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Stakeholders' Perceptions of Community Engagement in a System-Wide Educational  
Change Effort: Implications for Building Partnerships

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Lindsay K. Nickels

December 2007

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Keywords: Community Engagement, Community Involvement, Parent Involvement, School  
Partnerships, School-Community Partnerships

## ABSTRACT

### Stakeholders' Perceptions of Community Engagement in a System-Wide Educational Change Effort: Implications for Building Partnerships

by

Lindsay K. Nickels

This qualitative study should provide insight into stakeholders' perceptions of a system-wide educational partnership focused on a change effort to increase student achievement in a school system located in a large, metropolitan city in the southeastern United States. The importance of partnering to assure that all children are succeeding in school has never been more important to local communities and our nation. Not only are definitions of educational partnerships expanding, but so are the parameters, the players, and the structures. As educational improvement initiatives are put into effect by local, state, and national governments, schools across the country are realizing the need for local action. Some of the many successful school systems in our nation have implemented more than parent involvement; they have created a collaborative school-community partnership.

Through investigation of surveys and interviews administered to the stakeholders of a partnership that has only been in existence for 2 years, this case study was designed to identify similarities and differences in the stakeholders' perceptions regarding their respective roles in the partnership, in improving student outcomes, and in the desired future state of this particular school system and partnership. Findings from this study confirm that there are both similarities and differences in all stakeholders' perceptions about most aspects of the partnership. In addition, many of the study's participants have changed their perceptions of the partnership over the 2 years of its existence and the challenges facing education. Finally, challenges and barriers of this partnership were identified. Differences in perceptions regarding the vision, mission,

goals, action plans, and measures exist between school system personnel, school board members, and the partnership.

This study focused on the implications of building partnerships and provides a section detailing recommendations and lessons learned from the process for this particular partnership as well as recommendations for future partnerships. This study might be of interest to stakeholders who are presently involved in a similar collaborative change effort or serve as a guide for other school systems that wish to replicate this type of school-community partnership.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this process. I am so thankful to each of you for your continued patience, encouragement, and support. This was a combined effort; it took each and every one of us working together to complete this journey ... and I know that this journey was not easy on any of us.

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To my wonderful husband, Joey, you are amazing. I feel as if your name should be on the front of this paper as well as mine because this was definitely a joint effort. Those nights that I got frustrated and wanted to quit, you always said the right things to motivate me to continue. You were so patient throughout this process and went above and beyond the call of duty to make sure I had the time needed to study and that our children were well taken care of. You showed me how proud you were of me every step of the way. I love you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The globalization of education, or the “flattening” of our world as Friedman (2005) described the 21<sup>st</sup> century's international economy and escalating social, political, and economic challenges, has been redefining educational partnerships in our country. The importance of partnering to assure that all children are succeeding in school has never been more important to local communities and the nation. Not only are definitions of educational partnerships expanding, but so are the parameters, the players, and the structures.

Parents' involvement in schools has been a topic of research for many years and has continued to be a focus for improvement in schools across the country. Researchers have shown that parents' involvement in schools plays an important role in students' success (Barbour & Barbour, 2001; Gestwicki, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2001). As researchers, educators, and practitioners continue to identify ways to improve the education of students, not only do parents need to be involved in the schools, but partnerships with the community also need to be extremely effective (Barbour & Barbour; Berns, 2001; Blank & Kershaw, 2001). Furthermore, studies have shown that partnering with families and communities has contributed to an increase in students' test scores, grades, attendance, attitudes, and graduation rates (Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Lundblad & Stewart, 2005).

According to Barbour and Barbour (2001), educators, administrators, parents, community members, community leaders, and social service providers are responsible for ensuring the best possible education for students who will be the foundation of society in the future. Furthermore, school systems must establish procedures for mutually beneficial school partnerships (Blank & Kershaw, 2001). “School Partnerships” is a relatively new term used to describe the interactions of parents, community members, local businesses, community leaders, government officials, and civic organizations regarding involvement with schools and education of students (Hiatt-Michael, 2003). According to the Center for Mental Health in Schools (2003), the partnership

trend that is spreading across our country has been described as “groups of people who often haven’t worked together previously that are combining their talents and resources to improve outcomes for children and youth” (p. 1). While parents continue to play a critical role in school improvement initiatives across the country, they are able to take part increasingly in collaborative change efforts within their communities (Blank & Kershaw; Ellis & Hughes, 2002). According to Bagin and Gallagher (2001) and Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999), parents, educators, and community members can create workable partnerships by supporting each other in their respective roles, maintaining open communication, participating in shared decision-making processes, and implementing collaborative and authentic activities for the students.

For decades, there have been overwhelming public concerns about the quality of education America’s students are receiving. There has been a continuous focus placed on school reform across the country to address the global perception that public schools are failing students (Popham, 2004; Sanders, 2003; Spring, 2000). Government officials, businesses, and communities continue to show concerns about the education of America’s students and the impact it will have on the future (Tulloch, Seldon, & Brady, 2002). As educational improvement initiatives are put into effect by local, state, and national governments, schools across the country are realizing the need for local action. School improvement plans are being developed and revised yearly to include community engagement as a significant component in the school reform change effort. Some successful school systems have implemented more than parent involvement; they have created a collaborative school-community partnership.

Researchers, educators, and policy makers have noted a tremendous need for community engagement in the schools (Blank & Kershaw, 2001; Feinberg & Soltis, 2004; Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Community engagement is a term that has carried different meanings to schools throughout the country. Parent involvement has been a focus of school improvement for decades, but reaching out beyond parents and into the community has become a national focus for school improvement (Hiatt-Michael). School systems across the country are

realizing the need for the involvement of parents, businesses, community leaders, community members, civic organizations, and government officials to truly make an impact in the change effort to improve our public schools (Feinberg & Soltis; Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002; Whittle, 2005). As society continues to change, a problem lies in how to involve the community in the education of today's students in order to increase student achievement and improve schools.

The focal point of this study was an anonymous established partnership--a collaborative effort designed to address the issues of misaligned intentions, planning, and focuses for improving student achievement. This partnership included community leaders, government officials, school system leaders, university faculty, educators, civic organizations, community members, educational union organizations, and parents in an effort to improve student achievement in a large metropolitan city located in the southeastern part of the United States. The partnership that has participated in this study is referred to as The Outstanding Schools Alliance (OSA) in order to protect the anonymity of the participants in the study. The partnership's vision of the future is "[OSA's public school system] will be the best metropolitan school system in the nation by the end of the decade" (Board of Trustees Retreat Meeting Minutes, 2006). The partnership has focused on five initiatives, one of which was community engagement. Community engagement is, perhaps, the most challenging initiative. As a major component of this initiative, the partnership has been created with community members engaged to serve as a "voice" for improving educational outcomes for students. However, the stakeholders' perceptions differ in regards to their respective roles in the partnership, in improving student outcomes, and in the desired future state of this particular school system (Meeting Notes, 2005).

### *Intent of the Study*

Increased demands on school systems to improve American students' performance on a global scale and to reduce the achievement gap of various student subgroups (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, and SES) in the United States have driven communities throughout the country to step

"out of the-box" and establish community-wide partnerships with schools. In this type of collaborative effort to improve educational outcomes for students, there often have been barriers to overcome when dealing with group dynamics, differences in perceptions, and personal or professional agendas. The intent of this study, therefore, was to extend current research on community engagement by focusing on stakeholders' perceptions of a change effort in a recently established community-wide partnership focused on school improvement. After gathering and analyzing perceptions of stakeholders, this study should indicate similarities and differences among them regarding their specific roles in the partnership, their changing perceptions as they continue to collaborate on how to focus their efforts to achieve the best results, and those factors that could facilitate or limit community engagement of this type.

The purpose of this study was to identify similarities and differences in initial expectations of the innovative partnership, changes in participants' perceptions over the first 2 years of participation, and insights regarding implementation that might prove useful to other school system-community partnerships in replicating a formalized model for collaboration. Additionally, this study identified the stakeholders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of this emerging school-community partnership that might be used in refining this partnership model and informing others engaged in partnership work at any level. The Outstanding Schools Alliance, has developed a structure that incorporates civic, business, and community leaders, government officials, and parents along with educators from P-12 and higher education in achieving their collective goal of transforming a school system located in a large metropolitan city in the southeastern United States into one of the best in the nation by 2010. In the partnership's first years of implementation, it has evolved from smaller partnerships funded by a federal grant and the local mayor's initial Education Summit in 2004.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the perceptions of educators and community partners regarding educational partnering?
2. From the inception of the partnership to present, do stakeholders perceive that their attitudes about the partnering program have changed?
3. What factors facilitate or serve as barriers in the engagement of educators and community members collaborating in a change effort?

### *Significance of the Study*

School systems nationwide have been caught up in a whirlwind of change for decades with continuous national attention placed on the failures of our schools (Johnson & Friedman, 2006). With each new federal mandate and each new school year, systems across the country are implementing change efforts to improve schools. Within these change efforts, school systems have turned to the communities for support and involvement, but have had little or no success (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004). Researchers have suggested that involvement, as a whole, has been limited because of the lack of understanding from society members on how to be engaged (Lundblad & Stewart, 2005). Christensen (2006), the State Commissioner of Education in Nebraska, responded to a question at a Public Agenda Meeting about his view of engagement by stating:

Public engagement is about building connections to communicate and create and resolve problems. It is about building trust so all the stakeholders have an investment in the problem and in the solution. It is about building confidence so the strategy that is created is likely to work and be supported. Public engagement enables us to be clear about what our publics are actually saying rather than paralyzed by making decisions based on our assumptions. (p. 28)

Researchers have suggested that minimal information exists regarding how to “reach the unreachable” and best practices for getting the community engaged (Berns, 2001; Gestwicki, 2000). Furthermore, America’s schools must find a way to abolish the on-going national trend: the lack of community engagement in the schools (Bagin & Gallagher, 2001; Feinberg & Soltis,

2004; Hiatt-Michael, 2003). There is no simple solution to the complex struggle of engaging communities into our schools. The findings of this case study might provide a better understanding of current research, lessons learned in regards to partnership development, and guidelines for other school systems that wish to replicate a collaborative program of this type in an effort to meet the national demand of community involvement with schools.

### *Scope of the Study*

This study focused on the perceptions of the Outstanding Schools Alliance stakeholders in a large metropolitan city located in the southeastern United States who were actively involved in the educational change efforts that are taking place within the partnership. A case study design was used to gather qualitative data from these stakeholders. Data sources included an exploration survey that was sent to all 50 partnership stakeholders. In addition, personal interviews were conducted with 13 participants. The study also included several partnership documents, meeting notes, and reports that could provide greater insight into the perceptions of the stakeholders.

### *Definitions of Terms*

1. *School Partnerships*: Any person, group, or organization working with a school or schools to improve the education of the students.
2. *Stakeholders*: Anyone who has a claim, stake, or vested interest in the issue at hand, or in an organization, or in his or her relationship with a product, service, or brand.

### *Overview of the Study*

Chapter 1 includes the introduction, intent of the study, research questions, significance and scope of the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature and briefly addresses the practices of other established partnerships within the United States that are located outside of this study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used in

this study to obtain the findings. Chapter 4 contains the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Chapter 5 contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### *Introduction*

According to Haycock (2005), the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development has concluded, “We are the only developed nation where young adults are less literate than [are] their parents” (p. 258). Haycock further stated that America has a crisis in education because we have not grasped the concept of the “consequences of our failures – both for students and for our economic success and social cohesion” (p. 264). The challenge to change schools to better serve the needs of the increasingly diverse student population and to address the challenges of preparing students to function and succeed in an international community is currently being recognized as more than schools and school systems can accomplish on their own. Furthermore, an additional challenge exists in turning what Mathews and Thomason (2003) and Mathews (2006) of the Kettering Foundation identified as the kinds of relationships people have with schools. Mathews and Thomason identified four types of relationships based on members’ characteristics related to their views of education and how they related to any educational agendas. These were:

1. consumers, the largest group within most communities, are community members who want the best for their own children, but may not consider the needs of all children in the community;
2. shutouts have had limited, unsatisfactory relationships with schools although they would like to have had better relationships;
3. dropouts have had a relationship with schools, but have, for one reason or another, become estranged; and
4. inattentives have little investment in education and how it can contribute to their community, they pay little attention to educational agendas, and generally are not supportive of increased spending for schools (p. 5).

A small percentage of school systems and communities around the nation are developing partnerships to address these challenges. Several have been highlighted by researchers for their ability to change the status quo in targeted improvement areas. In describing five educational reform success stories, Schmoker (2001) identified the Milwaukee Partnership Academy as one where working together, setting clear goals and expectations, and using data to plan and assess interventions made a significant difference in student achievement. Winik (2006) described how five communities were assuring a quality education for all students. The author highlighted Chattanooga, Tennessee for demanding better teachers; Long Beach, California for making schools a family resource center; Cleveland Heights, Ohio for challenging the entire community to get involved; Bridgeport, Connecticut for initiating a student mentoring program; and Mobile, Alabama for involving business leaders and developing an apprentice program. The author ranked high expectations for every student and parent and community support as the top two research-based characteristics of good schools. According to Winik, “Across the nation, schools are defying expectations and succeeding. What makes them different? In nearly every case, a community rallied to improve its schools” (p. 4).

There is no doubt that partnership work focused on improving student achievement by overcoming the traditional “silo mentality” and collaboratively aligning talent and resources in a united effort to redefine effective schooling is a complex and challenging change effort. “Silo mentality” is an analogy describing the traditional practice of independent groups working effectively, or sometimes ineffectively, on a goal without sharing across the different groups versus “non-silo mentality,” where different groups of people collectively work toward a common goal by sharing ideas and best practices. Partnerships have been developed with the “non-silo mentality” in an effort to alleviate the gaps or redundancy often seen when one group of individuals are unaware of what the other groups are doing while working toward a common goal (Meeting Notes, 2005).

The positive impact of partnerships working to improve students’ outcomes has been widely documented (Bagin & Gallagher, 2001; Berns, 2001; Epstein & Jansom, 2004; Epstein &

Sheldon, 2003; Whittle, 2005). At the same time, issues of “buy in,” common understandings and agendas, turf issues, and sustainability have continued to challenge most partnership efforts (Littky, 2004). Underlying these challenges has been the need for partnerships to operate on a sound understanding of change theory and leadership and with a spirit of innovation and willingness to challenge the status quo (Fullan, 2001; Moye, 1997). Furthermore, there continues to be a need for further research to identify “best practices” in promoting, supporting, and sustaining these partnership efforts (Epstein, 1995; Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Littky; Sheldon). This literature review addresses current research concerning: the rationale for partnerships, traditional partnership practices, partnerships in action, the theoretical frame of reference for partnerships, and a brief description of the case study approach to researching partnership practices.

### *Rationale for Partnerships*

Historically, school systems have used their personnel, curricular, and fiscal resources to improve student performance. Faculty members in nearly every school have participated on committees focused on preparing school improvement plans to address the needs of their specific student populations. Nearly all have included a parent involvement component. The quality of design and implementation of annual school improvement plans has varied both across and within schools. The component that is more often “hoped for” than actualized has been parent involvement (Blank & Kershaw, 2001; Epstein, 2004). Rarely has the involvement of the community extended beyond fiscal support or the involvement of community role models for special events. As noted in the introduction, the need for real partnerships has become apparent as schools are now focusing on systemic reform. Based on the literature throughout, the voices of parents and community leaders can no longer be marginalized if schools are to address the national call for increasing student engagement and achievement in rigorous coursework, the challenge of an increasingly competitive workforce, the diverse needs of children and families,

the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* (Executive Summary, 2006) reform movement, and the need to assure that communities remain strong and viable places to live and work.

### *Increasing Academic Rigor*

The low performance of U.S. students in math and science has been, according to Augustine et al. (2006), a national emergency. According to the authors, the declining number of students graduating with math and science degrees as well as lower than desirable student performances on international comparisons have highlighted the fact that the nation is losing its competitive edge, and, as a result, its position as an international leader. This decline could ultimately impact individual communities, the workforce, and, potentially, national security.

According to Poliakoff (2006), the Trend in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an international assessment, recently showed one of the largest achievement gaps among advanced countries. TIMSS results indicated that students in the United States under performed compared to students in Europe and Asia. Furthermore, Poliakoff cited international studies that indicated U.S. students were below their peers in Asian and European countries in their knowledge and application of mathematics by the middle grades (NCES, 1999).

According to Epstein (2005), student performance in mathematics has become a high priority in schools. As concerns increase about the quality of mathematics education students are receiving, community and family involvement has been found to be a key factor in the higher levels of achievement in mathematics. Educators must help parents and community members understand the importance of mathematics and help students understand their role in the complex nature of mathematics and the effectiveness of their involvement with mathematics education (Epstein, 2005). According to Noll (2005), engaging students in challenging math and science classes requires both awareness of the need for students to take more challenging courses and a willingness of families to assure that their children do not take easier coursework to maintain grade point averages or to avoid the rigor of demanding core courses.

### *Increasing Students' Capacity for a Competitive Workforce*

Because of the lower than desirable educational levels of some of our high school graduates, the quality of our workforce, and the higher cost of wages paid to workers in the United States versus those in third world countries, the United States is losing businesses and jobs to other countries at an unprecedented rate. According to Friedman (2005), science and engineering jobs in the U.S. have continued to grow, but there has been a rapid decline in the number of U.S. citizens training for these types of professions. This is because of the lack of emphasis being placed on science and engineering in the U.S. in comparison to other countries. Friedman concluded, “The most important reason for the numbers gap, of course, is our education gap. We simply are not educating, or even interesting, enough of our own young people in advanced math, science, and engineering” (p. 335).

The long-term impact has been that the United States is losing its intellectual leadership capacity when our students cannot keep up with students in other countries. Friedman (2005) and others concluded that our nation could no longer afford for parents to lack the understanding of the need for their children to be nationally and internationally competitive. Communities must understand the importance of educating our youth and keeping themselves economically alive. Our nation must find new ways to motivate students who do not have aspirations for careers or education. Our challenges are greater today than ever before, even to the core of our nation’s survival as a world leader (Friedman). Schools cannot “save” our country alone; communities must engage in the critically needed school reform efforts taking place in our nation. According to Littky (2004), “It is time to change the system of education” (p. 185). Furthermore, he stated, “Change is not only possible, it is necessary. We are losing our children and they are losing their futures” (p. 184).

### *Addressing Needs of Diverse Student Populations*

Educational reform and achievement gaps have been the focus of intensive school improvement efforts as educators try to work diligently to improve outcomes for students at all

ability levels and in all ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups. However, the achievement gaps among various student subgroups (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, and SES) in the United States continue to plague most schools and school systems. Over the years, there has been a consistent discrepancy among the academic achievement of African American, Hispanic, and low-income children and those children in the White or more affluent demographic groups (Poliakoff, 2006). Schools have been working desperately to narrow the gap as mandated by *No Child Left Behind* but are having difficulty. According to Poliakoff, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) identified progress in 2003, but major gains are still needed. The teachers are being held responsible for the achievement gaps still happening in the country. The passage of *No Child Left Behind* called for “highly qualified” teachers in the U.S. schools; however, strategies and resources that are ultimately needed to achieve this goal have been lacking. According to Zimpler and Howey (2005), there are few systematic efforts being made across the country to align teacher preparation and school reform. There is a tremendous need for partnerships between the K-12 school sector and local universities that are willing to collectively design teacher education to meet the changing needs in school reform (Navarro, 2005; Teitel, 2003).

#### *Addressing Requirements of Educational Reform*

Over the years, there has been an increasing amount of speculation about public school education. There have been government change efforts put into place that are increasingly more progressive with regard to the involvement of families and communities in public education (Popham, 2004). As federal legislation regarding the involvement of parents and communities into the schools is passed, researchers have continued to identify benefits surrounding community engagement (Hiatt-Michael, 2003). Researchers have found that community engagement has a tremendous impact on the education of today’s students; however, the schools continue to focus primarily on students' test scores while ignoring the benefits of involving the community. School systems, schools, and educators across the nation are now being held

accountable for student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Furthermore, most of the efforts toward school reform have been placed on classroom instruction rather than initiating a cohesive effort with the community to improve the schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

According to Wood (2004), the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 (ESEA, Public Law 89-10) was put into legislation to strengthen the quality of education America's students were receiving and claimed that the right types of interventions and supports could close the gap between the rich and the poor students. Under this landmark reform movement, states and districts could vary the requirements and programs implemented to meet the needs of their student population. Furthermore, local education agencies were encouraged to locate and implement new methods and approaches to teaching (Tullock et al., 2002).

In 1983, a letter written to the American people by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, called *A Nation at Risk*, became an icon for educational reform (Executive Summary, 2006). The letter addressed schools as failing our students by providing a middle-of-the-road education. Furthermore, it noted that students were not being taught the skills and gaining the knowledge needed to survive in the rapidly changing world ("A Nation at Risk," 1983). Tozer et al. (2002) raised the perception, "The weakness of American education would usher in an era of economic decline" (p. 442).

Bill Clinton initiated *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* in 1994 that focused on the improvement of teaching and student learning. This act included an initiative promoting partnerships in every school "that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth in children" (National Education Goals, 1994). This focus on parent involvement heightened the awareness of the necessity of connecting schools with their communities. According to Hiatt-Michael (2003), this goal of parent involvement in the schools was additionally supported by the U.S. Congress with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001.

President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 that included parental involvement as one component of the educational reform movement. *No Child Left*

*Behind* requires schools to create opportunities for parent involvement in their child's education and in improving the school as a whole (Executive Summary, 2006). According to Popham (2004), "We are entering an era in which test-based evidence of school quality will play the key role in shaping parents' perceptions regarding the excellence of their children's schools" (p. 19).

### *Assuring Quality and Sustainability of Communities*

As educators, we must stop trying to be the "best" when compared to the schools in the next town or adjacent state; we must be the "best" on the planet (Friedman, 2005). According to Hiatt-Michael (2003), public schools "should consider and include the larger social context of family and community because this context affects student educational outcomes and future community productivity" (p. 1). If communities are to attract business growth, they must have strong schools. This means that graduates of the community's schools must have the knowledge and skills needed by local businesses and by those interested in locating within a specific area. Currently the concern is that a large percentage of high school graduates are not adequately prepared for either postsecondary education or the workforce (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Littky, 2004; Matthews & Menna, 2003).

### *Traditional Partnership Practices*

The majority of school systems have not realized that there must be a break from traditional views of partnerships if they are to achieve the types of results that meet the challenges facing today's schools (Noll, 2005). Over the years, school systems have given little effort toward the involvement of families and communities in the schools beyond financial, athletic, volunteer, or committee contributions. Federal initiatives, such as *Goals 2000* (National Education Goals, 1994) and *No Child Left Behind* (Executive Summary, 2006) have mandated that each school have a parent involvement component in their school improvement plans. Despite increasing efforts to involve parents and community members to address the mandate, traditional limited practices are still the norm (Zimpher & Howey, 2005). Why? Most schools

and school system leaders simply do not know how to meaningfully engage families, businesses, and communities (Christenson, 2006; Crispeels, 1996; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Furthermore, those attempting to bridge this gap are often met with insurmountable challenges and limited supports needed to overcome those challenges. Developing a strategy to address this challenge requires an understanding of traditional and innovative partnership practices.

Traditional family and community engagement have focused on parents and community members volunteering in the schools, funding from local businesses, and the development of project partnerships. Hiatt-Michael (2003) noted that schools often were able to get partners but failed to put a strategy into place for focusing their resources on a collaboratively structured set of outcomes. Furthermore, schools have often formed project partnerships with business and community members, rather than partnerships where all the stakeholders played an on-going, active role in increasing student achievement.

### *Parent Involvement*

Parent involvement has played an important role for years in the American schools. Parents are considered by many schools to be “actively involved” by attending school-wide events, parent teacher conferences, and field trips with open communication with the teacher. This type of involvement is important, but is it enough?

According to Berns (2001), Crispeels (1996), and Hiatt-Michael (2003), there are two major types of parental involvement: the family learning environment and school-initiated parent involvement. The family learning environment plays a vital role in the education of today’s students. Much of the research on the family learning environment focused on significant family factors such as socioeconomic status, family values, and parenting practices (Crispeels; Epstein, 2004). Some of the parenting practices included parent and child daily conversations that stimulate creative thinking and higher-order thinking skills, encouraging leisure reading, expressing an interest in a child’s academic and personal growth, setting long-term goals and objectives with the child, and encouraging and supporting the child in all endeavors (Crispeels;

Epstein, 2004; Robbins & Alvy, 2003). Researchers have documented a correlation between family factors and student success. The more involved the family is with their child in the home setting, the higher the academic achievement of the child (Popham, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001; Whittle, 2005). As expectations for students increase and researchers continue to document the successes in student achievement attributable to the involvement of parents, why is the lack of parental engagement a continuous national trend?

According to Lezotte (2001), there are two generations of parental involvement that describe where we need to be as a nation with positive home-school relationships.

**The First Generation:** In the effective school, parents understand and support the school's basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve this mission.

**The Second Generation:** During the first generation, the role of parents in education of their children was always somewhat unclear. Schools often gave "lip service" to having parents more actively involved in the schooling of their children. Unfortunately, when pressed, many educators were willing to admit they really did not know how to deal effectively with increased levels of parent involvement in the schools. In the second generation, the relationship between parents and the school must be an authentic partnership. In the past, when teachers said they wanted more parent involvement, more often than not they were looking for unqualified support from parents. Many teachers believed that parents, if they truly valued education, knew how to get their children to behave in the ways the school desired.

It is now clear to both teachers and parents that the parent involvement issue is not that simple. Parents are often as perplexed as the teachers about the best way to inspire students to learn what the school teaches.

The best hope for effectively confronting the problem -and not each other- is to build enough trust and communication to realize that both teachers and parents have the same goal- an effective school and home for all children. (Introduction Letter, para. 2)

According to Lezotte (2001), many schools, though sadly not all, in our nation have achieved the first generation. Few, however, have been able to effectively tackle and break down the barriers of the second generation. According to Gestwicki (2000), Hiatt-Michael (2003), and Meier (2002), there is a lack of communication between the schools and the families. Many parents do not know how to be involved. Schools are going to have to take the first step in trying to resolve this problem. This will require new ways of thinking about family and community

involvement--the development of an effective, partnership program within each school (Epstein & Jansom, 2004). According to Meier (1995):

When schools see themselves as membership communities, not service organizations, parents and teachers discuss ideas, argue about purposes and exercise judgment, because taking responsibility for making important decisions is at the heart of what it means to be well educated. Students can't learn unless the adults show them the way to practice what they preach. (pp. 369-370)

### *Community Involvement*

According to Hirsch (1996), students learn the communication skills in classrooms that enable them to learn from diverse new experiences in the community. The involvement of the community with our schools gives students opportunities to learn to participate as autonomous citizens in the economy and policy of the nation (Epstein, 2002). In the past decade, there has been an increased amount of community engagement in schools; however, the traditional type of involvement from the community is no longer sufficient to meet the increased demands placed on schools to increase student achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Wang & Walberg, 2001). Traditionally, community involvement has incorporated volunteering, tutoring, funding, providing resources, and mentoring and internship opportunities. There is a trend throughout the research that documents the need to get students out into the community relating content knowledge with real-life practices (Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Lunblad & Stewart, 2005; Meier, 2002; Teitel, 2003). The school walls should not define the learning environment. According to Lunblad and Stewart, community classrooms often are more effective than the traditional public school classrooms are. Community classrooms are places where community members and parents must create an enriching learning environment, outside of the schoolhouse, for the student to continue to increase his or her knowledge (Littky, 2004). Furthermore, Littky stated, "Schools should be allowing kids to follow their interests and should be connecting them to adults and the outside world" (p. 199).

### *Emerging Best Practices for Partnerships*

When groups collaborate as teams when implementing a change effort, they will be quite competitive, possibly untouchable (Friedman, 2005). According to Hiatt-Michael (2003), “Family, school, and community partnerships involve persons across educational and relational groups, including administrators, students, community groups, teacher training institutions, policy makers, and businesses, as well as parents and other family members” (p. ix). WestEd (2002), in describing common characteristics of award-winning school districts, found that all had formal partnerships with others outside the district. These included business partnerships, community foundations, partnerships with higher education, alliances with professional associations, regular contracts with local service providers, and formalized linkages with other school districts.

This is not easy to accomplish and relies heavily on the participants who are involved in each of the targeted roles. According to Navarro (2005), “Partnership work relies on networks of personal and institutional relationships that constantly must adapt to the dynamic forces of change within educational institutions” (p. 13). Navarro further stated that because individuals are constantly changing within partnerships, it is critical to institutionalize tools and processes that will allow for changing membership and the natural “ebb and flow in the level and quality of partner activity” (p. 13).

A compelling common focus or vision related to student learning, relationship building, clear organizational structures, communication and collaboration, and accountability have been central to effective change efforts (Sergiovanni, 2001). Bridging gaps in background experience (context), communication, and trust are inherent in any organizational structure, but are central to change efforts (Blank & Kershaw, 2001). Relationship building has been studied in detail by researchers analyzing the impact of Professional Development Schools, a structure initially developed through the Holmes Partnership of over 100 university and school system partnerships to enhance teacher preparation, and, simultaneously, student achievement. Teitel (2003), one of the well-known researchers of Professional Development Schools, stated, “In many school-

university partnerships, structures and roles are in tension with district ways of doing business, assigning rewards and resources, etc.” (p. 7). Teitel further identified a pyramid of components necessary for effective partnership efforts. The components were: (a) collaboration; (b) structures, resources, and roles, learning communities, experiences of all stakeholder groups; and (c) student learning within the framework of accountability and quality assurance and diversity and equity. The Center for Mental Health in Schools (2003) developed an informational packet that provides guidance to developing effective collaborative efforts. The information clarified:

1. collaboration is a process for carrying out delineated functions;
2. accomplishing different functions often require different mechanisms or structures;
3. data can help enhance collaboration; and
4. sustaining collaborative endeavors over time requires attending to systematic endeavors. (Preface)

Across the nation, school systems and communities have been realizing the need for building partnerships. Research has found that partnerships must be built around trust and a clear focus or vision if they are to contribute to overall academic achievement and outcomes of success (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2003). Furthermore, for partnerships to be effective, the school and business community stakeholders must establish relationships before implementing specific plans in the development of the school. According to Epstein and Jansom (2004), teamwork played an important role in building effective partnerships. All stakeholders must play an active role in the development of the partnership and in the overall education of the students in order to see results. The stakeholders are most effective when they are involved in the change processes taking place to improve the education of today’s students, the decision-making processes taking place, and the implementation of new concepts and ideas (Ellis & Hughes, 2002; Teitel, 2003; Zimpher & Howey, 2005).

As researchers continue to document the importance of family and community engagement, schools across the country continue to struggle with the development and implementation processes needed for effective partnership programming to take place (Epstein,

2002; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Wang & Walberg, 2001; Whittle, 2005). According to Epstein and Jansom (2004), “Every school needs a purposeful, planned partnership program that creates a welcoming environment and engages families in activities that contribute to students’ readiness for school, academic success, and positive attitudes and behaviors” (p. 10).

According to Epstein (2004), an action team for partnerships must be developed in each school that consists of educators, administrators, parents, and community members. The responsibilities of the action team should include, but are not limited to, preparing annual action plans for continually improving family and community involvement, implementing, monitoring and evaluating progress and results, organizing committees, continually gathering research, information, and ideas, and most importantly, communicating to all stakeholders.

### *Partnership in Action*

#### *Milwaukee Partnership Academy*

The Milwaukee Partnership Academy (MPA) is an alliance of educators, laborers, local businesses, government officials, university personnel, and community leaders and groups “whose purpose is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Milwaukee Public Schools” (Milwaukee Partnership Academy, 2005). The partnership stated that with the proper leadership, determination, and sustained participation in the partnership, the mission for the Milwaukee public schools could be accomplished. The MPA mission was for “every child in MPA to be at or above grade level in reading, writing, and mathematics” (Milwaukee Partnership Academy, 2006, n. p.). The Milwaukee partnership has been in action since April 1999. The improvement of student achievement through better teacher preparation, educator recruitment, and retention of qualified teachers was the initial focus for the partnership; however, the partnership has expanded into a much broader initiative. From the time of inception, the MPA stakeholders have developed ownership in the academy documenting student success and now boast a shared responsibility for the educational accomplishments of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools.

The Milwaukee Partnership Academy is one of many effective school partnerships developed in the nation. The Milwaukee Partnership Academy has been a driving force behind the development of several other partnerships in the United States. The MPA has made such tremendous gains in student achievement in the past couple of years that the stakeholders of other recently established partnerships have held the MPA as a model to base their partnership. The Milwaukee Partnership Academy welcomes visitors from other communities to gain insight on the initial development and implementation practices used. The MPA continues to be a resource for new partnerships as they implement the change effort needed to increase student achievement (Milwaukee Partnership Academy, 2005; 2006).

### *Theoretical Frame of Reference for Partnerships*

Successful partnership efforts are the result of careful planning, the involvement of key stakeholders, and mutually beneficial desired outcomes. The theory of action guiding partnership work has been that outcomes for students, families, and the larger community can result from sharing collective strengths, working together to identify problems and solutions, and learning together how to challenge traditional practices in order to create a more productive system for educating a community's youth. Successful partnerships also perceive that a sound understanding of leadership and change theory is necessary to sustain emerging partnerships that often struggle initially once initial goals are met.

### *Change Theory*

Knoster (1991) defined necessary components for effective organizational change. These included a vision and mission, data, teamwork, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. His premise was that if any of these components were missing, the result would be less than optimal. For example, the absence of a vision and mission has led many schools to buy into quick fixes and random change efforts. Not all change theories have promoted the belief that

action plans need to be fully designed before initiating change. Gold, Simon, and Brown (2002), representing Research for Action and the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, described a theory of change for community capacity building and school improvement. Their theoretical model had three main components: (a) building community capacity: social capital, community power, and leadership development; (b) school improvement: equity, school or community connections, curriculum, instruction, and school climate; and (c) public accountability that impacts both community capacity and school improvement. Gold et al. further described their model:

Work in the three indicator areas--leadership development, community power, and social capital--increases civic participation and leverages power through partnerships and relationships within and across communities, as well as with school district, civic, and elected officials. Public accountability is the hinge that connects community capacity with school improvement. Increased community participation and strong relationships together broaden accountability for improving public education for children of low-to-moderate income families. Public accountability creates the political will to forward equity and school/community connection, thereby improving schools climate, curriculum and instruction making them more responsive to communities, laying the basis for improved student learning and achievement. Stronger schools, in turn, contribute to strengthening community capacity. (p. 7)

### *Capacity Building and School Improvement*

As Fullan (2001) has described, innovative change efforts often follow a process of “ready, fire, aim” versus the more traditional “ready, aim, fire.” These are change efforts that resulted from leaders’ identifying a need for change, studying the context, and making an informed decision to do something without following the traditional laborious and time consuming practice of developing strategic plans. Fullan concluded it was often these change efforts that made significant contributions to their field. He also identified natural components of the change process that involved implementation dips where the challenges and obstacles appeared so overwhelming that they could derail less than diligent participants in the process. Haycock (2005) charged schools and school systems to engage the community in changing the outcomes of the educational process. This would require, she stated:

. . . a new willingness on our part to embrace aggressively the notion that what we do matters a lot, a new eagerness to examine our programs from top to bottom to be certain that we do not unintentionally undermine that message, and a new commitment to do whatever it takes to matter even more. (p. 264)

### *Motivational Theory*

Alignment of aims, purpose, and values between staff, teams, and organization has been the most fundamental aspect of motivation. The better the alignment and personal buy-in with organizational goals, the better the groundwork is for motivation (Owens, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001). The level of success in motivation has been determined by whether there was or was not goal alignment from all stakeholders involved. Motivation is a complex area. The level of motivation in everyone changes from day to day, from situation to situation. Motivational methods of any sort will not work if people and organizations are not aligned (Locke & Latham, 1990). People are motivated towards something they can relate to and something they can believe in. Times have changed. People want more.

McClelland's (1975) motivational needs theory describes three needs in terms of being motivated and motivating others. The three needs are: the need for achievement, the need for authority and power, and the need for affiliation. As far as partnership involvement goes, McClelland's needs theory related in that each stakeholder might have a different motivational need within the partnership, whether it be the need for a sense of accomplishment of the partnership goals, the strong need to lead and for their personal ideas or agendas to prevail, or the need for interaction with others. In an organizational situation, such as a partnership, McClelland's need theory might make it difficult to grasp the understanding of group dynamics unless the group members were achievement-motivated people who made things happen and got results (McClelland).

## *Group Dynamics*

The definition of a group is “a collection of people who interact with one another, accept rights and obligations as members, and who share a common identity” (Neill, 2007, p. 1). According to Owens (2004), “Groups are dynamic social systems that establish interdependent relationships between and among people” (p. 351). Group dynamics has been a key component of partnership development. In order for a partnership to be successful, the stakeholders must take into account the dynamics of the group as a whole and the individuals within the group. According to Neill, “Criteria for a group include: formal social structure, face-to-face interaction, two or more persons, common fate, common goals, interdependence, self-definition as group members, and recognition by others” (p. 1). According to Owens, group cohesion and morale tended to identify the character and quality of the group. Furthermore, Owens noted that the dynamics of the group “give rise to basic assumptions and values that are shared between and among the members of the group as truth and reality” (p. 351). Tuckman (1965) developed four stages to group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Ten years after these were developed, Tuckman developed a fifth stage: adjourning (Tuckman & Jenson, 1977). Figure 1 shows descriptions of each stage.

According to Tuckman and Jenson (1977), the importance of group dynamics has been in recognizing where the stakeholders are within the process and helping them do what is needed to reach the perform stage. As groups experience on-going change, they might move from stage to stage. For example, if a new member joins a group, the group might be forced back to the storming stage.

### Stage 1: Forming

Individual behavior is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others, and avoid controversy or conflict. Serious issues and feelings are avoided, and people focus on being busy with routines, such as team organization, who does what, when to meet, etc. But individuals are also gathering information and impressions - about each other, and about the scope of the task and how to approach it. This is a comfortable stage to be in, but the avoidance of conflict and threat means that not much actually gets done.

### Stage 2: Storming

Individuals in the group can only remain nice to each other for so long, as important issues start to be addressed. Some people's patience will break early, and minor confrontations will arise that are quickly dealt with or glossed over. These may relate to the work of the group itself, or to roles and responsibilities within the group. Some will observe that it's good to be getting into the real issues, whilst others will wish to remain in the comfort and security of stage 1. Depending on the culture of the organization and individuals, the conflict will be more or less suppressed, but it'll be there, under the surface. To deal with the conflict, individuals may feel they are winning or losing battles, and will look for structural clarity and rules to prevent the conflict persisting.

### Stage 3: Norming

As Stage 2 evolves, the "rules of engagement" for the group become established, and the scopes of the group's tasks or responsibilities are clear and agreed. Having had their arguments, they now understand each other better, and can appreciate each other's skills and experience. Individuals listen to each other, appreciate and support each other, and are prepared to change pre-conceived views: they feel they're part of a cohesive, effective group. However, individuals have had to work hard to attain this stage, and may resist any pressure to change - especially from the outside - for fear that the group will break up, or revert to a storm.

### Stage 4: Performing

Not all groups reach this stage, characterized by a state of interdependence and flexibility. Everyone knows each other well enough to be able to work together, and trusts each other enough to allow independent activity. Roles and responsibilities change according to need in an almost seamless way. Group identity, loyalty and morale are all high, and everyone is equally task-orientated and people-orientated. This high degree of comfort means that all the energy of the group can be directed towards the task(s) in hand.

### Stage 5: Adjourning

This is about completion and disengagement, both from the tasks and the group members. Individuals will be proud of having achieved much and glad to have been part of such an enjoyable group. They need to recognize what they've done, and consciously move on. Some authors describe stage 5 as "Deforming and Mourning", recognizing the sense of loss felt by group members.

## *Figure 1. Descriptions of the Stages of Group Development*

"Tuckman's Classic Description," 2007

A major component of group dynamics has been collaboration. According to the Center for Mental Health in Schools (2003), where collaboration was the aim, “This requires developing ways to work together that enable participants to overcome their particular areas of advocacy in order to pursue a shared agenda and achieve a collective vision” (p. 3). The fact remains that no organization can be truly effective if everyone works in isolation. True collaboration involves more than meeting and talking. The point is to work together in ways that produce the type of actions that result in effective programs. And it is a simple fact that there is no way for schools to play their roles in addressing barriers to student learning and work toward better student outcomes if a vital mass of stakeholders do not work together toward a shared vision (Forsyth, 2006). There are policies to advocate for, decisions to make, problems to solve, and interventions to plan, implement, and evaluate. Ego-oriented behavior and pointing fingers tend to get in the way of accomplishing the task at hand (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2003).

Another component of group dynamics has been innovation. According to Forsyth (2006), group members must strive for new ways of performing a function, process, or procedure in order to stay competitive, especially in the education sector. The sharing of information, respect for diverse backgrounds and experiences of members, the absence of competition over territory, and the alignment of goals and levels of performance must be at the top of the groups' agenda at all times (Forsyth; Locke & Latham, 1990).

### *Case Study Methodology*

The case study method of research is used when the research being conducted focuses on a solitary informant, participant, situation, event, program, or phenomenon. This method is used when the purpose is to engage in an indepth examination of one of the above mentioned study focal points. For a case study, data collection is limited, but multiple types of data collection tools can be used. The findings of a case study are detailed descriptions and explanations of a particular focal point of study (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

The case study method allows the researcher to use a variety of data analysis procedures. Case study analysis procedures are not limited to qualitative type procedures and can involve statistical procedures as well. Data collection tools can include such things as photography and artifacts. The researcher may choose from a variety of options when trying to decide what type of data collection tools and analysis to use in order to follow the intent of study and the guiding research questions. To triangulate data, the use of multiple data collection tools is essential (Creswell, 2003).

### *Constant Comparison Analysis*

The most commonly used data analysis procedure is the constant comparison analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Creswell (2003), this procedure calls for coding data from the interviews under headings that appear to capture the theoretical properties of that category. Each coded category is then described as concisely as possible to capture the meanings within it. Then, using that category, all new and existing data are constantly compared to determine the descriptive adequacy of the category. Revisions and modifications take place as necessary. These categories are narrowed down to form patterns and themes and will ultimately narrow down the findings (Creswell; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin).

### *Summary*

According to Friedman (2005), the flattening process of the world is happening rapidly and in the last few decades, the nation has failed to address the rapid changes taking place. Our country's businesses and educational institutions are now facing inevitable changes but they are lacking the leadership, flexibility, and imagination to adapt to the overwhelming speed of change (Friedman). A reoccurring theme through the literature called for educators and community members to be proactive in an effort to exceed the educational demands by establishing community-wide partnerships with their schools.

An article titled, “We enter the Twenty-First Century With Schooling Designed for the Nineteenth,” sums up the need for drastic reform in education (Banathy, 2001). It is time for educators to stand up and educate our students to meet the increased demands of our society. The typical school day cannot end at 3:00 if we are to meet the academic demands placed on today’s students. Families and communities must exhaust every intervention and strategy to better prepare our students for the rapidly changing future before, during, and after school hours. Time is critical and educators, families, and community members must work together and use every opportunity to increase the knowledge base of today’s students. While increasing knowledge, our students must be learning how to apply that knowledge in “real-life” situations. This can happen with the development of dynamic educational partnerships that are willing to challenge the status quo whether at the building, system, or community level. These partnerships must include educators, community members, family members, government officials, community leaders, and university personnel who are willing to take ownership in the improvement of student achievement. Students must know that they are not alone in their fight for the future. Students must know that they have what it takes to be competitive with other countries. Education is no longer the effort of students and schools within a small community; it has become a nation-wide educational reform effort to increase the knowledge base of U. S. students.

The literature review emphasized the escalating social, political, and economic challenges that are redefining educational partnerships in this country (Friedman, 2005). As a nation, the educational reform requirements regarding parent involvement with the schools should be redesigned to embrace the community stakeholders as vital components in the decision-making processes that take place in schools (Bagin & Gallagher, 2001). The need for change in schools is now greater than ever and it cannot be done with the involvement of parents alone (Hiatt-Michael, 2003). Building partnerships to improve schools can be extremely difficult; however getting buy-in to a shared vision with goals, expectations, and implementation practices among all of the partnership stakeholders can often be a complex and tremendously slow process

(Lundblad & Stewart, 2005). The key component in building and implementing a partnership is an understanding by participants that literature documents that such change does not happen quickly or easily (Sergiovanni, 2001).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This case study addressed the perceptions of the OSA stakeholders who were directly involved in a change effort taking place in one large metropolitan school system in the Southeast. The purpose of this study was to identify similarities and differences in initial expectations of the innovative partnership, changes in participants' perceptions over the first 2 years of participation, and insights regarding implementation that might prove useful to other school system-community partnerships in replicating a formalized model for collaboration. Additionally, this study identified the stakeholders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of this emerging school-community partnership that might be used in refining this partnership model and informing others engaged in partnership work at any level.

#### *Participants*

The school-community partnership in this study was in its 2nd year of implementation. The partnership was established to include selected school system administrators and personnel, civic organization leaders, community leaders, higher education professionals from the local university and community college, government officials, and teachers to implement a change agenda designed to improve educational outcomes for all students and families residing in this metropolitan community. The "Every School A Great School Agenda" was an outgrowth of a 2004 Education Summit and a series of meetings with key community leaders to identify what was needed to transform this school system from a traditionally "good" system into what Collins (2001) identified as a "great" school system.

#### *The Partnership Structure*

The partnership structure initially included a 13-member board of trustees defined in the charitable trust authorized by the school system's board of education. It also included two

executive directors and five implementation teams (initially led by one chairperson and five co-chairpersons) to address the five goals of the “Every School A Great School Agenda” and work teams to address the three to four initiatives included in the plan to achieve each of the five goals. The implementation team chairperson and co-chairperson structure was developed to allow the team leadership to divide their work among the three to five initiatives they would be implementing to achieve their goal. Thus, two implementation team co-chairpersons would serve as leaders of individual initiatives and would, at monthly meetings, continually collaborate with their fellow team leaders. It became apparent from the outset that the teams needed more than the six leaders included in the initial structure (Meeting Notes, July 2005). Within a year, the implementation teams ranged in size from 6 to 20. The initial structure involved 35 individuals representing the school system, the local government, business leaders, the community-at-large, and parents. See Appendix A for a graphic illustration of the initial partnership structure.

The implementation team met twice per month during their 1st year and once a month during the beginning of Year 2. Individual work teams met on a regular basis depending on the initiative. As noted in summaries of these meetings, the structured implementation team meetings worked well at the outset, but were not well attended by the end of Year I and the fall of Year 2. This was one of the reasons for revising the structure of the partnership.

As of September 2006, the structure was revised to better facilitate the work of the partnership. The current structure included the same 13-member board of trustees and one executive director who worked closely with the school system's assistant superintendent. The purpose of the revision in the position of executive director was to give the executive director the authority and responsibility of the day-to-day functioning of the partnership. The school system “liaison,” a role also included on the implementation team, was to promote frequent collaboration and dialogue and to assure that the executive director’s efforts clearly aligned with expectations of the school system and the school board. The “chair” and “liaison” structure was repeated for the implementation team chairperson. The chairperson of each team was either a

school system leader or a community or higher education faculty member. The position of “liaison” assured that there would be one person representing the school system in a leadership role on the implementation team along with someone from outside the school system who could provide the external perspective needed to approach the goal and initiatives from a noneducator's perspective. See Appendix B for the revised structure of the partnership.

Several factors have influenced the changes in the partnership structure. First, one trustee (NAACP President) had been replaced because of a change in organizational leadership. The new trustee had just begun to learn about the partnership. Second, informal decisions have been made to include two school system leaders as “chairpersons” on two teams because of their overlapping professional responsibilities and the number of initiatives their team is addressing. This was the case for Solid Foundation where the chairperson was a supervisor of special education and her “informal” co-chairperson was the director of elementary schools who controlled budgets and work responsibilities. The two worked together as the “chairperson.” The same situation emerged for Individualized Challenge. The “chairperson” was the director of secondary schools. The informal “co-chairperson” was the director of middle schools who was directly involved in leading the majority of the team’s initiatives. Each of the chairpersons and co-chairpersons worked closely with his or her nonschool system “liaisons.” The remaining “original” implementation team co-chairpersons were now part of the leadership in the work teams for each initiative that were of greatest interest to them. For example, Individualized Challenge had five work teams: (a) Small Learning Communities, (b) Maximum Achievement Plans for students (MAP), (c) Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), (d) Early College, and (e) Advisor-Advisee programs (see Appendix B for all of the expanded implementation team initiatives). Thus, the number of current trustees and implementation team members was reduced to 27. Beyond the 27 partnership stakeholders, there were eight work team chairpersons who were leaders of specific initiatives. The remaining initiative leaders were implementation team chairpersons or liaisons.

### *Selection of Participants*

After receiving verbal permission from several of the partnership stakeholders to conduct research on the partnership, the partnership participants were identified. For the purposes of this study, the participants included the 27 stakeholders who currently compose the trustees and implementation team leadership, the eight work team chairs, the eight remaining school board members, four school system principals involved in piloting one or more of the OSA programs, and three teachers involved in an OSA pilot program. There were 50 participants included in this case study.

### *Informed Consent*

The partnership that participated in this study wished to remain anonymous. Therefore, the partnership has been referred to as the Outstanding Schools Alliance (OSA) located in a large metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States. Each participant was given an informed consent document to sign and return prior to participation in this study (see Appendix C). Participants were fully aware that their words might be quoted directly in the findings and results section of the research report. The results were not labeled with the participant's name but still might be identifiable.

### *Research Design*

This study addressed the perceptions of the Outstanding Schools Alliance stakeholders on community engagement using a case study approach and a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period (Creswell, 2003). Based on the literature review, this study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the perceptions of educators and community partners regarding educational partnering?

2. From the inception of the partnership to present, do stakeholders perceive that their attitudes about the partnering program have changed?
3. What factors facilitate or serve as barriers in the engagement of educators and community members collaborating in a change effort?

The case study design consisted of two phases of research. The first phase included an exploration survey given to all 50 participants. The survey was sent to each participant by mail with an informed consent form and a self-addressed stamped return envelope. The survey was designed to obtain information regarding their involvement in the decision-making processes of the partnership, their buy-in to the change efforts being implemented, and their perception of how the partnership was progressing toward the OSA goal or vision. The exploration survey included 22 statements that the participants ranked on a five point Likert-like scale: (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Unknown, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree) and three open-ended questions (see Appendix D). The survey questions were designed to include categories from the Framework for Systematic Change (Knoster, 1991). According to Knoster, the theory must contain all the following components in order to effect change:

1. vision or mission;
2. skills;
3. incentives;
4. resources; and
5. action plan and structure. (n. p.)

Knoster pointed out the following reasons for including these components:

1. without vision or mission, random change or quick fixes with no direction might occur;
2. without skills, anxiety from not knowing how to do something might occur;
3. without incentives, there might be resistance (no one will do anything without a perceived benefit);

4. without resources, frustration might occur (having the desire to do something but stopped by lack of resources of time, people, and funds); and
  5. without an action plan or structure, a treadmill might occur (going around in circles).
- (n. p.)

The information obtained from the survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics and used to design the interview questions in order to obtain the most useful information to best answer the guiding research questions. The second phase consisted of 9 face-to-face interviews, 3 phone interviews, and 1 on-line interview for 13 interviews focused on gathering more indepth perceptions on a limited number of questions (see Appendix E). As previously stated, there were five major groups of participants in the partnership: educators, community members or parents, government officials, business leaders, civic organization representatives, and university personnel. Of those five groups, 13 members were chosen to participate in an interview using purposeful sampling. The interview participants were chosen based on their group membership, their willingness to participate, and how they answered the exploration survey if they chose not to remain anonymous. When analyzing the exploration survey in order to choose participants for phase two, the researcher was looking specifically for: (a) one or more individuals from each membership group, (b) participants who had a great deal to say, and (c) participants who had either similarities or differences in perceptions when compared to the other participants in at least one or more areas. In this case study approach, purposeful sampling was used to assure equal contribution from the five groups of participants and to capitalize on a wide variation of interest and perceptions amongst the participants in order to maximize the identification of similarities and differences of perceptions and information obtained.

### *Data Collection*

The primary data sources for this study were an exploration survey given to 50 OSA stakeholders and 13 recorded interviews. Additional sources, such as meeting minutes, notes,

and observations were included in this study. The additional sources of data were used to obtain a greater understanding of the partnership and the stakeholders involved.

### *Exploration Surveys*

The exploration surveys were mailed to the 50 previously identified partnership stakeholders. Fortunately, 22 of the 50 surveys were returned resulting in a 44% rate of return. After analyzing the survey results, there was clearly a sufficient amount of data available to design the interview questions.

### *Interviews*

The interviews were approached with open expectations as to how they should be conducted. In addition to the five questions asked to the participants during the interviews, the chaining or snowballing purposeful sampling technique was used to generate additional conversation and clarify any further details or questions. According to Creswell (2003) and Dey (1999), probing for further explanations or additional information is a research technique that increases the clarity of the data gathered. Credibility and validity were established by implementing a member-check of the transcribed interviews prior to the analysis of the interview data (see Appendix F). According to Creswell, member checking is an important technique for establishing participant trustworthiness and research validity. The transcribed interviews were sent to the participants via email with a member check document attached. All 13 participants returned the member-check document with any changes or additions they wished to make to their interview.

The interviews were conducted with 13 partnership stakeholders. Of the 13 interviews, 9 were conducted face-to-face, 3 interviews were conducted over the phone, and 1 was completed on-line. The 9 face-to-face interviews were conducted in comfortable surroundings chosen by each participant. Furthermore, the surroundings allowed the participants to feel less intimidated

by the interview process. Many of these interviews took place in the participant's office, whereas others took place in public restaurants.

Because of scheduling conflicts, three of the interviews were conducted by phone. After several attempts to meet in person, the researcher and interviewees agreed to the phone interviews. The same format was used during the phone interviews as during the face-to-face interviews. These three interviews were audio recorded as well. Finally, the last interview was conducted on-line. The interview questions were sent to the participant by email. The participant answered the questions thoroughly and returned the interview upon completion. This type of interview did not allow the researcher to use the probing technique to gather further information, but several attempts to conduct the interview face-to-face or over the phone were made prior to choosing this method. The participant was well aware that the interview was not 100% secure when submitting electronically.

### *Data Analysis*

A case study research design was used to gather the stakeholders' perceptions of community engagement in a system-wide educational change effort. The exploration survey was given to 50 stakeholders and was returned by 22 participants. The information obtained from the surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to describe basic features of the data in a study. According to Creswell (2003) and Merriam (1998), the researcher uses descriptive statistics to simply describe what the data show by reducing large amounts of data into a smaller summary. The survey included 22 questions that the participants rated on a Likert-like scale. The results were tallied on an excel spreadsheet. The survey's three open-ended questions were coded and analyzed question-by-question and put into a excel spreadsheet. This allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of the partnership stakeholders as a whole prior to developing the interview questions for phase two of the research study. The results of the survey were used to design the interview questions.

There were five questions developed for the 13 interviews. Several probing questions for each survey open-ended question were asked to the participants in order to gather further information or to clarify previous information. The interviews were analyzed using the constant comparison method. As stated previously, this procedure calls for coding data from the interviews under headings that appear to capture the theoretical properties of that category. Each coded category is then described as concisely as possible to capture the meanings within it. Then, using that category, all new and existing data are constantly compared to determine the descriptive adequacy of the category. Revisions and modifications take place as necessary. These categories are then narrowed to form patterns and themes that ultimately become the research findings (Creswell, 2003; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

The analysis began by the researcher reading the transcribed interviews several times. This allowed the researcher to develop first interpretations of the themes within each transcript. It also provided indications of several themes emerging from the interviews that were identified as initial coding terms. The next step of the process was coding the interviews. The interviews were coded by category by highlighting words, phrases, or sentences related to the guiding research questions and typing in a concise coding label at the end of each identified segment. The initial coding terms were used in analyzing the first interview. As additional themes emerged, new coding terms were added to adequately describe what the respondents were communicating. The same process of adding new coding terms as new themes were introduced was repeated in interviews three, four, and five. By the sixth interview, it was apparent that the major coding categories had been identified. Only one or two were added in later interviews. When each new category was added, the researcher reviewed the initial interviews to be certain that the themes represented by the coding categories had not been overlooked. Throughout the transcripts, quotes were identified that could be used to illustrate the themes and patterns identified in the interviews.

The next step in the coding process involved putting the information into an excel spreadsheet in order to develop themes from the coded information. A spreadsheet was

developed and emergent themes were identified with regards to common threads of discussion. The spreadsheet then allowed for further analysis. The themes were merged into patterns that helped to pinpoint important components of similarities or differences among the stakeholders. Information was also tallied in order to know what membership groups perceived about the partnership. A review of all the identified potential quotes highlighted those that were most appropriate in illustrating perceptions of particular patterns or themes. These were targeted for inclusion in the findings of the study. Finally, all data gathered and results associated with this study will remain at the researcher's home under lock and key.

### *Quality And Verification*

To ensure the quality of the research design and enhance internal validity to this case study strategies, including triangulation and member checks, were used. According to Merriam (1998), triangulation is a strategy that involves using multiple sources or methods to obtain emergent themes or patterns. Triangulation was used in the research design of this study in two ways: (a) multiple sources of data were gathered through the surveys and interviews, and (b) different groups of individuals participated in the research study including 13 who were chosen for interviews using purposeful sampling.

As noted previously, the researcher incorporated member checks into the study to establish internal validity of the data gathered during the interviews. Each of the interviewees received a copy of his or her transcribed interview before any analysis took place. This allowed the participant the opportunity to verify the information transcribed, make any necessary changes, add any additional information, or delete any part of the interview. The participants were reminded during the member check that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

To strengthen the external validity of this study, cross-case analysis procedures were implemented by using predetermined questions for the interviews developed from the survey results and using constant comparison analysis to code and analyze the data obtained.

Purposeful sampling of all the member groups discussed previously was also used to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The case study was designed to analyze stakeholders' perceptions of an established community-wide educational change effort in a large, metropolitan, southeastern city. This partnership, in its 2nd year of existence, was formed by major business and civic leaders with the involvement of the superintendent to help transform the school system from a high-performing system in a low-performing state to a system that could compete with any other system both nationally and internationally. The partnership formed to accomplish this goal was, at its initial meeting, provided with a reform agenda that had been developed over a year-long timeframe with educator and community input, research, and consultations with nationally recognized leaders in school reform. This study was designed to understand the perceptions of the various stakeholder groups regarding its development, the current state of the partnership, and recommendations for its future. Specifically, the researcher attempted to identify the strengths of the partnership, challenges it has faced or is facing, and suggestions for improving its impact on students, teachers, schools, and the school system.

For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked to identify themselves as a representative in one of the following stakeholder groups: (a) educator, (b) community member or parent, (c) government official, (d) business leader, (e) civic organization representative, and (f) higher education personnel. In order to determine perceptions in the various stakeholder groups regarding the current state of the partnership, the study was designed in two stages. The first stage consisted of surveying a large group of individuals from all the various stakeholder groups to determine general patterns in their perceptions. Findings from this stage led to the development of an indepth interview that was conducted with many of the partnership's trustees and the school system's senior leadership staff. The interviews were used to explore and gain a better understanding of the patterns identified in the survey. Findings are presented in the following order: (a) survey findings and (b) interview findings, both of which help to explain the

research questions that guided this study.

### *Survey Findings*

The survey was administered to 50 participants of the partnership representing various stakeholders groups. As stated in Chapter 3, 22 of the 50 surveys were completed resulting in a 44% rate of return. The survey consisted of 22 closed-ended questions ranked on a five-point Likert-like scale followed by three open-ended questions. Several themes highlighting perceptions of the partnership’s various components emerged from the analysis of the surveys. These themes were then used to design the questions for the interviews for the second phase of the study. The interviews were used to explore, indepth, the perceptions of partnership leaders to better understand the reasons behind the themes that emerged from the surveys.

As stated in Chapter 3, the survey questions were designed to address categories from Knoster’s (1991) Framework of Systematic Change. The first three questions and the last two closing questions of the survey were overview questions designed to assess stakeholders’ overall views of the partnership. The remaining questions were divided into the following categories: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action planning (see Appendix D). Table 1 shows the survey questions and the responses given by category.

Table 1

#### *Partnership Survey Questions and Responses*

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unknown	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Overview Question #1: Partnership work is challenging for everyone involved.	45.5%	45.5%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%
Overview Question #2: Partnership work requires time and effort in collaborating and understanding the perspectives of others.	77.3%	22.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Overview Question #3: GSP partners frequently differ in their perceptions of how to improve the educational outcomes for students and families.	31.8%	59.1%	5.3%	5.3%	0.0%

Table 1 (continued)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unknown	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Vision Question #1: It is critical for partnerships to begin by developing a common vision and mission.	72.7%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Vision Question #2: There is common agreement among the Trustees and the Implementation Team chairs that we must focus on our efforts	18.2%	50.0%	5.3%	26.3%	5.3%
Skills Question #1: The partnership structure is utilizing personnel with the knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities.	27.3%	36.4%	4.5%	22.7%	4.5%
Skills Question #2: Trustees and Implementation Team members have been able to shape the direction of the GSP during its first two years.	4.5%	59.1%	0.0%	31.8%	4.5%
Skills Question #3: I am actively involved in the decision-making processes taking place in the partnership.	9.1%	50.0%	9.1%	18.2%	13.6%
Skills Question #4: The partnership's focus on teamwork involves representatives from all stakeholder groups in working toward a common vision for students in our community.	13.6%	68.2%	4.5%	9.1%	4.5%
Incentives Question #1: My expectations for the partnership are being addressed and/or met.	4.5%	54.5%	4.5%	27.3%	9.1%
Incentives Question #2: I am valued as an important part of the partnership.	13.6%	77.3%	4.5%	4.5%	0.0%
Incentives Question #3: My involvement in the partnership is worth the time and effort I am giving to it.	27.3%	59.1%	4.5%	9.1%	0.0%
Resources Question #1: The strengths, talents, and resources of partnership members are being utilized appropriately.	0.0%	50.0%	18.2%	27.3%	4.5%
Resources Question #2: The resources that I bring to the partnership are being utilized.	4.5%	59.1%	13.6%	18.2%	4.5%
Resources Question #3: If professional development or information is needed, the partnership leadership makes an effort to secure what is needed.	27.3%	63.6%	4.5%	4.5%	0.0%
Action Planning Question #1: The partnership has a well-defined action plan that guides our efforts.	4.5%	45.5%	4.5%	40.9%	4.5%

Table 1 (continued)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unknown	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Action Planning Question #2: Changes have been made in the action plan that reflect a consensus of opinion across the partnership.	4.5%	40.9%	26.3%	31.8%	0.0%
Action Planning Question #3: The initial structure of the partnership facilitated our collaborative efforts to implement the action plan.	4.5%	50.0%	18.2%	22.7%	4.5%
Action Planning Question #4: Changes in the partnership structure have improved our collaborative efforts to implement the action plan.	9.1%	36.4%	31.8%	22.7%	0.0%
Closing Question #1: Looking back over the first year of implementation, the partnership is moving in the right direction.	18.2%	63.6%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%
Closing Question #2: My perceptions of how to improve educational outcomes for students and families are changing as a result of my involvement with the GSP.	22.7%	45.5%	0.0%	27.3%	4.5%

Overall, the analysis of the survey questions indicated a consensus of perceptions for a majority of the questions. More than 70% of the stakeholders were in agreement as to the value and structure of the partnership, the importance of developing a common vision and mission, and the focus on outcomes rather than programs. More than 80% of the participants indicated that the partnership was moving in the right direction. Some of the respondents (63%) also reported that stakeholder's perceptions of how to improve educational outcomes for students and families were changing as a result of their involvement in the partnership.

The majority of the respondents ranked all of the 22 items on the survey as "agree" or "strongly agree." Of the participants, 100% ranked two of the questions similarly. These questions related to partnership work requiring time and effort and the importance of beginning a partnership with a clear vision and mission. More than 90% ranked three other areas as

strengths: (a) some of the partnership members disagree on the focus of our efforts; (b) I am valued as an important part of the partnership, and (c) if professional development or information is needed, the partnership leaders make an effort to secure whatever is needed.

One area was identified by nearly half of the respondents as an area of concern. This related to the partnership having a well-defined action plan that guides the partnership's efforts (45%). Other areas that were ranked as areas of concern for over one-third of the participants were "expectations of the partnership are being met" (36%) and the "direction of the partnership during its first 2 years has been shaped by the trustees and implementation team members" (36%). Five other aspects were mentioned by more than 30%: vision, decision making, changes in the action plan, resources being used appropriately, and changes in personal perceptions as a result of participation in the partnership.

The following sections describe the differences of opinion that existed regarding the major areas of discrepancy.

### *Action Planning*

The action planning section of the survey addressed four distinct factors: operating from a well-defined action plan, changing the plan to align with outcomes and stakeholders' input, having a structure that promotes collaboration in implementing the plan, and making refinements to the partnership structure to enhance collaboration. These factors were addressed by specific questions. First, do stakeholders perceive the partnership as having a well-defined action plan? Second, have changes that have been made to the action plan reflected a consensus of opinion across the partnership? Third, has the initial structure of the partnership facilitated collaborative efforts toward the implementation of the action plan? Fourth, have changes in the structure improved the collaborative efforts toward effectively implementing the action plan?

There were different perceptions regarding whether the partnership's action plan is well defined and guides the stakeholder's efforts in achieving their collective goal of raising student achievement. Of the 22 survey participants, 50% agreed or strongly agreed that the action plan

was well defined. This respondent group was primarily comprised of kindergarten- through 12th-grade educators, although it did include one community and one civic leader. However, the same percentage of kindergarten- through 12th-grade educators, some higher education personnel, government, business, civic, and community leaders indicated that the action plan was not well defined. This comparison of perceptions was significantly different among the stakeholders, especially among the educators. The differences in perceptions for this question are illustrated in Figure 2.

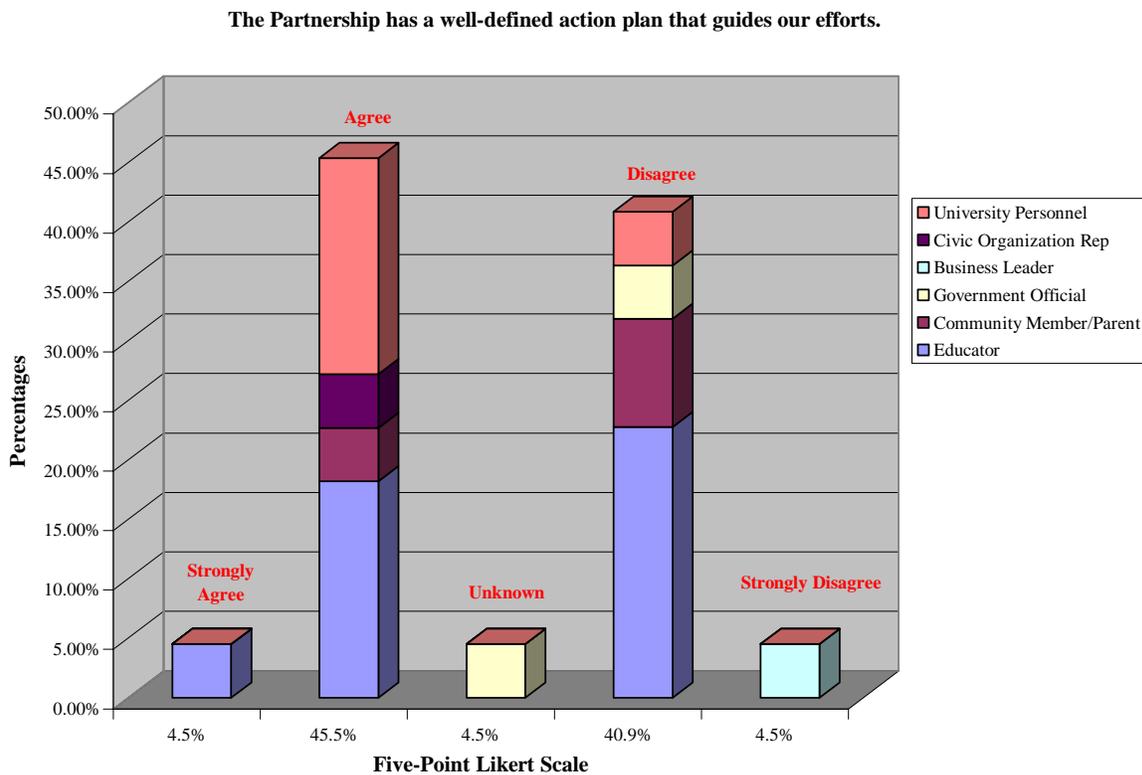


Figure 2. Differences in Perceptions With Regards to Action Planning Question #1

Further survey analysis related to action planning resulted in discrepancies regarding whether the initial partnership structure facilitated collaborative efforts to implement the action plan and whether recent changes to the partnership structure improved those collaborative

efforts. Over 50% of the stakeholders agreed that the initial partnership structure facilitated the collaborative efforts to implement the action plan. Of those 50%, 18% noted that they did not know whether recent changes in the structure of the partnership improved those initially facilitated collaborative efforts. Furthermore, 11% of the others marked unknown as well when asked whether the changes lead to improvements in the collaborative efforts toward implementing the action plan. Lastly, only participants from the educator stakeholder group (22%) disagreed with improved collaborative efforts brought about by the changes made in the partnership structure. The results are shown in Figure 3.

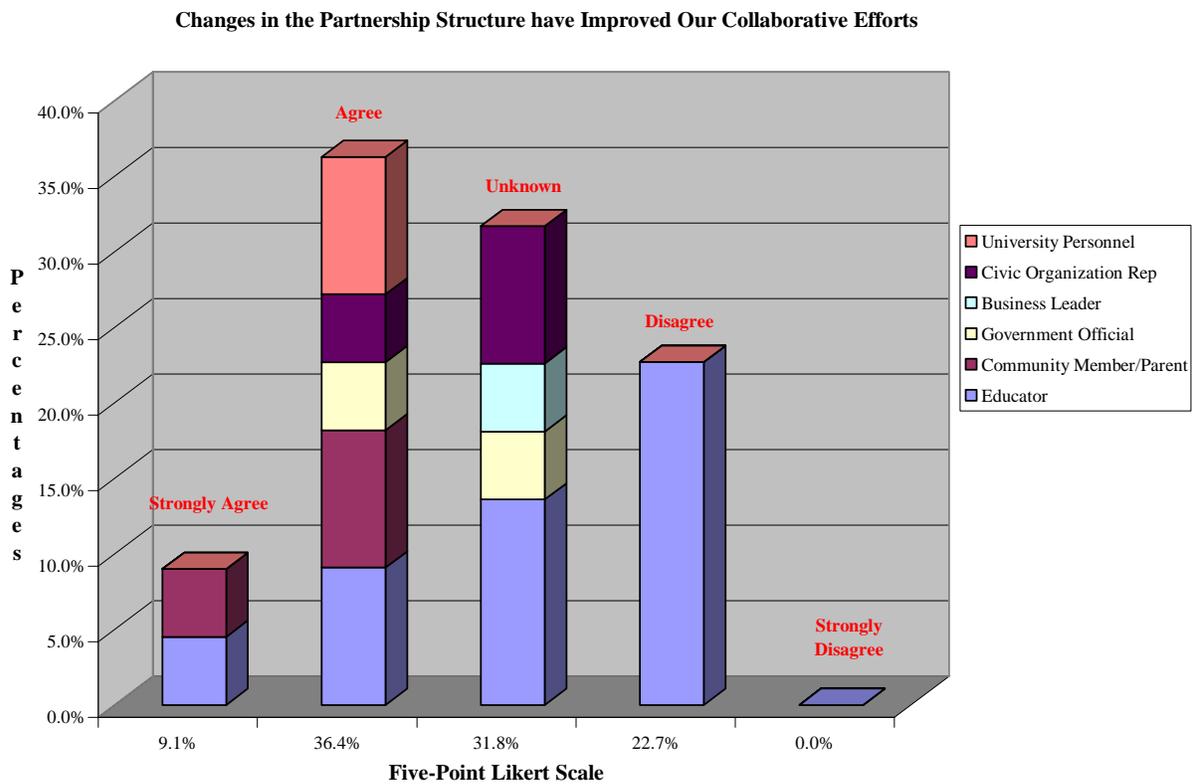


Figure 3. Differences in Perceptions With Regards to Action Planning Question #4

In one of the three open-ended questions, the participants were also asked what they perceived as weaknesses or challenges of the partnership. The written responses of 6 of the 22 survey participants (27%) noted action planning as a weakness stating the partnership has had difficulty moving from adopting programs to creating customized strategies. Furthermore, it was noted that creating and using evaluation evidence and data to assess outcomes and create accountability benchmarks was a challenge. A pattern in several of the comments pointed to strategic planning being a challenge for the partnership, particularly for some of the implementation teams. While slightly more than one fourth of the respondents identified action planning as a challenge in the open-ended questions, their comments added to the large percentage of survey respondents who expressed concern with action planning indicating that this was an area of concern that should be explored in greater depth.

#### *Using Resources Appropriately*

Two statements on the survey addressed whether resources were being used effectively and appropriately. The first asked if the strengths, talents, and resources of the partnership members are being used appropriately. The second asked each respondent whether the resources that he or she brings to the partnership are being effectively used. There were differing perceptions when respondents were focused on overall use of resources versus the partnership's use of their own resources. Not only were there differences in perceptions within each stakeholder group, but in addition, two stakeholder groups as a whole took one side.

Slightly more of the respondents agreed than disagreed that the strengths, talents, and resources of the partnership members were being used appropriately. Specifically, 0% strongly agreed and 50% agreed. On the other hand, 27.3% disagreed and 4.5% strongly disagreed for a total of 31.8%. For this question, 18% marked "unknown." These figures indicated a 50-50 split among the partnership participants with half of the stakeholders noting that the partnership was using the strengths of each partnership member, whereas the other half disagreed or had no idea. With this type of discrepancy, it was important to take the next step to identify how these

responses represented specific stakeholder groups. Figure 4 illustrates the results of this question broken down into the various stakeholder groups.

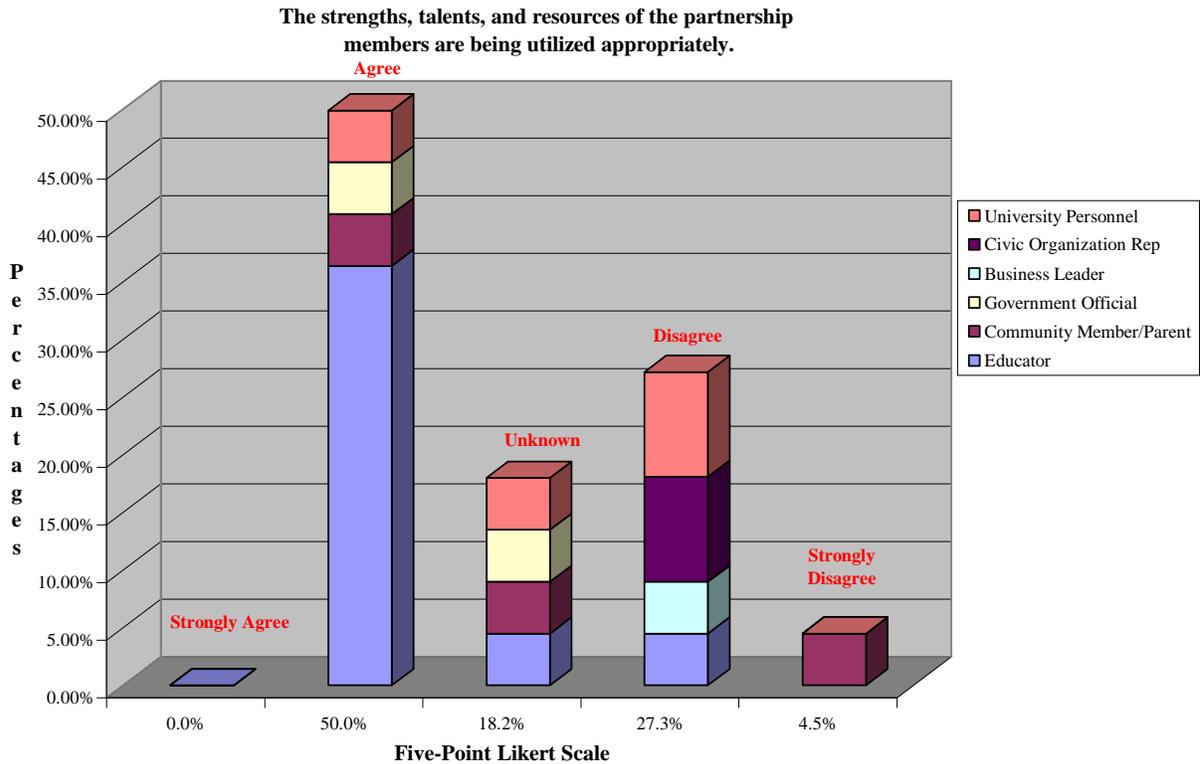


Figure 4. Differences in Perceptions in Regards to Resources Question #1.

The illustration in Figure 6 shows that four of the six membership groups, with educators being the prominent group, agreed that the partnership does use resources and talents appropriately, whereas participants from the same four groups responded that they did not have adequate information to answer this question. Furthermore, participants from the civic organization and business leader membership groups responded only that they disagreed, along with some participants from higher education and educators groups. These responses clearly indicate that the civic organization representatives and the business leader representatives

perceived that their personal resources or those of their professional colleagues were not being used appropriately or to the fullest extent. When asked if the resources or strengths that they, as individuals, bring to the partnership are being used appropriately, 65% agreed or strongly agreed. This is higher than the 50% who responded similarly to the question about resources used in general. Only 18% disagreed and 4.5 % strongly disagreed that their individual resources were not being used as they would expect or desire. Three respondents (education, business, civic) did not answer this question. These findings are shown in Figure 5.

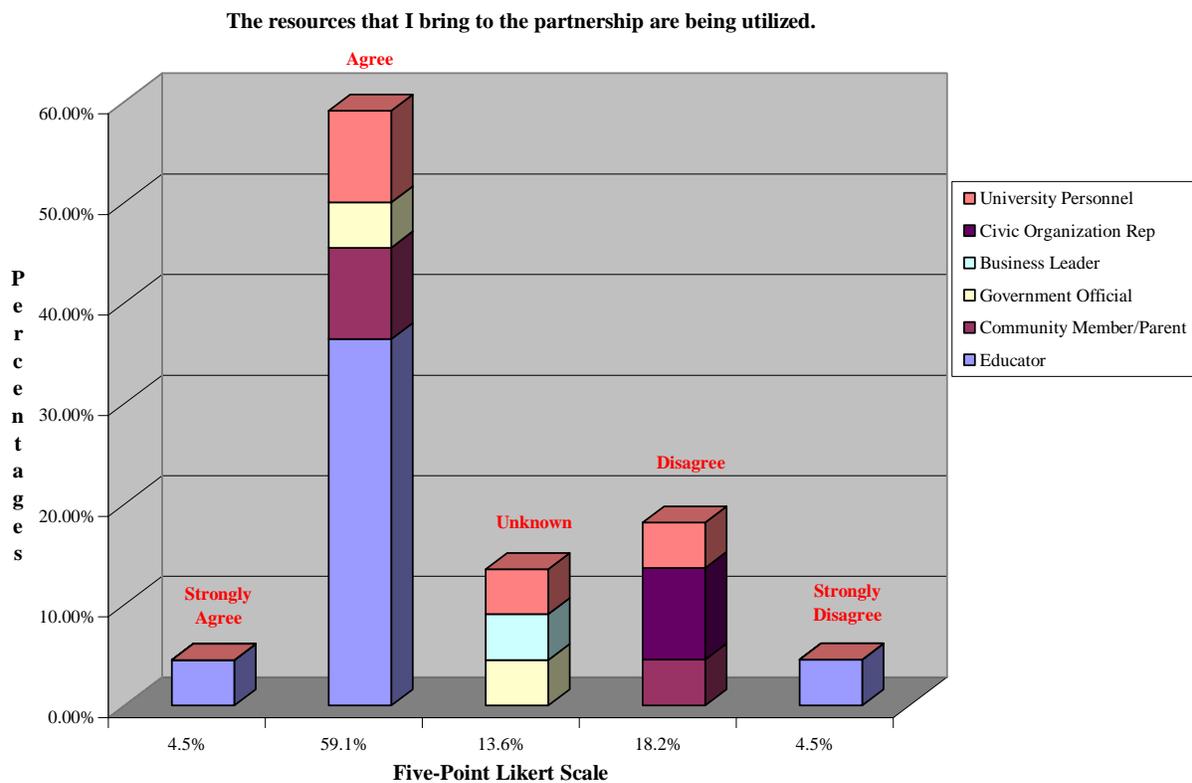


Figure 5. Differences in Perceptions in Regards to Resources Question #2

*Strengths of the Partnership*

The first open-ended question on the survey asked the participants to identify what they perceived as the strengths of the partnership. Several themes emerged across the various stakeholder groups in regard to the strengths of the partnerships. One of the most prominent

strengths identified was group dynamics. Several participants noted the appropriate representation of the various stakeholder groups. One participant acknowledged, “The right organizations and individuals are represented on the partnership.” It was also noted that breaking down barriers between educators, and business and civic leaders was not only a strength of the partnership, but also strengthened the entire community. A large percentage of the participants (62%) indicated that the partnership’s strong leadership, specifically the trustee chair and the director, was one of the strengths. One participant wrote, “The director’s leadership, her willingness, her effort to make each program successful, and her knowledge of individual programs is great while still supporting ideas and offering suggestions for program improvement.” Collaboration was another theme that emerged. Several stakeholders, over 50%, said there is a clear and strong focus on collaboration that was producing obvious results. The third major theme that emerged from the first open-ended questions was developing a shared vision. According to one stakeholder, “We have finally agreed on an outcome measure of excellence... finally, after 1 year of talking.” Another stakeholder said, “Reaching a collective consensus about our desired goals and outcomes as a community [is a strength of our partnership.]” Several participants (46%) noted that the partnership supported research-based innovation in education had raised the bar for students, teachers, and school performance.

### *Challenges of the Partnership*

As noted previously, action planning was the main challenge identified in the surveys, both in the closed questions and in the second open-ended question. Another issue facing the partnership that emerged from the survey responses was funding. Several participants identified that there was a competition, primarily between the partnership and the school board, for the same limited funds. Others noted a lack of success in procuring private or grant funding.

Another major theme that emerged from the interview questions dealt with personal and professional agendas. Many participants (54%) responded that whereas an operating principle of the partnership is to “leave personal agendas at the door,” this was not always what happened.

This was related to another theme: power. Power was identified by several stakeholders with issues such as “ego,” “turf,” “control,” and “credit” as being major challenges for the partnership. A smaller number identified bureaucracy and political influence. According to one stakeholder, the partnership “does not value the input of all trustees. A few stakeholders have too much influence because they financially back the partnership.”

In response to the survey's open-ended comment question, two respondents noted issues related to school system personnel's buy-in to the partnership. As one said, “I don't know if all district personnel are fully ‘sold’ on the partnership. Sometimes it feels and looks just like business as usual.” Another said, “A great superintendent will clearly see the role that the partnership can play in helping him or her reach the desired outcomes for the school system.”

Lastly, communication emerged as being a challenge for the partnership. The survey findings (62%) suggested that there was a lack of communication across the partnership concerning the sharing of information and keeping all stakeholders informed of progress. “Sharing what the partnership is accomplishing with the larger community” was also mentioned as a challenge.

### *Recommendations*

Each survey participant had a recommendation to make when asked. Five themes emerged from the data. The recommendations have been categorized under the following themes:

#### Theme 1--Action Planning:

1. to better know where we want to go;
2. to better know why we want to go there;
3. to better know how we are going to do it;
4. to better know how we will know when it has been done;
5. to have better accountability-documenting work, collecting data to support our work;
6. to have better accountability for staying fully engaged and driving or pushing

- initiatives;
7. to engage in additional strategic planning;
  8. to start with a vision and plan vs. developing it; and
  9. to have more action on a personal level with students who are in need and not merely become another blanketed program.

One respondent indicated, "Too many children are still falling through the cracks. I believe the partnership has the ability to respond to this and should utilize the power that it has to reach further beyond the theory of *No Child Left Behind*."

Theme 2--Partnership Structure:

1. to modify membership to include more teachers and parents;
2. to replace positions that are vacant in a timely manner;
3. to let the educators have a stronger voice;
4. to settle on a staffing structure that reflects that alignment of interests;
5. to use the people who are the ones doing the jobs;
6. to replace positions that are vacant in a timely manner; and
7. to leave the educators alone and let them work.

Theme 3--Stronger Involvement and Commitment:

1. trustees must show up and be directly involved and follow through;
2. trustees need to be at every meeting... it looks good to be a part of this, but they don't show up;
3. greater involvement by all trustees--don't commit to be a trustee if you can't attend the meetings, study information, and fully participate in discussion; and
4. continue to stay the course--work through and learn from the challenges because the potential benefits are worth the effort.

Theme 4--Increase Community Awareness and Involvement:

1. to increase exposure--people do not know who we are and people need to be aware of that;

2. to have listening meetings with parents and try to engage more parents in the process, a major effort on understanding parents limitations and on facilitating their involvement;
3. to better communicate the partnership's message; and
4. to encourage the trustees to visit programs and classrooms.

Theme 5--Communication: Relationships andAlignment:

1. to make improvements in communication approaches;
2. to have closer relations and communication between trustees and board of education;
3. to move closer to being a partner with the superintendent;
4. to align the new superintendent's interests, the school board's interests, and the partnership's interests; and
5. to ensure that the partnerships goal is to break down "silos" of good work by engaging stakeholders in reform. We still need to focus on breaking down the silos and collaborating.

*Other Comments*

A comment section was provided at the end of the survey for the participants to add any further comments concerning the partnership. Five participants (38%) responded with their perceptions of the partnership. Comments ranged from the challenge of partnership work that is not the norm for most school systems and their communities to the unique benefits for their own community. One respondent noted:

The partnership has faced numerous challenges in its initial development. As in any significant change effort, it has experienced some successes and some implementation dips. Much of the anxiety is due to the developmental nature of the collaborative efforts that have forced us all to challenge our own thinking, to try to leave our agendas at the door, and to open our minds to very different perspectives. We are growing as a partnership because we have been facing and confronting obstacles in our path.

Another participant said:

Many people from all of the stakeholder groups are giving of their time and expertise to help transform a very good school system. This is a slow process but it is already producing positive results-many of which would not have happened without the partnership's efforts. Everyone needs to be recognized and celebrated for what it has accomplished and for significantly raising the bar for the future.

Another participant commented:

Systemic change of this type cannot happen quickly, but we need to celebrate the small steps forward--and we do; but, I am not aware of how the general public perceives the accomplishments. Hopefully they value what they've got in the partnership.

Yet another said, "A collaborative effort of this magnitude requires time and patience."

Finally, one respondent said, "This is a terrific program with an expansive array of unique possibilities within its reach."

#### *Using the Survey Results to Design the Interview Questions*

As noted throughout the survey results, the main discrepancies found helped to create the interview questions that were used in phase two of the study. In order to gain a greater understanding of the implications of partnership development, the interview questions were designed based on the survey results to garner an indepth look into the following areas of the partnership: partnership development and structure, personal and professional agendas as they relate to the operating procedures of the partnership, action planning, the perceptions of collaboration, communication, and relationships as they pertain to the partnership stakeholders, and anything about the past or future of the partnership that would help to gain a deeper understanding of the partnership (see Appendix C).

#### *Findings From Interviews*

In analyzing the interviewees' responses, it became apparent that many of their responses focused on several specific patterns that were referred to throughout the interviews. The patterns of responses were portrayed by the coding categories used to analyze the interviews. The following patterns emerged: (a) partnership development, structure, and dynamics; (b)

partnership versus board of education; (c) vision, mission, and goals; (d) role of the partnership; (e) buy-in; (f) funding; (g) stakeholders; (h) communication; (i) public awareness; (j) collaboration; (k) personal or professional agendas; (l) outcomes; (m) partnership future; (n) commitment and time; (o) change; (p) comparisons; (q) perception of partnership; (r) control; and (s) relationships.

In many cases, the respondents made the same comments multiple times. Their responses were coded by topic and counted only one time unless new information was added, which, then, introduced a new subtopic under the original code. The following portrayal of the interview data is presented by pattern and coding category.

### *Partnership Development, Structure, and Dynamics*

Partnership development, structure, and dynamics was one of the most frequently identified patterns throughout the interview responses. Of the interviewees, 12 of the 13 (92%) commented on an aspect of this topic. The most frequently mentioned response was related to the initial structure of the partnership. Six respondents (46%) indicated that the initial structure was appropriate. The most commonly mentioned response was summarized by the statement, “I don’t know that I would have done anything different because I think we have the important components there.” Another stated, “If we waited until the plan was perfect to start this, we would never start it. So I think you have to start a new group like this with imperfections in the plan.” Yet another said, “The partnership became formal after the plan, but many of the same people were at the table developing the plan.” One more stated, “I think it is organized very well and was carried out very well.” Another, noting commonly identified concerns, said, “If you think about group dynamics and how you go from a collection of individuals to a really well-functioning team, a certain amount of confusion, disorganization, is a very natural part of the evolution of an effective team.” Others (23%) suggested that the initial structure needed to be changed. One said the reason a change was needed was to be better able to work with the school system's superintendent. This respondent added:

No school superintendent candidate in his or her right mind would accept a job knowing that there is a school board on one hand and then there is another organization out there making a different set of decisions. Until we bring that closer under the superintendent, I think we won't be more than a political arm for [mayor's name] at some point. We need to become the support person, the support group, for the superintendent.

Another stated this pattern in different terms, saying:

We really need to be more of a committee to help the new superintendent be successful than we are ... a partnership because we want to bring in a school superintendent we think has ideas, a sense of direction, a vision, and we ought to bring... We ought to be the ones providing the community support to help that person be successful.

Others (15%) suggested the need for improved alignment between trustees and implementation team members. One participant explained:

I don't think there is a great deal of participation from the trustees with the implementation teams. There have been a few trustees including myself and [Name] and [Name] who were very much involved with the implementation teams initially. But then for whatever reasons, that fell off. So there doesn't seem to be a clear pathway to me from the trustees to the implementation teams. The implementation team is really where all the work is supposed to take place. And there is some very, very good leadership at that level. Those leaders do have direct, you know, connections to various trustees; but I think something gets lost in the translation.

Another subtopic for this pattern related to the initial dynamics of the partnership.

Several (31%) mentioned that they were concerned about decisions being made behind the scenes. As one said, "At the very beginning, it doesn't happen so much now, but at the beginning, there were a lot of complaints about backroom stuff going on and then us coming to the meeting and things were already done." This same respondent continued on this topic by saying, "The very first chairman and vice-chairman that we had, they were just picked out. We were just told who they were. Well so-and-so is going to be the chairman, and so-and-so is going to be the vice-chairman." Another noted the impact of the "sunshine law" requirements on the dynamics of the partnership by saying, "That makes it a very difficult thing. And so, I think any group that I have ever been a part of has a natural evolution including this one."

A final subtopic, as noted by two of the respondents (15%), related to the potential for the future development of the partnership. One described:

I think it developed probably the only way it could develop. We just had to take

advantage of the energy that was there and go with it. But over time, it should evolve into quite a different organization. I don't think it can stay as we are now and be successful.

Another said:

I think the kind of restructuring we are talking about that integrates the partnership is more of an advisory and support group into one structure rather than continuously treating it as a separate structure with its own staffing" would solve the problem of conflicting agendas.

### *Partnership Versus Board of Education*

Another pattern that emerged throughout the interviews was what many of the stakeholders referred to as "separate silos" when referring to three of the major stakeholder groups participating in this change effort, a failure of alignment between the partnership, the school board, and the school system. Eight of the 13 respondents (62%) pointed out tensions between the board of education and the partnership. One respondent stated, "There is a communication breakdown between the board and the partnership." Another respondent noted that there was a lack of involvement from the board members that caused tension and stated:

The board of education... some of them are very involved... we invite them to every meeting. The ones that are very involved are the only ones that come. So I am not sure how to fix that other than either they need to get over the fact that we are trying to take their jobs. We're not. We're not trying to tell them what to do. We are trying to help them.

Yet another respondent stated, in reference to how the board members felt about the partnership, "A lot of them probably feel like they are responding to two masters, and their job is complicated enough as it is." More tension exists as it related to a lack of alignment between the two groups. One respondent stated:

Some initial issues in terms of vision and the role of the partnership versus the role of the school board and whose vision takes precedent, you know, whether it is what the partnership sees as being important or it is the initiative that the school board has established.

Another interviewee stated, "People on the school board took issue with the partnership making decisions about school policies or school things when they are the school board." This

same respondent went on to state:

I could just about bet that the school board will take a position that "We don't want to play anymore." So there is no alignment right now, and I don't know how . . . if it were to occur, there would have to be an opportunity where the school board can sit at the table and say "No, we will not support that because that is not aligned with what we have in place," and "No, that is not going to work." But there has not been any conversation. It is like there are two separate blueprints for the school system to operate under.

Furthermore, another respondent summed up the issue of tension by stating:

So I think that there is just going to be an inherent tension between, you know, the school folks and then the external folks, you know, in terms of . . . I don't know if it is a resistance to change. I don't think it is that. I think it is just a tension in terms of, you know, who knows best or whose perspective is more valuable in determining where we need to go.

### *Vision, Mission, and Goals*

As stated previously, vision, mission, and goals were already noted as a discrepancy between the partnership and school board. Yet, several respondents (62%) focused on other aspects of vision, mission, and goal alignment. Four of the 13 respondents noted the need to "define good versus great" when setting goals. One respondent stated:

Unless we formulate our ultimate goal and define what "good" is or what "great" is-- define exactly what we need to do, then we are kind of shots in the dark. We don't know where we are going, and we are just kind of bouncing from one end to the other. But if we have a true goal and say, "O.K., this is it. This is what we are striving for. This is the bar. This is how high we have to get," then I think we can all kind of focus our energy in that direction.

Another participant stated:

The school system is setting very high goals for itself, and I think a lot of it comes out of this discussion all of the time. What are our goals? What are we really trying to achieve? What is good? What is great?

One respondent (8%) pointed out that "great" had already been defined:

The school system . . . . Actually the partnership and the school board and the school system have agreed to a definition for great, and basically what I mean by that is that if you go to [Name's] research and good to great in both the business sector and the social sector, it says the first thing you need to do is define what you mean by great. And so the school system has come up with this definition. [The school system] has come up with a definition that has been proposed to the board and been proposed to the partnership that everybody has enthusiastically embraced and is that we want: To have 100% of our kids

complete high school, 90% of those kids to get a regular diploma, 90% of those to take the ACT, and 90% of those to get a 21 or greater on the ACT. And if you compare that to existing conditions, it is a pretty ambitious goal.

Another subtopic under this pattern, responded to by five of the stakeholders (39%), related to whether the vision and mission were clear to the partnership's stakeholders. One respondent stated, "I don't think it had a clear mission." Another respondent stated, "It is not clear where the partnership is in the process of defining itself in terms of [the] ultimate purpose." Yet another respondent replied, "I mean get beyond that and get more specific developing a very clear sense of vision and then bring a more defined measurable set of goals to the table." Another participant summed it up by saying, "One of the hard parts, when dealing with organizations, is getting a sure sense of mission."

The final subtopic, responded to by four participants (31%), related to whether the goals were appropriate in implementing the "Every School a Great School" action plan. One respondent stated:

I think maybe we tried to tackle too much in the original action plan instead of focusing on two or three priority areas and really working on those areas; it could be that our original goals were unrealistic within the time frame. Again, if we focused on, just on addressing a little piece at a time and fewer pieces rather than more pieces, I think that we could have done better or we can do better in actualizing the ultimate action plan.

Another participant stated:

When the partnership was really launched, there were five goals or target areas that were developed that were presented as being I guess initiated at the first Education Summit, and I think that was something that, again, was another agenda that was hoisted on the partnership as a vehicle to maybe bring some action through that. It has been said many times that these were goals that the school system wanted to take on based on the Education Summit. That has almost become an urban myth because it is not that they are not admirable goals, but it was not something that the school system would have placed out there that they wanted to more or less go after first.

This same respondent went on to say:

Those are not the goals that we have established as a system that we are going to pursue to make sure that we, in fact not only on student achievement but also demonstrate long-term sustainable growth as far as academic gains.

### *Role of the Partnership*

Across the interviews, the researcher found that 8 of the 13 participants (78%) stated a specific role that they perceived the partnership to have. Four of the respondents (31%) said they perceived the role of the partnership to be research, noting that the intent of the partnership is to research ideas, benchmark them, and then develop them. Six of the respondents (46%) said they perceived the role as being innovation and the creation of new ideas. This group said they perceived the partnership as an “innovation business” that researches, benchmarks, finds the good programs, and comes up with funding needed to implement them. One of these respondents (8%) stated that the partnership’s role has been to research programs and present them to the school board. The school board is then to decide what programs they would or would not like to implement. One respondent explained, “Once the partnership has supported an initiative, there needs to be a mechanism to at some point shift the resources that are needed to sustain that initiative over to the school board and to the county to support.” Why? As one respondent said, “States around us are passing us by leaps and bounds.”

Five of the participants (39%) said they perceived the role of the partnership as being a support mechanism for the superintendent or the school board. All of these respondents said they perceived the partnership having difficulty with this at the time because there had been a recent change in staff with regards to the superintendent and the interim superintendent was not familiar with the partnership. One respondent stated that in a perfect world, the partnership would tell the superintendent:

We want to help this school system. If you will come and tell us what you need from outside the appropriated . . . whether it is the state or local dollars. . . that we can help with and if it is not reoccurring income and expenses and we understand what is going to be achieved with that money, [and] then we want to help. We want to raise the bar, and you come tell us what we need to do for you, and we will go out and try to get it done for you.

Several other respondents said they perceived the partnership as being ongoing support for the superintendent and school board by aligning their work toward the school board's goals and objectives.

On the other end of the spectrum, two participants (15%) said they perceived the partnerships role as different from how it was currently functioning. From the educators' perspective, the concern was that what was initially believed to be a support mechanism has become a vehicle for achieving personal or professional agendas. From the educational partner's perspective, a respondent stated, "The whole purpose of the partnership is to support our schools to become great. It is not to be out here advocating for our schools to become great hoping that the school system will do something about it."

A smaller, but vocal group (15%) indicated that the role of the partnership was to get students to where they "should be" rather than where they were currently functioning. One respondent stated:

Our children are not stepping up and taking our places and, therefore, we need to make our students "head and shoulders above their peers" to build the economy, lower joblessness, lower homelessness, and make sure children are less likely to end up incarcerated down the road to because they will have an education and they won't resort to things that they should not be resorting to.

### *Buy-In*

Five respondents (39%) commented on stakeholder buy-in related to the partnership. Their comments focused primarily on the fact that teachers and school administrators were not onboard with the partnership for a variety of reasons. One respondent stated:

It doesn't surprise me that educators are more negative about the partnership. One of the reasons for that is, I am absolutely sure, a lot of them probably feel like they are responding to two masters, and their job is complicated enough as it is. You know, trying to figure out how they make the partnership happy and make the superintendent of the school board happy. You know if there is a conflict, they are clearly going to make the superintendent of the school board happy, right?

Another said:

I think whenever educators approach a problem; they talk about it in terms of programs. They will talk about obstacles on why things are the way they are and therefore, it is an obstacle in doing things that others would say, "Well why can't we do that?" Well, you know, we got this problem or that problem. We don't get enough money or whatever.

Yet another stated, “I don’t think that they understand what all the partnership does. I think there are people in the partnership who don’t understand what a partnership does. So it is hard to communicate that to people outside of the board.” Finally, another said, “I respect the job teachers do very much. But I will tell you, we are talking about changing their culture and no matter how much you talk about it, some are dragging their feet kicking and screaming.”

### *Funding*

Funding was the category with the most responses from participants. Eleven respondents (85%) referred to funding as a major factor impacting perceptions of the partnership. Each of these respondents noted several subcategories related to funding issues. Overall, the major theme was that funding is a critical area of concern for the partnership.

The most prevalent issue is that most of the partnership’s funding was coming from the local government. Why this concern? Several reasons were cited. First, 62% of the respondents said they felt that partnership funds should be allocated for innovative practices and not given to the school system as part of their regular budget. As one respondent stated:

So it [funding] is a shell game. The school system always requests more than they really need. The county mayor always cuts it down, and the commission always tries to cut it down even further. So in that environment when the money ultimately comes to the school system, if they didn’t get what they requested, they could say they wanted to "start a new birth to kindergarten program." We will use that as an example. When it [funding] gets over here, they might use it for busing. They might use it for buildings. They might use it for landscaping--something that doesn’t impact student achievement whatsoever.

One partnership trustee stated, “The biggest concern I have is we are taking appropriated dollars and making decisions without really, us having, you know, a station in life to do those types of things.” Others said they wanted the partnership to cover its costs with funding as soon as possible. One explained:

It is not like the school system can afford to be having six to ten million dollars flying off to this group. That money has to be leveraged in terms of grants, contributions. I mean, that is what the partnership needs to be really working towards... is building up its capacity.

A second theme within this pattern was that educators are not using funding in the most appropriate manner. This is why local public and private supporters are working to establish innovative funding structures. As one respondent stated:

I know educators don't like to hear this but we hear it all the time. There is a major piece of the business corporate community that thinks that schools are .... that there is enough money going to education. It is just not focused in the right direction.

A third theme relating to funding was that the partnership must secure private or grant funding to offset public financial support. As one respondent stated:

Until this partnership produces new dollars as opposed to dollars that many perceive as coming from the county that should be going directly to the school system but is going through a partnership filter, there will not be a buy-in. You know, right now, every dollar in there is a public tax dollar that clearly could just have easily gone directly into the school system.

Another said, "Right now the challenge is that public dollars are going in to support the partnership and where the questions are being generated right now is 'when and where are we going to see the private dollars?'" A third respondent expressed frustration that the partnership has not brought in large amounts of money. This participant stated, "You know, we went up to [see the model partnership] and we saw 30 million here for this grant, 40 million for this grant, 6 million under this thing, and thus far, we have not brought anything in." On the contrary, another stated:

We are really at a critical crossroads right now as far as where the partnership will go and the support mechanism because right now the challenge being that public dollars are going in to support the partnership and where the questions are being generated right now are, "When and where are we going to see the private dollars" and what they perceive as being grant money.

A few of the respondents, (31%), said they felt that placing funding in the partnership was helping the school system make needed changes. One respondent said, "Things have to change. We are not going to give [the school system] more money to do the same things [the school system] has always done." One of the interview respondents communicated on issues related to securing grant funding. As this respondent stated, "Grants are being pursued but again,

when you are looking at a fledgling organization, there is not a long history yet and people are being too impatient as far as how the dollars will be generated.” Another said:

We do not have a history that grants are awarded. We are competing with other districts, with other organizations that not only have a history but they also have pretty substantial data to support their efforts. We need at least another year under our belt to be able to do that, and I think again it is not only impatience but people commenting on something that not only do they not know about but are also trying to divert attention away from the lack of effort on their part to pursue private dollars.

Finally, two respondents (15 %) noted that the partnership might be using funding or applying for grants to start initiatives that could be costly for the school system to continue in the future. One explained:

The thing I see that no one has landed on, whether it is those in charge or even the trustees themselves, is the idea that much of what is being launched can't be supported by grants because grants are very specific as far as what they are going to support and how you look at it.

### *Stakeholders*

Stakeholder involvement was a topic of discussion for four (30.8%) of the respondents. The focus was more on the lack of stakeholder involvement as it related to meeting attendance and participation from the trustees and board members. One participant stated:

It is difficult when not all of the trustees come to every meeting. We only meet once a month anyway. And when not everyone comes to the meeting, it is hard to know how they (sic) feel. It is also hard to keep reminding them what was decided at the last meeting.

In addition, another respondent shared the following statement:

One of the things we know about [other partnerships] is that once somebody made a commitment to be a leader, what we would call a trustee in our organization, or other responsibilities of leadership, they showed up. They were there all the time. They were there every time. It didn't matter if they were, you know, the most important person in the whole community, they came. And that has not happened here yet. The trustees are irregular in attendance; it is very hard to get them to come together to make decisions, and it seems to me that one of the things that [other partnerships], for whatever reason they were able to do, was for their leaders to keep the partnership at this level. And I think here the trustees, at least to date--too many of them haven't been there. It is not the first thing; I mean it is the first thing they drop. It is not the first thing that they say

"Yeah I have got to be there." And I think that is going to continue to be a problem unless more of them are there when they need to be making decisions they need to make and being able to communicate and defend what they are doing because that is not something that the executive director can do over and over again. The trustees have to take some responsibility for that. They need to make more public statements, they need to be more publicly supportive, and they need to act like they are working together.

The lack of participation from board members was also identified by two of the four respondents mentioned above (15%). Both interviewees noted a concern with board members attendance at meetings where they were invited to attend.

Another subtopic under this pattern was parent involvement. Parent involvement was mentioned by one (8%) respondent. The respondent discussed the level of involvement parents have in the decision-making process of the partnership as being pretty good, noting that this partnership "wanted people to have a full seat at the table and to put their input in."

### *Communication*

Communication was an area of the partnership upon which the stakeholders seemed to agree. Twelve of the 13 participants said they felt that there was a lack of communication among the partnership that lead to the problems the partnership was facing. One respondent stated, "There is a communication breakdown between the board and the partnership." This same respondent went on to say, "I think the communication problems are no different than any other large bureaucracy's communication problems." Another participant made the following statement:

Communication is probably the weakest area but it is also the hardest area to address. And it is not just the...just basic communication. I mean, everybody has e-mail; everybody has a phone, and all of this. It is just that . . . what is it that we need to communicate? You know, and who needs to communicate and then re-communicate? If there is ever going to be a break, you know, in the [mold] ... it is always going to be with regard to communication.

Yet another respondent stated, "I think communication can be improved. I don't necessarily know how. I don't think the answer is going to be making the group bigger. I think the website still has a long way to go. It is a start, but it still has a long way to go." This same

respondent then discussed over-communication by stating, “I think communications work very well among the partners, so maybe we are over-communicating with each other. Maybe that is something that we ought to look at.” Another stated:

The communication piece as far as externally would be the one that would probably be the weakest and one that was not really developed and supported until after the fact but should have been from the front instead of more on the back end, and I think that is probably the weakest area across the board.

Another participant stated:

Communication is probably the very toughest piece because our first summit... we brought together over 1,000 people. It is hard to get . . . our goal was to stay in touch with the education community, the community at large, the PTA, civic groups, and especially the business community. You know that is a major communication piece to stay in touch with that many people and keep them current with the program’s successes and shortcomings. So, you know, the communication might have been one of our weakest pieces.

This respondent went on to say, “Part of the problem with communication . . .

Communication is more than sending e-mails. Communication takes money. I mean you could almost hire a full time communications director to make us effective and we just don’t have that money.” Yet another respondent summed it up by stating:

Part of the problem of not communicating is this whole very vague understanding of who the hell we are ourselves. We don’t understand it. Are we a think tank? Are we a foundation? Are we a school board in absentia or some stuff?”

On the other side of the spectrum, three participants (23%) had something positive to say regarding communication among the partnership stakeholders. One participant stated, “There has been discussion about how to improve the school system, how to be, how to get the community more involved. There have been conversations that have really...well; they are the right ones to have.” This same respondent went on to state:

You hear these discussions and so, those look good and the school system sets very high goals so I think that has worked very well. So there is more communication than I am aware of, and I am more familiar with, I think all the partners are more familiar with the schools and what they are trying to do and what the problems are among community leaders than I have ever seen anywhere else, so I feel very good about that.

Another participant stated, “The fact that the community leaders are being informed and are communicating with each other about this is a very positive thing.” Yet another participant focused on one goal of the partnership by stating:

When looking at the engaged community...that really promotes the collaboration piece, the relationships, as well as the communication. When you look at the involvement there, you are looking at private industries, you are looking at government, you’re looking at the school system, and the energy that was established there was a really good promotion.

### *Public Awareness*

Public awareness was noted by three individuals (23%); all referred to a different aspect of public awareness. One respondent commented on whether public communication was the role of the partnership by stating:

As far as the public communication side of it, you know, I guess you would have to ask yourself, "Is public communication a role for the partnership?" I mean, should the public know all about the partnership? Is that what it is about because in a lot of ways where the partnership really plays a role is in the research and development side of the business. In terms of communicating with the public, do most companies advertise their research, development, and innovation departments? You know, I am not sure they really need to be this public, well-known group because my sense of that group is just as I described which that is not to say it is not good to recognize people, I mean it is always good. But I just don’t think being well-known, you know... if you survey 100 people on the street and 80% of them knew what the partnership was, does that make them a better partnership? No. They are just a better known.

Another participant focused on public awareness as being tied to funding by stating, “In the process of building up its financial base, yeah, then it needs to become more public. If you are going to get support from the business community or philanthropies or foundations, you have got to be known.” This same respondent went on to say:

What you want to do is you want to promote . . . what needs to be visible in public is the output. . . if you have come up with a program or some really neat, nifty idea or studies on different academies that could be used in high school, that is what you want to make public. That is the key.

The third respondent spoke about public awareness of national norms by stating:

The thing that grew, the one great thing that *No Child Left Behind* did...and it was great, was that it got people starting to focus on numbers. The day I realized that 87% of the kids in Tennessee are proficient in math and science . . . math and English compared to a

national norm, it was 21% and 24%. It allowed me to start looking, "Well what in the heck is this stuff?" And that is what . . . that is why ACT is appealing... it's that, at least you are setting a real standard by which to take looks at, and I know it is flawed. The thing that the business community looks at more than just those course accomplishments and the production of skill sets is being able to read for comprehension and to solve complex problems and to think and to reason, because that is really, once you get out on the job, you may never do an algebraic problem again, but you are going to have to solve problems every bit as complicated as algebra in everyday life.

### *Collaboration*

Collaboration was commented on by all 13 participants. Nine of the 13 participants (69%) spoke negatively about the amount of collaboration taking place in the partnership. One participant stated, "Collaboration. That is what a partnership is, a collaboration...but we are not doing a very good job at this." Another respondent stated, "Parts of this partnership have been successful and strong, and parts haven't. So probably it is a stab at a collaboration and partnership and we need to do a better job." Another participant stated:

I think that it is hard sometimes because we are talking about educational goals and student learning outcomes and sometimes folks from the outside think they have an expertise or, you know, they feel that they have something that establishes them as an expert in how we should do things; they may never have worked in a school or really understand curriculum, policies, and some of the things that govern us. I think that is also a good thing because sometimes we have practices and things in place that are just historical in nature and really don't serve any good purpose in today's climate. So I think that there is just going to be an inherent tension between the school folks and then the external folks, you know, in terms of . . . . . I don't know if it is a resistance to change. I don't think it is that. I think it is just a tension in terms of who knows best or whose perspective is more valuable in determining where we need to go.

Yet another participant stated:

I think they [collaboration and communication] are nowhere near where we want them to be. I think when you set up a group of people who have very important jobs, they have very limited time. And unless you can gather as a group and get to know the people as people as opposed to their roles, it weakens that collaboration, that group functioning.

Few (31%) saw collaboration as a strength of the partnership. One respondent stated, "I think initially and particularly, in some of the groups, as far as when you look at the goal, there was some really strong collaboration." Another respondent stated:

When looking at the engaged community--that really promotes the collaboration piece, the relationships, as well as the communication. When you look at the involvement there, you are looking at private industries, you are looking at government, you're looking at the school system, and the energy that was established there was really good promotion.

Finally, another respondent stated, "I think the strength of the partnership is the fact that we do come from different walks of life and are coming to the table to collaborate and establish some common goals and action steps to achieve those."

### *Personal-Professional Agendas*

After the pattern of bringing personal and professional agendas to the table was identified in the survey, an interview question was developed pertaining to personal and professional agendas. When asked the question, "One of the operating procedures of the partnership was to leave personal and professional agendas at the door in order to maintain the focus on student achievement. Do you believe this is the case?" all 13 participants (100%) noted that many people did have agendas that guided their participation in the partnership. One respondent stated:

I think there are some people whose agendas are that of a constituency base that they represent. Like, for example, when people from the business community launch into a tirade about schools that are not doing what they need to do to prepare the next generation of business leaders, they are worried about their own profession. They are not worried about what is best for students and what is best for teachers. They are looking at it, you know . . . they are casting judgment on things that only relate to their interest, not the purpose of the partnership as a whole.

The same respondent went on to say:

There was a lot of commitment but, you know, because so many people are inherently driven by their own personal agenda, as soon as they determine that their agendas would not be met by this particular action plan, they basically withdrew."

Another respondent stated, "In my opinion, however, the majority of members have not. Personal and professional agendas have determined nearly every decision the partnership has made." Yet another responded by saying:

I think that the board of trustees--and it had to be this way--I mean, there is really no other way to do it because you really needed people who could get things done on that board. But I think that the nature of the people and the people themselves is that they are

used to being in charge. They are used to calling the shots. And I think that is why it has taken us so long . . . . I mean there is no strife between us really except for really, you know, that which is good. I think it's to challenge each other. But it is very difficult with people who are used to running foundations, running a school board, running governments to come in and let go of the reins a little bit. So I think we have all come a long way as far as that goes, but it is very difficult not to want your own way.

Some of the respondents (54%) noted that there was difficulty in leaving agendas at the door. One respondent stated:

I don't think that there are very many human beings alive who can leave their personal agendas at the door....I think our philosophies are fundamentally driven by our personal agenda and vice versa. I think our agendas are driven by our personal philosophies.

Another interviewee stated:

I think that it is hard for us as educators or community members or whoever we are, you know, to come into a situation without bringing our own professional opinions about how things should be done....I do see that folks come to the discussion from a particular perspective, and I don't think you can avoid that.

Yet another responded by saying:

It is just real difficult for someone who is like the mayor of a city or the mayor of a county or the chairman of the school board or the chairman of the county commission for instance – all four of them are on it – it is real hard to completely divorce yourself of the agenda you carry as a mayor or a country commissioner.

Finally, the following respondent summed it up by saying:

We all have our agendas. It is awfully hard to leave them at the door. When you have politicians as part of the process, they have to serve their own agendas. There is no way they cannot do that. So that is always going to be a part of it under the way we are currently organized.

### *Outcomes*

According to several of the participants (31%), outcomes should be the driving force behind the alignment of all stakeholder groups with regards to the partnership's goal of raising student achievement. One respondent stated, “We need to really look hard at what drives outcomes and once we understand what drives outcomes, we need to do it.” Another respondent stated, “It is all focused on student achievement. The partnership since then has been begging

the school system to come up with outcome measures, the ultimate measure for great. So that is all based on student achievement.” Another participant noted:

Our ACT scores are now above the national average. For a long time, the system and the state were saying "We want our ACT scores to be above the state average." We know where our state is and where it needs to be. So our ACT scores are now above the national average. That is where we want to be competing. We don't want to be competing with [Name] or [Name] although we are not knocking them. We want to be competing with the best school systems in New York and California and Illinois.

Lastly, another participant summed it up by saying:

The second thing is that [the stakeholders] have lived in a process-driven environment and they look at outcomes but they look at them in levels of improvement. In other words, if we are able to do two-tenths of a percent better this year on these areas, we are showing improvement. If we have done it over the last 5 years, we have shown constant, steady improvement. That is a good thing. When you are looking... when folks from my side of the world look at it, we are saying, "What are these kids supposed to know when they walk out of here?" They are ready to go to college, they are ready to go to work, and they are ready to go to life, what is it that they are supposed to be able to do and what does it take to get there and how do we know when they have gotten there?

### *Partnership Future*

Several of the participants commented on the partnership's future. Many of the participants noted that there needed to be some sort of change taking place in the partnership at this point. Four participants (31%) noted change as it related to getting a new superintendent.

One respondent stated:

It will have to change to survive, I think. Basically, here's the problem right now. We are out looking for a new superintendent. We want to bring in some one bright, energetic who is envisioned, who could help. You know, everybody's new model for hiring somebody now is Bruce Pearl. You want to . . . you hire Bruce Pearl. Well, there is probably only one Bruce Pearl. So we need to get somebody, you want to attract somebody really good and so, the problem we face right now is that we say, "We got a great system, we are interested in change, there is a community group that would help you and support you, and oh, and by they way, the county mayor also funds some projects totally apart and aside from what you do, you know, in the school system."

Another participant said:

No school superintendent candidate in his or her right mind would accept a job knowing that there is a school board on one hand and then there is another organization out there driven by the county mayor who is making a different set of decisions. Until we bring

that closer under the superintendent, I think we won't be more than a political arm. We need to become the support person, the support group, for the superintendent.

Yet another stated:

If I were the superintendent coming in, I would say, "I have got all those people sitting there ready to go; they just haven't had a leader to lay out a vision for the school system and what their proper role should be, and I am going to use it to take advantage and redirect them."

Another type of change noted by two participants (15%) related to funding. One respondent stated, "The partnership still has a chance to be effective in helping make [the school system] a great district. Some things need to change such as the funding source and decision making process." The other participant summed it up by saying:

I think we are at a really critical crossroads as far as the future of the partnership and whether there is going to be some kind of agreement as far as the funding source and particularly as we either remove programs or add programs. How will it be paid for and then how will we be able to sustain the programs. Because much of what happens is that once the public dollars come in from the county government, it will be the responsibility of the school system to sustain the programming should they determine that it is good practice. So I think, in itself, the question that needs to be asked is, "What is in the future for the partnership and how will funding become critical to the sustainability of the partnership?" That is the million-dollar question that everyone is bouncing around right now.

### *Commitment and Time*

The commitment of time was mentioned by four of the 13 (31%) interviewees. All four respondents said they perceived that several of the partnership participants lacked the time needed to make a change effort of this time work. Furthermore, it was stated the partnership work "just takes time, and sometimes people get impatient." It was also mentioned by all four of them that sometimes people do not realize the level of commitment that is needed in an organization of this type. As mentioned previously under the stakeholder pattern, four respondents (31%) noted that there was a lack of stakeholder involvement possibly caused by the time it takes to be involved in an organization of this nature.

## *Change*

Change was mentioned throughout several interviews with the stakeholders in regard to the theory of change, issues with change, resistance to change, and the positive outcomes of change. Seven interviewees (54%) responded to the interview questions with a statement or two about change. One of the respondents (8%) referred to Fullan's (2001) theory of change by stating:

Whenever you start something new, there is always going to be a dip in performance and then you have to find out why the dip was, what caused the dip, and what it takes to get things back on track. So, I think, we are sort of in that "dipping phase" of this partnership; and we've got to work hard to try and get it back on track.

Two respondents (15%) mentioned issues with change as to changing the mold of education. Both mentioned that many of the partnership's stakeholders have never worked in the education field prior to joining this partnership but said they felt as if they could tell educators what the best practices were. On the other hand, it was also noted, "Part of the partnership's long term agenda is to sort of change the mold of education, and educators have always shaped that mold." Furthermore, the respondent stated that this would possibly lead to a resistance to change from the educators involved in the partnership.

Expanding on the topic of resistance to change, another interviewee's responses dealt with resistance to change. Both respondents, making up 15% of the participants, mentioned culture change and how difficult it is to change a culture in any organization, but made even more difficult when non-educators were trying to push for educational change.

On the other side of the spectrum, two respondents (15%) said they perceived change as being positive. One respondent mentioned that the partnership "has a chance for some really innovative programs" that would bring about a great deal of positive change in the schools. The other respondent said she perceived positive change in making the partnership's goals and objectives more focused and aligned with the school system.

## *Comparisons*

Many of the partnership's stakeholders were involved in getting a first-hand look at a model partnership that this partnership could follow. Three interview participants (23%) referred to a model partnership in comparison to their partnership throughout their interviews. One respondent stated:

One of the things that the model we were trying to follow. . . we couldn't do exactly what they were doing because that was a . . . it is a city school system. It was all inner city. It was probably 99.9% free and reduced lunch--poverty stricken. Schools were amiss. I mean physically and teachers were . . . morale was low. They were just falling apart. So they had to have something to come in that was pretty drastic. Our schools are not failing. We have some that are not meeting AYP but we are not in a crisis situation like they were when they started their partnership. So they had a real sense of urgency. And really, the urgency brought them together and all the egos were left at the door, and they had the same make up on their board as we have on ours. They had their mayor. They had their superintendent. They had their union head. They had all that, but I think it has been easier for us to be sort of lackadaisical about reaching our goals or measuring our goals when there is not a real crisis.

This participant went on to say,

One of the things we saw when we went to visit . . . where they have a similar partnership, was they had . . . the two things they were focused on were math and reading. That was it; just raising those scores up to grade level by the third grade in math and reading. That's it. So everything focused around math and reading. And we have five different pillars that we are trying to hit all these different aspects of, and it is just too much for us to do with the limited resources we have.

Yet another respondent commented on the comparison with the model partnership in regards to commitment and agendas from some of the stakeholders by stating:

One of the things we know about the [model partnership] is that once somebody made a commitment to be a leader, what we would call a trustee in our organization, or other responsibilities of leadership, they showed up. They were there all the time. They were there every time. It didn't matter if they were, you know, the most important person in the whole community, they came. And that has not happened here yet. The trustees are irregular in attendance, it is very hard to get them to come together to make decisions, and it seemed to me that one of the things that [the model partnership], for whatever reason they were able to do, was for their leaders to keep the partnership at this level. And I think here the trustees, at least to date, too many of them haven't been there. It is not the first thing; I mean it is the first thing they drop. And I think that is going to continue to be a problem unless more of them are there when they need to be making decisions they need to make and being able to communicate and defend what they are doing because that is not something that the executive director can do over and over

again. The trustees have to take some responsibility for that. They need to make more public statements, they need to be more publicly supportive, and they need to act like they are working together. There are too many egos in that group. In one sense that is always going to be true. But you know, leaving egos at the door is very hard for some people, and some people say they are, and they aren't. It is like, they believe they are, but they're not.

Another theme, mentioned by two of the interview participants (15%) related to comparisons with other states in regards to the board of education. When it comes to other states, one respondent stated, "They have better starts. Why? Because it is a different mentality. Their board of education system is not that great, but they are leaps and bounds ahead of us." Yet another participant stated:

There has always been, you know, without the partnership, wherever I have been around school systems and working in the school system years ago in another state where I dealt with the school board, not many school boards could get it in the sense that they are supposed to make policy and leave the implementation to the administration of the system.

### *Perceptions of Partnership*

Most of the participants (77%) had some sort of comment on how they believed the partnership was perceived from the outside. One participant stated:

I think that a lot of people thought of or saw us as layering program on top of program, on top of program, on top of program. It has been quoted many times that [our state's] curriculum is a mile wide and an inch deep. I think they saw us coming in and adding to that inch and not putting in any depth.

Another respondent stated:

I think it looks a lot like a foundation that would raise and provide money as many school systems have from outside the tax streams. But that was not it. It was because we are getting appropriated dollars to spend in the education area. It looks like a research institute, which I understand, but we are really an advisory body.

Another respondent stated, "It gets national attention. It's huge. So we were going from nothing to this." Yet another respondent commented on the extremely positive or extremely negative perceptions by stating, "The people who feel strongly in favor of or are very critical of

it is, frankly, a very small group of people who are kind of inside that little network, and it is a very few number of people.”

### *Control*

Seven respondents (54%) made numerous comments on the topics of control and credit, that suggested issues related to turf. Most indicated that these issues have plagued the partnership since its inception. Control as related to reasons for the development of the partnership, managing initiatives, developing budgets, making decisions, and working collaboratively were mentioned most frequently in this category.

All seven respondents commented on issues of control. Several complained that specific stakeholder groups had control issues. Four respondents (31%) cited tension among the school board members and government officials over who had control of the money. One said that a few school board members had “agendas” and “power kingdoms” and that “It is very difficult for them to see the greater good that you really have to work in partnerships.” Another indicated that some school system personnel:

. . . find it difficult to really collaborate and communicate with the partnership on projects that they ought to be sharing and be collegial about rather than having their project here and the partnership having a project there.... they don't really like to share leadership or control.

Two respondents said they perceived the teacher's association as wanting control and not leaving their agendas at the door. As one stated, “It is about power and control, not student achievement.” Another commented on control from outside the school system, saying:

It has been said many times that these were goals that the school system wanted to take on based on the Education Summit. That has almost become an urban myth because it is not that they are not admirable goals, but it was not something that the school system would have wanted to go after first.

One non-educator spoke of the control issues and said:

In the long run, I still think the set up of the partnership will prove to be a major positive for the community... we will pass a resolution this week that the partnership will be willing to restructure in any way we need to support the agenda of achieving the outcome measurement of a new superintendent who is recruited around achieving that outcome

measurement. That is basically saying, "I will give up control of this . . . if we get a superintendent who is trying to achieve and has the potential to achieve."

Another, said, "Looking at the last 2 years, this is where the personal agendas have more or less been latched on to and we have seen different entities . . . take ownership and maybe moving some of the girds in different directions."

There were others who indicated that they realized many of the misperceptions of power and control were having a negative impact. One said, "There isn't going to be no more 'cram-down' or even an implication of it. They can come and ask us to do something but other than that, we will stand down until they come and tell us." Another said:

I think some of them felt like, "You are telling us that we can do this or you are telling us that you will give us the money to do these things you want." And we don't like that. So, it is pretty complicated.

Another said, "I think a lot of people felt like when you are trying to break the mold on education that you are trying to throw out everything."

### *Relationships*

There were a few comments made by four of the participants (30.8%) strictly about relations between the stakeholders as being positive. One respondent stated, "I think relationships have improved to the point where I think it has developed some spin off activities that are still related to the basic plan, but maybe not moving directly through the partnership tunnel." Another respondent stated, "When looking at the engaged community...that really promotes the collaboration piece, the relationships." Another participant stated:

I think that in terms of relationships, you know, what I have observed is a very cordial and collegial type of group. There may be some debate and, you know, sometimes there is discord there, but it is not malicious or, you know, it is a debate.

Another commented on the fact that relationships "improve the effectiveness of trustees in their own work."

On the other side, two participants (15%) had negative comments regarding relationships. One respondent stated, "Some of the working groups have great collaboration, communication,

and relationships among the members, but I think we are weak in these areas overall.” The other respondent commented on the “sort of divisions between school board members who are close to some of the trustees who are adamantly opposed to any political agenda put forth” and went on to say, “We have got some other board members who have a personal dislike for a couple of the trustees.”

Another subtopic under relationships was blame. Only four participants (23%) placed blame for the weaknesses within the partnership, but those who did took a 50-50 side of placing blame on the trustees or placing blame on the director. Examples of this are portrayed in the following comments. One respondent noted:

There is no energy from the trustees to pursue private dollars. Going back to the Model, when you look at the leadership at the top, they become more or less the catalyst and also to make sure that the funding supports very specific and focused goals but the private dollars are coming in from different entities that are all part of the partnership and that is something that we have, for whatever reason, we are not seeing trustees or anyone connected to the trustees doing any lobbying or trying to pursue those private dollars. So the pressure is put on at the top, toward the executive director or even with some of the chairs of the five groups, and that is simply . . . not only is it unreasonable, but that is not good practice.

Supporting this comment, another respondent stated:

The trustees are irregular in attendance, it is very hard to get them to come together to make decisions, and it seems to me that one of the things that [the model partnership], for whatever reason they were able to do, was for their leaders to keep the partnership at this level. And I think here the trustees, at least to date, too many of them haven't been there. It is not the first thing; I mean it is the first thing they drop. It is not the first thing that they say yeah I have got to be there. And I think that is going to continue to be a problem unless more of them are there when they need to be making decisions they need to make and being able to communicate and defend what they are doing because that is not something that the executive director can do over and over and over and over again. The trustees have to take some responsibility for that. They need to make more public statements, and they need to be more publicly supportive, and they need to act like they are working together. There are too many egos in that group. In one sense that is always going to be true. But you know, leaving egos at the door is very hard for some people, and some people say they are, and they aren't. It is like, they believe they are, but they're not.

On the other side of the blame debate, one respondent stated:

I think we have a staffing problem, and so, I think there is a lot of paperwork, a lot of meetings, a lot of canceled meetings, a lot of confusion, and a lot things that are caused

by that staffing problem. And so that is particularly difficult when that staff member for the partnership needs to get the educators on board and yet has no real authority to get them on board. Again, she is not working for the superintendent. Their ultimate boss is the superintendent of the school board. So that is the second reason I think they would be frustrated because I can tell you, I am one of the more active partnership members and I am frustrated because of that kind of stuff.

The other respondent stated, "One of the biggest problems we have has been with our budget. Things get moved here. Things get overspent there. I am not real sure how experienced our director is with dealing with a budget."

A final subtopic, responded to by only two participants (15%) related to a lack of trust among the partnership. One respondent stated:

Well, that distrust exists still in all of the partnership. Part of that was, I believe, still the motivation of other stakeholders that said, "Let's set up our separate partnership." You know, and I guess that if somebody works on the board, I would say, "Go back and look at previous budgets and see where any new funding went." It went to teacher pay, it went to increase student achievement, you know, it is going to go to a literacy program that we are trying to develop. So it is easy to say that, but if that is your motivation, then you really are doing what people suspect. You are taking public dollars and funneling it to somewhere else where you will have more control over how it is spent. That is not the intent of the partnership.

Another participant commented on the mayor's reasons for giving the money to the partnership rather than the school system. He stated:

The problem was that he didn't trust that the school system would use the money for the plan elements if they were just turned over to the school system and there was no accountability for it outside. That is why the partnership was set up the way it was.

### *Summary*

Throughout both the survey findings and the interview findings, the same themes emerged and some of the same patterns developed to help to explain the implications of building community-wide partnerships of this type. The findings showed similarities and differences among various stakeholder groups regarding nearly every aspect of the partnership. Many of the patterns could have been narrowed down to fewer, but the researcher felt that each area

addressed in the findings was just as important as the other. Chapter 5 addresses the findings further and presents conclusions drawn from the researcher's findings.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary of Findings and Conclusions*

The partnership at the focus of this study was in its 2nd year of existence. Developed with input from a variety of community stakeholders and educational researchers and consultants, it was designed to assist school leaders in transforming a “good” school system to a “great” school system. The manner in which it was developed, the stakeholders it has brought to the table, its unique structure, and its funding mechanisms are all innovative for the community it represents. It is a massive change effort with five goals, over 15 strategies with 15 different work teams, an implementation team, and 13 trustees to direct and oversee the partnership. All of this effort has been focused on improving outcomes for all students in every school in the system.

#### *Research Questions*

##### *Research Question #1*

What are the similarities and differences in the perceptions of educators and community partners regarding educational partnering?

Findings from this study confirmed that there are both similarities and differences in the perceptions of all stakeholders about most aspects of the partnership. Both the similarities and differences appeared to have their roots in the research and development stage leading up to the inception of the partnership. Many of the participants who were involved in one of the two site visits to the model partnership expected the outcomes of their new partnership to be the same as those of the model they visited. However, those who actually designed the initial structure, vision, mission, goals, strategies, and outcome measures of the emerging partnership were tailoring their planning to their local context, not to that of the model.

Participants in this study identified numerous areas in common between both the model

partnership and the emerging partnership: (a) a focus on improving the achievement of all students as the driving force and motivation for the partnership; (b) assuring the involvement of a wide cross-section of stakeholders in planning and implementing partnership activities; (c) leadership by a board representing key stakeholder CEOs or presidents who could make decisions regarding policy and funding; (d) the desire to break down “silos” or separate entities; (e) developing and refining a structure to facilitate the work of the partnership; (f) having a clear vision, mission, and goals to drive all partnership actions; and (g) a focus on outcomes as measures of the impact of the partnership. These were the areas where most of the study’s respondents agreed. Most said they felt that the initial structure was appropriate, that the work of the partnership was important and worth their time and commitment, and that the role of a partnership in moving a school system forward was very important.

Even in these areas of similarity, there were also specific areas where there were differences of opinion. The major example was action planning. Nearly all groups said they believed this was important but did not feel the current action planning was as effective as it could be. Some wanted the original "Every School A Great School" (ESGS) action plan to be carried out in a more systematic and measurable way with business style charting and “starting with the end in mind” planning. Others said they had no “buy in” for the ESGS plan because only the school system superintendent was involved in its development, not the district senior leadership, principals, or teachers. As a result, it called for many programs or initiatives that were not a priority for the school system's leaders. The plan was presented to the partnership trustees, director, and implementation team and was followed with only a few exceptions. What happened, according to many of the interview participants, was that school personnel strongly supported the programs and initiatives that “fit” with their long-range planning goals and avoided others. Board members, who initially approved the partnership, its structure, and the ESGS plan, suggested in their responses that some of the initiatives were not what they wanted to support to achieve their current goals. In many cases, the trustees were frustrated that certain initiatives were not being implemented according to the plan and its initial timeline. Some board

members and school personnel were upset that some initiatives, which they would not place as a top priority, were draining funds away from others that were more important. Some board members expressed frustration at not having been directly involved in designing action plans and budgets. This created tension and frustration across the partnership related to action planning. Second, whereas nearly all of the study's participants agreed that focusing on goals and outcomes to measure the impact of the partnership was important, there were differences in opinion about "goals" and "measures." Several meeting notes and comments indicated that many of the trustees had concerns that the 'vision' presented to them was not their own and although the strategies in the ESGS plan were valuable, they were not sure if they were the "right" ones to be supporting. Two retreats have been held to refine the vision and mission to reflect what the trustees, including the school system superintendent, want to achieve. Many of the trustees questioned whether the "programs" that have been developed were the best ones to achieve their new vision and mission and whether they should even be supporting programs at all. Several trustees and school system personnel indicated that there is a lack of "buy in" into some aspects of the ESGS plan. A smaller percentage was committed to it as "the plan." Some pointed to important areas that were not included, like technology. Others said they felt that all of the initiatives were worthwhile, but fear they were, in many cases, "extras" that a school system with a traditionally tight budget could not afford.

Differences of opinion among educators and their community, civic, and business partners were apparent. Many of the educators who initially perceived the structure of the partnership as a support mechanism for public education have become frustrated that it has turned into a means of promoting non-educators' private agendas and, as one educator said, "using the school system as the vehicle to launch from." Many also said they perceived the partnership as having forced them to attend to priorities that were not their own. At the same time, they and some of their board members said they resented the fact that their community partners were trying to take credit for the work that they are doing on a daily basis. Most of the partnership leaders, on the other hand, said they did not feel that they were trying to take credit

for the many accomplishments. Instead, they were frustrated that the partnership is only infrequently given any credit for providing funding, research and development, and support.

In most other areas, however, the model and emerging partnerships were very different. The differences have created tension for this partnership. First, the model partnership is a high need school system (i.e., poverty, low test scores, and students leaving the school system). The emerging partnership's school district is not failing, is not a low SES school system, and is the most successful large school system in the state. Second, the model partnership, begun with Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant funding, was in its 6th year of existence. The emerging partnership was in its 2nd year at the time this study was conducted. Third, the model partnership had revised its structure numerous times because of new challenges it has faced. The emerging partnership was in the midst of making its first structural changes at the time of this study.

Despite the obvious socioeconomic and experiential differences, many of the civic, business, community, and school board leaders (non-educators) who visited the model partnership expected their own partnership to also be able to attract grant funding at a similar level and to perform as the more experienced system was able to perform. In fact, action planning and funding were the two least satisfied aspects of the partnership. While it is apparent that there is much work to be done in these areas and that their concerns have targeted high priority needs for improvement, it could also be that these stakeholders are expecting too much from a very young organization. As one respondent concluded, "We have the right people at the table. We just might not have the right table." It might take more time and effort to strengthen what was begun in the first 2 years. As another said, "Grant writing is a developmental process. We're learning and growing and will get there... There is too much impatience."

### *Research Question #2*

From the inception of the partnership to present, do stakeholders perceive that their attitudes about the partnering program have changed?

Many of the study's participants have changed their perceptions of the partnership and the challenges facing education over the 2 years of its existence. Many said they felt even more strongly that the partnership is important and that it can and will make a big difference for the community. Many of the trustees said they are very pleased to have been part of a significant change effort--and were not real sure that would be the case when they were invited to participate. Many said they felt the relationships that have been formed have been very beneficial. For example, one said, "I think relationships have improved to the point where I think it has developed some spin-off activities that are still related to the basic plan, but maybe are not moving directly through the partnership tunnel." A few said they were less satisfied than they were initially with specific aspects of the partnership. There were two individuals in the educator and trustee groups who blamed specific individuals for problems ranging from action planning, funding, grant writing, communication, collaboration, and politics. Although these individuals were far outnumbered by those whose perceptions were more positive or problem-solving, they said they felt very strongly that lack of leadership, agendas, control, and funding issues have kept the partnership from operating at an optimal level. All, however, stated the partnership is "at a critical crossroads" and that changes needed to be made to make it more effective.

Since this study began, the school board bought out the superintendent's contract and they are searching for a new district leader. Most of the participants viewed the timing of recruiting a new superintendent as an opportunity to rethink the structure of the partnership to make it more supportive of the school superintendent and school system. This might mean how the partnership has functioned will also be changed. One respondent captured the feelings of many by saying:

What's the future? What are the best practices out there to get to there? The things we are doing right now, how do we measure them, etc.? A smart superintendent would have an advisory board for R & D, basically. In other words a community partnership that is supporting the things that need to be implemented to go forward because it is more than just the school system. You know, you need the business community to help you here. You need the foundations and community to help you. You need the teachers. You

need the parents; in other words, a support group. So a smart superintendent would have that. That is the [OSA] Partnership.

### *Research Question #3*

What factors facilitate or serve as barriers in the engagement of educators and community members collaborating in a change effort?

Many of the barriers faced by this partnership can be linked to Knoster's (1991) model of change that was used as the framework for the survey questions. Differences in perceptions regarding the vision, mission, goals, action plans, and measures exist between school system personnel, school board members, and the partnership. It appears that there are issues related to skill development in working collaboratively, communicating effectively (in all directions), developing positive relationships, and learning how to work together in a very unique manner. Some stated they were given too much information and others reported they did not have enough. Still others accused colleagues of not reading information provided and not attending meetings (i.e., trustees, school board members, and implementation team members), looking at the website, and acknowledging that they have been given information on a regular basis. Some said they did not attend meetings because someone was telling them what to do and others reported frustration with those who do not attend and the need to continually revise schedules to address "school system crises" that interfere with established meeting dates. Many of the school system personnel, not compensated for additional work required by the partnership, said they do not feel that the partnership is providing adequate incentives for them or for others engaged in their partnership initiatives. Yet, others said they were pleased to give their time to partnership work because they felt the partnership was helping the school system make a difference and that was their incentive.

Having adequate resources appeared to be the single greatest barrier. Nearly everyone is frustrated that the funding for the partnership has primarily come from the local government and not private or grant sources. This also indicated that there is some sort of lack of communication

between the stakeholder groups on what the specific talents are from each of the stakeholders and how best to use them. The perceptions of the participant identified in the business leader membership disagreed with the partnerships ability to use resources appropriately but was not aware if personal resources were being used. This suggests that there, once again, was a lack of communication, especially from the non-school system stakeholders' perception. As several noted, it is critical that each stakeholder communicate what it is he or she has to offer the partnership and school system as a whole. Then, the partnership needs to be better able to use their resources appropriately. Action plans have suffered because of issues of control, credit, and promoting personal or professional agendas in capitalizing on partners' talents and resources.

Overall, the partnership has been experiencing challenges that are part of a change process that operates as Fullan (2001) described, "ready, fire, aim." Although the ESGS plan was developed with widespread input from teachers, community members, and researchers and those involved would have described it as "ready, aim, fire," it only had the input of the superintendent, who has since been released from his contract, and the school board chair. It did not have the involvement of central office personnel who ultimately became "partners" in the implementation. As a result, many said they felt that the goals, although admirable, were not their own and that they had been "hoisted" on the school system with future funding implications. Many indicated that changes are currently taking place to overcome issues that started with the presentation of the original ESGS plan as it was presented to the trustees at their initial meeting. This indicates that the partners are facing their developmental problems – or that they see the need to do so.

Harkavy (personal communication, September 27, 2007), who has won several awards for his work in developing and managing community change efforts, stated, "Collaboration is an unnatural act between consenting organizations with a common goal and varied perceptions of how to get there" (n. p.). Whereas the partnership has many challenges to face, the majority of its members said they felt it was worth the effort and were proud to be part of a change effort that is making a difference. They said they recognized that they were relatively "young" as a formal

support organization and were taking steps to revise their structure. The majority wanted to continue the partnership but recognized that significant changes need to be made to overcome the issues of relationship building, communication, control, and credit that have become major barriers to their progress.

### *Recommendations*

The purpose of this study was to identify similarities and differences in initial expectations of the innovative partnership, changes in participants' perceptions over the first 2 years of participation, and insights regarding implementation that might prove useful to other school system-community partnerships in replicating a formalized model for collaboration. Additionally, this study identified the stakeholders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of this emerging school-community partnership that might be used in refining this partnership model and informing others engaged in partnership work at any level. After gathering and analyzing the perceptions of the stakeholders, this researcher discovered similarities and differences among the stakeholders regarding their specific roles in the partnership, changing perceptions as they continue to collaborate on how to focus their efforts to achieve the best results, and factors that might facilitate or limit community engagement of this type. The following recommendations are presented in two categories: (a) recommendations for the OSA partnership and (b) recommendations for future partnerships.

#### *Recommendations for the OSA Partnership*

The conclusions drawn from the analyzed data, explained in the previous section, pinpointed many areas of the partnership that need improvement in order for this partnership to be successful in achieving the ultimate outcome of raising student achievement. The following recommendations have been developed based on the information obtained during this study.

There is a need to build on early success and to develop strategic plans addressing areas of concern. This partnership has accomplished a tremendous amount in its first 2 years of

existence and has blazed a trail for others attempting similar work. It has formalized what P-16 partnerships across the state and nation are just beginning to develop. It is also very easy to focus on what is not working and forget what is working and what is being accomplished. This partnership needs to take stock of accomplishments and address obstacles in light of its successes. Celebrating accomplishments, giving credit to all who participated, and collectively sharing in achievements of teachers and students should take the focus away from competitive agendas and perceptions that some participants are using the partnership for their own personal or professional gains.

There is a need to make improving communication a priority. This was the most frequently mentioned recommendation from the participants in this study. Most significant are issues related to opportunities for school system, school board, and the partnership partners to communicate about what is most important for students in a system with limited resources. Rather than continuing to place blame for the communication problems, it is time to hold all individuals accountable for the communication barriers. There needs to be regular meetings where all stakeholders come together to communicate. Publishing meeting attendance might be a good way to hold each stakeholder accountable for his or her participation and commitment to the partnership. This will only work if every stakeholder commits to fully participate in the partnership, allows the time that is needed, and attends every meeting, including all board members and all trustees; this seems to be a problem at this point. At the same time, the partnership needs to find a way to meet with board members or communicate in a manner that does not double their official time commitment for meetings. Using the website for sharing information has been a strength to many, but others were barely aware of its existence. Better use of the website could also be a means to improve communication. If this partnership is going to be successful, breaking down the communication barriers is essential, especially communication barriers caused by lack of participation. A plan needs to be developed for addressing this major obstacle to the partnership's success.

The second component of the communication barrier deals with understanding the

concept of dialogue. According to Issacs (1999), “The ability to talk and think together well is a vital source of competitive advantage and organizational effectiveness. This is because human beings create, refine, and share knowledge through conversation” (p. 2). Improving dialogue among the stakeholders is vital to this partnership’s success. Communicating electronically is great for day-to-day operations; however, when it comes time for action planning or decision-making, face-to-face dialogue is critical. According to Issacs:

The essence of dialogue is an inquiry that surfaces ideas, perceptions, and understanding that people do not already have. This is not the norm: We typically try to come to important conversations well prepared. A hallmark for many of us is that there are ‘no surprises’ in our meetings. Yet, this is the antithesis of dialogue. You have a dialogue when you explore the uncertainties and questions that no one has answers to. In this way, you begin to think together- not simply report out old thoughts. In dialogue, people learn to use the energy of their differences to enhance their collective vision. (p. 2)

Dialogue is different from discussion. Discussion is more of a debate, whereas dialogue is merely sitting and talking. Oftentimes, discussion takes place in hopes that differences in opinion will lead to results: but what happens, according to Issacs, is, “Such exchanges represent a series of one-way streets, and the end results are often not what people wish for: polarized arguments where people withhold vital information and shut down creative options” (p. 2).

This partnership needs time to set aside retreats or half-day meetings with all stakeholders to identify ways to best support the school system. Open minds and creative thinking might overcome the defensiveness about a plan that was presented to the system that might or might not address high priority needs in improving student achievement.

There is a need to clarify roles. The third recommendation for the partnership is to make sure every partnership stakeholder is aware of what his or her role is in the partnership. Roles can be defined easily after doable goals and outcomes have been agreed upon. If participants know what they want to do as a partnership, know how to do it, and know how to measure the outcomes, it becomes easier to define the roles of the stakeholders in making this happen.

A second part of this recommendation deals with rethinking the role of the partnership as a whole. The partnership might need to think about the programs that are being put into place by

the partnership with regards to future funding and implementation. After several years, who is going to continue to fund these programs and who is going to continue to implement them? This might place a great deal of unneeded pressure on the school system unless the goals of the partnership are aligned with those of the school system.

There is a need to continually refine goals, strategies, and measures. This is an area of differing perceptions. Many of the participants said they felt that the partnership has a responsibility for raising expectations and goals for student outcomes. Others reported they dislike “outsiders” taking this role. As one said, “Who is ultimately responsible for the student outcomes?” The school system's personnel, including school board members, administrators, principals, and teachers, are the individuals who are being held accountable for the outcomes of students. Therefore, participants said they should play the key role in the development of the partnership goals and in making sure that they are aligned with the school system's goals. One of the interview respondents stated, “Whose goals and strategies are these?” As noted throughout the research data, the present work of the partnership was not always clearly aligned with the present school system goals and needs. Obviously, more involvement from the school system stakeholders would be critical when developing attainable goals, strategies, and measures for the partnership that are aligned with the goals the school system has in place. Because school system goals change to address the ever-changing needs of students and schools, this means that the partnership must be flexible in its structure and accept responsibility for continually revisiting how it is serving in its supportive role. It is recommended that the school system, school board, and partnership members have ongoing dialogue about how to better align their efforts around common goals.

There is a need to secure funding that does not replace local funding and better aligns with the school system's long range planning. Funding was a major concern for this partnership. Because it is primarily funded by public dollars, it was perceived as taking money from the regular school budget. Therefore, for the partnership to continue to thrive, it must develop strategies for securing private dollars and appropriate grant funding (i.e., trustees securing

private dollars, grant writing). Grant writing should involve representatives from all groups (school system, school board, and GSP) to be certain that any grant funding being pursued does, in fact, provide the support that would help the school system achieve its desired outcomes.

There is a need to consider agendas, power positions, and egos. Agendas, power positions, and egos seemed to play a major role in some of the problems taking place in the partnership. The final recommendation for this partnership is to maintain a focus on students rather than personal needs or those of the community in general. One of the respondents summed it up by stating, "It's all about the kids." If this remained the focus, then personal or professional agendas, power positions, and egos should not be so problematic. With so many people in powerful positions participating in this partnership, there is an issue of control and credit. It is difficult to leave personal or professional agendas behind when making decisions. Developing the skills of all involved to allow all voices to surface in dialogue around significant student issues and making sure that everyone understands what everybody else is saying should diminish some of the communication and control issues. When all voices surface, all participants should feel more in control of the situation and everyone could better share credit for the results whether positive or negative. Furthermore, the issues of control and credit might be lessened if everyone were able to celebrate student successes and progress. Perhaps this would reduce the need to blame others.

### *Recommendations for Future Partnerships*

The reason for doing this case study was ultimately to provide future partnerships with a roadmap for designing, developing, and implementing a successful process. As noted previously, the partnership that was studied has only been in existence for 2 years and needs more time to make the necessary changes to make the partnership a success. From this standpoint, recommendations for future partnerships are as follows:

1. Bring the right voices to the table in a way that they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. It is a challenge for school systems to open their doors to business

- and civic leaders and this needs to be respected. Those working with the school system should not overstep the boundaries of the established roles if they are to develop effective collaborative relationships and the trust that is needed to promote change.
2. Define measurable and doable goals and outcomes that are aligned with the school system, including both immediate and future, and describe the means you will use to attain them. Focus on a few obtainable goals at a time to allow the successes to remain within reach. This should maintain stakeholder interest and involvement. Revisit the goals, activities, and measures on a regular basis.
  3. Determine what resources each partner can contribute to the partnership in working toward common goals. In order to create buy-in from all stakeholders, everyone must be involved in this process. Develop a structure that facilitates sharing of ideas, resources, and concerns. Make time to hold planning sessions, retreats, or other sessions where all the participants can learn with and from each other and begin to address their lack of understanding of their varied perspectives, ideas, and accessible resources.
  4. Anticipate potential barriers or roadblocks along the way and formulate a plan to prevent them. All organizations suffer from communication problems. Working across two established organizations (i.e., school board, school system) and adding a loosely-linked third group (i.e., a partnership representing multiple organizations), could make this a monumental task. Be prepared to facilitate numerous types of communication and to revise the plan on an ongoing basis.
  5. Remember that effective communication extends to all stakeholder groups. At the same time, it is in the classrooms and schools that major changes take place. Be sure that teachers and principals are involved in all aspects of partnership work and that their voices are both heard and valued. This might help break down the perception gaps that exist between communities and schools.

6. Identify strategies to evaluate success or determine whether the goals have, in fact, been met. Clearly defining desired outcomes and assessment plans to measure progress are essential. Make data-based decisions in planning and revising all partnership actions. Celebrate the successes as publicly as possible. Share both successes and failures--and collectively take responsibility for them. If students are not succeeding, do not point a finger in blame. Work together to find, implement, and assess new solutions and, in doing so, grow together as a partnership.
7. Do not give up when the going gets tough. This old adage has tremendous application for partnership work. This is new, unexplored “turf.” It is not a natural alignment. There are no exemplar models. Only a few school systems in the nation have formed structured, working partnerships and they are all addressing similar challenges. What has been “natural” throughout the history of education is that one group often blames another for its problems. Parents blame schools when their children are not progressing as they believe they should. Educators blame parents for not supporting their efforts and local governments for under-funding their programs. Civic, community, and business leaders blame schools for not helping build their economic base and for not using available funds to their best advantage. Higher education blames P-12 educators for sending them students who are not prepared to learn. If a partnership is able to develop the capacity to work together to quit placing blame and start sharing the responsibility for moving forward together, it will ultimately accomplish more than a few goals or plans. It will establish a new way of doing business for the community and will become one of the exemplars that will guide the development of other emerging partnerships. However, this developing and sustaining an effective partnership is very difficult to accomplish; be prepared for set backs. As Fullan (2001) has noted, the more significant the change effort, the greater the implementation dips. This is tremendously important work. Stay the course.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### The Partnership's Initial Structure

13 Trustees	Superintendent, School Board Chairman, County Mayor, City Mayor, County Commission Chairman, University Chancellor, Community College President, PTA President, Chamber of Commerce CEO, NAACP President, Community Foundation Representative, Urban League President and CEO, Teacher
2 Executive Directors	Executive Director hired through a national search and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

<b>IMPLEMENTATION TEAM</b> (Tri-Chairs: University Dean, Superintendent, Community Foundation Representative)				
<b><i>An Engaged Community</i></b>	<b><i>A Solid Foundation</i></b>	<b><i>Individualized Challenge</i></b>	<b><i>Effective Teachers</i></b>	<b><i>Continuous Improvement</i></b>
Chair and 5 co-chairs for each of the five targeted areas. Implementation Team members serve as the leadership for all five areas and coordinate the work of their work teams. (Periodic meetings will be for the Implementation Team to share progress and serve as “critical friends” to other teams. Other meetings will be with work team members.)				
<u>Strategy 1</u> Sustained public involvement campaign	<u>Strategy 1</u> Birth-to-kindergarten program	<u>Strategy 1</u> Individualized multiyear education plans for sixth and ninth grade students	<u>Strategy 1</u> Investing in teachers and increasing effectiveness	<u>Strategy 1</u> Establish and Office of Research, Evaluation, and Implementation
<u>Strategy 2</u> Outreach efforts and partnerships	<b>Strategy 2</b> Kindergarten intervention program for 5 year olds not ready for kindergarten	<b>Strategy 2</b> Adult-student advisory connections	<b>Strategy 2</b> Offer financial incentives, based on teacher and school performance, beginning with hard-to-staff schools	<b>Strategy 2</b> Emphasize student learning growth as the primary measurement at all levels and review distribution of teachers and resources
<b>Strategy 3</b> Tutoring, mentoring, business internships, leadership opportunities	<b>Strategy 3</b> Read with Me and targeted one-on-one tutoring (K-3)	<b>Strategy 3</b> Smaller schools and smaller learning environments	<b>Strategy 3</b> Recruit skilled scientists, engineers, linguists, to teach in hard-to-staff subject areas	<b>Strategy 3</b> Develop a partnership coordinating council to oversee the implementation of the “Every School A Great School Agenda”
*** Additional strategies will be included as the partnership evolves. ***				

## APPENDIX B

### The Revised Partnership Structure

13 Trustees	Superintendent, School Board Chairman, County Mayor, City Mayor, County Commission Chairman, University Chancellor, Community College President, PTA President, Chamber of Commerce CEO, NAACP President, Community Foundation Representative, Urban League President and CEO, Teacher			
1 Executive Director 1 School System “Liaison”	Executive Director hired through a national search and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction serving as Liaison			
<b>IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS</b> (Chaired by Executive Director)				
<b><u>An Engaged Community</u></b>  Chair: Community Representative  Liaison: School System Public Affairs Director	<b><u>A Solid Foundation</u></b>  Chair: School System Supervisor of Special Education (in coordination with the Director of Middle Schools) Liaison: TBA	<b><u>Individualized Challenge</u></b>  Chair: School System Director of Secondary Schools (in coordination with the Director of Middle Schools) Liaison: Community Foundation Representative (Trustee)	<b><u>Effective Teachers</u></b>  Chair: University Associate Dean in College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  Liaison: School System Supervisor of Professional Development	<b><u>Continuous Improvement</u></b>  Chair: School System Director of Evaluation  Liaison: CEO of the Chamber of Commerce (Trustee)
<b>WORK TEAMS</b> (Chaired by Implementation Chairs)				
<b><u>Strategy 1</u></b>  Sustained public involvement campaign	<b><u>Strategy 1</u></b>  Birth-to-kindergarten program	<b><u>Strategy 1</u></b>  Individualized multiyear education plans beginning in elementary school	<b><u>Strategy 1</u></b>  Investing in teachers and increasing effectiveness	<b><u>Strategy 1</u></b>  Establish and Office of Research, Evaluation, and Implementation
<b><u>Strategy 2</u></b>  Outreach Efforts and Partnerships	<b><u>Strategy 2</u></b>  Pre-K for At-Risk Students	<b><u>Strategy 2</u></b>  Adult-student advisory connections	<b><u>Strategy 2</u></b>  Offer financial incentives, based on teacher and school performance, beginning with hard-to-staff schools	<b><u>Strategy 2</u></b>  Emphasize student learning growth as the primary measurement at all levels and review distribution of teachers and resources
<b><u>Strategy 3</u></b>  Tutoring, mentoring, business internships, leadership opportunities	<b><u>Strategy 3</u></b>  Kindergarten intervention program for 5 year olds not ready for kindergarten	<b><u>Strategy 3</u></b>  Smaller schools and smaller learning environments	<b><u>Strategy 3</u></b>  Recruit skilled scientists, engineers, linguists, to teach in hard-to-staff subject areas	<b><u>Strategy 3</u></b>  Develop a partnership coordinating council to oversee the implementation of the “Every School A Great School Agenda”
	<b><u>Strategy 4</u></b>  Read with Me and targeted one-on-one tutoring (K-3)	<b><u>Strategy 4</u></b>  Increasing rigor and relevance  Middle School AVID initiative	<b><u>Strategy 4</u></b>  Assure quality teacher induction in all schools	
	<b><u>Strategy 5</u></b>  Work with Imagination Library to promote early literacy		<b><u>Strategy 5</u></b>  Promote teacher leadership through professional development and recognized leadership roles	

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

#### Survey & Interview

*This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. All participants have the right to refuse participation without penalty.*

#### PURPOSE:

The purpose(s) of this research study is/are as follows:

1. To extend current research on community engagement by focusing on stakeholder's perceptions of a change effort in a recently established community-wide partnership focused on school improvement.
2. To identify similarities and differences of perceived strengths and weaknesses of the partnership and possible recommendations for improvement for those involved in the partnership and for others wanting to implement a similar community engagement initiative.

#### DURATION

Part 1: Approximately 50 individuals will participate in this study. All of the participants will fill out a 22 question survey rated on a Likert Scale and three open-ended questions. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Part 2: Approximately 12 of the 50 individuals will participate in this part of the study. The individuals will participate in one 15 minute interview, approximately 2 to 3 questions developed using the survey results

#### PROCEDURES

*The procedures, which will involve you as a research subject, include:*

*Part 1: To complete a 22 question survey rated on a Likert Scale and answer three open-ended questions.*

*Part 2: A 15 minute interview*

#### ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

There are no alternative procedures available to you if you elect not to participate in this study.

#### POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Participants are fully aware that their words may be quoted directly in the findings and results section of the research report. The results will not be labeled with the participant's name, but may still be identifiable.

## POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The possible benefits of your participation are:

1. You will receive a copy of the final research report to review.
2. The participants can use the findings to identify perceived strengths and weaknesses that can play an important role in the improvement of the current partnership and in the change processes needed to enhance what might already be taking place.
3. The findings from this research will be published nationally with an audience interested in engaging the community in a system-wide change effort to improve student outcomes.

## COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT:

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. ETSU makes no commitment to pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423/439-6055.

## FINANCIAL COSTS

There are no additional costs to participants that may result from participation in the research.

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Lindsay Nickels, whose phone number is XXX-xxx-xxxx. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

## CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Lindsay Nickels at XXX-xxx-xxxx, or Dr. Eric Glover at XXX-xxx-xxxx. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at XXX xxx-xxxx for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at XXX/xxx-xxxx or XXX/xxx/xxxx.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or

presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the ETSU IRB and personnel particular to this research (individual or department) have access to the study records. Your name will not be used on the final research report. Only the researcher will know of your participation in the study.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

_____ SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	_____ DATE
_____ PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT	_____ DATE
_____ SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR	_____ DATE
_____ SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)	_____ DATE

## APPENDIX D

### Partnership Survey

The following survey was designed to gather information regarding the perceptions of the partnership stakeholders. Please read each question carefully and answer to the best of your knowledge. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Participant Signature (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

As a member of the partnership, what stakeholder group do you represent?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Educator
- \_\_\_\_\_ Community Member and/or Parent
- \_\_\_\_\_ Government Official
- \_\_\_\_\_ Business Leader
- \_\_\_\_\_ Civic Organization Representative
- \_\_\_\_\_ University Personnel

#### **Survey Frame of reference:**

*The survey questions were designed to include categories from the Framework for Systemic Change*

Knoster, T. (1991). Washington, D.C., Presentation at TASH Conference

Knoster, T., Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2000). A framework for thinking about systems change. In R. Villa & J. Thousand (Eds.), *Restructuring for caring and effective education: Piecing the puzzle together* (pp. 93-128). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

**Theory:** You must have all components to effect change or you end up with the results below:

- 1) Vision/ Mission
- 2) Skills
- 3) Incentives
- 4) Resources
- 5) Action Plan/Structure

**Results:** Without any one of these...

- 1) Vision/Mission = Random change or quick fixes (no direction)
- 2) Skills = Anxiety (don't know how to do something)
- 3) Incentives = Resistance (no one will do anything without a perceived benefit)
- 4) Resources = Frustration (want to do something, stopped by lack of resources of time, people, funds)
- 5) Action Plan/Structure = Treadmill (going around in circles)

- 1) Partnership work is challenging for everyone involved.  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree
- 2) Partnership work requires time and effort in collaborating and understanding the perspectives of others.  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ partners frequently differ in their perceptions of how to improve the educational outcomes for students and families.  
A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree

#### Vision

- 1) It is critical for partnerships to begin by developing a common vision and mission

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 2) There is common agreement among the Trustees and Implementation Team chairs that we must focus our efforts on outcomes rather than programs.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

### Skills

- 1) The partnership structure is utilizing personnel with the knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 2) Trustees and Implementation Team members have been able to shape the direction of the \_\_\_\_\_ during its first two years.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 3) I am actively involved in the decision-making processes taking place in the partnership.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 4) The partnership's focus on teamwork involves representatives from all stakeholder groups in working toward a common vision for students in our community.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

### Incentives

- 1) My expectations for the partnership are being addressed and/or met.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 2) I am valued as an important part of the partnership.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 3) My involvement in the partnership is worth the time and effort I am giving to it.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

### Resources

- 1) The strengths, talents, and resources of partnership members are being utilized appropriately.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 2) The resources that I bring to the partnership are being utilized.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

- 3) If professional development or information is needed, the partnership leadership makes an effort to secure what is needed.

*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

Action Planning

- 1) The partnership has a well-defined action plan that guides our efforts.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*
- 2) Changes that have been made in the action plan that reflect a consensus of opinion across the partnership.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*
- 3) The initial structure of the partnership facilitated our collaborative efforts to implement the action plan.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*
- 4) Changes in the partnership structure have improved our collaborative efforts to implement the action plan.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

**Closing questions:**

- 1) Looking back over the first year of implementation, the partnership is moving in the right direction.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*
- 2) My perceptions of how to improve educational outcomes for students and families are changing as a result of my involvement with the \_\_\_\_\_.  
*A. Strongly Agree B. Agree C. Unknown D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree*

3) What do you see as the strengths of the partnership?

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4) What do you see as the weaknesses or challenges of the partnership?

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5) If you could improve the partnership in any way, what recommendations would you make?

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6) Other Comments:

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*Thank you for your participation!*

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Questions

1. From your perspective as a     (Insert Stakeholder Group)    , how would you have developed the partnership differently?
2. One of the operating procedures of the partnership was to leave personal and professional agendas at the door in order to maintain the focus on student achievement. Do you believe this is the case? Why or Why not?
3. Across the entire survey, Action Planning was the major area of discrepancy. Furthermore, the results indicate that educators are the least positive about changes in the partnership structure designed to achieve the \_\_\_\_\_ action plan. Why do you think that this is the case?
4. Collaboration, communication, and relationships were all mentioned frequently as strengths and weaknesses in the survey. What are your perceptions of these three areas?
5. Is there anything about the past or future of the partnership that I have not asked that you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

Member Check

I have read the transcribed interview and found the transcription to be accurate. Everything transcribed was, in fact, stated during a recorded interview with Lindsay Nickels.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Please initial any of the following that apply to you:*

\_\_\_\_ I made changes to the original transcription (please highlight all changes and feel free to add any further information)

\_\_\_\_ I chose to delete portions of the interview that I would not like to be included in the study.

\_\_\_\_ I would like to withdraw from this study at this time. Please do not use my interview in your study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Comments:

## APPENDIX G

### Permission Letter

January 25, 2007

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Lindsay Nickels. I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University and a special education teacher in the Kingsport City School System. I am presently working on my dissertation and seeking your permission to conduct research on the \_\_\_\_\_. My dissertation, titled "Stakeholders' Perceptions of Community Engagement in a System-wide Educational Change Effort: Implications for Building Partnerships" has been designed using a case study approach to identify the \_\_\_\_\_ stakeholders' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of this emerging school-community partnership that could be used in refining this partnership model and informing others engaged in partnership work at any level.

I developed an interest in the \_\_\_\_\_ while attending AERA in April of 2005. As a Knoxville native, I had read several articles about the Great Schools Partnership and while attending AERA, I spoke with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, the Co-Executive Directors at the time, about my interest in the partnership. We discussed the development of partnership and brainstormed about possible dissertation topics. As I continued my program coursework, I began researching partnerships, the change theory, community engagement, and group dynamics. Before long, I had written the majority of my literature review. While designing this study, I continued contact with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ asking for feedback and suggestions on how to make this study worthwhile for this partnership.

Presently, I am trying to obtain IRB approval. Prior to IRB approval, I must have a signed permission letter allowing me to do the case study on the \_\_\_\_\_. I have attached the IRB narrative that will explain the study in greater detail and the survey that I plan to administer to the stakeholders. If you feel that this is a worthwhile study and are willing to grant permission to continue, please print, sign, and fax the permission letter on the following page to (423)378-2173. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [lnickels@k12k.com](mailto:lnickels@k12k.com) or (XXX) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for this opportunity,

Lindsay Nickels  
Special Education  
Kingsport City Schools  
XXX-xxx-xxxx  
[lnickels@k12k.com](mailto:lnickels@k12k.com)

APPENDIX H

Permission Letter to Conduct Research

Principal Investigator: Lindsay K. Nickels

Project Title: Stakeholders' Perceptions of Community Engagement in a System-wide Educational Change Effort: Implications for Building Partnerships.

\_\_\_\_\_ ,

*Please check the appropriate space below:*

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission, as Chair of the \_\_\_\_\_, for Lindsay K. Nickels to conduct this study on the \_\_\_\_\_. I have read the IRB narrative and understand the intent of this study. Furthermore, I understand that the partnership, the school system, and the stakeholders involved will remain anonymous except to the researcher.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for this study to continue (please explain below).

*Please sign and date below.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Thank you for this great opportunity!

Lindsay K. Nickels

**Upon completion, please fax this letter to (XXX) xxx-xxxx (Attn: Lindsay Nickels)**

VITA

LINDSAY K. NICKELS

Personal Data:      Date of Birth: August 21, 1974  
                            Place of Birth: Knoxville, Tennessee  
                            Marital Status: Married

Education:            East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
                                    Special Education, Early Childhood Pre-K-1, BS;  
                                    1996

                            East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
                                    Special Education, Modified K-12, M.Ed.;  
                                    2000

                            East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;  
                                    Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed.D.;  
                                    2007

Professional  
Experience:

                            Early Childhood Special Education Teacher;  
                                    West Haven Elementary, Knoxville, Tennessee;  
                                    August 1996-May 1999

                            Early Childhood Special Education Teacher;  
                                    The Palmer Center, Kingsport, Tennessee;  
                                    March 2000-June 2007

                            System-wide T-CAP Alternative Assessment Coordinator;  
                                    Kingsport City Schools, Kingsport, Tennessee;  
                                    August 2000-present

                            System-wide Transition Team Chair;  
                                    Kingsport City Schools, Kingsport, Tennessee;  
                                    August 2005-June 2007

                            Behavior Modification Special Education Teacher;  
                                    John Sevier Middle School, Kingsport, Tennessee;  
                                    August 2007-present