Abstract Title Page

Title: Shared Solutions: A Model for Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships

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Abstract Body

Background / Context:

The University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education (Penn GSE), and the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), have a researcher-practitioner partnership called *Shared Solutions*. We consider Shared Solutions to be a hybrid of the "place-based research alliances" and "design research teams" described by Coburn et al. (2013). Like a research alliance, we have a formal research data agreement , a shared agenda, and a detailed plan for co-dissemination of findings. We also operate somewhat like a design research team, in that our research agenda includes analyzing data incrementally to identify paths of improvement and then crafting interventions that respond to these findings.

In our efforts to build a long-term partnership "focused on investigating questions of policy and practice that are central to the district" (Coburn et al., 2013, p. 4), we have built in activities that create routines to sustain and build the partnership (Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011).

Grounded in lessons from the field (e.g., Bryk, Seabring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Coburn & Stein, 2010), our approach to developing a meaningful, effective, and sustained partnership includes the following key components: (a) establishing working groups, (b) holding regularly scheduled meetings, and (c) establishing a culture of joint decision making.

Shared Solutions' research agenda focuses on studying the district's "improving" schools—reform models whose goal is to student academic achievement by providing a productive and safe learning environment, strong leadership, and high-quality curricula and teaching. To study the SDP's school improvement models, Shared Solutions adopted a conceptual framework, based on the work of Anthony Bryk and colleagues (2010), which identifies five essential supports for successful schools—leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, school climate, and instruction. Our framework combines Bryk et al's (2010) work with research on school turnaround and reform (e.g., Desimone, 2002; Herman et al., 2008; Herman & Huberman, 2012). Instrument development, and all researcher-practitioner discussions fostered by the partnership were grounded in this jointly adopted framework, which served as a powerful strategy for developing shared interpretations (e.g., Hubbard, 2010).

Purpose / Objective / Research Question / Focus of Study:

Shared Solutions rests on four foundational pillars: (1) a rigorous research agenda currently studying the SDP's school improvement efforts, but expanding to include other District interventions; (2) development and analysis of a searchable database and research archive, which will provide stakeholders with efficient access to District data and contribute to coherence across research projects; (3) activities that build the capacity of Penn GSE students and faculty to integrate practice into research, and of SDP educators to use evidence and data in their school improvement efforts; and (4) community outreach efforts to improve communication and understanding between local stakeholders and the SDP.

Setting:

Description of the SDP. Serving 206,567 preK-12 students, the SDP is the eighth largest school system in the country. The District enrolls a diverse population of students: 9.4% of students are classified as ELLs and 13.8% as having disabilities; 52% are African American, 19% are Hispanic/Latino, 14% are Caucasian/Euro-Americans, 8% are Asian, and 4% identify as multiracial or other (SDP, 2014a, 2014b). The SDP has been lauded nationally for its successes, such as Masterman High School, the top-ranked high school in the state (U.S. News and World Report, 2015), but also targeted for its failures, including financial shortfalls and low achievement in a majority of its schools (SDP, 2015). A reform-minded district, the SDP is committed to building on its successes and addressing its challenges to better serve its students.

Description of Penn GSE. Penn GSE is well positioned to be a committed and effective partner to the SDP. The school is consistently ranked among the top 10 education schools in the country, and is unique among Ivy League universities in its support for practical knowledge building. Enrolling just under 1,300 students, the school has 40 faculty members, with an additional 35 secondary faculty members from other university departments, including economics, sociology, and psychology. Penn GSE has capitalized on its location, less than 3 miles from SDP offices, to engage deeply with local education issues. Penn GSE trains more Philadelphia teachers than any other institution, and its midcareer Ed.D. program in educational leadership trains local, state, and national leaders for schools, districts, and nonprofits.

Population / Participants / Subjects:

Shared Solutions collected survey data from all teachers, students, parents and principals in the district. We had over 50% response rates on most of our spring 2015 surveys. Outreach and communications activities are targeted to the broader Philadelphia community, including educators, researchers, and interested community members.

Intervention / Program / Practice:

Studying the implementation and impact of the district's school improvement models is the core of Shared Solutions' research agenda. SDP's key strategy for addressing the widespread low achievement in the district is through instituting in struggling schools an "improvement" model, which can vary from a complete redesign, to a turnaround of at least 50% of the staff, to adopting a charter model. More than 20% of all SDP students attend a school with an improvement model. Part of the work of Shared Solutions is to document the components of different types of the district's school improvement efforts, and to identify paths to success, and help educators use evaluative data to improve their efforts.

Research Design:

Study of improving schools. In its first two years, Shared Solutions led working groups of researchers and practitioners to (a) jointly identify, develop, test, and adapt a core set of instruments that can be used across all SDP schools to measure implementation, teacher effectiveness, and progress on student outcomes; (b) pilot the instruments and begin collecting

implementation data across the district; (c) link these data with time series analyses of student achievement data to analyze trends and suggest possible causal relationships; and (d) build district and school capacity to administer, interpret, and build specific action plans based on the data collected and analyzed (see Collins, Joseph & Bielaczy, 2004; Penuel et al., 2011).

Database. Shared Solutions is also developing a publicly accessible, online database that will allow users to view data for every school in the District—the annual surveys results from parents, students, teachers, and principals, as well as achievement, behavior, and demographic data. In addition to being a community resource, this database will provide a valuable access point for researchers, similar to the National Center for Education Statistics' "public release" data.

Capacity-building. In the past year, Shared Solutions has hosted several mini-conferences and interactive forums. These activities build District and school capacity to administer, interpret, and develop specific action plans based on data related to our study of school improvement efforts (see Collins, Joseph & Bielaczyc, 2004; Penuel et al., 2011). At the same time, the forums increase researcher and student understanding and capacity in how to work with practitioners at all stages of research to produce research grounded in the realities of the classroom, which in turn increase the chances that findings will be integrated into practice.

Data Collection and Analysis:

The District sent the surveys to all schools in the district. They were web-based surveys, but hard copies were made available to parents. Shared Solutions orchestrated a system of reminders, incentives, and conversations with district leaders and select principals to increase understanding of the survey effort, and as a result, the response rate was substantially higher than in years past. The district is working toward a culture in which such research activities are an expected part of the job description, and it has already instituted with some success a change of culture in terms of how research is viewed.

In terms of analyzing the survey and other data, our approach to studying the district's school improvement efforts combines cohort and interrupted time series analysis with propensity score matching to suggest which models improve student learning, behavior, and attendance. We combine this with implementation analysis (e.g., mediation and structural equation modeling as well as basic exploratory predictive regression models) to understand how the dose and quality of implementation of particular aspects of the models relate to intermediate and final student outcomes. We have also conducted intensive interviews and observations in a targeted subsample of 14 schools, to more deeply understand contextual influences, and explain challenges and failures.

Findings / Results:

In its first year, Shared Solutions has made considerable progress on its research agenda studying the SDP's turnaround schools, and on its Partnership-building agenda focused on capacity building, database development, and community outreach. Our work thus far has resulted in (a) joint development of a conceptual framework to guide our work; (b) creation,

administration, and ongoing analysis of data from survey, interview, and observation instruments based on that conceptual framework; (c) the hosting of several researcher-practitioner mini-conferences and interactive forums; (d) development of resource-sharing mechanisms such as district-initiated studies of SDP data in a Penn GSE practicum course, and operation of a work-study program at SDP for Penn GSE students; (e) development of an external SDP database and archive; and (f) initiation of a community outreach strategy that includes traditional and social media.

We are currently analyzing the survey data, and will provide each school with a summary of their survey data in an easy-to-read template that highlights their strengths and weaknesses in each of Bryk's essential supports, as well as key quotations that reflect how educators, students and parents view their school. We also plan to host events that help the community understand, interpret and use these data.

Conclusions:

Our innovative approach to developing research-based surveys, including stakeholders at every stage of the research process to build understanding, participation and buy-in, serves as a model for researcher-practitioner partnerships. We believe this partnership represents a new education research paradigm that removes the research-practice gap by relying on a truly collaborative process of designing, implementing, analyzing, reporting and using research.

Appendices

Appendix A. References

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