Launching a Multi-Year Research-Practice Collaborative:

Lessons Learned from Year One

A Working Paper by Katherine Sadowski, Jennifer Worden, and Sara Bartolino Krachman

v1.0 December 2015

transforming
education

Equipping students with the mindsets, essential skills,
and habits they need to succeed

Launching a Multi-Year Research-Practice Collaborative:

Lessons Learned from Year One

A Working Paper by Katherine Sadowski, Jennifer Worden, and Sara Bartolino Krachman

v1.0 December 2015

transforming
education

24 School Street | 3rd Floor | Boston, MA 02108
617.378.3900
www.transformingeducation.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and MIT, school leaders, educators, and other colleagues for their partnership in the Boston Charter Research Collaborative. In addition, we thank the Transforming Education National Advisory Board: Jonas Bertling, Clancy Blair, Marc Brackett, Carol Dweck, Camille Farrington, John Gabrieli, Hunter Gehlbach, Paul Goren, Damon Jones, Laura Keane, Matthew Kraft, Patrick Kyllonen, Rick Miller, Terrie Moffitt, Paul Reville, Greg Walton, Roger Weissberg, Martin West, Daniel Willingham, and David Yeager for their friendship and support overall and their extensive contributions to our collective knowledge about the skills that affect student outcomes in school and beyond.

We also gratefully acknowledge the colleagues who reviewed early drafts of this report and provided thoughtful and comprehensive feedback, which informed and improved the final product. We appreciate the members of the Transforming Education team whose input strengthened the paper's clarity and structure. Finally, we thank the Walton Family Foundation for their support of the Boston Charter Research Collaborative.

Note that the views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the Walton Family Foundation or the members of our National Advisory Board; any errors in fact and interpretation are our own.

ABOUT OUR WORKING PAPERS

Transforming Education is pleased to issue a series of working papers that are meant to distill information of value to educators, policymakers, and others in the field of Mindsets, Essential Skills, & Habits (MESH) in a form that can be readily updated as knowledge continues to emerge and be refined. Our working papers summarize the current state of knowledge and evidence about which skills matter for success in school, college, career, and life; how we can responsibly measure and build those skills; and which supports are needed for districts and schools to implement best practices. Because the MESH field is constantly evolving, we expect to revise our working papers periodically. Moreover, we hope educators, researchers, and policymakers will share additional research and effective practices related to MESH skill development.

If you have feedback on *Launching a Multi-Year Research-Practice Collaborative: Lessons Learned from Year One* or want to share your own approach to incorporating MESH in your district or school, please e-mail press@transformingeducation.org.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Greater Boston is home to a set of charter schools that are among the most successful in the country in improving student academic skills as measured by state tests. These schools are committed to boosting student outcomes and continuously improving through innovation. Greater Boston is also home to research universities that are exploring how students' cognitive and non-cognitive skills contribute to their success in school and later in life, how best to measure those skills, and what school-based interventions are effective in building them. The Boston Charter Research Collaborative (BCRC) is a multi-year partnership among these high-performing charter networks, researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Transforming Education (TransformEd) that seeks to conduct rigorous in-school research on measures and interventions that target growth in cognitive and non-cognitive skills over time.

Together, researchers and practitioners within the BCRC are working over an initial three-year period to serve as:

(1) *a source of gold-standard evidence on scalable practices to improve student outcomes within and beyond school; and*

(2) *a model for similar partnerships between practitioners and researchers that efficiently address the education sector's most pressing evidentiary needs.*
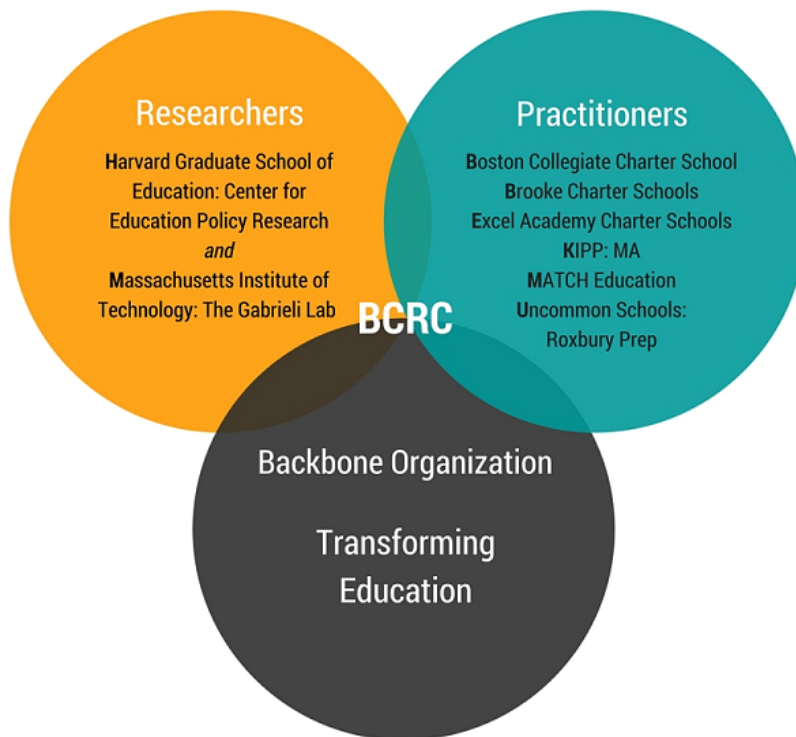
Collaborative members combine their expertise to conduct research and improve practice that supports growth in cognitive skills and in non-cognitive skills, which TransformEd refers to as the "mindsets, essential skills, and habits" (MESH) that contribute to student success in school, college, career, and life.

This paper is the first in a series that will share lessons learned from collaborative activities. We focus on the BCRC's first year and provide recommendations for laying a foundation for a successful collaboration between researchers and practitioners who want to work closely with each other to better understand and support growth and success for all students.

THE BCRC STRUCTURE

The BCRC is a unique partnership that brings together researchers across multiple universities and content areas to partner with local charter management organizations (CMOs) to develop innovative measures of student skills and test the effectiveness of school-based interventions that aim to improve student outcomes (see Figure 1). A research team at HGSE's Center for Education Policy Research led by BCRC Principal Investigator Martin West manages the overall project and is responsible for constructing a shared data warehouse to allow for rapid analysis and project evaluation. Researchers at MIT's Gabrieli Lab led by John Gabrieli focus on the development and implementation of measures and interventions targeting cognitive skills such as fluid reasoning, working memory, and processing speed. TransformEd contributes expertise on measures of non-cognitive competencies and works with the research team to adapt and implement non-cognitive measures and interventions pioneered by a national network of research collaborators.[1] Many of these measures and interventions have only been deployed in limited ways in school settings, so the active collaboration of participating CMOs is key to effective design and implementation.

Figure 1: The BCRC Structure

---

[1] TransformEd's National Advisory Board includes the following leaders of the psychology, MESH, and education policy fields: Jonas Bertling (ETS), Clancy Blair (NYU), Marc Brackett (Yale), Carol Dweck (Stanford), Camille Farrington (U of Chicago), Damon Jones (Penn State), John Gabrieli (MIT), Hunter Gehlbach (UC Santa Barbara), Paul Goren (Evanston/Skokie School District), Laura Keane (uAspire), Matt Kraft (Brown), Patrick Kyllonen (ETS), Rick Miller (CORE Districts), Terrie Moffitt (Duke), Paul Reville (Harvard), Greg Walton (Stanford), Martin West (Harvard), Roger Weissberg (CASEL), Daniel Willingham (UVA), and David Yeager (UT Austin).

transforming education

Another unique component of the collaborative is the presence of a distinct backbone organization dedicated to coordinating the work of the various collaborators involved in the BCRC. TransformEd brings expertise in translating research on cognitive and non-cognitive skills into actionable policy and experience providing technical assistance to schools and education systems on MESH measures and practices to facilitating the relationships and activities of the collaborative. TransformEd is charged with engaging charter leaders and teachers in the work of the collaborative, managing communication across collaborative members, coordinating collaborative logistics, and facilitating data collection and project implementation. TransformEd staff maintains close relationships with researchers and CMO staff, including CEOs, central office staff, and classroom teachers. The major aims of this backbone structure are to drive continued engagement among all parties, ensure that the research agenda and its implementation are mutually beneficial for participating researchers and schools, and to disseminate findings within and beyond the collaborative.

In addition to forging close working relationships between researchers and practitioners, the BCRC provides a unique opportunity for ongoing exchange of ideas between researchers investigating how the typically siloed domains of cognitive and non-cognitive skills impact student success. We all work together to develop a research agenda of mutual interest to be executed in a rapid-cycle fashion that allows us to refine or revise approaches based on emerging findings so that we can have maximum impact on as many students as possible as soon as we are confident of the benefit of a given intervention or practice.
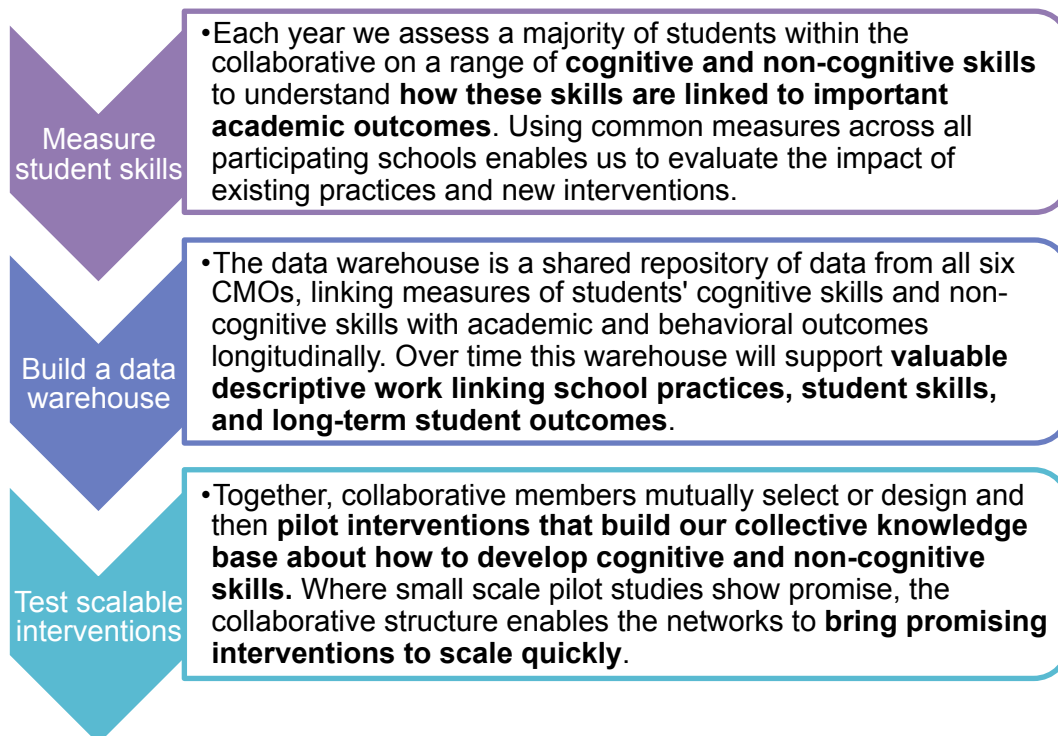
HOW AND WHY WE COLLABORATE

Existing literature[2] on researcher-practitioner partnerships in education highlights a number of challenges faced by researchers and schools who seek to partner with each other to investigate school practices and student outcomes. Chief among them is the tendency for research to be unidirectional: researchers enter schools in order to conduct studies that are primarily of interest to the research community and may or may not take into account pressing problems of practice for those schools. Similarly, the research and publication process typically doesn't emphasize the importance of sharing results back in a timely or accessible manner with participating schools such that they could change practice in response to findings. Research can take months or even years to produce findings, but most schools are inclined to act now to impact student outcomes. Meanwhile, schools can't always execute interventions in ways that correspond to rigorous methodological requirements because of logistical limitations. Practitioners may not always place the same value on accumulating rigorous evidence when implementing new programs if doing so comes at the expense of reaching more students.

[2] See, for example: Coburn, C.E., Penuel, W.R., & Geil, K.E. (2013). Research-Practice Partnerships: A Strategy for Leveraging Research for Educational Improvement in School Districts. William T. Grant Foundation, New York, NY. Retrieved from: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/RPP/StructuringPartnership; Penuel, B. (2014). Building and Sustaining Research-Practice Partnerships. Albert Shanker Institute. Retrieved from: http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/building-and-sustaining-research-practice-partnerships; Teeters, L. (2015). Conceptualizing Research Practice Partnerships as Joint Work. National Center for Research in Policy and Practice. Retrieved from: http://ncrpp.org/blog/2015/conceptualizing-research-practice-partnerships-as-joint-work

Even in thoughtful long-term researcher-practitioner partnerships, where mutual goals are prioritized, challenges remain. Being responsive to both requirements of strong research design and the logistical realities of school operations can require ongoing negotiation and compromise or adaptations from both parties. Pacing is also often an issue: research universities often have important, but sometimes slow-moving, review processes and procedures before projects can begin, while schools—perhaps especially schools in the charter sector—are inclined to work quickly to implement changes that could benefit students as soon as approval has been granted, sometimes without hard evidence about the effectiveness of a particular intervention. Schools are also understandably eager to implement promising interventions with as many students as possible as quickly as possible, making randomized control trials designed to provide rigorous evidence on their causal impact less appealing. These different priorities and working styles present continuous obstacles for productive partnerships.

The BCRC collaborative structure is intended to address the most basic challenges to traditional research-practice partnerships. Collaborative members are supported in pursuing mutual goals and developing trust through a governance model that values roundtable decision making at every stage of the intervention development process, from idea generation to design, implementation, and follow-up. While all participating CMOs agree to administer common measures of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and to create a warehouse linking that data to school-generated academic, behavioral, and administrative information, CMO leaders have the autonomy to choose which specific projects to participate in at what scale, as well as the extent to which they want to be engaged in the development of interventions that may be rolled out on a school-by-school or collaborative-wide basis (see Figure 2). The multi-year nature of the collaborative allows time to build relationships, set a joint agenda, and refine ideas that show promise for improving student outcomes.

Figure 2: The BCRC's Three Goals

Measure student skills
- Each year we assess a majority of students within the collaborative on a range of **cognitive and non-cognitive skills** to understand **how these skills are linked to important academic outcomes**. Using common measures across all participating schools enables us to evaluate the impact of existing practices and new interventions.

Build a data warehouse
- The data warehouse is a shared repository of data from all six CMOs, linking measures of students' cognitive skills and non-cognitive skills with academic and behavioral outcomes longitudinally. Over time this warehouse will support **valuable descriptive work linking school practices, student skills, and long-term student outcomes**.

Test scalable interventions
- Together, collaborative members mutually select or design and then **pilot interventions that build our collective knowledge base about how to develop cognitive and non-cognitive skills.** Where small scale pilot studies show promise, the collaborative structure enables the networks to **bring promising interventions to scale quickly**.

Reporting results in ways that are meaningful and actionable for schools is a central objective for all participants engaged in the collaborative. In traditional research, rarely are the investigators in a position to scale up an intervention immediately if initial results indicate a positive effect. In a research collaborative, researchers and schools are well-positioned to conduct small studies that they can scale if initial results are promising. The collaborative offers enormous benefits to both researchers and schools: greater statistical power when testing the effects of interventions, and greater potential to impact large numbers of students through existing relationships that pave the way to bring interventions to several different schools and networks simultaneously and to scale them when evidence warrants.

The first year of working together in the BCRC both demonstrated the potential of this model for collaboration and revealed challenges that require time and thoughtful planning in order for that potential to be achieved.

YEAR ONE: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The collaborative enjoyed several successes during its first year: we laid the foundation for strong relationships with schools, gathered data on students' MESH skills across all six participating charter networks, implemented two small-scale interventions across five charter networks, and made headway in defining a collective research agenda. We were fortunate to be able to hit the ground running at the beginning of the school year due to strong buy-in among collaborators. The Leadership Council, the governing structure consisting of CMO leaders, key school-level staff, and researchers, met three times across the academic year to discuss collaborative goals, preliminary results, and long term plans.

Despite these initial successes, it also became clear that it takes substantial time to create the enabling conditions for productive collaborative work. It takes time to build project infrastructure and relationships, articulate common problems of practice, and identify the key people at each organization who will be in charge of leading the implementation of collaborative projects at the network and school level. The following sections develop these observations and illustrate additional lessons learned from our first year.

RECOMMENDATION #1: PLAN FOR A WARM UP YEAR

Several enabling conditions need to be in place in order for collaborative work to be successful, many of which may take several months to develop. While it can be tempting to dive immediately into implementation mode once the initial structures are in place, planning for substantial lead time will enable projects to launch more quickly and run more smoothly across the life of the project. The complex supports required span interpersonal relationships, founding documents and procedures, and baseline data collection.

Build Strong Relationships: Collaboration requires thoughtful exchanges among stakeholders. Strong relationships among participants—network staff, researchers, and facilitators alike—are essential to ensuring that the collaborative meets the most pressing research needs of the school. Early efforts to build relationships at the school level are a prerequisite for understanding school culture and identifying the relevant point people on the ground. Making relationship building a

priority early on also helps to build buy-in among the various teachers and other staff members who will be instrumental in carrying out the work within classrooms and offering input at the project design and implementation stages of collaboration.

Tips:

- Meet face-to-face whenever possible, preferably at school campuses; at a minimum, have the backbone organization (and if possible the researchers) conduct visits to each school at least once in the first year.

- When conducting outreach to schools, seek out teachers and staff from many different departments to surface diverse problems of practice that are common across networks.

- Keep school staff up-to-date on project progress and outcomes in order to maintain momentum and showcase the impact of their contributions to the research.

Get Paperwork in Order: Both research institutions and public schools are subject to strict scrutiny when it comes to human subjects research and student data privacy. It is necessary to ensure the proper agreements are in place to uphold legal and ethical requirements on both sides. In this case, all parties were required to review and sign a statement of work and a data use agreement (DUA) that was circulated to each network, TransformEd, and the research institutions. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at both Harvard and MIT had to approve the collaborative research protocol and supporting documentation. Given the number of details that needed to be worked out in sequence and the number of collaborators involved, this took our collaborative a full year to put in place.

Tips:

- Prepare IRB research protocols as soon as possible, and build in several weeks of lead-time for revisions and final approval.

- If additional collaborators or staff are added to research projects, clarify the required administrative procedures. Does this person need to be added to the IRB protocol? Get background checked? Sign a statement of work?

- Determine additional documentation needed prior to carrying out projects at the school level. For example, do parents need to provide opt-in or opt-out consent for their children's participation in the research? Will the consent letters need to be translated into multiple languages? How will student data be shared across parties?

Collect Data to Inform Decisions: Data can function as a common language between researchers and practitioners: it illuminates areas for focused attention and identifies problems that both researchers and educators can tackle by combining their unique expertise. Both the CMOs and the researchers frequently expressed the need for data in order to decide which hypotheses to test through interventions—a stumbling block during the first year was a lack of

data to inform which interventions to pursue. As the CMOs all use various data systems and employ diverse data collection practices, acquiring and standardizing data across the networks requires special technical skill and significant lead-time.

Tips:

- Identify the right school-level contact for data early. Some schools have full-time data coordinators, while others may distribute the responsibility across staff on a part-time basis.

- Clarify the data to be collected and procedures for data collection early in a DUA; assume that fully executed DUAs will require time and multiple rounds of iteration before data can be collected.

- If working across various CMOs, school support organizations, or districts, prepare for the possibility that different data systems and field names may require substantial data cleaning and organization.

- Start building the data warehouse 6-12 months before planning to launch any interventions so that study design can be informed by baseline data.

- Ask data coordinators about trends they've been investigating in their own data. What questions do they want help answering?

RECOMMENDATION #2: BUILD STRUCTURES AND CONDITIONS THAT SUPPORT SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

A central challenge of collaborative work is that all participants must take on new roles and responsibilities while learning the best ways to work together. It is unsurprising that researchers and practitioners often have different goals and different work styles. As a general rule, CMOs move fast—they implement new strategies to improve teacher practice and student performance immediately. They deal with uncertainty and act on instincts every day. Researchers, by comparison, tend to move more deliberately—they want to ensure a rigorous research design, even if getting reliable results takes years. They want to be able to control for as many variables as they can. Year One surfaced multiple strategies for aligning these two very different approaches.

Identify Key Contacts for Each Project, At Every Level: In an effort to preserve school autonomy, the collaborative did not specify who on each CMO staff would be appointed to carry out the various activities pursued during the partnership. The CEOs of the charter networks attended quarterly Leadership Council meetings to offer high-level thought leadership and make decisions about which projects the collaborative should explore. Key contacts at the network level arose organically to address myriad implementation needs on the ground, such as student survey administration, network data collection, and intervention planning. While it is paramount to give school partners the flexibility to appoint the appropriate contacts at their schools, it is still important to clarify at the outset what types of projects the collaborative seeks to carry out at the schools in order to identify who should be decision maker, site coordinator, and implementer on the ground within each CMO.

Tips:

- Communicate with each CMO leader early on about anticipated staffing needs to support various projects at the network and school level. Will there be one point of contact at each network or several, depending on the project?

- When possible, recruit CMO staff members that have decision-making authority and an interest in research. In our experience, the most effective individuals in a site coordinator role also demonstrated strong data skills and the ability to gain buy-in from the CMO's CEO, school leaders, and educators alike.

- Identify who will be the lead researcher for each research project and what staff will be required to support activities such as data collection, data analysis, and reporting results back to the schools. Determine which research staff will interact directly with school staff and how.

Build a Strong Backbone: A strong collaborative backbone organization with knowledge of both research and educational practice is essential for making direct connections between collaborative participants and ensuring that needs on both sides are met. Researchers often need support around practical considerations for research design such as understanding school schedules and creating implementation guides for school staff. Schools need details about a research project well in advance of implementation so they can make a decision about whether or not to participate, plan student schedules accordingly, and enlist the appropriate staff to carry out the project on the ground. A strong backbone organization ensures that the proposed research design aligns with existing school structures and that all the necessary considerations for effective implementations are addressed.

Tips:

- Recruit individuals or organizations that have a breadth of important skills necessary for collaboration. Backbone organizations should have excellent negotiation and communication skills and familiarity with both research and practice.

- The backbone organization staff must balance assertiveness with humility: they should meet the different players where they work to get a feel for culture and specifics of each environment, ask questions to gain understanding, and routinely acknowledge the organizational context that influences the perspectives of diverse participants in the collaborative.

- A backbone organization should be prepared to advocate equally for researchers' and practitioners' needs, consistently prioritizing and balancing both rigorous research design and effective implementation.

Be Nimble in Building and Evaluating Collaboration Structures: The complexity of collaboration with so many diverse partners and activities means that participants need to be flexible and willing to adapt to substantial changes from the initial vision. The BCRC's initial "project working circles" assembled groups of educators from across the CMOs to brainstorm around specific problems of practice that could be addressed by targeted interventions. While working circles were an effective relationship-building tool, the most productive brainstorming often came from one-on-one meetings with staff at school sites in which conversations centered on student data and how we may be able to link new information to student outcomes. In retrospect, we included classroom teachers too early without enough information about what those teachers were in a position to decide on behalf of their respective networks.

Tips:

- Clarify the types of projects the collaborative will pursue and identify the roles and responsibilities involved for each project at each organization. What decisions need to be made? Who is best positioned and empowered to make those decisions on behalf of each CMO?

- Explore which meetings will be necessary to push collaborative work forward. For example, who will be a part of the Leadership Council and how often will they meet? How and how often will different CMOs communicate with each other? When does it make sense to bring practitioners and researchers into conversation with each other versus having the backbone organization bridge those groups?

- Experiment with different forms of communication to achieve efficient collaboration for all parties involved. Do certain collaborators prefer emails or phone calls? Weekly or monthly updates? Lots of information at once or more frequent, shorter updates?

RECOMMENDATION #3: FOCUS ON MUTUAL GOALS

Ultimately, despite disparate working styles and areas of focus, researchers and practitioners within the collaborative all have the same end goal: to improve outcomes for students. Their approaches may differ, but conversations between the two sides have underlined important ways in which researchers and practitioners can collaborate to meet individual and shared aims. This is particularly true when randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are desirable; schools are often willing to participate in RCTs, but it's important to design them carefully so that schools reap benefits from the additional logistical burden.

Select Valued Control Conditions: While testing whether or not an intervention improves student outcomes, such as a mindfulness program for middle school students, it is essential to provide a meaningful educational alternative for the classes assigned to the control condition. While added homework time may appeal to school leaders in some cases, the collaborative also explored more involved options such as art, music, physical activity, and learn-to-code programs. The selection of the control condition should be made in partnership: researchers should verify that potential outcomes from the control condition won't interfere with measurement of the

intervention outcomes, while school leaders should offer input as to what they consider valuable for students and possible to carry out.

Tips:

- Create time and space for school leaders to vocalize their programmatic goals to researchers. What specific skills do they want to focus on developing in their students this year? Are there ways to target these skills that won't interfere with the evaluation of the proposed intervention?

- Actively engage educators in the process of exploring control condition options. This may provide an opportunity for experienced school faculty to introduce new class material that couldn't previously be accommodated in the school schedule.

- If a meaningful control condition cannot be identified, consider using a research design that compares student outcomes year over year instead of randomizing students into an intervention and control condition.

Address Implementation as a Collaborative Process: Successful implementation of research projects in schools is not a responsibility that falls solely on school staff. Researchers have a stake in smooth implementation, even if they are traditionally more comfortable with designing data analysis plans rather than proctoring scripts. How and when student data are gathered directly impacts the validity of each study. There are several practical considerations that researchers must take into account when designing research projects for schools, including detailed logistical information such as student enrollments and existing schedules. School staff who are responsible for implementing interventions need to be informed of appropriate administration protocols that should be adapted from thoughtful and detailed research documents.

Tips:

- Create implementation timelines that are responsive to both researchers' and practitioners' needs. For example, if administering a student survey at the beginning of the school year, have researchers weigh in on their preferred window for capturing student responses, and have schools respond with what is feasible given beginning-of-the-year programming and enrollment churn.

- Engage a team of researchers and practitioners that can collaborate around detailed implementation questions for every study. If a student activity will be administered online, does the school have enough computers? How much time will it take them to complete the activity? Is there a plan to engage students who finish early?

- Determine which staff will be needed to carry out on the ground research. Do they need specific training? What data will they need to collect? What instructions will they need to provide students?

transforming education

Consider Multiple Audiences When Reporting Results: Reporting research results in traditional academic settings can sometimes take years, and the outcomes are not always shared outside of academic journals. One goal of researcher-practitioner partnerships is to communicate findings in a timely and accessible manner to participants at the school level. An additional goal of the BCRC is to communicate findings and lessons learned from practice in ways that are actionable for schools within and beyond the collaborative.

Tips:

- Engage multiple perspectives in the reporting and dissemination process. While researchers are practiced at writing for academic journals and conferences, they may need some support in crafting practitioner-oriented materials or student and parent briefs.

- Consider the goals of the data that are being reported. One-page overviews can be disseminated to the whole school community, while data-heavy reports may be useful for network-level strategic planning.

- Beyond reporting just the outcomes of a classroom intervention, consider translating a successful research project into a step-by-step guide for how other educators may adopt a practice, or set of practices, in their classrooms.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In addition to facilitating the connections between the research institutions and charter networks within the collaborative, TransformEd is committed to working alongside our BCRC partners to produce practitioner-oriented guides that will help schools learn from and engage in cutting edge research on successful interventions to improve students' cognitive and non-cognitive skills that can be implemented at scale. At the end of Year One, we are enthusiastic about the promise the collaborative holds to directly impact both student outcomes on the ground and knowledge about how to effectively measure and build cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Here are our biggest takeaways:

COLLABORATION IS CHALLENGING BUT WORTHWHILE: By the end of the current project, we expect to be able to draw from multiple disciplines to inform our knowledge about which skills are foundational to student success, which measures of those skills are most valid and reliable, and which interventions to build those skills are most promising. The complexity of paperwork, logistics, and priorities grows with additional partners, but the benefit is that having so many different partners allows us to pilot measures and interventions in one or two schools and then rapidly scale to the other collaborative members as evidence of success emerges. Moreover, we are not only building new knowledge on measures and interventions, we're also learning how best to *implement* interventions in ways that are practical for schools.

THERE ARE STRUCTURES AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT NEED TO BE IN PLACE BEFORE COLLABORATION IS EFFECTIVE: Plan for a full year to build relationships, get agreements drafted and approved by all parties, and collect initial data to inform where to start**.** This time also allows for the many new roles and responsibilities to surface and be assigned effectively. Above

all, collaborative members must be flexible and willing to experiment with the best systems for communication and execution as projects develop and point people emerge. Doing this successfully includes building a strong backbone to engage all partners through open communication, negotiation, and skills and knowledge in both research and practice.

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE GOALS AREN'T MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE Everyone is interested and invested in the same end goal of helping students be as successful as possible in school, college, career, and beyond. Combining skill sets and perspectives to focus on real problems of practice and identifying rigorous methods for exploring strategies for improvement—that can be tested and scaled—hold immense promise for supporting educators in helping students build these skills. Both researchers and practitioners have a stake in smooth implementation: by aligning their efforts thoughtfully to accomplish mutual goals, researchers and practitioners can achieve outcomes that are meaningful for both research and schools.

REFERENCES

Coburn, C.E., Penuel, W.R., & Geil, K.E. (2013). Research-Practice Partnerships: A Strategy for Leveraging Research for Educational Improvement in School Districts. William T. Grant Foundation, New York, NY. Retrieved from:
http://wtgrantfoundation.org/RPP/StructuringPartnership

Penuel, B. (2014). Building and Sustaining Research-Practice Partnerships. Albert Shanker Institute. Retrieved from: http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/building-and-sustaining-research-practice-partnerships

Teeters, L. (2015). Conceptualizing Research Practice Partnerships as Joint Work. National Center for Research in Policy and Practice. Retrieved from:
http://ncrpp.org/blog/2015/conceptualizing-research-practice-partnerships-as-joint-work

ABOUT TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

Transforming Education (TransformEd) advances research, policy, and practice to support students in developing the intrapersonal and interpersonal "non-cognitive" competencies they need to succeed in college, career, and life. TransformEd has coined the term "MESH" (Mindsets, Essential Skills, & Habits) to encompass the subset of non-cognitive skills that research has linked most clearly to student success and that are, therefore, of the most immediate importance to educators and education policymakers.

TransformEd's work is grounded in compelling, longitudinal research on the importance of MESH competencies and informed by our on-the-ground experience as:

- **The Lead Strategic Advisor to the CORE Districts:**

   Six school districts (serving over one million students) that have chosen to integrate MESH competencies alongside academic outcomes in their federally approved accountability and continuous improvement system; and

- **The Backbone of the Boston Charter Research Collaborative (BCRC):**

   A collaboration between six high-performing charter management organizations and researchers at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to develop and pilot innovative ways to assess and develop students' cognitive and MESH skills.

Through our relationships with the leading researchers, policymakers, and education system leaders, TransformEd is uniquely positioned to translate lessons learned from our on-the-ground research and practice work into changes in education policy that will help ensure all students have opportunities to build the MESH skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

TransformEd operates as an autonomous program within the nonprofit National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL), which provides administrative and fiscal operational support.

Transforming Education's national advisory board brings together many of the leading experts focused on the mindsets, skills, and habits that help children succeed. These experts include Jonas Bertling (Educational Testing Service [ETS]), Clancy Blair (New York University), Marc Brackett (Yale University), Carol Dweck (Stanford University), Camille Farrington (University of Chicago), John Gabrieli (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Hunter Gehlbach (University of California, Santa Barbara), Paul Goren (Evanston/Skokie School District), Damon Jones (Pennsylvania State University), Laura Keane (uAspire), Matthew Kraft (Brown University), Patrick Kyllonen (ETS), Rick Miller (CORE Districts), Paul Reville (Harvard University), Greg Walton (Stanford University), Roger Weissberg (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL]), Marty West (Harvard University), Daniel Willingham (University of Virginia), and David Yeager (University of Texas, Austin).

Stay up to date on our latest work by subscribing to our newsletter, following us on Twitter and Facebook, or visiting our blog.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KATHERINE SADOWSKI

Katherine is a Project Manager at Transforming Education, where she coordinates in-school research projects aimed at understanding the impact of cognitive and non-cognitive skills on student outcomes. In this role, she facilitates the Boston Charter Research Collaborative. Prior to joining TransformEd, Katherine worked for a number of organizations that focused on education research and providing support to school districts across Massachusetts. Katherine currently serves as a member of the executive board for Young Education Professionals-Boston.

JENNIFER WORDEN

Jennifer Worden is the Director of Strategic Partnerships at Transforming Education, a nonprofit that translates the latest research on social-emotional skills into actionable policies and practices that support student success. Prior to joining TransformEd, Jennifer was Director of Outreach at Lectica, Inc., where she worked to increase awareness, engagement, and support for new assessment paradigms. She has taught courses in cognitive science, psychoeducational assessment, and research methodology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Jennifer has worked with practitioners at the district, school, and classroom level to improve instruction and student engagement.

SARA BARTOLINO KRACHMAN

Sara Bartolino Krachman serves as the Co-Founder & Executive Director of Transforming Education, a nonprofit that translates the latest research on social-emotional skills into actionable policies and practices that support student success. Prior to founding TransformEd, Sara was a Senior Associate within The Parthenon Group's Education Practice, where she worked with leading national foundations, large urban school districts, and state departments of education on strategic planning and implementation of systems change efforts.