.com, they have moved up 50-something spaces. All the programs and activities through the partnership have had an impact.

He gave another example,

[Dillard] High School, this past year, moved past 27 schools of the 357 schools listed on the schooldiggers.com website. Something we are doing is working and the partnership is a huge part of what we are doing.

Likewise, in another county district, an assistant principal/leadership coach, Ms. Eta, was of the opinion that she had validating numbers. She relayed,

The reason that we were classified as a priority school is we had a graduation rate of 58.4 which was below the 60% the state marked as being 'in need of improvement'. We're not a failing school. So we have raised that up to 77% in the last two years, I would definitely celebrate [Landmark] University for enhancing that by helping us to hire two assistant principals at the high school that came through the program to be better instructional leaders.

Another superintendent, Dr. Delta, gave her numbers,

In my district, I have two [20%] failing schools and eight [80%] not failing schools. And if you look at my eight not failing schools, there are very strong instructional leaders that just hang on to every word that you [the superintendent] talk about, and they're constantly researching, and they're reading, and they're just participating in all these professional learning communities, and they're taking advantage of all these things that [Landmark] offers to us.

Ms. Chi is a central office level administrator in one of the partner districts and alluded to there being numbers in her district to corroborate claims of higher student achievement being an outcome of partnership/leadership program activities. She appealed,

We made AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) [based on a formula of student achievement scores], for the first time in years, after our [newly graduated instructional leaders] first year at the high school level because we had that mindset. We are still looking at problem areas and trying to hone in solutions. A lot of our data won't say we are making gains, yet. I think it has gotten better over time and that we are heading in the right direction. At least, we are analyzing our data and using it to make decisions. That's due to some groundwork laid through classes at [Landmark] and all the partnership activities

When the researched probed further to upheave if there was additional quantitative data to support the effects of the partnership on the achievement of the students in partnered districts, most comments pointed towards the existing data being mainly qualitative in nature. Local superintendent, Dr. Gamma, reported,

I can't show you quantitative data. [However,] I definitely observed some direct achievement results from our student achievement results in science, especially in the elementary grades....So I see the results in our kids, but I don't have the hard data.

She added in support,

I see it in the teachers and how they get excited. I could give you several examples of what teachers have done recently that I think have had great impact on student achievement. And that's things that they've learned, that they've been inspired to do by them [the university partner staff].

A superintendent, Dr. Delta, told,

I can certainly attribute the fact that we have credit recovery to them [to the partnership], which has increased our graduation rate. And I think not just our graduation rate, but our

success rate with kids because when they can go through credit recovery and have some success, they feel better about themselves and they do better in other things.

In that same vein, Dr. Epsilon, a high school principal in a partnered district, stated,

I certainly can show you where it positively impacted individual student lives. So, that's evidence of a strong partnership, producing results that affect students. That's the most important data we would have. We have students who I believe finished school because of their involvement in the BICS (Building Individual Capacity for Success) program who might have otherwise been a dropout.

Ms. Eta, an assistant principal and leadership coach from a neighboring county system that is partner member, spoke of a lack of empirical evidence of improvement in student scores,

Well, I can say that we're still struggling. I mean according to that [test results], we are struggling. Our middle school is a failing school. It's been on the failing list. And that's easy to do, and hard to get off. We do not have an instructional leader [from Landmark] at that school. So maybe that's the problem....And there's been some changes in the assessments and they've realigned some of the assessments. It's kind of hard to really compare. I haven't seen much advancement, honestly, in the assessments [results].

She did, however, list the changes she sees as forward progress in student achievement results, in her district. She explained,

We are at least using data. We're presenting it [the data] to our teachers and our teachers are going, 'whoa.' Then they are thinking, 'What can I do to enhance instruction.' So, it's helping conversations and dialogue.... I can say that our teachers are more knowledgeable and they're more informed than they've ever been, and so now it's causing them to question.

She further discussed,

We [administrators] constructed a new evaluation program [this past school year]. We were holding teachers more accountable. We were in the classrooms a lot more. That's all because of what I learned at [Landmark] University. And because of that, we've been able to see the increase and growth in our students.

A university faculty member, Dr. Theta, made a definitive claim about improvement of student achievement through partnership activities. She declared,

I also know for a fact that in a couple of counties, achievement has increased. And I won't say it's only because of our [educational leadership] program, but I would say some of the things that have gone on there [leadership program] have helped make that [increase] happen, and some of the leaders we've sent have helped to make that happen.

Professional Networking

The researcher found data in support of the idea that there are increased opportunities for school districts to network with other districts and organizations through the partnership. The researcher observed opportunities for professional networking during advisory council meetings and the partnership sponsored institutes. During the interviewing, participants reported chances to interact among districts, from district to district, from districts to the university, and from districts to other partner-related organizations. A university faculty member, Dr. Theta, recognized the cumulative effects of sharing among partners,

There's been some crossing between schools where one school is doing something and the other school finds out about it. They start doing it among the districts themselves. I think it's helped to create a bit more communication between the districts because we do [have opportunities to] get together. Those that are very involved.

Graduates of the program and now administrators, Mr. Lamda and Mr. Mu, talked about making connections through the partnership which fostered a seamless transition from theory to practice for them as they graduated and moved into leadership roles. Mr. Lamda said,

I would say more than anything is the networking opportunity....I was just able to make connections with some people and have an experience with that community that kind of prepared me for working in this capacity [as an assistant principal].

Mr. Mu agreed,

With that partnership that [county district] already had with the master's program and the doctoral program was sort of a gateway for me to go in and engage in that instructional leadership position.....that collaborative relationship did aid in that preparation.

Discussions of how networking among districts provides support to the districts were brought out. A superintendent, Dr. Delta shared,

When we go to those quarterly meetings, we get to hear not just what's going on with [Landmark] University and their leadership program, but we get to hear what's going on in other school systems.

Two district central office coordinators spoke about the benefits of making partnership connections. Mrs. Alpha, started with,

Developing a bridge to include others and expand their educational opportunities is a good thing of this partnership. All it does is continue to provide a scaffolding throughout the educational experience of the members in the district.

Mrs. Chi stated,

You can collaborate with surrounding districts and things like that. So that's a real benefit. I like [being able to do] that.

Two of the assistant principals and leadership coaches had comments about networking as a resource, with examples to their respective districts. Dr. Zeta told,

That part is really nice too. We get to make those new relationships with people for when we need each other.....So that's very beneficial for us.

Ms. Eta explained,

I will say that due to my involvement in the program, with the master's program and now the Ed.S, I have built relationships with other students who have gone out [been hired] across the state, and I maintain those relationships....it's kind of been an informal consortium that we look to each other for advice and talk.

She gave another example of networking with different partners,

Some of my former professors or [staff] from [Landmark] University are also involved with the state department [of education], run different review committees; regional planning teams and things like that.

Professional Development and Available Resources

The analysis of the data presented evidence of another partnership benefit to the district partners as perceived by partner participants. Professional development opportunities and increased resources being made available to the districts became the theme. Integration of technology, creation and use of data rooms, more effective strategies for response to intervention, student engagement evaluations, and alternative school-day scheduling methods were some of the profits identified by members. Information was provided by every interview participant category to develop this theme of partnership outcomes.

Student graduates of the leadership program supplied these data during the focus group discussions. Ms. Iota spoke of how partnership activities were used in her district as a growth opportunity for one of their leadership programs. She told,

The system where I teach in [a nearby city system] allowed us to use [our Capstone presentation] for a professional development day for our transformation team.

Ms. Kappa recalled a partnership event where administrators from her district and some other educational stakeholders gathered to hear information presented for professional growth. She remembered,

There were quite a few principals and assistant principals and central office figures from multiple school systems across the region, and I think we even had some state department [people] there.

From the interviews, data was gathered from the school district superintendents to substantiate these benefits. Mr. Beta had a great deal to say about outcomes of the partnership. He started,

One is the benefit we get for our system. It fits right in with our vision for where we want to be and what we want to become: a school system that is worthy of the children we serve. I believe we need them [the partners] to do that.

He explained,

To me, that's what a partnership is about. It's sharing, it's 'we do things together'. It's not a piece of paper that has a contract written by somebody, but it is an active agreement and participation between two organizations or more that genuinely want to help each other. We need their help. We can't be what we want to be without the resources of that university.

Mr. Beta further explained with an example,

Let me give you an example. Dr. [Phi] and two of the graduate students attended three of our board meetings this past year where we presented data to the board. Now, that tells me that it is important to them that we succeed.

He gave another example,

I mean you look at what they do for [Massey] School over there, and those kids at [Massey] would never be able to participate in some of the activities and programs that they participate in if it were not for this group of people. It's invaluable.

Mr. Beta summarized his thoughts on outcomes of the partnership with,

This partnership aids with that: curriculum instruction, technology, leadership....They help us with strategies, instructional objectives, teaching in terms of strategic teaching by strategic teaching models, and project-based learning. They help us with selling that to our teachers and [explaining] how to use those two models to improve student engagement in the learning process so that it is retained. People [Everyone] sees the relevance of what we're doing....One thing is technology. "[A partner organization] has tailored three different workshops for us on how to use technology in the classroom to better engage your students to get them involved in their learning and how to use technology in strategic teaching and how to use technology in project based learning.

Dr. Gamma shared her thoughts on outcomes of the partnership to include the increased availability of resources and superior expertise to her district. She claimed,

We need every resource we can get in this business. As fast as everything changes, you've just got to make sure you're willing to reach out everywhere you can to make sure you've got [many resources]. You just got to have a bag full of resources to find out

what [is effective] for the kids. And it would be a shame to be [this close] to a [university] that has great resources there [and not utilize that].

She added,

I have worked with [Dr. Tau] and her work with LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification. I have pulled her in working on our facilities planning. I have used her [expertise] on several things, and talked to her about different issues. We had a conversation about some surveys, about different ways to survey to get information from our administrators and staff. She was very helpful in feeding me some information, and giving me some research, and pushing me into certain resources and references.

Another superintendent perceived many positive results for her district being in the partnership.

Dr. Delta reflected,

I guess originally, as a school improvement specialist, I was looking at it from a ‘this will bring more resources to us’ [standpoint]..... So even things that don’t [already directly] relate to us, they make sure to somehow get that information over to us. Or they’ll call us and say ‘hey, we’re about to start on this grant project, do you want to be a part of this, we know you guys are trying to work on student engagement or virtual schools or what have you, so we’re doing this, do you want to start that?’ And so that has been a huge asset to us that’s truly unintended consequences, I think.

We work very closely with [a partner organization] that’s located on campus, to not just provide professional development to our staff but to keep us informed on things that we need to be looking forward to on ways that they can actually assist us in our school system. There’s a whole lot of things, a lot of resources.

She further discussed,

Like the Capstones that they present, the professional development that they allow our principals and central office administrators to come to and to be a part of, that has certainly been an advantage for us....The fact [university staff] do[es] all this research and we [the districts] are able to pull them in to do professional development for our principals and our teachers for free is wonderful.

The superintendent supported her opinions with personal examples. She began,

In the early stages of the partnership, they presented on ways to increase graduation, those kinds of things..... Prior to that, [our district] did not offer credit recovery. We had really not even heard of it. We offer it now, and we do it really well. We've raised our standards so that with credit recovery, now we are able to use this same program for virtual school.

Like the Capstones that they present, the professional development that they allow our principals and central office administrators to come to and to be a part of, that has certainly been an advantage for us.....Also, a lot of professional development that we gained for our RTI, that was another project that was done, and so we used resources from information we got from the partnership to go out and find these individuals who could come in and provide this professional development for us.

Lastly, she cited examples that focused on the specific needs of her district being met through partnership activities. Dr. Delta claimed,

We became really focused on student engagement which has caused us to do a whole lot of professional development. We have also changed our walk-through tool to be student engagement centered. It's the ELEOT (Effective Learning Environments Observation

Tool). We were able to get all of our people trained on that so they can go in and do a quick check on student engagement. I could even pull student data and teacher effectiveness data.

Students [graduate students through the partnership] actually came and trained all of our principals on strategic teaching and unwrapping the standards, which was great professional development for our guys. Also, the fact that we have enrichment/remediation periods now. We've moved to a seven-period day. All this came from this partnership.

Also from the school districts, district level administrators had some perceptions to share on the subject of partnership outcomes. Mrs. Alpha mention availability to resources and professional development opportunities as her perceived benefits to the partnership. She reported,

One of the biggest strengths [of the partnership] is physical resources and human resources. The people are there. There is very little you need, that [Landmark] doesn't have. It's a huge learning institution, so the resources are a key and essential part.

She added,

There are opportunities there for professional development, and for those people [district staff] to participate in quality professional development presentations.

Ms. Chi talked about a more personal experience in her district,

One of the Capstone presentations was referencing data rooms one year. A member of that cohort came to a school with which I was working to share all of the data that had been collected over a few years span. She explained how we should consider setting up

our data room. Now, that was something that was extremely beneficial to our school and district.

Yet another district group that participated in the interview process for this research, the school level administrators that serve as educational leadership coaches shared what they believed are the benefits to their district being in partnership with the university. Dr. Zeta, an assistant principal, spoke about the professional development as a valued, personal outcome for her. She commented,

The AP [Assistant Principal] Consortium, which I loved, [Landmark] started, and different APs from all over got to come together for professional development.

Ms. Eta, an assistant principal, gave her views,

Through resources like the Capstone, AMSTI [Alabama Math, Science, & Technology Initiative], and [an outreach program], we are getting a lot of valuable professional development, and even grant opportunities....Another example is I had [one of the university faculty] come out and do professional development with cognitive coaching and mentoring.

Finally, the university faculty partners discussed their insights of professional development and increased resources as positive outcomes of partnership activities for the school districts. Dr. Theta shared,

There's some professional development that's been done at the schools as a result of them knowing what we're doing [at the university].

She went on to explain,

Resources are so limited for both sides. [The partnership] is increasing outsources.

[Districts are] getting professional development without paying for it. They're getting

expertise, getting knowledge, getting individuals coming in, so it's multiplying their [districts] resources.

University staff, Dr. Phi, commented on the university staff's expertise as a resource to the districts,

Just the ability for them to be able to pick up the phone and say 'Hey, we are going through this. What can you do to help' is a very important resource to the partner districts....It's making connections with many different areas of expertise.

Dr. Tau told of her experiences to be a resource to the district partners on a continual basis. She reflected,

The partners get access to research, access to cutting edge information if they want it. I can't say exactly how often that happens widespread. I don't think we get requests for that terribly often. But I know I get called a couple of times a semester and typically from former students who are now administrators who say, 'I need some information on x, y, or z and could you help me?' Of course, I drop everything and try to make that happen.

Summary

In Chapter IV, the researcher reported the findings from this study to examine what has acted as facilitators for the partnership, what has been hindrances or barriers to the progress of the partnership and the benefits of the partnership that are being realized. In Chapter V, the researcher interprets the findings from the data analysis, explains the implications these findings have to the field of education, relates the findings to the conceptual framework of the study, and proposes a conceptual framework for partnerships. Finally, the researcher makes some recommendations for possible future inquiries based on the data.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the perceptions of those involved in a university/K–12 school districts partnership created to enrich the educational leadership preparatory program of the university and improve K–12 school leadership and student achievement outcomes for the school districts. The study inspected the factors that facilitate and sustain participation, the aspects that hinder collaboration, and the benefits of the partnership endeavor.

A natural case study approach was employed for this research. Evidence was obtained from a variety of sources including semi-structured interviews with thirteen partner members, a focus group discussion with four educational leadership program graduates, a review of primary source documents, observations of partnership meetings/activities, and a review of related literature.

The discovery categories developed to describe the research findings in Chapter IV of this study arose from the data collection process and analysis. In this chapter, the researcher summarizes the major findings, presents implications for practice, discusses the findings related to the conceptual framework, proposes a conceptual framework formulated from the findings, and proposes recommendations for future research.

Facilitating Factors

There were five facilitating factors found during this investigation. The researcher organized them into two large categories. They are summarized in this section. This is followed with a discussion on the implications of these findings for practice.

Human/Relational Factors

The analysis of the data collected in this study yielded three themes of facilitators that are related to the nature of the humans involved in the partnership. These factors rely on the attitudes, trusts, and confidence levels of the partners. The themes of social connections, involvement and commitment from district leaders and partners, and involvement and commitment from university leaders and partners, are discussed in detail in this section.

Social connections. The most prevalent reason for the members of these two organizations desiring to join efforts in partnership lies in the relationships cultivated between them. It was evident that many of the participants from both sides of the collaboration had previous knowledge of the people from the other group and an admiration for their work, before the onset of the partnership creation. A sense of trust and a shared vision had been fostered prior to forming partnership, during its inception, and since. Trust is an essential element that should exist throughout all levels of a partnership (Dhillon, 2005). Opportunities to form bonds with members through increased social networking have created a sense of reciprocal team work. This was shared by participants during the interviews and observed during the advisory council partnership meetings. Partners were given time to have conversations among themselves and in small groups and to talk to one another in the larger group. At these meetings, many of the partners shared what was trending in their districts with the group as a whole. Chances to ask questions and further discuss topics of interest were afforded to the members.

Involvement and commitment of district leaders and partners. A strong element of partnership facilitation is the support from district partners, especially top leadership. The university members shared that the district leaders are not only instrumental, but imperative, to expediting the processes of the partnership.

The literature review is clear on the impact that buy-in from higher level administrators has on educational partnerships. Committed engagement from top leaders is critical to the creation, implementation, and sustainability of the partnership (Breault & Breault, 2010, Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Orr, 2006).

The importance of a program to an organization often hinges on the member's perceived recognition of its importance to their leader. Actions spoke clearly about the participant's views on this element. Most district superintendents are making partnership events and activities a priority for themselves. They are choosing to attend the partnership meetings and events and making efforts to stay engaged in partnership activities. Other members of the district, such as assistant superintendents, principals, and student mentors are also actively involved. Both school-based and university-based personnel spoke about this involvement and its importance.

Involvement and commitment of university leaders and partners. This dedication to believing in the purpose and importance of the partnership and being involved in it, seems to resonate between the involved organizations. The district leaders spoke of how the dedication of the university staff inspired them to be more active participants. University staff members are carving out time in their already loaded schedules to cultivate relationships with district partners, put together resources for the districts, and be available to the partners. These efforts are a display of commitment from the university faculty who are not rewarded on a merit system for engaging in such activities. A similar pledge of allegiance is exhibited by university administrators who have supported the partnership with the resources of time, staffing and money.

Structural Factors

There were two themes for facilitating the partnership that developed from the data collected during this study that relate to the structural makeup of the partnership design. These two factors are open and regular communication and the use of a clinical educator. Details of these themes are provided in this section.

Open and regular communication. The first structural facilitative element revealed in this research is that of having open and regular communication among partners. This was a finding in the interviews and the focus group discussion and was evident in the agendas and meeting notes that were reviewed.

All participants contributed to the conversations about all facets of the partnership and giving them voice was found to be an important facilitating factor in this collaboration. This was apparent by examples given in the interview data and was evidence by the planning committee attendance records and a survey conducted by the redesign planning group.

The comfortable and convenient manner in which the partners felt that they could communicate with each other was strongly evident in all data sources. There appears to be a familiarity among the members of the partnership that would relate back to the relationship building and social networking aspect discussed earlier in this chapter. The partners seem to be aware of what is taking place with each superintendent and in their districts and with the university staff and around the university. The exchange of information is large and frequent and creates an awareness of partner and partnerships operations and goals. The awareness generates interests, concerns, and/or celebrations of accomplishments and appears to operate much like a family structure.

The use of a clinical educator. Using a clinical educator as a liaison between the two organizations was found to be a major facilitator for the partnership. It became apparent when in each interview and in the focus group discussion, the clinical educator was mentioned, either by name or by position, by all participants. The role of the clinical appears to be invaluable in coordinating partnership activities and helping leadership candidates matriculate through the university program, to include the oversight of a theory-to-practice, clinical experience that is required for each candidate. Some questions exist about how the role and responsibility of the clinical education could best meet the needs of both organizations. Being a member of both groups in some aspects of the partnership, but not fully a member of either group in some regards, is a challenging balance to find.

Implications for Findings on Facilitators

Although it is true that all findings may not be generalized to other partnerships, some implications to forming educational partnership are believed to exist. Success in creating, implementing, and sustaining a partnership appears to be very dependent upon how familiar each member of the partnership is with all the other partners. How easily partners commit to the purposes of the partnership, partners willingness to openly and regularly communicate, and partners dedication to stay actively involved hinge on the trust relationships and confidence in others that has been fostered. Partnership endeavors should take care to create opportunities for relationship building and incubate those bonds to promote the long term effects they have on collaborations. Social networking is key to partnership success.

It appears that these relationships take a long time to build and must be nurtured. Those who wish to create such partnerships will need to assure that time is made to develop these relationships and that structures are put into place to nurture them. Planning regular meetings

and encouraging one on one conversations among members is foundational for creating relationship building opportunities. Additionally, taking measures to ensure that the conversations continue is an important planning step for partnership sustainability. The aspect of not allowing a lack of open and continual communication to become a barrier for sustainability is discussed in more detail later in this chapter in the section on barriers.

Another possible implication related to forming collaborative endeavors is the discovery of the need for strong engagement from the partners, especially the leaders. The university leaders are an integral part to the partnership. The university program department head should be made aware of all partnership information and efforts to keep him/her involved should be a practiced priority. District leaders speak and act on behalf of their systems. It is critical to get buy-in from them and continually try to keep them engaged in partnership related activities.

The involvement and commitment from leaders has a “drill down” effect on the organization they lead. For that reason, it is imperative that beginning with the planning phase of the partnership and following through in continual monitoring of the partnership processes, opportunities and instruments to promote more involvement and strong commitment of leaders and of those who have direct and indirect partnership responsibilities should be implemented. Some examples of this practice would be to have leaders share in decision making, keep all stakeholders informed, continually exchange information, jointly define the roles and responsibilities of all participants and sign an agreement (such as a Memorandum of Agreement).

There are definite implications for forming university/school district partnerships with the findings of the huge impact the use of a clinical educator has on facilitating the partnership. This person is the one who has been given the time and primary responsibility to coordinate and promote the partnership. Utilizing a member of the partnership to be a connective member to

both organizations relieves other involved members from some of the added burdens of coordinating and communicating meetings, activities, and events.

It is important to note that the clinical educator for this partnership is a well-blended, integration into the overall group. She has been very instrumental at being an active part without becoming a substitute for the other university members and leaders in the partnership. There lies a real danger in allowing an organization to defer all partnership duties and responsibilities to one person and this partnership appears to have understood that and assured that while the clinical educator is the visible connection, the person in this position is also well integrated into the faculty role and the faculty are strongly connected to the schools. While the clinical educator, many times, is the face of the university to the districts, based on this case, it appears important that they not have the sole responsibility for the partnership. Those wishing to form similar partnerships would be wise to invest in a clinical educator with a background in both involved organizations and who has the ability to gain the trust and confidence of the members. This person is the center hub through which partnership information passes from one organization to the other. Because every other aspect of the collaboration hinges on the work of the clinical educator, it is imperative that the person employed be extremely engaging, open and transparent, methodically organized, and thorough. Likewise, it seems important that other faculty in the program are also individuals who believe in and support the partnership concept and its implementation.

Barriers

The researcher identified seven themes for hindrances to the creation or sustainability of the partnership. These themes are organized into two major groups based on the nature of them. The two groups are human/social-emotional factors and physical/structural factors. The factors

are discussed in this section and followed by a discussion of possible implications of these findings.

Human/Social-Emotional Barriers

From the findings, the foremost factors that impeded members from partnership participation centered on human/social-emotional aspects of the collaboration. Three dominant themes of this social category were common in the interviews, in the review of literature, and in the primary source documents. These categories were staff changes, resistance to engage, and the need for more effective communication.

Staff changes. Perhaps the most pervasive social factor theme in the data to manifest as an impediment for the partnership dealt with the turn-over of staff in all involved organizations. The tenure of district school leaders is not very long on average (Alsbury, 2008). According to the School Superintendents Association (AASA), the national average tenure of a superintendent is about six years. Of the original superintendents leading the seven districts at the inception of the partnership, none remain in that position for those systems now. Of the university department staff that served the leadership program and partnership originally, none remain in those positions at this university today. To say the partnership has a different makeup is an understatement. In fact, it is more accurate to say that the partnership membership is continually being redefined.

Change is an inevitable characteristic of all created groups. The hindrances created by changes in staffing relate back to one of the major facilitators that was identified for a strong partnership—creating and maintaining strong social connections. It becomes a threat to the growth and/or sustainability of the group when past, familiar trust relationships no longer exist. With the changing of staff comes the uncertainty of who is reliable, who is knowledgeable, and

who is willing. New relationships must be formed and new trusts built. To compound the issue, the expectations of each organization, the original goals and mission of the partnership, and the individual roles and responsibilities may not be as clear to the newer members.

Resistance to engage. District and university members are faced on a daily basis with making decisions about the programs and tasks for which they should concentrate their time and efforts. Many factors influence their decisions concerning these types of issues. District partners may not be keenly aware of all of the positive benefits of engaging in partnership activities. During prosperous times, some leaders or members may not perceive an overwhelming need for being or staying actively engaged in the partnership. University participants may particularly feel that they are not rewarded for their efforts and, therefore, need to spend their time focused on activities for which they are more accountable. In essence, all of the reasons members decide to be committed and engaging in partnership activities and events could serve as excuses not to become or stay involved in the partnership. The partners that are the most active choose to do so because they see the value in them doing so to their organization and to the field of education in general.

More Effective Communication

Just as the theme of open and regular communication was mentioned as a positive aspect for strengthening the partnership, a need for more effective communication was credited for weakening the endeavor. It is important to note that the data did not indicate that the exchange of information among members of the group had to be deplorable in order to be a deterrent. Rather, there was much evidence that revealed just an inadequate amount or a break in reliable communication could result in a compromising relationships.

The interview data were riddled with examples of partners' sense of freedom to call or text with questions or inquires and to request information. The members also perceived that response time to their requests was short and deemed that to be valuable to them. In contrast, it was gaps in knowledge of and/or means of good tracking for whole group activities that received scrutiny from members. Interviews brought to light that participants become more disengaged when longer spans of time occurred between group partnership activities or sporadic communications are happening. It was agreed that collaboration activities are occurring as often as is probably feasible, given the demanding schedules of everyone involved. Even then, members being able to schedule and attend the activities relies upon the early notifications and, perhaps, approximation reminders of the dates and times for the events. Additionally, the content of the activities being distributed to all levels of the organizations depends upon the follow-through of leaders and representatives who received the information at the meetings.

Physical/Structural Barriers

Other barriers discovered through this study for collaborative endeavors are rooted in the structure of the group processes. Although these were not identified often, they were identified by a few participants. These structures are naturally existing, physical characteristics of the organizations. They are features of the partnership that lie beyond the total control of human change. The found features are time constraints, the number of partnered districts, partner districts proximity to the university, and funding availability.

Time constraints. As is a common theme of life, everyone seems to have way more to do than they have time to get it done. So is the story with the demands placed on educators today. University staff has teaching responsibilities, community outreach duties, and research requirements. Cultivating educational partnerships has to be worked into their schedules.

District leaders are under public scrutiny and state and federal governance to lead successful schools. Overall, these leaders must be discerning in the activities and programs they devote their time to. This barrier relates back to many, if not all, of the other factors of the partnership. Time allotment and the primary focus of each member impacts their degree of commitment, having time to build relationship trusts, responding to the requests or needs of others, and participating in collaborative activities.

Number of partners. This barrier was not an overwhelming subject in the interview data. It appeared in the researcher probing about the size of the partnership (number of partnered districts) and ties closely to time limitations. While most of the university staff did not have an ideal number of partnered districts in mind, there was a great deal of concern about being able to serve all the district members to the needed extent. The research revealed that some districts are more active participants than others. There is great apprehension anytime a partner is believed to not be as involved as they could be.

If relationships have to be carefully cultivated and often rebuilt, that takes time and attention. If continual, timely communication is necessary, that takes time and attention. University staff being able to be available as resources to each district takes time and attention. There were manifestations in the interview data and observations that university staff attend planning meetings for the districts, attend board meetings to present data in support of district leaders, research requested topics for district leaders, and travel to districts to conduct program courses. All of these undertakings take time and attention. The subject begs the question, when does it become too much?

Partner districts proximity to the university. Another physical obstacle to develop as a minor refrain in the data collected for this study was the distance between the university and

the school district. Literature suggests that distance is a consideration in choosing with whom to join forces. Because most of the partnered districts are within 30 miles of the university, there is not a preponderance in perceptions by the members of this partnership that proximity presents much of a barrier. Also, this hurdle is another feature that cannot be physically altered. It connects back to the two previously discussed structural barriers through the aspect of time. Obviously, the closer a district is to the university the less time there would be required for both organizations to travel back and forth to partnership activities. Longer distances, by nature, create an inconvenience of consuming time.

Funding. Finally, concerns over funding availability to sustain partnership sponsored activities and programs presented as a finding in the data. Perhaps less transparent to the school district leaders than university personnel, very few comments were made about the financial requirements of the partnership. Most of the perceptions of the school leaders are that the programs are basically free to the districts. Sparse comments about the money to sustain certain programs or the need to garner grant support were made from district members. The university staff seemed to be somewhat more concerned about the lifespan and strength of the partnership hinging upon the continuation of funding. Some partnership sponsored programs have already been eliminated or severely altered by the lack of funding. Stipends offered to some members for their extra service (such as co-teaching a course) have been removed. There were substantial money pledges made from outside agencies during the creation of the partnership that were either short lived or never materialized after conception. However, the commitment of both partners seem to have helped to overcome this problem as school district partners have continued to fulfill their roles without stipends being available.

Implications for Practice Related to Barriers

The finding that staff changes are a possible deterrent to partnership growth or sustainability has many implications for this partnership, as well as for others seeking to create this type of partnership. To offset some of the feelings of non-continuity and unfamiliarity that partners can develop when personnel changes come to the partnership, there should be a periodic review, perhaps annually, of the program goals. To alleviate some of the potential challenges that may arise as new members are transitioned into partnership positions, efforts need to be taken to revisit the tenets of the partnership with newly appointed leaders. To do this, new relationships have to be cultivated. University members need to make contact and go out into the districts to visit the new leaders. Once some familiarity and trust is formed, a “reselling” of its importance and a request for commitment to the partnership should take place. Updated MOAs should be agreed upon and signed between the university and new district leaders. Additionally, efforts to engage district leaders that are in positions with traditionally, more longevity could help lessen the impacts of leadership turn-over. This could reduce the need to re-establish the importance of the partnership, the program goals, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved, as often.

The university should take care when hiring new faculty and staff to seek people who have a proven commitment to helping school districts improve. This partnership consistently involves their district partners in the hiring processes for new program faculty. It is important to the district partners that they know something about the person the university is considering hiring and that they have a voice in selecting with whom they will work. Once new university staff is hired, it becomes important to welcome and familiarize them to and with the partnership. They need to be made aware of the partnership purpose, the role they serve in the partnership and

expectations for their involvement in the partnership. Again, the clinical educator is key in coordinating many of these efforts.

More implications come from the findings about the need for additional effective communication about the partnership. To ensure more reliable communication of important activities, events, or meetings attention should be given to methodically disseminating those announcements through a comprehensive email list of every stakeholder, a website and other forms of social networking communication such as texting. Avoidance of relying upon a few people in a system or department to communicate the information to others could alleviate some confusion. If everyone is made aware of activities, they can decide the important for themselves and determine what fits into their schedules. These announcements should be sent well in advance so that members have ample planning time to work out schedules and other logistics of attending the events. Finally, interval follow-up reminders could be circulated to decrease the likelihood of an oversight in scheduling or attendance.

One subsequent suggestion for improving partnership communications arose from the interview data. It was recommended by some participants to circulate a quarterly or semi-annual newsletter about the partnership happenings. This additional transfer of information could keep members abreast of major events, upcoming meetings, program changes, and possible topics of interest as they pertain to the partnership members. An electronic newsletter would be a fast, efficient, and economical way for the clinical educator to circulate the wanted information. This could also be added to a website in order to have archival information available to new members.

To reduce the effects of time demands on partner participation, the group and others wishing to create similar partnerships should explore creative ways to minimize travel time to and from meetings and streamline meetings to be as efficient as possible. Perhaps an alternant

meeting delivery method could be utilized to alleviate the necessity of face-to-face meetings. Webinars, online meetings, and other technology based program may allow for increased opportunities for members to participate by reducing the amount of time required.

The elimination of the need to stretch resources and focused attention on a larger number of partners and avoiding that as a hindrance to the partnership is not totally possible. However, it might be possible to reduce the negative impacts that come along with adding more districts to the partnership by distributing the concentration of responsibility among the university staff members. Perhaps each university staff could be responsible for a given number of district partners for which they would focus. This would reduce the chance that any one district would get no attention or disengage from staying active. Additionally, when considering developing partnerships, others, like this partnership group, should engage in conversations about the optimum number of districts which can be feasibly integrated into a partnership and the issues of proximity and travel time related to this factor.

Outcomes and Benefits of the Partnership

There are many benefits to this partnership endeavor that were identified. While it is recognized that many of the outcomes are interrelated with both organizations, they are divided into two major categories determined by whom they most profoundly effect. The categories are benefits to the university and benefits to the districts. There were three themes found under benefits to the university and four themes placed as benefits for the school. All of these themes are summarized and discussed in this section followed by implications of these findings for practice.

Benefits to the University

There were three profits found from this study that would appear to have an impact on the university program. They are a higher quality of leadership student, data to inform program curriculum and research concentration, and job placement opportunities for program graduates.

Higher quality leadership student. The university members can give many examples of utilizing collaborative input to select candidates for the leadership program cohorts and how this focus on candidates who have shown previous leadership potential leads to stronger leadership students. Careful attention was given to the admissions process and criteria during the planning phase of the program redesign. District partners played a crucial role in helping to identify those candidates that show leadership potential and are a good fit for the program. Superintendents said they are more excited to be able to interview and offer positions to the graduates because they know from experience the quality of the university leadership program and because other recent personnel choices they have made to hire from the program are proving to be good leaders.

Furthermore, feedback from the school leaders that are hiring graduates from the instructional leadership program, the brief wait time for graduates to find placement in leadership positions, and the longevity of tenure these graduates are experiencing suggests that the university is producing a higher quality instructional leader through their redesigned program. In the partnership status report (2013), university staff lists these as indicators of a program more aligned with the latest instructional leadership standards.

Data to inform program curriculum and research concentration. Another benefit to the university partners is that of educational insight at the district level. Examples were supplied during the data collection process of how the university staff uses information gained from

district partners about current policies, procedures, and/or trends in K–12 education to craft their course curriculum and choose research topics for individuals or courses. The sequencing of the curriculum taught has been rearranged since the original implementation of the redesigned program. Based on feedback from district partner members after working with some of the program students with clinical experiences in the districts, adjustments were made to make connections from theory to practice more seamless for the leadership students. Further practice, partners discuss and collectively choose topics for the leadership students and their university professors to research and report back to the partners. Knowledge from those that are in the districts and facing the latest educational challenges is being used to inform what content is valuable to share in partnership meetings, activities, and presentations.

Job placement opportunities for program graduates. It was apparent in the data that graduates of the leadership program get extra exposure to district leaders who may be seeking to hire instructional leader positions. As leadership graduate students matriculate through the program, they are given opportunities to present research to partnered district leaders and other interested stakeholders. At these events sponsored by the partnership, leadership students may begin to network with other district members or showcase their abilities to an audience of superintendents and district administrators. These additional opportunities to interact with interested districts have led to the quick hiring of many of the graduates. Graduates of the program are crediting their being hired to current leadership positions to their introduction to superintendents and principals and, in turn, the district administrator's exposure to the graduates work through partnership activities.

Benefits to the Partner Districts

There were four themes that delineated from the collected data for this study that appear to be more closely related to the improvement of the school district. These benefits include a higher quality educational leader, an increase in student achievement, professional networking, and professional development with available resources. These outcomes are discussed in more detail in this section.

Higher quality leaders. A higher quality leader for the schools is being recognized from the redesigned leadership program that is enhanced by the partnership. District administrators are hiring the new leadership graduates and the new hires are being kept in the districts. The new instructional leaders that are coming out of the program are being hired off of their impressive work products produced during the clinical experiences, for their researched knowledge of current educational issues and how to deal with them, and because of the rigorous, data-driven, instructional leadership style for which they have been trained. This hiring process and recognition of the high quality of the new leaders is thus a benefit for the university, the school systems, and the graduate student who is hired.

Improved student outcomes. Entwined in the goals to improve educational leaders for schools is the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement outcomes in schools. This topic was explored heavily during data collection for this study. The perceptions of the partnership are that student achievement has begun to increase as new instructional leaders have been hired to lead in partnered district schools. Many respondents that are current leaders in the districts referred to the facts that they are seeing the inclusion of data to inform decisions about curriculum being incorporated more aggressively in their districts and student work products that are more project-based and show a greater depth of knowledge are emerging in the schools.

There is, however, a strong recognition that the empirical data to support these perceptions does not exist.

Professional networking. The benefit of professional networking is related to the facilitating factor of social networking. Opportunities for district partners to build relationships and connections to other educators facing similar challenges and experiences is a valuable benefit of the partnership. While this was not one of the planned goals of the partnership, evidence of the importance of networking opportunities cannot be denied. District partners are able to turn to those within the group to answer questions they have about something happening in the schools. It appears to be important to the district superintendents, principals, and assistant principals to have opportunities to meet with others serving in similar positions to discuss things related to the welfare of their district or schools.

Professional development and available resources. A benefit that garnered overwhelming recognition from the members was that of how much free, professional development and available resources, especially the expertise, the partnership has made readily accessible to the district partners. University staff and leadership students are going into the school districts and providing prescriptive professional development for the school and district staffs. Professional growth and trainings are being sponsored and coordinated through the partnership. Districts are implementing new technology programs, teacher evaluation instruments, instruction delivery model programs and schools, and nationally sponsored school improvement initiatives with the advice and guidance of the university faculty and staff.

Implications for Benefits to the University

The university receiving a higher quality leadership student was a hoped for outcome for the partnership while gaining information from district feedback on internship experiences and

increasing job placement opportunities for their graduates of the program were more incidental in nature. It is worthy to note that all of these are realizations found to be outcomes of the partnership. The implications for these findings are trifold.

Firstly, anyone trying to create this type of partnership can probably expect that the educational leadership program candidate will be of an increased caliber when they follow the template of this partnership. The university should take measures to include the districts in the vetting process of candidate selection. The district leaders' previous knowledge of the skills and potential of applicants is accurate in predicting candidate success.

Secondly, though not planned for, there seems to be real value to the university staff being able to harvest feedback information from the district partners to inform decision about the program. This partnership and others like it would be wise to formalize the collecting methods for gathering this kind of information. Annual surveys of the partnership status to assess what aspects of the program are effective and which elements need adjustments might be helpful. Partnerships may want to have standing committees who look at certain program aspects (i.e. admission, curriculum) on a yearly or bi-yearly basis to make any needed adjustments. Then, for example, if sequence of the courses or the content of the coursework is not meeting the needs of the districts, the university staff would be made aware of that immediately so adjustments can be made. Additionally, involving the district partners in choosing topics to be researched and presented by the program students and university faculty appears to be a powerful aspect of this partnership. School districts thus receive research and support on topics and areas that they view as vital to their success. Others may wish to follow this example as a means of meeting the needs of the district partners and strengthening school and partnership success. Lastly, job placement opportunities for program graduates may be capitalized upon through this partnership

and in others like it. Combining graduate presentation events with career fair activities would foster more opportunities for graduate students of the program to be showcased in front of district leaders looking to hire new educational leaders. District leaders can be made aware of available graduates and get some additional insight into their work and educational experiences.

Implications for Benefits to District Partner

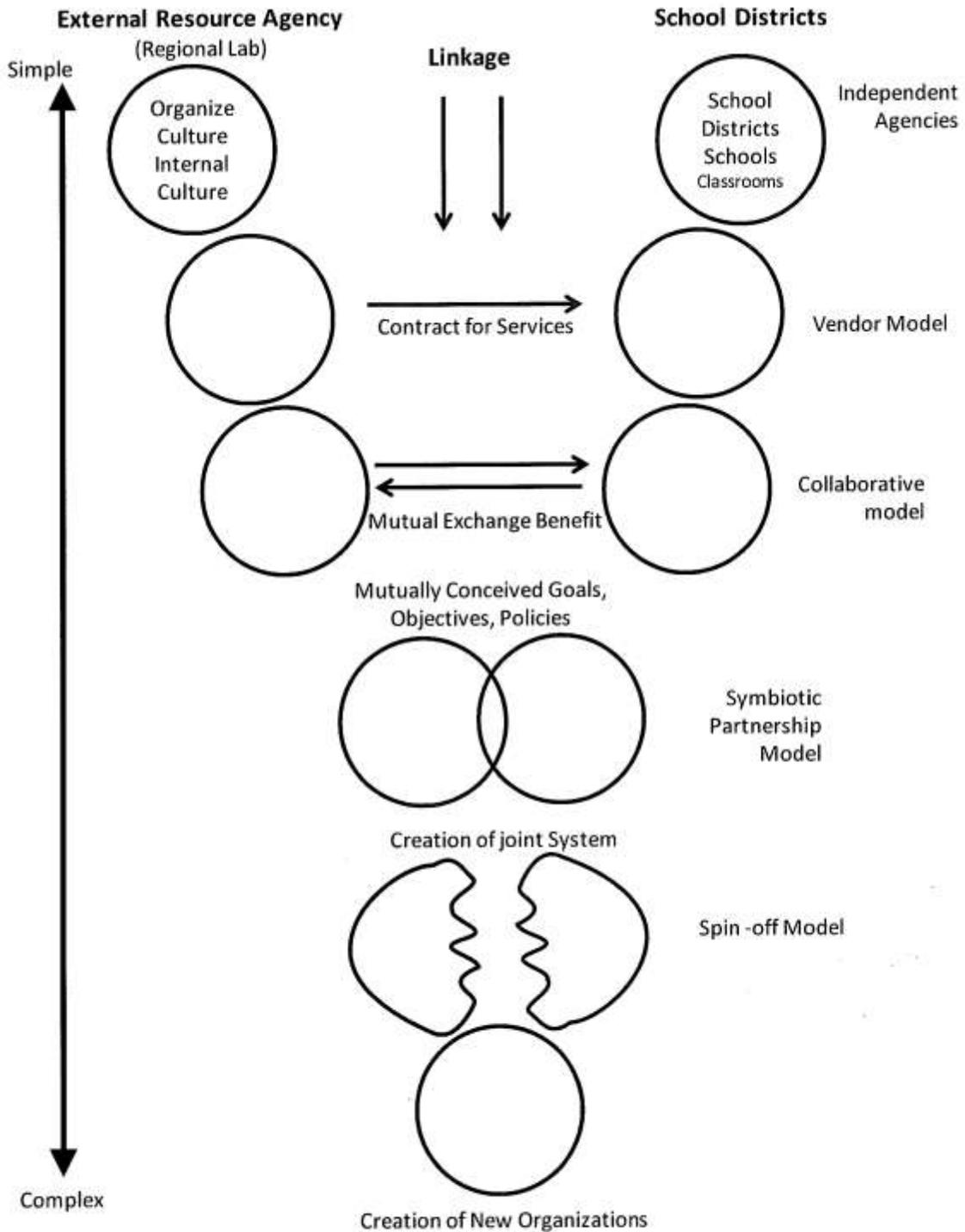
A higher quality leader was one of the primary goals of the partnership as an improvement to leadership preparation. In turn, the improved leader would be able to lead the schools to an increase in their achievement scores. Although participants perceive improvements in student achievements, changes in state assessments make it difficult to compare more recent test results with any previously established baseline scores. Further obscuring the measurement is the fact that student achievement success may, and perhaps should, be determined by so many more standards than just state assessments. Unfortunately, most accountability models for education rely heavily upon high-stakes test scores. University programs and partnerships need to make a special effort to identify the means by which student achievement will be measured prior to partnership initiation, and throughout the process. Much of the early criticism about leadership programs centered on leadership for student learning. Thus, this issue should be paramount in leadership program assessment. Additionally, programs should keep accurate records of student hires and their success in terms of their leadership roles and accomplishments over time. The issue of assessing program outcomes in terms of hard data bears further discussion within this partnership and should be paramount in those that others develop.

It is invaluable for school systems to be able to keep their staff abreast of the most current professional developments. Often these trainings are time consuming to district staff and financially burdening to the districts. Expertise and other available resources that come with

being partnered to a major research institution staffed with a superior educational leadership faculty is a huge advantage to the school districts. This assistance in meeting the needs of the district school system staffs enhances the efforts to improve the schools and the quality of education in all of the partnered districts. The findings indicate that it is important for groups planning to form partnership to plan for and implement a partnership agenda of activities and events to include valuable, current, affordable and convenient professional development for the district staffs. Additionally, knowing how valued the expertise of the university faculty is by the districts in addressing situational issues, this partnership, and any that desire to be like it, should be careful to keep the university staff involved and in touch with what is needed by the district partners. This was accomplished through open and regular communication of the partners, a commitment from all involved partners from the university and the district schools, and the coordinating efforts of the clinical educator. Those wishing to create such partnerships must consider creating relationships and opportunities to foster this type of communication and commitment.

A Comparison to the Conceptual Framework

The difficulty a researcher has in developing a partnership model to represent all of the involved elements in a partnership is noted by Barnett et al. (2010). The researchers' conceptualized partnerships to be on a typology continuum from simple to more complex. The type of partnership is determined by how dependent upon each other the involved organizations are and who receives benefits from the collaborative efforts.



From Barnett, B. G., Hall, G. E., Berg, J. H., & Camarena, M. M. (2010). A typology of partnerships for promoting innovation. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20, 10–36

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Types of Partnerships Between an External Resource System and School Districts

The partnership that was examined in this study can be measured using the framework proposed by Barnett and his associates. This collaboration most closely resembles the symbiotic partnership model, which portrayed a relationship between two organizations that surpassed mutual gains for both. This type is described as a collaboration where additional benefits are realized by all participants and there is an interdependency upon all the participants involved.

Proposal of a Conceptual Framework for Partnership

Based upon the findings from this study, the researcher conceptualized a framework based upon the findings. The partnership is portrayed as a mechanism used by stakeholders to reach several desired outcomes. The partnership “wheel” is connected to a system of pulleys which represent the elements of the partnership that contribute to the overall, collective efforts and in turn, moves the partnership forward. The pulleys (contributing factors) are interconnected which means they are all affecting and are affected by one another. This means it takes a collaborative effort by all the involved partners to make all the parts work together.

The university and district school system organizations are depicted as larger pulleys to imply an increased amount of contribution. The schools are arranged within the districts. These two larger units portray the many partners of the two organizations but also represent the commitment and involvement of all those members which plays an enormous facilitative role within the partnership. Additionally, the clinical educator is represented by a larger, double pulley located in the center of the mechanism to show the importance and the positional relationship of the role to both organizations and to all of the other contributing factors. The central placement of this pulley shows that the other elements and activities are connected by running through the clinical educator, as the central hub of the system. The other elements are represented by varied sized pulleys that are distributed along the pulley system to suggest the

amount of contribution or challenge they may have and to which of the other elements they may be more closely related.

Underpinning the mechanism are three foundational phases within which the partnership must operate to be successful. The phases are labeled: careful planning, strong engagement, and continual feedback. It was found that a lengthy period of careful planning contributed to many of the facilitative elements identified in this partnership. A strong engagement of the partners in all facets of the partnership such as communication, scheduling, building social relationships, time management, securing funding, and overcoming barriers was revealed to foster partnership sustainability. Finally, continual feedback is needed to assess the progress of the partnership and inform decisions about adjustments to its processes.

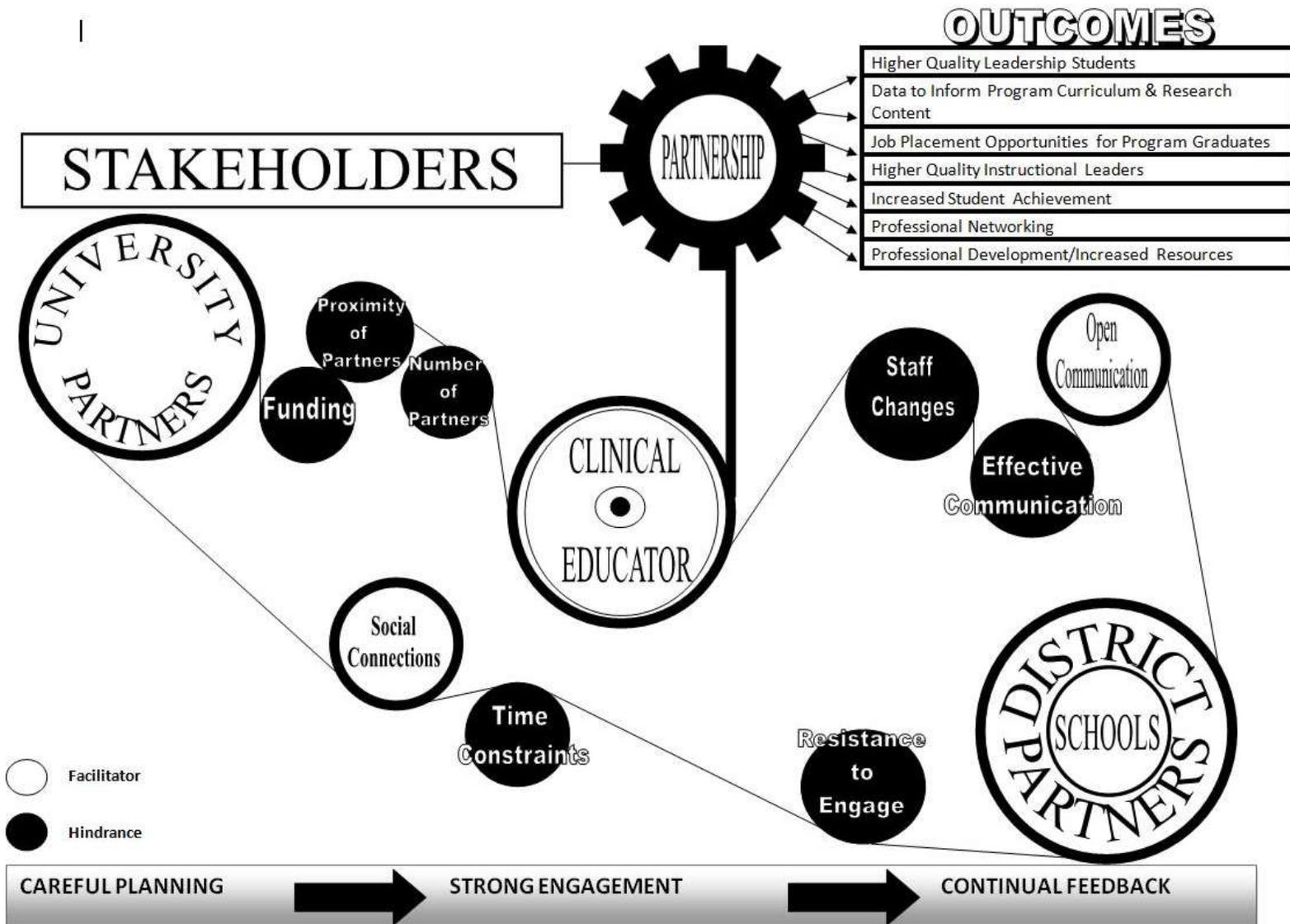


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for a Partnership (Hudson, 2016)

Future Research Suggestions

Social networking within the partnership and the relational roles of the partners in facilitating a stronger partnership is an interesting phenomenon. Daly (2010) shares his intriguing investigation of how social networks can facilitate or impede educational change initiatives. He showcases the work of several scholars who examined formal and informal organizational structures and the mechanisms by which ideas, information, and influence transfers from person to person and group to group. Social networking appears to have become an emerging field of importance in education research. To that end, in-depth examinations of this phenomenon would serve to inform those desiring to create or strengthen partnerships. Questions about the connections among partners that have been previously made and those that are cultivated during the partnership and the role those connections play in sustaining the partnership and to what degree are important to be answered.

Another suggestion comes from the facilitative themes center on the utilization of a clinical educator. The hiring of a clinical educator was part of the tenets for the formation of a partnership brought about by the original grant written by the university. Just how aware the grant writers were of how critical the position would become to the success of the partnership is unclear.

Not much exists in literature about the use of a clinical educator to support collaborative educational efforts. There has been some written about clinical education support in the training of teacher leaders following the emergence of Professional Development Schools introduced by Holmes and his associates (1990). The concept of using a clinical professor to essentially be a member of both organizations for the purpose of more effectively connecting the two and achieving the common goal of enhanced school leadership is fairly uncharted territory.

More studies are needed to correlate the role of a clinical educator to the successfulness of university/K–12 district school partnerships. This investigation could be very informing to the field since there is so little published about the topic. Inquiries should be made into which duties and responsibilities of the clinical are most effective in promoting partnership sustainability. Additionally, a skills set could be defined for anyone in the position.

The claimed benefits that the partnership enriched leadership program is helping to produce a higher quality leader for schools and in turn, student achievement is increasing, need empirical studies to back them. These claims connect back to garnering financial support for the partnership as part of the program. In addition, making these claims with verified empirical data would satisfy the demands of current educational accountability standards and strengthen the position.

Now is an extremely important time for the partnership to conduct a program evaluation to determine if its goals are being accomplished, what it would cost to realize optimal benefits from the endeavor, and be able to show the importance of all the efforts. In this age of accountability, the partnership needs to be able to prove to any investing stakeholders that the partnership is worth what it requires in monetary and other resources. It would be a great project in the future to conduct quantitative studies to gather empirical data that would support the efforts of the collaboration. It would also be useful to gather data on this topic through a literature search and research project to identify effective approaches to partnership evaluation through the collection of both soft and hard data sources.

Conclusion

As education increasingly turns to collaborative efforts to strengthen the preparation of educational leaders for our schools in hopes of increasing student achievement and learning,

examinations of university/k-12 school districts partnerships will progressively become more valuable to the field. This case study examined one such endeavor and adds to the literature on the topic. Future studies on the most facilitative factors for partnership, the hindrances that they can present, and what outcomes are being realized from other joint ventures will serve to inform those desiring to create a new partnership and will guide adjustments to those wishing to sustain already implemented partnerships.

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Appendix 1

Interview Script

Interview Script

HUDSON: Partnerships

1. What was/is your primary involvement in the partnership?
2. What goals were set forth for the partnership (What was the university suppose to gain and what were the districts suppose to gain)?
3. Do you feel that the partnership has predominantly been able to achieve and maintain those original goals?
4. What are some of the great benefits of this partnership?
5. Do you feel the partnership has improved the overall educational leadership in the districts?
6. Do you have knowledge that (K-12) student outcomes and/or student achievement in the districts have changed since the implementation of the partnership and its leadership activities?

7. Have you learned of any (non-intentional) benefits that have emerged since the inception of the partnership?
8. What factors presented as barriers or hindrances to the university or the districts to have buy-in and get involved?
9. What factors have hindered the university or districts from realizing maximum benefits from the partnership?
10. Are you still actively involved? If so, what has helped to maintain your personal involvement?
11. What do you think are the primary weaknesses of the partnership? (Some ways the partnership needs to improve)
12. Do you have any concerns about the future of the partnership moving forward from this point? What are your primary hopes for the partnership and its future?
13. Are there any other things about the partnership I didn't ask that you would like to share?

Appendix 2
Informed Consent



The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from
3/10/15 to 3/9/18
Protocol # 15-101 EX 1503

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT

You are invited to participate in a research study titled, "Creating school/university partnerships to enhance leadership preparation and school success: Benefits, barriers, and sustainability factors". The study is being conducted by Robert Hudson under the direction of Dr. Frances Kochan in the Auburn University Department of Educational Leadership. You were selected as a possible participant because you are age 19 or older and you have/had involvement with the Auburn University Leadership Partnership.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately one hour. The interview will be audio taped and the recording destroyed upon completion of its transcription. A pseudonym will be used to ensure your anonymity.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this study.

If you participate in this study, you might expect to increase your understanding of school/university partnerships. We/I cannot promise that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Leadership, or the Auburn University Leadership Partnership.

Participant's initials _____

Page 1 of 2

Your privacy will be protected. Any information with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Dr. Frances Kochan at kochnfr@auburn.edu or Robert Hudson at rh0023@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or email at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY, YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature Date

Printed Name

Investigator obtaining consent Date

Printed Name

Co-Investigator Date

Printed Name

