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A Partnership Model Approach to Understanding Challenges in Collaboration around College Readiness

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Abstract

This paper explores challenges in starting, developing, and incorporating partnerships between secondary and postsecondary education sectors. Site visits data from high schools, districts, and colleges across six Florida counties is used to identify the types of challenges educators faced in various phases of partnerships. We provide empirical evidence to support a conceptual framework based on a partnership model, which demonstrates that social capital and organizational capital are needed to create “partnership capital” to initiate and sustain partnerships. Whereas considerable collaborative resources are available to help higher-performing students prepare for selective universities, there is much less collaboration around improving college readiness.

Keywords: college readiness, partnerships, state policy

A Partnership Model Approach to Understanding Challenges in Collaboration around College Readiness

One of the most distinctive features of governance in American education is the level of separation between K-12 and higher education (Maeroff et al. 2001; Tucker 2004). Disparities in high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements, differences between secondary and postsecondary assessments, misaligned curriculum content, a lack of student awareness of information needed to make the transition to college, and conflicting expectations between K-12 teachers and college faculty have all been cited as evidence of the disconnect between the two sectors (Identifying Reference, 2010). This organizational divide has been associated with problems such as the underrepresentation of low-income and minority students in postsecondary education, high participation rates in developmental education, and low rates of college persistence and degree completion (e.g. Kirst, 2005; Maeroff et al., 2001). In response to these problems, some states have implemented policy efforts that span secondary and postsecondary education to bring the two sectors closer together.

We explore challenges to obtaining collaboration around college readiness using the case of a statewide policy in Florida that had the potential to foster greater collaboration between high schools and state colleges. State definitions of college readiness in the U.S. commonly refer to the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students need to succeed in postsecondary education, including academic knowledge, critical thinking skills, social and emotional learning skills, perseverance behaviors, community involvement (Mishkind, 2004). However, Florida's reform focused more narrowly on the academic knowledge needed to succeed in initial college-level courses in math and English. Beginning in 2008/09, the Florida College and Career Readiness Initiative (FCCRI) required high schools to administer the college placement test used by all

state community colleges to mid-performing grade 11 students. In Florida, this exam assesses skills from the state's own postsecondary readiness competencies, which were developed jointly by K-12 and higher education educators to comprise, "the knowledge, skills, and academic preparation needed to enroll and succeed in introductory college credit-bearing courses within an associate or baccalaureate degree program without the need for remediation" (Florida Department of Education, 2018). High schools were also required to provide college readiness and success (CRS) courses in grade 12 to students who scored below college-ready. These courses were designed to align with both K-12 state standards and the postsecondary readiness competencies. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) encouraged K-12 educators to collaborate with local colleges in developing the CRS courses, but the state provided no resources, contact information, or incentives for participation.

We conducted a five-year, mixed methods evaluation of the FCCRI's implementation and impact on student outcomes. Using qualitative data from this evaluation, we explore the impediments to starting, developing, and sustaining cross-sector partnerships around college readiness. We use findings from site visits to high schools, district offices, and state colleges across six Florida counties to identify the types of challenges educators faced in various phases of partnerships around college readiness. Then we provide empirical evidence to support a conceptual framework based on Amey, Eddy, and Campbell's (2010) partnership model, which demonstrates that social capital and organizational capital are needed to create "partnership capital" to initiate and sustain partnerships.

We show that forming K12-to-postsecondary partnerships is a complex undertaking, and demonstrate that applying the partnership model provides insights into the challenges that occur at each phase of the partnership process. Overall we find very little evidence of secondary-

postsecondary collaboration around the CRS courses or college readiness more broadly. The small number of educators who did participate in cross-sector collaboration indicated it was very helpful, and those who did not participate expressed a desire for more opportunities to do so. This lack of collaboration stands in sharp contrast to the efforts undertaken by high schools and colleges to work together to provide dual enrollment courses to higher-performing students who are already college-ready.

Our study makes several significant contributions to research and practice. First, there is a growing movement nationally toward initiatives like the FCCRI, with 39 states offering early assessment and college transition courses either statewide or locally. While there is some descriptive research on the availability and characteristics of these types of programs (Fay, Barnett, & Chavarin, 2017), this study is the first to explore the issue of secondary-to-postsecondary collaboration more comprehensively using in-depth qualitative data from a diverse group of high schools, districts, and colleges. Second, our study uses a conceptual framework based on the concept of partnership capital to provide insight into the factors that facilitate or hinder collaboration across educational systems. This informs our understanding of the underlying processes that occur in both the development and sustainment of partnerships, which contributes to the knowledge base about why K-12 and higher education have historically been so misaligned. Third, our study has practical implications for those seeking to work across sectors to improve college readiness. The case of Florida offers valuable lessons learned that may inform future college readiness efforts in other states to improve student success.

Conceptual Framework

Social Capital and Social Ties in the Context of Educational Reform

Social capital theory has been commonly used to understand implementation and impacts of education reforms, although studies have focused primarily on networks within K-12 or higher education rather than on networks that span both sectors (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Holme & Rangel, 2012; Kezar, 2014). Social capital consists of components such as trust, closeness, personal power, frequency of interactions between actors, and level of commitment (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1988). Within education settings, social networks provide resources and expertise that may include curriculum, teaching strategies, and technical skills (e.g. Penuel et al., 2009). Educators must develop social ties to access these resources to effect change and improve student outcomes. While weak ties may be sufficient for transferring routine information, strong ties are needed to transfer more complex information that is often needed to implement education reforms (Daly et al., 2010).

Innovation in education systems can spread among existing social ties, such as among educators within the same school or college. However, change can also be facilitated in reforms by creating new social ties with people who are experts in implementing the initiative (Penuel et al., 2016). There may be few changes in practice if there is not much depth of interaction among members in the social network, or if educators have limited access to expertise.

Leadership also plays an important role within social networks during education reform efforts. Principals may provide supportive norms for these efforts, or they may serve as a "buffer" against external pressure to respond to new mandates (Penuel et al., 2009). School leaders may also serve as mediators by influencing patterns of interaction among school staff. For example, Coburn and Russell (2008) found that during the adoption of new curriculum, school leaders influenced the way that instructional coaches were used, how much direct interaction the coaches had with teachers, and the level of congruence between the curriculum

design and how it was talked about within the school. At the district level, the leader's ties to the network determine how central the leader is within the network structure, with some evidence that more highly centralized district leaders tend to have greater influence (Daly & Finnigan, 2011). College leaders have traditionally had little role in college readiness initiatives, but could potentially improve these types of reform efforts by leading tasks such as communicating the need for reform, helping to develop K-12 standards, aligning college admissions and placement with new standards, and providing professional development for teachers (Haycock, 1996).

The extent to which policy can influence social networks in educational settings is debatable. Coburn and Russell (2008) suggest that policy can influence some aspects of social networks like structure and access to expertise; however, policy alone cannot influence patterns of interaction because educators are more likely to interact with those whom they already trust. Through these informal interactions, teachers may communicate differently from school or district policies. In addition, Daly and Finnigan (2011) found that reform networks tend to operate within school or district sites and remain relatively closed to external influences.

Challenges to Developing Social Capital in Reform Efforts

There are numerous challenges to developing social capital within reform efforts. First is network size; in larger social networks it is difficult to have face-to-face relationships with other members and develop trust, and there tends to be greater bureaucracy (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Schools and districts may need to limit the number of outside agencies involved to provide a clear focus for the collaboration (Penuel et al., 2009). Within higher education, it may be difficult to develop social ties when there is a greater diversity of stakeholders in different disciplines and departments, which makes it harder to establish trust than when individuals have similar interests (Kezar & Sam, 2010; Kogan, 2000).

Second, an organization's social context may influence the organization's stability, which in turn affects social capital and the ability to respond to reform initiatives. Holme and Rangel (2012) found disadvantaged schools had difficulty creating organizational conditions for improvement because they have high rates of teacher and principal attrition, which leads to organizational instability. The stability of social networks may also depend on whether they are pre-existing or created in response to new initiatives. For example, Kezar and Lester (2009) found an initiative to change college assessment and pedagogy had stronger implementation on campuses with existing centers for teaching and learning (compared to campuses that created new centers) because they could draw upon existing social networks and integrated structures.

Third, educational organizations frequently face multiple external demands and must work together in an ongoing process of "crafting coherence" (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Multiple demands can be positive if pursued jointly to improve student learning opportunities and if organizations can combine additional resources for improvement. However, such demands can also create challenges if initiatives are unaligned and have competing goals.

Fourth, developing social capital across multiple agencies can be very time-consuming; it may take many years before results can be observed. Domina and Ruzek (2012) conducted a quasi-experimental evaluation of local university-school district partnerships and found positive effects on high school graduation rates and college enrollment, but it took up to ten years to achieve strong positive effects. They conclude that these types of partnerships are better viewed as a long-term strategy than as a short-term fix.

Fifth, it is necessary to look at how social capital interacts with human capital and financial resources (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Penuel et al. (2009) found that even though resources may be available within a school to support reform efforts, teachers may not be aware

of them or open to using them. Teachers' access to these resources may be linked to their position within the social network. This suggests that leaders need awareness of resources and how they are distributed, as well as any reasons for unequal distribution of resources.

Partnership Model for Cross-Sector Educational Reform

The partnership model developed by Amey, Eddy, and Campbell (2010) guides our understanding of cross-sector collaboration (figure 1). Social and organizational capital create "partnership capital" needed to sustain a partnership. Organizational capital includes both tangible resources (such as technology and information) and intangible resources (like authority and influence). Through social and organizational capital, partnerships can develop to allow groups to accomplish more than they would independently. For example, successful education partnerships can optimize state and local resources by pooling them together, share facilities and equipment, and better address student learning needs. Amey and colleagues (2007) conceptualize partnerships on a continuum ranging from informal relationships between high schools and colleges to formal consortia established through articulation agreements.

Amey, Eddy, and Campbell's partnership model consists of three phases for establishing secondary to postsecondary partnerships. The first phase, "getting started," begins by identifying motivators for the partnership, which may include factors such as pooling resources, responding to policy, or building on existing relationships. Next, members of the partnership establish roles and responsibilities and develop a common understanding of objectives and goals. The authors note it may be difficult to start a partnership when it is mandated by policy, as it affects members' motivation and willingness to participate.

The second phase, "partnership development," moves beyond members' self-interests to aligning intentions. Challenges can occur when partners have different status or authority,

unequal resource contributions, and variation in operations (such as curricular requirements). In this phase it is important to establish buy-in among members. This requires continued communication and examples of success. It is also important to have someone in the role of a "champion" who advocates for the partnership. However, partnership members need to be cautious not to rely too much on one person; instability could result if this person leaves the partnership or changes roles.

In the third phase, "incorporating the partnership," members align processes to work as a team and sustain efforts. Challenges in this phase include misalignment between work structures and rewards for participation, differences in institutional policies and values, and variation in institutional decision making. Within the K-20 education context this can include factors such as conflicting beliefs about what it means to be college-ready and differences among educators in the amount of control they have over the curriculum.

State Policy Context in Florida

The partnership model is useful for understanding how collaboration between secondary and postsecondary education sectors develops, the factors necessary for success, and challenges to effective partnerships. In this paper, we use the partnership model to explore the impediments to starting, developing, and sustaining partnerships in the case of the FCCRI — a complex initiative involving a range of state and local education stakeholders.

The FLDOE consists of the Division of K-12 Public Schools and the Division of Florida Colleges. The Division of K-12 Public Schools sets common standards for all K-12 courses, while the Division of Florida Colleges establishes statewide courses with common course numbering across postsecondary institutions. The Division of Florida Colleges is also under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education, which sets rules about assessments and cut-scores

needed for exemption from developmental education at all 28 community colleges (referred to as "state colleges"). Four-year universities in Florida typically do not offer developmental education, so this responsibility is limited to the state colleges.

Under the FCCRI, FLDOE provided a common assessment through the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) and provided funds to administer the PERT to targeted high school students. Additionally, the Division of K-12 Public Schools set standards for CRS courses and communicated these requirements to district-level administrators, who in turn were responsible for communicating information to high schools. Guidance from the FLDOE (2008, 4) about the CRS courses said that, "The postsecondary readiness curriculum offered by the community college will be used to develop the high school course. The development of the high school curriculum should mirror the college course and will require secondary-postsecondary collaboration where subject area faculty, both high school and college, make joint decisions regarding the curriculum and student outcomes." However, the FLDOE provided no specific encouragement of or time allotment for interaction.

Districts had autonomy in making decisions about curriculum and instruction, including instructional materials for CRS courses and professional development for teachers. They also were responsible for providing guidance and oversight of PERT administrations and for reporting test scores to the state. High school administrators directly implemented PERT testing and CRS courses, the key components of the FCCRI. They also provided guidance to CRS teachers; though in many cases, CRS teachers were left largely on their own to develop lesson plans and select instructional resources. Our own research has found that the content and rigor of the CRS courses varied substantially across schools (Authors, 2014). In some schools the CRS courses were considered to be slightly more advanced than courses typically taken by students

prior to the FCCRI, while in other schools the teachers spent a lot of time reviewing basic skills that students should have already mastered. Educators also had mixed views on how similar the CRS courses were to the developmental education courses offered at state college, and on the extent to which the CRS focused on helping students to test college-ready. Although state colleges had no direct role in the FCCRI, they have extensive experience in crafting developmental education programs with goals very similar to those of the CRS courses. In sharp contrast to the high schools, state colleges have developmental education departments that provide detailed lesson plans for their instructors; a wide range of teaching materials; and extensive support services such as tutors, computer labs, and study skills courses.

Methods & Data

Our analyses were guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent did secondary and postsecondary educators collaborate on college readiness under the FCCRI in each phase of the partnership model?
2. How did partnership capital facilitate or impede progress at each partnership phase?

Selection of Sites

We conducted site visits in six districts to gain an in-depth understanding of the FCCRI's implementation in different settings. These districts represent 2 each of Florida's 7 large districts, 21 medium-size districts, and 39 small districts. In Florida each county constitutes its own district and also has a single public state college. Because large districts tend to have more specialized staff at both the district and school levels to help implement new programs, we hypothesized that FCCRI implementation may vary by district size and therefore included a mix of district sizes in the sample. Additionally, large urban areas tend to have multiple branch locations for the local state college, so schools in these areas tend to be in closer proximity to

potential partner institutions than rural schools. This is important because the distance between high schools and colleges may serve as a deterrent to partnership activities if it is difficult for members to meet in-person. Within each county we visited two high schools, the district office, and the local state college. This provided a total of 24 sites consisting of 12 high schools, six district offices, and six state colleges.

We limited the selection of districts and high schools to those that allowed us to survey their CRS teachers in the prior year about their perceptions of the FCCRI (see Identifying Reference, 2017). We further limited the selection to districts where we could visit one school where surveyed teachers reported FCCRI implementation was very effective and another school where implementation was ineffective. This selection process was chosen to identify the factors that facilitated and impeded effective implementation of the FCCRI.

Nine of the 12 high schools visited were Title I schools. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch ranged from 39 to 83 percent, and the percentage of students from a racial/ethnic minority ranged from 6 to 99 percent. There was also substantial variation across sites in the percentage of graduates who took the PERT (23 to 71 percent), scored college-ready (27 to 100 percent), and attended college (29 percent to 65 percent). This suggests that the scale of the FCCRI testing and remediation varied considerably across schools, which may also have implications for collaboration around college readiness. Schools and colleges may have greater motivation to adjust their activities if a large proportion of students could benefit from additional college-readiness support, or if their performance is low on indicators perceived to be important. Additionally, schools with high percentages of low-income and racial/ethnic minority students may have weaker social networks, so they may encounter greater challenges to developing collaboration. While the sample is not large enough to

disaggregate results by school characteristics, the variation across sites allow us to broadly explore the process of collaboration in diverse contexts.

Interview participants. At each high school, we asked to interview at least one person in each of the following roles: math CRS teacher, English CRS teacher, and guidance counselor. At each district office, we asked to interview at least one curriculum specialist, and at each state college, we asked to interview at least one developmental math chair, one developmental reading chair, one developmental math instructor, one developmental reading instructor, and one academic advisor. Participants at all sites were also allowed to invite additional interviewees familiar with the FCCRI. A total of 85 people participated in the site visits—38 at high schools, 7 at districts, and 40 at state colleges (Table 1).

This paper focuses on questions in our interview protocols asking participants to describe collaborations around college readiness, highlight examples of effective collaboration, and identify barriers to greater collaboration. The site visits, which were conducted in spring 2014, included a mix of small group discussions and individual interviews. Educators and administrators were interviewed separately, but there were some cases where two to three teachers were interviewed together. Individual interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes, and small group interviews lasted around 60 to 90 minutes.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Each site visit included an interview lead and a note-taker. Audio recordings were reviewed to fill in any gaps in the notes from the interview and to collect sample quotes to support key findings. We began by reading the descriptions of secondary to postsecondary collaboration and identifying the phase of the Amey et al. (2010) partnership model for each

interview participant. We found they could be straightforwardly categorized into the different phases of the partnership model and were coded on a scale from 0 to 3 as follows:

- 0: “None” indicates that the participant was not involved in any secondary to postsecondary collaboration around college readiness.
- 1: The “getting started” phase indicates that the participant engaged in some collaborative activity, but the activity consisted of a limited occurrence (for example, a once-a-year activity with no follow-up) or involved only a single actor from a participating institution.
- 2: The “partnership development” phase indicates that the participant was involved with multiple actors from each institution in collaborative activities beyond a limited occurrence, but these activities were not sustained or scaled up over time.
- 3: The “incorporating the partnership” phase indicates that the participant was involved with multiple actors from each institution in sustaining collaborative activities over time and/or scaling up these activities to other settings.

For this analysis, we focused primarily on interviews with high school teachers, district administrators, and college instructors since these were the most relevant actors for understanding the development of the CRS courses and collaboration around college readiness under the FCCRI. However, we supplemented with quotes from the guidance counselors and other college staff where appropriate. Next, we coded the types of challenges that emerged during each phase of partnership by relying on theoretical propositions and by using an inductive approach to identify key concepts by closely examining the data (Yin, 2014). We created an initial codebook with themes based on FCCRI implementation findings documented in feedback collected from teachers through surveys and focus groups in the prior year of the study, and then applied the codes to the interview notes as appropriate and noted the phase in which each

occurred. While reviewing the interview notes, we also developed descriptive codes to document new themes that emerged. After coding the interviews, we used an iterative approach where we compared cases of similar challenges at different sites and revised the explanatory propositions after taking into account each perspective. We then summarized findings across sites to provide evidence that contributes to understanding the challenges to collaboration that occur during each phase of the partnership model. While some challenges spanned across multiple phases, we describe the phase in which each challenge seemed most prominent.

Results

Extent of Cross-Sector Collaboration Around College Readiness

Secondary and postsecondary collaboration tended to focus on high-performing students. Interviews revealed that all colleges had established partnerships with local high schools for recruiting students for college admissions and providing dual enrollment for high-performing students. More than 50,000 Florida students participate in dual enrollment annually, but these courses are limited to students who maintain a GPA of at least 3.0, have tested college-ready, and meet any additional eligibility criteria in the dual enrollment articulation agreement (FLDOE, 2014). The mid-performing students targeted for the FCCRI are typically not eligible to participate in these courses because they have not achieved a college-ready score.

Our discussions with K-12 and postsecondary educators revealed there was much less collaboration around helping underprepared students become college-ready. Across all relevant site visit participants who were asked about collaborations around college readiness, 55 percent did not participate in any collaborative activities, 10 percent in phase 1, 24 percent in phase 2, and 12 percent in phase 3 (Table 2). However, there were important differences by respondent type, as we discuss below for each phase.

No collaborative activities. Nearly 80 percent of high school teachers, 57 percent of district staff, and 30 percent of college instructors reported that they did not participate in any cross-sector collaborative activities. The differences among the three groups of respondents suggest that the networks for collaboration around college readiness lacked ties to all actors, especially teachers at the school level. It is possible that individual respondents may not have been aware of partnership activities happening beyond their individual courses or department, which demonstrates the fragmented nature of social network. Interestingly, many teachers in this phase had previously given high effectiveness ratings to the FCCRI on the teacher survey, which suggests that they may not think collaboration with the colleges is necessary to improve college readiness.

One district curriculum specialist noted, “from what I’ve seen, we’ve not done a whole lot to make a connection with the college.” When the CRS courses were introduced, the district convened a textbook adoption committee consisting of high school and district staff. In math, they adopted the same textbook used by the state college for developmental courses, but this happened by chance because one of the teachers on the committee had worked at the college and recommended the book. But in English the CRS textbook was selected without any information about the materials used for developmental English courses because there was no connection to the college. This lack of use of college materials corresponds with findings from our earlier survey of CRS teachers, where only 17 percent of English teachers and 26 percent of math teachers reported using resources from state colleges when developing their CRS courses (Identifying Reference, 2017).

Phase 1 – Getting started. Among the 21 percent of CRS teachers we interviewed who did collaborate with state colleges, all were in the first partnership phase. Collaborative activities

typically consisted of a CRS teacher reaching out to a college instructor to request support in identifying instructional materials for the CRS courses or resources for helping students prepare for the PERT. A few other teachers indicated that they took the initiative to invite someone from the college to speak to students in their CRS courses about the types of programs available at the college and the skills needed for college success. Both efforts were undertaken by individual teachers and were not part of a larger effort by the school.

Phase 2 – Partnership development. Fourteen percent of district staff and half of college instructors were categorized in the second partnership phase. In one district, the curriculum specialist met with college staff about once a quarter to discuss topics such as changes in the PERT assessment and how colleges can support implementation of the new state standards in local high schools. Activities included holding a conference for counselors, teachers, and administrators to discuss the new standards and how they align with college courses. However, the curriculum specialist said she was not aware of any follow-up discussion or activities that came out of the conference.

College instructors in the partnership development phase were most commonly involved in partnership activities to share curricular materials with the district or local high schools and to organize professional development events. The state colleges often took the lead on organizing these types of collaborative events, even though the legislation did not require them to do so. For example, one college organized a summit during the summer for all high school teachers in the three-county area to discuss what it means to be college-ready. At another college, English instructors invited high school English teachers to mini-workshops where they demonstrated what they do in a typical class and described their expectations for their students.

A college instructor who participated in this program said she thought the high school teachers found it very helpful. However, sometimes participation seemed more driven by job obligations than by common cause and benefit. This may be attributed to a dearth of social capital and networks from which to draw on. As described by a college English instructor, “it’s hit or miss. We had a meeting with someone from [a local high school] once after Senate Bill 1908 was passed. She got our textbooks and syllabus and left. We never heard from her again.” A math instructor at another college expressed similar concerns, saying, “we’ve had a number of trainings [for high school teachers] over the past four years and showed them the books we use. In many cases they came because they had to. We told them they could contact us for additional information, but I’ve never gotten an email or anything. And we’ve done it for years.”

Phase 3 – Incorporating the partnership. Twenty percent of college instructors and 29 percent of district staff who participated in the interviews were categorized in the third partnership phase. The majority of these respondents were from large urban districts where high schools may be in closer proximity to state college to facilitate social ties; however, generalizations among site characteristics must be considered cautiously given the small sample size. In this phase, collaboration activities seemed to be driven by a common recognition of problems with the existing education system and a mutual desire to improve the system to help students succeed. According to a district administrator, “we are expanding partnerships to a great degree. We can’t be in our silo doing what we think is imperative for college and career readiness, while they [the colleges] are doing what they think is appropriate for persistence and success. It’s not happening once again if we aren’t aligning and making linkages.” One partnership activity in this county focuses on K-12 to postsecondary curriculum alignment. High school teachers receive data on the outcomes of students from their school who attend the nearby

state college. Teachers meet individually with college faculty to review the secondary and college curricula and discuss gaps between the two. They also considered potential opportunities for further collaboration.

Another partnership activity involved math and English teachers at six high schools who worked one-on-one or in pairs with a college faculty member. They observed each other's classes and afterward met to discuss instructional techniques, examine any gaps in curricular alignment, and share syllabi and pacing guides. At the end of the four-week program, all participants wrote reflections on their experiences and gathered as a group to discuss them. This program grew out of a college initiative designed to formalize interaction between high schools and the college by organizing three meetings throughout an academic year for secondary and postsecondary administrators, faculty, and students. Attendees were encouraged to continue conversations and collaborations after the meeting. For example, they organized an event where high school STEM students partnered with the college robotics club on a "hack-a-thon," which was designed to give the high school students an experience of what a college campus is like.

In another county, a college administrator explained, "we have partnered with the high schools on so many things in the past that it was very natural when the legislation required them to offer the PERT that they came to us for help." The college organized a training session for high school staff about the content and structure of the PERT assessment, and also sent their testing director to each high school to explain how to administer the PERT. When the CRS courses were introduced, the college held an orientation for high school staff describing the legislative changes. Afterward, the high school teachers were invited to break-out sessions with developmental education instructors who shared resources used by the college and walked them

through the developmental course framework. Over time the college developed more of its own resources for developmental courses, which they continued to share with high schools at no cost.

Summary of partnership activities. Despite differences among participants in various phases of partnership development, a desire for greater collaboration emerged as a common theme. As one college instructor noted, "[there is] a disconnect between college and high school. I thought this initiative would connect us, but that hasn't happened…But I think we would all benefit. I hope that trend will change." Even among sites with more established partnerships, many activities were limited to a few high schools or a single campus of a multisite college, so there was an interest in expanding the reach of these partnerships.

The next section describes the types of challenges that occurred in each phase of the partnership, and the how they correspond to the key components from the conceptual framework. Figure 2 summarizes these results.

Challenges to Phase 1 – Getting Started

Accountability system did not incentivize college readiness. A key component in the first partnership phase is identifying motivators for the partnership. The state provided little incentive to fulfill the college-oriented goals of the FCCRI, so district and school administrators often gave higher priority to goals specified in the state accountability system. In the year of the site visits, each high school received an accountability score out of 600 points, which consisted of up to 400 points for standardized test scores (not including the PERT); 100 points for high school graduation rates; and 100 points for "acceleration," measured through Advanced Placement and dual enrollment indicators (FLDOE, 2015). A common theme that emerged in interviews was the perception that high schools focused disproportionately on graduation rates and preparing students for standardized tests. One district administrator explained, "the new high

school accountability requirements have really focused folks on 'what measures is what matters.' So college readiness hasn't been as in-your-face. Principal, teacher, and counselor evaluations focus on high school measures." A CRS math teacher also noted, "I feel it doesn't really matter because the PERT's not a state [high school] test. Don't stress about teaching this."

Some interviewees indicated that the emphasis on high school testing precluded teachers from using similar instructional techniques and resources as college instructors. One college instructor noted, "the problem is they [the high school teachers] want to teach to the test. They teach to the FCAT and look where it's gotten them. They give them [the students] 4,000 handouts. They are teaching to the test and they don't get to teach." Another college instructor described a professional development event where they shared strategies with high school teachers. He said, "the thing is, they [the high school teachers] have another agenda. They were open to it and receptive. But it's one thing when you tell someone we do X, Y, and Z, but then when they go home they have FCAT to prepare for."

Lack of leadership. Another key component in the first phase is establishing roles and responsibilities for members, including identifying a leader to initiate the partnership. There is often uncertainty about which organization the leader should come from. This was particularly challenging for the FCCRI because no single person was assigned to improve the initiative's implementation. An assistant principal said, "I don't know who would be responsible for orchestrating [a partnership with the college]. DOE? The district? We need a liaison; otherwise everyone blames anyone else."

When leaders want to engage in collaboration, they often don't know whom to contact because typically no single person is in charge of developing lesson plans and materials. According to one high school principal, "There is no formal relationship with colleges to get

access to the materials they are using. I'm really just feeling my way around in the dark." A dean of developmental education at one of the state colleges said he had not provided any curricular resources to the district or high schools but would "be more than happy to share with them." However, no one at the secondary level had asked for the materials, and the dean did not know where to send them. FLDOE did not provide any guidance on how to request this information, and it seems that none of the leaders felt entitled to make such a request.

Several interviewees also expressed difficulty finding a point of contact to start a conversation. One college instructor described how she was asked to invite someone from a high school to participate in a college readiness conference that the college was hosting. She explained, "I found that to be difficult. I don't even know anyone in the high schools to have a point of contact and then what do I do? Walk into their office and say, 'Do you want to go to the conference with me?' I don't know where to start so I didn't do it." A high school teacher shared a similar uncertainty about finding an initial contact. She said that she would like to have more collaboration with the college, particularly by having someone visit her CRS courses. However, she was unsure about whom to contact at the college to make these visits happen.

Misalignment of curricula and standards. A third key component in getting started with a partnership is developing a common understanding of objectives and goals. One challenge to this under the FCCRI was the misalignment of curricula and standards due to separate operating procedures. As noted previously, FLDOE intended for CRS courses to align with state college developmental education courses, but that did not seem to happen in practice. As one college instructor described, "their courses are supposed to mimic ours, but they don't. We're not sure if they are using the state competencies." An administrator in a district that did bring together secondary and postsecondary educators to discuss college readiness noted that "it was

enlightening because what they were teaching is not what students are being tested on for college readiness. That was a really powerful message – this is what we are supposed to teach, but what colleges are testing is not the same thing. Alignment is really important."

One important difference between CRS and developmental education courses is that all the college courses are highly standardized within each college and have been developed over many years. We asked one high school teacher who is also an adjunct how teaching at the college is different from teaching at the high school. He responded that the primary difference is that "everything [at the college] is prepared. [At the high school] you have to prepare and deliver…. You're responsible for everything from beginning to end." Without any funding or guidance from the state, the lack of uniform CRS course implementation is not surprising.

Another concern was that developmental education courses tend to focus on helping students master basic skills, whereas the CRS courses tried to cover a much broader range of topics, typically at a more advanced level. One college English instructor explained, "when I have taught the English developmental education courses, one of the biggest things that is needed is basic sentence structure. A number of students can't put together a paragraph and they don't know punctuation." In math, one college instructor noted that the high school math curriculum "is often too packed and tries to do too much. It's better to master something and move on to the next level. Numeracy preparation varies tremendously [in the developmental math courses]. We have students that don't know their multiplication tables. They have no number sense." Another developmental math instructor suggested that high school "take the calculator away from them [the students]. Students have to have basic skills without having a calculator. I wish they would work on those skills."

Courses taken by more advanced students tend to be better aligned with college curricula. For dual enrollment, which can result in college credit, the course objectives and skills being developed are almost by definition aligned between high schools and colleges. Yet even in schools where dual enrollment courses are taught on the high school campus and there is extensive coordination with the college, the colleges tend to remain uninvolved in the CRS courses. The greater coordination around dual enrollment is likely because Florida has strict requirements on articulation agreements between high schools and colleges, which are reviewed annually and reported to the State Board of Education if they are found to be non-compliant (FLDOE, 2014). State statues require that high school dual enrollment teachers provide the department chair at the college with a copy of the course syllabus. The department chair must then ensure that the content of the syllabus meets the same standards required for college-level courses. Under the FCCRI, districts were held responsible for developing CRS courses and there were no requirements for working with state colleges on the syllabus or course content.

Lack of integration of non-academic skills needed for college readiness. Another challenge in developing a common understanding of objectives and goals was due to misperceptions between K-12 and postsecondary educators about the non-academic skills needed for college success. One English instructor explained, “[incoming students] really don’t understand college. We teach more than just reading. Our courses help prepare them for college. We teach skills like how to study, note-taking strategies, selective highlighting – things like that they can carry on to their content courses that they are very unfamiliar with.”

Although many interviewed teachers wished they could dedicate more time to non-academic college readiness skills, they believed there was simply not enough time available because of the strong emphasis on academic content and PERT testing in the CRS courses. The

state standards for the CRS courses did not specifically mention non-academic goals, and often teachers were not expected to cover this kind of content. In addition, some teachers suggested that the development of non-academic skills overlaps with other parts of the high school experience, so less time needs to be spent on this goal in the CRS courses.

Challenges to Phase 2 – Partnership Development

Insufficient time and competing demands. A key component during the second phase of partnership development was aligning member intentions, which was challenging under the FCCRI due to insufficient time and competing demands. One college administrator noted there were already too many demands on high school teachers, as they weren't given enough to time to commit to their courses, handle administrative responsibilities, and deal with difficulties in working with vulnerable student populations. When an English CRS teacher was asked whether she would like to participate in more professional development around college readiness, she replied, "I really don't know because I feel like I have so much I'm supposed to be doing and I'm trying to do everything. I get very frustrated. Sometimes I feel like I'm just treading water trying to stay afloat." Lack of time also made it difficult for teachers to adopt some of the more innovative instructional approaches used in the colleges. As one college instructor noted, "there are some fantastic high school teachers, but some are intimidated by technology today. A lot of it is that they don't even know what is out there; they don't have time to research new stuff. It does take a lot of work, it's a time factor."

Both secondary and postsecondary educators also faced competing demands from other state policies during the time that CRS courses were first mandated. The colleges were focusing on implementing changes under new legislation that required redesigning developmental education programs to offer new instructional modalities such as modularized or compressed

courses. The high schools were focusing on the transition to the new Florida state standards, which were modified from the Common Core State Standards. An interviewee from the college student services department found it challenging to work on alignment of initiatives when there were constant changes. She explained, “if we have moving targets, then it is hard to solidify relationships and work on common ground.”

Difficulty getting buy-in. Another key component in the second stage of partnership is establishing buy-in among members, which was a challenge under the FCCRI. For example, even though some colleges worked with districts or high schools to provide curricular materials, teachers did not always use these materials. The curricular alignment issues described for the first stage may have hindered acceptance among teachers.

In one large county, the college provided a binder of instructional resources for teachers in feeder high schools when CRS courses were introduced. Later, the district created its own pacing guide, which all teachers in the district were supposed to use for their CRS courses. A college instructor who helped create the original materials indicated, “some schools continued to use the materials in the binders to supplement their courses, but the district pacing guide is supposed to take priority.” A college administrator also said she noticed differences among high schools in how receptive they were to working with the state college. She explained, “the ones that understand the importance of being in college and what it can do to students are more likely to be “open arms” in working with us…. The difference is buy-in from principals and guidance counselors and what their dynamic is.”

Challenges communicating to all involved in the partnership. A third key component during the partnership development phase is maintaining continued communication by ensuring that all actors who would benefit from the partnership activities have access to them and receive

the information they need. During the introduction of the FCCRI, it was particularly challenging to involve the teachers on the frontlines of implementing the CRS courses. One college instructor said his department communicated only with the district-level staff and had no direct contact with teachers. He noted, “It’s very strange that the relationship we have is mostly at the higher level with people at the district office and not at individual schools….We don’t communicate with the instructors. There is a hierarchy of the flow of information that seems a little weird.” Another CRS math teacher explained, “I think the state probably knows what they are doing [with the CRS course], but something is being lost here at ground level. By the time it gets down to us, it is a skeleton, a shadow of what it’s supposed to be.” This suggest some individuals may not be well-positioned within social networks to access organizational capital.

Lack of advocates for financial and infrastructure resources. A third key component during partnership development is identifying a “champion” who advocates for the partnership, and can help to identify and secure the resources needed. Although the availability of resources was a challenge for all partnership phases, it was particularly apparent as groups tried to transition from partnership development to incorporation. Several interviewees provided examples of how they had obtained initial funding for partnership activities but were no longer able to continue the activities once that funding ran out.

Limitations on computer lab space also presented obstacles. One college math instructor described having to move some of the developmental education courses to another building because there were not enough computers for the students to complete the online component of the course. She explained, “It’s not ideal, but we’ve managed to do it. I think that would be an even bigger problem for high schools to have a computer lab for everyone to meet in.” Several CRS teachers also mentioned that they had difficulty getting access to computer labs for

assignments in their CRS courses because the labs were almost always being used for other purposes. Perhaps a stronger "champion" for the FCCRI could have helped teachers gain greater priority among use of computer labs.

Challenges to Phase 3 – Incorporating the Partnership

Differences in institutional decision making and work structures. One of the key components when incorporating the partnership is aligning processes to work as a team. This alignment was a challenge under the FCCRI due to differences in institutional decision making and work structures across sectors. As mentioned earlier, one partnership had high school teachers work with college faculty to observe each other's classes and discuss instructional techniques. However, only a limited number of the practices could be incorporated across sectors due to disparate work structures. One instructor who participated in the program explained, "the big disconnect is the way we operate as a faculty here and they operate as a faculty there. They [the high school faculty] have very rigid guidelines. We have to give this number of tests, we have to assess this way. The disconnect there is more than on the content itself." Another instructor reiterated this concern by saying, "high school teachers have very little freedom about what they do in the classroom. Everything is regulated. They don't have much freedom beyond curriculum to innovate. Teachers are swamped with paperwork and have very little room to do things that are creative. They need freedom to be able to impart the curriculum and do stuff that is not just administrative."

Another college instructor who participated in the teacher-instructor partnership program said it was "a big a-ha moment" for everyone as they realized differences in operating procedures between high schools and colleges. First, college instructors saw that high school teachers have more interruptions and often have difficulty maintaining control of their class.

Second, the instructors found that teachers had to follow their pacing guides even if many students had not learned the material, which the instructors found "very disturbing." Third, the instructors thought the number of competencies covered in the high school math courses was "ridiculous," as the college instructors covered a smaller amount of material at a deeper level.

The teachers in the program also identified several other discrepancies between their courses and those at the college. The teachers were surprised to see that most of the material being taught in the college developmental education courses was only at the grade 10 level. They couldn't understand why the college was teaching this if students had already been exposed to more advanced topics like trigonometry or precalculus, which they mistakenly inferred indicated mastery of grade 10 curriculum. The experience also helped teachers identify gaps in the curriculum used in their courses and the district pacing guide.

Furthermore, differences in institutional decision making may influence the extent to which partnership activities are adopted. A college instructor described several collaborative activities that his campus engaged in around K-12 to postsecondary curriculum alignment. Yet there were differences in the types of activities undertaken among the different campuses within the college system. He noted, "all of the campuses have their own leadership and do their own things. They are all supposed to be doing similar outreach activities with their feeder high schools, but [our campus] is the most active campus in this area."

Difficulty sustaining funding. Another key component to incorporating partnerships is sustaining efforts over time, which is often difficult due to funding constraints. Although initial efforts may be funded by outside sources, members will likely need to contribute their own resources if they want to integrate the activities into their standard operating procedures. In one large district, funding was provided by an external agency to provide college and career coaches

to local high schools. Under a smaller follow-up grant the schools had to take on more of the costs themselves, and many could not maintain the same level of services.

One of the college hosted an annual PERT test preparation “boot camp” for high school students, but an instructor said the format was not scalable because it was too expensive. The costs incurred by the colleges included providing buses for students to get from the high school to the college and serving lunch to participants. The program was initially offered at no cost because the college anticipated that it would be difficult to recruit students to sign up, particularly if students had to pay to participate. Over time the college had to charge students a nominal fee to sustain operations.

Unfeasible to scale-up activities beyond a certain size. Another challenge to sustaining efforts was that it is often difficult to scale up activities beyond a certain size. In the college campus that was most active in partnership activities around K-12 to postsecondary curriculum alignment, most college students came from six public high schools which engaged in partnership activities. By contrast, other campuses within the same college had as many as 20 feeder high schools. An instructor at the smaller campus noted that it would probably not be feasible to scale up the same activities among a group of schools that large because it is difficult to organize and engage so many actors.

Discussions and Implications

This paper has shown that forming partnerships between the secondary and postsecondary education sectors is a complex undertaking, even when a state like Florida with a tightly coupled education system implements a statewide policy to improve college readiness. In the case of the FCCRI, we found that many educators had little to no cross-sector collaboration, even though they believed this would improve college readiness. Networks also tended to be

fragmented based on individuals' roles, with teachers on the frontline of teaching CRS courses reporting the least involvement in cross-sector collaboration. This reflects the complicated nature of aligning expectations and instruction. While alignment is often seen as shifting two lines so that they are parallel, the process is appreciably more complex. Organizations are multidimensional and a shift in one direction may result in misalignment in another direction.

The challenges to starting, developing, and incorporating partnerships may be better understood by applying a conceptual framework that explains how social capital and social ties combine together with organizational capital to form "partnership capital." One of the reasons why it was often challenging to even get started with partnership efforts under the FCCRI was due to difficulties establishing roles and responsibilities for members, including identifying a leader to initiate the partnership. This also relates back to the conceptual framework in the development of social capital about the importance of finding a "champion" who advocates for the partnership. Within education reforms, leaders play a critical role in providing supportive norms, and helping educators to develop social ties to gain access to the resources and expertise needed for implementation (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Penuel et al., 2009). This may have been particularly challenging for an initiative like the FCCRI that brings together secondary and postsecondary educators, as there may have been perceptions of inequality of status among members. Traditionally high schools have been blamed for not adequately preparing students for college, while colleges tend to act like they know best (e.g. Grubb & Oakes, 2007; Rosenbaum & Becker, 2011). This sentiment was echoed in the responses from our site visits with comments about teachers declining to use curricular materials, lacking time to participate in professional development, and failing to implement teaching innovations used by state colleges.

A second theme was educators had difficultly "crafting coherence" with other external demands. High school incentives tend to be driven by accountability systems based on test scores (which usually do not cover topics beyond grade 10) and high school graduation rates. Thus, high schools continued to focus on these outcomes, while devoting less attention to students who were on-track to graduate but needed additional support to become college-ready. This led to a lack of true alignment of the FCCRI with other mandates that were independently developed and enforced. As noted by Cohen and Spillane (1992, p.42), even reform efforts that are intended to improve consistency may "only add several new and unrelated layers of educational and instructional refinements on top of many old and inconsistent layers."

A third theme had to do with difficulty in developing a common understanding of objectives and goals. The site visits revealed a misalignment of curricula and standards between CRS courses and developmental education courses. Typically, social networks provide resources and expertise that may include curriculum, teaching strategies, and technical skills (Penuel et al., 2009). However, in the case of the FCCRI there were few social ties between high school teachers and college instructors, so those responsible for developing the CRS courses didn't have access to the resources they needed to align the courses with the intended goals.

Directions for Future Research

One broad takeaway from our study is that state and local educational institutions may not be doing enough to support the development of social ties across sectors on the issue of college readiness. Mario Small's (2009) work emphasizes the importance of organizational context in both the development and maintenance of social networks. The mechanisms through which organizations contribute is by providing actors who can help connect people to each other, and by integrating institutional practices that provide multiple opportunities for frequent and

focused interactions. Future research could explore these processes in the context of dual enrollment, which has historically been subject to much greater alignment between K-12 and higher education. For example, who provides referrals to put staff from high schools in contact with those from the colleges? How are repositories created for storing and sharing information about dual enrollment policies and curricular issues? Learning more about how these processes work in a well-functioning context could provide lessons learned for burgeoning partnerships around college readiness. This has important equity implications for ensuring that all students receive the academic preparation they need to succeed college, not just those who are high-achieving.

Additionally, while this study has examined the role of collaboration in supporting the development of high school CRS courses, future research could further explore the two-way flow of benefits from social networks. Specifically, how does partnership capital from college readiness reforms also inform postsecondary improvement? For example, Title I schools may have developed strategies for supporting disadvantaged students that could inform the teaching expertise of college faculty. Research by those such as Penuel and colleagues (2009) suggests that educators' perceptions of the value of resources and expertise from their interactions is a key determinant of the strength of social networks; therefore, it is important to understand the benefits of college-readiness collaborations to both K-12 and postsecondary educators. **Policy Implications**

This study may have practical implications for those seeking to work across sectors to improve college readiness. At the state level, it is unrealistic to expect cohesive partnerships to form on their own when an initiative like the FCCRI is introduced. There are simply too many potential challenges to overcome at each phase of the partnership process. Policymakers and

state departments of education can help by clearly identifying priorities, providing human and financial resources to support partnerships, and aligning accountability systems to prioritize desired outcomes. The state also might facilitate cooperation by providing information about relevant local contacts and delegating responsibility for initiating partnerships. Educators at the local level should also consider that state support alone is not sufficient to promote collaboration. Colleges, districts, and schools need to provide leadership, generate buy-in among constituents, and make resources available to satisfy these additive if not competing requirements. They must also facilitate opportunities for collaboration to help educators develop the social ties needed to gain access to the resources and expertise needed for successful implementation.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1

Total Number of Site Visit Interview Participants, by Site Type

Type of site	Role	Participants (#)
High school	Math CRS teacher	11
(N=38 participants)	English CRS teacher	13
	Guidance counselor	12
	Other high school staff	2
District office	Curriculum specialist/ instructional staff	5
(N=7 participants)	Other district staff	2
State college	Developmental math instructor or chair	10
(N=40 participants)	Developmental English instructor or chair	10
	Academic advising	7
	Student services	8
	Other college staff	5
	Total	85

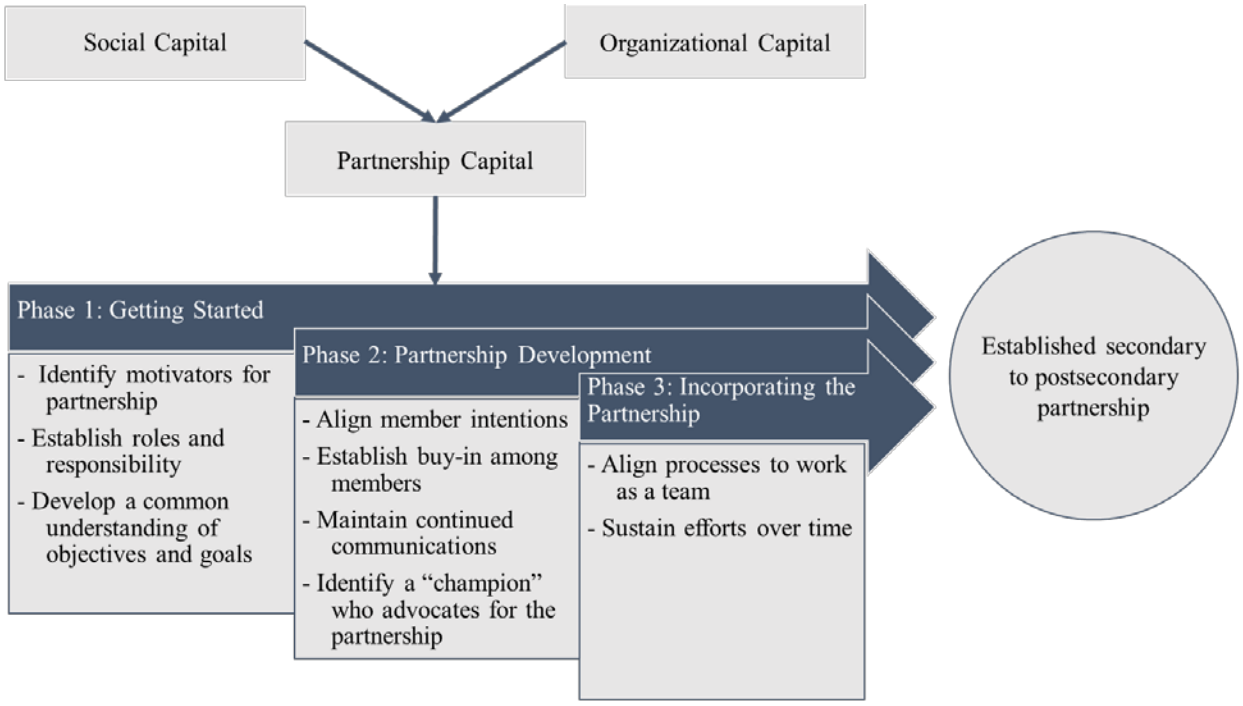
Table 2

Number and Percent of Respondents at Each Partnership Phase, by Role

	No collaborative Activities (N) (%)	Phase 1 (N) (%)	Phase 2 (N) (%)	Phase 3 (N) (%)	Total (N) (%)
High school teacher	19	5	0	0	24
	79%	21%	0%	0%	100%
District staff	3	0	2	2	7
	43%	0%	29%	29%	100%
College instructor	6	0	10	4	20
	30%	0%	50%	20%	100%
	28	5	12	6	51
Total	55%	10%	24%	12%	100%

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Establishing Secondary to Postsecondary Partnerships



Source: Author's illustration based on Amey, Eddy, and Campbell's (2010) partnership model.

Figure 2

Summary of Challenges Corresponding to Key Components During Each Partnership Phase

Phase 1: Getting Started

Key Components	Challenges
- Identify motivators for partnership →	- Accountability system did not incentivize college readiness
- Establish roles and responsibility →	- Lack of leadership
- Develop a common understanding of objectives and goals →	- Misalignment of curricula and standards - Lack of integration of non-academic skills needed for college readiness

Phase 2: Partnership Development

Key Components	Challenges
- Align member intentions →	- Insufficient time and competing demands
- Establish buy-in among members →	- Difficulty getting buy-in
- Maintain continued communications →	- Challenges communicating to all involved in the partnership
- Identify a "champion" who advocates for the partnership →	- Lack of advocates for financial and infrastructure resources

Phase 3: Incorporating the Partnership

Key Components	Challenges
- Align processes to work as a team →	- Differences in institutional decision making and work structures
- Sustain efforts over time →	- Difficulty sustaining funding - Unfeasible to scale-up activities beyond a certain size