Traversing School–Community Partnerships Utilizing Cross-Boundary Leadership

Bernita L. Krumm and Katherine Curry

Abstract

Utilizing the conceptual framework of cross-boundary leadership, researchers conducted this qualitative case study to gain a better understanding of district-level leaders' actions and attitudes that led to meaningful, sustainable partnerships between the school, families, and community. Administrators in two urban, two suburban, and two rural districts participated in individual interviews to discuss their experiences in and perspectives of each district's ongoing school–community partnership efforts. Administrators included a district-level and building-level administrator for each district type; researchers also interviewed a state department administrator who worked with several districts. Findings suggest that leaders with a strong emphasis on social justice with an intentional school- and districtwide emphasis on collaborative efforts encourage the shared influence and shared responsibility necessary to support student learning. Findings further suggest that a common vision provides a foundation and the motivation for collaborative efforts; partnership efforts became embedded in district culture.

Key Words: school–community partnerships, collaboration, cross-boundary leadership, school improvement, urban, suburban, rural, administrators

Introduction

Educational leaders recognize that community contexts, especially in urban districts, present extraordinary challenges for school effectiveness. For example,

increasing numbers of students living at or below the poverty level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), fragmented or nonexistent families, and cultural issues such as violence, substance abuse, and unsafe neighborhoods make the challenges of educating students more complex than in generations past (Panasonic Foundation, 2007; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2015). These out-of-school factors pervade in-school factors and hinder student performance, leaving the public school system with more responsibility than it has ever had or is now prepared to handle (Casto, 2016; Jean-Marie, Ruffin, & Burr, 2010). Legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) emphasized the fact that public schools cannot dismiss the potential of any student due to challenging factors outside of the school's control. In fact, public schools face a responsibility to ameliorate racial and human inequities and to prepare all students for the workforce and/or college. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation signed by President Obama in December 2015 provides states and districts with greater flexibility but also increased responsibility that "warrants the strong involvement of diverse communities and education experts" (Alliance for Education, n.d., para. 2). Our increasingly competitive global community reinforces the need for educational leaders and policymakers to find ways to support and enhance learning outcomes for all students. Community engagement is central to strengthening our educational system.

An understanding gaining widespread acceptance among educational leaders and policymakers is that schools cannot face these challenges in isolation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Casto, 2016; Jean-Marie et al., 2010; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2015). Rather, schools must reach beyond the walls of the school and engage the larger community to bring about reform that truly meets student needs (Casto, 2016; Rhim, 2011). Research suggests that developing family–school–community partnerships to build capacity and enhance student success is essential (Brown, Muirhead, Redding, & Witherspoon, 2011; Jeynes, 2005, 2011; Rhim, 2011), especially in high poverty communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). In fact, Warren (2005) explained that the school–community connection is "so close that the fates of urban schools and communities are linked" (p. 133). Specifically, reform efforts must advance civic capacity to generate sustainable partnerships through the formation of networks and strategic alliances to strengthen schools, families, and communities (Jean-Marie et al., 2010). Casto (2016) explained that the most commonly noted motivations for partnership efforts in the literature include "school reform and improvement, support for families, community development, and the creation of a sense of place for students" (p. 141). Also important to note is that, in partnership efforts for school reform, instead of employing reactionary reform or implementing several decentralized efforts

within a single building, schools must engage in comprehensive schoolwide reform that "works in tandem with communities to maximize their collective educational potential" (Jean-Marie et al., 2010, p. 15). Community involvement provides the benefits of advocacy for change, support for rigorous academics, and provision of external expertise (Brown et al., 2011; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Lewis & Henderson, 1997; Public Impact, 2007; Steiner & Brinson, 2011 as cited in Rhim, 2011).

Sustainable partnerships, however, are rare, with many initiatives starting and ending before partnership goals are fully accomplished. Blankstein and Noguera (2015) described this problem as "intellectually simple, but socially complex" (p. 2). According to Ishimaru (2014), "Deficit assumptions about students, families, and communities are often embedded within traditional forms of school partnerships" (p. 189). These deficit assumptions have negative consequences for nondominant, historically marginalized students in U.S. educational systems (Gutierrez, 2006). Perceptions of parents can also limit the development of sustainable partnerships. For example, low-income parents often have bad memories of their own experiences as students (Weissbourd, 2009, as cited in Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). These memories can lead to parents' suspicion of schools and limited experience or comfort with serving as advocates for their own children. Additionally, Blankstein, Hargreaves, and Fink (2010) found that, despite principals' best efforts to develop relationships, parents and students often remained unsatisfied with leadership efforts, leaving educational leaders to revert to complacency or denial as a "fallback position" (p. 189).

Despite the challenges associated with establishing effective partnerships, they remain an essential component of reform efforts (Steiner & Brinson, 2011). Blankstein and Noguera (2015) emphasized that school leaders must look beyond the walls of the school to create partnerships between schools and service organizations, such as social service providers and the health care community, to meet student needs. In sum, effective 21st century educational leaders must understand how to develop partnerships that will withstand the challenges of a multitude of obstacles including deficit thinking, competing priorities/understandings, lack of resources, and fragmented reform efforts that promise limited sustainability.

District Leadership and Partnership Development

Research emphasizes the importance of the role of the district-level leader for implementing sustainable partnerships. Sanders (2012) found that the district leader's reform knowledge, professional influence, and reform focus

explained the sustainability of efforts to develop school, family, and community partnerships. However, little is known about district-level leaders' actions and attitudes that truly enhance sustainable partnerships. This understanding is important because establishing social ties both within and outside of the school community is no longer just a "good idea" for educational leaders to consider. Effective partnerships are an essential component for meeting student needs and promoting meaningful reform.

Although many educational leaders understand the importance of partnership efforts, developing sustainable partnerships remains a challenge due to increasingly complex environments. Varying factors influence children's readiness for learning that should take place at school, and parent involvement in education differs across socioeconomic and ethnic lines (Graves & Wright, 2011; Hill & Craft, 2003; Yan & Lin, 2005), further complicating partnership efforts. Allen and Kinloch (2013) stressed the importance of addressing individual and community needs in partnership efforts; they suggested an emphasis on "partnerships" rather than "programs" to meet the needs of diverse communities. Epstein (2009) similarly emphasized the importance of partnerships to "help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life" (p. 9). Epstein's (2009, 2011) overlapping spheres of influence model emphasizes the importance of developing "family-like schools" and "school-like families" to coordinate efforts of schools and families to influence student success (2009, p. 11). However, her work typically addresses the type of programs needed to develop partnerships rather than the type of leadership characteristics necessary for program success.

Leadership to Traverse Boundaries

One approach commonly taught in leadership preparation programs is collective leadership, often used interchangeably with "shared leadership," "distributed leadership," and "democratic leadership" (Donaldson, 2006; Moller & Pankake, 2006). This type of leadership emphasizes interactions between individuals rather than a leader's specific actions (Harris, 2011). Spillane (2006) explained, "The distributed perspective defines it [leadership] as the interactions between people and their situation. These interactions, rather than any particular action, are critical in understanding leadership practice" (p. 144). This type of leadership resides in a communal relationship where participants are both "shapers of" and "shaped by" one another (Jean-Marie & Curry, 2011). Together, these leaders work to develop and share new ideas and to sustain practices that work to foster a climate of shared purpose, teamwork, and mutual respect (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006). From this perspective, the

role of leaders is to build capacity for reform by "leveraging the social ties of school members who interact at the boundaries of role groups" (Jean-Marie & Curry, 2011, p. 290).

Adams and Jean-Marie (2011) advanced the concept of cross-boundary leadership based on the idea that educational and social problems require collaborative approaches to leadership that cross structural boundaries and create a network of shared responsibility among the different spheres of influence in children's lives. According to Adams and Jean-Marie, cross-boundary leadership consists of two factors, structural components and normative conditions, that together lead to increased instructional capacity in a district (see Figure 1). The structural components of the model include the position of a community–school coordinator and the presence of a site team whose primary responsibilities include reaching across boundaries to form effective partnerships between community leaders and schools to work collaboratively within the educational process (Jean-Marie & Curry, 2011). Leaders on the site team represent the civic and business community, the local neighborhood, and school role groups. In cross-boundary leadership, the individuals who hold positions within the structural component of the model create processes to invite and allow teachers, parents, community members, and other constituents to support and advance shared educational goals.

Shared influence and responsibility, the normative conditions of cross-boundary leadership (see Figure 1), refer to an individual's "capacity to inspire, motivate, and guide leadership in others to reach desired goals" (Jean-Marie & Curry, 2011, p. 292). Shared influence and shared responsibility function as social supports for cooperative interactions (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011) that are supported by the structural features of the model. These social supports stand in contrast to more traditional formal control emerging from positional power or organizational rules/regulations (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011). Shared influence indicates influence that emerges from a common vision of "success" across an organization where stakeholders, both inside and outside of the walls of the school, are working toward common goals. Shared responsibility indicates a shared commitment to cooperative interactions that lead to the fulfillment of organizational goals to achieve student success. In sum, shared influence and shared responsibility, together, reflect cultural norms that support and facilitate consistent patterns of social interactions that lead to fulfillment of district instructional goals. Figure 1 illustrates the properties of cross-boundary leadership as developed by Adams and Jean-Marie (2011).

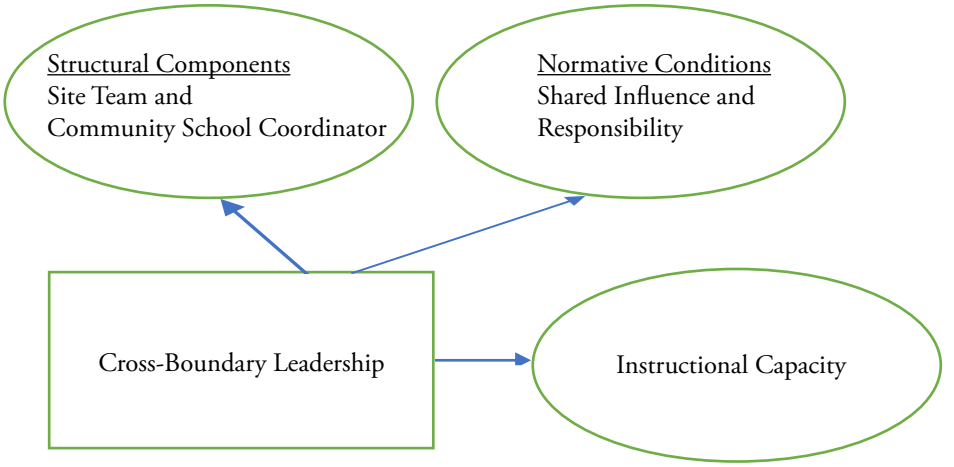

Figure 1. The structural and normative properties of cross-boundary leadership.

Research Design

Utilizing cross-boundary leadership—specifically, the normative conditions of shared influence and shared responsibility—as the conceptual framework, this study was designed to gain a better understanding of the actions and attitudes of district-level leaders that lead to meaningful, sustainable partnerships between school, families, and the community. The following questions provided direction for this inquiry:

1. How have these leaders utilized the concept of "shared influence" to sustain partnership efforts?
2. How have these leaders utilized "shared responsibility" to sustain partnership efforts?
3. How do other administrator actions and attitudes promote sustained school–community partnerships?

Methodology

Focusing this study on the process of sustaining partnerships to identify factors that support collaborative efforts, researchers chose a qualitative methodology using a collective case study design (Stake, 1995). Case study is a "particularly suitable design" for studying process (Merriam, 1998, p. 33). Descriptive case study is useful "in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted" (Merriam, 1988, p. 27). To allow for in-depth study, we relied on participant interviews, researcher field notes, and online and print documents.

Twelve participants representing six school districts participated in individual interviews to discuss their experiences in and perspectives of each district's ongoing school–community partnership efforts. All participants were completers of a graduate level course designed to prepare leaders to develop, promote, and sustain partnerships between the school, families, and community; each case comprised an administrator who was purposefully selected to participate in the current study because in a previous study (Curry & Krumm, 2016) he or she reported successful and continuing collaborative efforts. Districts in the study included two each of urban, suburban, and rural; administrators included a district-level and building-level administrator for each locale type. Additionally, a state department administrator who had also taken the course and who worked with several districts, including those in the study, was interviewed for purposes of data triangulation. Of the 20 respondents in the previous study, 13 qualified for and participated in this study. Important to note is that the focus of this article is not on the individual districts or the participants; rather, the focus is the reported collaborative activities—the actions and attitudes that support collaborative efforts—reported by the participants.

Audiotaped interviews of 45–60 minutes each were individually conducted by the two researchers at the school sites or via Skype or telephone as selected by each of the participants to accommodate their busy schedules. As former students in the doctoral program led by the faculty researchers, participants were well acquainted with their interviewers; rapport was quickly reestablished. The interview protocol consisted of 12 questions that addressed collaboration and partnership efforts within participants' districts, benefits and challenges of partnerships, roles and responsibilities of the school/district leaders and others in collaboration efforts, views of shared influence, and program evaluations.

We collected and reviewed documents from each district prior to analyzing interview data. These documents included school website pages and postings, meetings notices and minutes, and fliers on collaborative ventures. Interviews and field notes were transcribed by each interviewer and shared with one another; we then independently reviewed data. We used open coding to identify potential themes in participant responses then pooled our individual lists and negotiated one list of recurring themes. Next, we reviewed the interview data to categorize these themes or patterns in the responses. We then reviewed the recurrent themes for correlation with the three research questions. Although specifically interested in types of partnerships, process steps, and factors instrumental in sustaining collaborative efforts, throughout this process we remained open to the possibility of "discovered" themes. Please note, throughout the article, names of individuals and locations have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Findings of the Study

Four themes emerged from analysis of data in this study: the importance of an emphasis on relationships rather than programs, shared influence through collaborative decision making, shared responsibility through shared vision and goals, and sustaining partnerships through promoting a "win-win" context. The subsequent sections provide information supporting the four themes: developing relationships, shared influence, shared responsibility, and sustaining partnerships.

Developing Relationships

Participants in this study expressed a belief that partnerships are central to the success of their leadership efforts. These leaders view themselves as "part of the larger community," and they have a strong commitment to social justice, specifically addressing social, cultural, and economic inequities in their districts. They reported a wide variety of collaborative ventures and a high level of interaction with community members and stakeholders. However, none of the administrators referenced "programs" as a means of facilitating partnerships; rather, they emphasized the importance of developing "relationships" with common goals and expectations for student progress.

"Developing relationships" emerged as a common theme throughout the responses of participants. Leaders emphasized the importance of "professional" and "reciprocal" relationships to launching productive collaborative efforts. One participant asserted, "It's all about communications and keeping relationships established. It's being involved in their activities—chamber activities, city activities—keeping involved in their activities. We invite them to come to our activities. It really is communication and relationships."

Relationships often had foundations in previous experiences and school/community traditions; however, building relationships sometimes posed challenges to small communities. One participant explained, "Many of our teachers are past graduates. Relationships are key. It all goes back to relationships. It is harder because most of our families work in Central City and live in Farmington. We don't have a lot of business, industry here. There are challenges." In another participant's district, meetings at regular intervals provided opportunity for interaction and development of relationships; a group of community leaders, business leaders (including the city manager and the chamber president), law enforcement, and school leaders met once each month for informal discussion: "We have no agenda. It is a comfortable discussion. The goal is relationship building. Relationships are key."

Utilizing Shared Influence

Each participating leader expressed a strong belief in empowering members of stakeholder groups through effective, ongoing communication and shared decision-making. "Shared influence" was evidenced in collaborative decision making at both the building and district levels, and organizational structures were in place to enhance these shared leadership practices. Leader responses indicated that partnership building and continuation of collaborative ventures is influenced by skills in communication and organization.

Participants viewed shared influence as an integral component of their collaborative efforts. Whether able to provide a definition for shared influence, "relationship participation between groups within and outside our organizations to influence and achieve common, mutually agreed upon goals," or not, "I'm guessing [it's] a symbiotic kind of relationship," responses of participants illustrated decision making and implementation as integrally enacted. One participant explained shared influence in partnership efforts: "It's highly collaborative in nature; it gives ownership to all—they share the successes and the failures." For several, shared influence meant simply, "Every member of a partnership is influencing one another."

One participant reported that his district created a consortium of school personnel and community members whose focus was on preparing students for the workforce/college. The resulting program implemented across the district was designed to address apathy by motivating students through a paradigm of "personal responsibility" and involvement in their community. Community members readily came on board to assist with mentoring and service opportunities when the program was introduced. Business leaders, when included in discussions regarding the implementation of the "personal responsibility" paradigm, were enthusiastic and even provided internship opportunities for students during afterschool hours. The program's focus on "personal responsibility" closely aligned with business leaders' needs to hire individuals who take responsibility for their own actions and attitudes; the school was producing potential employees who could "come to work on time, pay attention to their work instead of talking on the telephone, and dress more professionally."

Another leader explained his district's actions:

> We open up to the community. We want the community to have a positive perception of the schools. It helps the community gain a better understanding of schools; it is a morale booster. We want to reinforce that our resources are being used wisely. One of our challenges is breaking down perceptions. We share stories…. My role is to be the "cheerleader" for the school. My goal is to ask for help and let the donor know how funds were used.

Another participant noted that a feeling of "community" developed through the collaborative efforts between the school and the wider community to address an emergency in the district. These collaborative efforts facilitated shared influence in her district following the crisis experienced by residents after a tornado destroyed much of the area. She described the community as a "homegrown" district. Families want to give back, and they want to be part of helping to meet student and district needs in times of crisis. She stated, "Many came up through our schools, and their roots are still in Southville. It is an 'emotional connection.'"

One participant personalized the impact of shared influence through her involvement in decision-making in the district:

> I think a lot about "influence" and the impact my actions and teachings are having on my students in both their educational careers and in their lives. Shared influence to me means others joining in the lasting impact on a child's life—whether it be the firefighter that taught a Pre-K student to "stop, drop, and roll" or the bank vice president that donated money for a new playground to our school.

Regardless of the circumstances, for these leaders, shared influence means "people trust you" enough to become involved in decision making in the district. The influence develops over time as trust is established and credibility is confirmed. "We are letting them [partners] have a hand in shaping our future generations at the same time they are sharing their business and their expertise and their knowledge or their financial resources with us." Response from the state department administrator echoed these sentiments: "Every member of a partnership is influencing one another [when they come together to make decisions]. Together, we are influencing the outcome of our partnership—although we may do so at different rates/levels."

Utilizing Shared Responsibility

Sharing responsibility for meeting educational goals was seen as a way to engender ownership by all stakeholders: community members, and district and school personnel, including students. This shared responsibility was promoted through the establishment of common goals and common understandings of "student success." Promoting a paradigm of shared responsibility led one community to a common vision of "student success," developed through collaborative efforts to understand business needs as well as school needs. In this district, community members, educators, and students were equal stakeholders in efforts based on Franklin Covey's program, *The Leader in Me*, that teaches leadership and life skills to foster student empowerment based on the idea that

every student can be a leader (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014). The administrator interviewed explained,

> Everyone understands that our paradigm is "personal responsibility" and our vehicle is *The Leader in Me*. We approach it through three areas: high academic expectations, character education and morals, and college and career readiness. We include all stakeholder groups in the conversation [to identify mutual goals].

Another participant enumerated his district's partnerships with a local university to help achieve district goals. He explained, "We partner with administrative cohorts and a career tech. Employees teach classes within our schools. We have an engineering academy and a medical program." He further described the district's partnership with businesses, the YMCA, and the city: "We have this new 25 million dollar facility with the Y. The city owns the property, the Y operates the facility. We've all put funds into it." He further explained,

> We meet quarterly with all of our departments. [With] the city, we talk about issues—what the future is. They tell us about their future plans. We partner with all the youth organizations—the Y, the rec. center. They rent facilities from us—they couldn't function without being a partner with us….We have a new program called Project Hope—it's kind of for the "'tweeners"—those who don't function well within a high school. Kids who want to find themselves.

Concerned that his elementary school seemed "closed off" from the community and that negative publicity about the school added to isolation, one participant asserted that schools need to "open up [to the community]: We aren't asking for a handout. I have a belief that we will 'do whatever it takes' [to help kids be successful]. We need to think in new ways about partnerships. We have to have the same goals in mind."

Specific practices that reflected collaborative responsibility for reaching district goals differed across the represented districts. Collaboration responsibilities for some districts were distributed "all through our system." In these districts, although participation may have been required, actions may not have been specified. "We are to maintain a community presence and to interact with our school stakeholders, our community members, and the community businesses, but I don't think it's explicitly defined what we are to do." School personnel "all sit on a variety of boards" that include local businesses, charities, and community and city boards. One participant explained that some local boards "require a school person to sit on the board. We have a strong community partnership where they realize the value of getting the school involved and getting the school's perspective."

One participant reported that her district employed an individual whose position focused on maintaining collaboration efforts; however, other employees also shared the responsibility. "We have one person who is tasked with encouraging, facilitating, and documenting internal collaboration. While she has this responsibility, it is the expectation of the organization that everyone find opportunities to collaborate." She further explained, "In terms of external partnerships, we all try to take an active role." Another participant noted that the district assumed most of the responsibility for sustaining partnerships. However, when a crisis occurs, everyone wants to help: "Residents want to be good citizens, and they want the school to produce good citizens." The importance of partnerships was explained by one leader: "I would suggest that partnerships are critical to schools and all education organizations. Our work assumes that we are doing the best that we can for each child that walks through our doors or comes under our influence."

Relating shared responsibility within districts and communities to partnerships at the state level, the state department administrator explained the critical role of external partners is to "assume the responsibility of helping improve our practices, processes, and products." Partnerships are based on shared accountability; partner responsibilities are reciprocal. She continued,

> We expect that if we enter into a formal partnership with an external provider or other state agency that they have accepted responsibility for improved student learning in our state. Further, we accept responsibility for improved student learning in the states of our collaborators.

Sustaining Partnerships

Participants identified factors central to the sustainability of partnership efforts that included stakeholder buy-in and motivation to enhance shared perceptions of stakeholder roles in the educational process. Adequate funding for personnel to support and facilitate partnership efforts, a clear understanding of actions and activities that target partnership building, and the importance of continual evaluation of the effectiveness of partnership efforts were strongly emphasized. Sustaining partnerships is not an easy task, nor are all partnerships sustainable. One participant commented:

> We are not good at this [sustaining partnerships]—internally or externally. With our external partners, we work at having regular communication between formal events in order to maintain the professional relationship necessary to be interested in supporting one another. Internally, our best efforts come through biweekly meetings of the leadership team. These often end up being rushed and focused on putting out fires rather

> than on sustaining partnerships, so our informal person-to-person chats usually are more effective.

Sharing the leadership as well as the responsibility is important to sustaining partnerships. As one leader explained, "We do a shared leadership model…I would say there are very few decisions that I make without taking it to the team leaders, and I rely very heavily on their expertise and our sharing in making decisions." The benefits for schools and their partners are mutual: "It's a shared team responsibility….They will have benefits from us promoting their business. In our literature distributed, they're listed as partners. It's win–win." Similar sentiments were expressed in another response, "The partners that join us in our work also receive benefits. Some of these benefits are taking time to reflect on their own work—what has made them successful and on what could they improve, learning from the partner school—true collaboration, and—perhaps most importantly—knowing that they have contributed to the improved learning experience of children." Another leader aptly summarized, "Education is a 'people job.' It is a reciprocal relationship. We have to value [each] other's time and commitment."

Sustainability efforts are supported through shared vision; actions that support that shared vision may be more effective than words. Participants detailed the actions their districts utilized to promote and sustain partnerships. The categories that follow identify and explain actions supportive of promoting and sustaining successful partnerships.

Communication

Although collaboration may take on a different appearance within each district or school, the common understandings that support the district's vision are central to success. One participant reported, "There are common expectations and a common language across the district [and in the community], but it may look different in how they implement it." Collaboration was perceived to be "embedded" within school culture: "It really assists us in moving forward, communicating, and forming real partnerships. I can't imagine functioning without them [partnerships] because it is so mutually beneficial." Responsibility for collaboration rests with all stakeholders, including the students. One participant explained,

> We are putting the responsibility back on the student. Students have to set an academic goal and personal goal for the year. They have to set goals and track their achievement [beginning in elementary school]. We flip the paradigm in our parent–teacher conference. Now the student presents to the parent and the teacher where he or she is with goals. You would be amazed at how well they do.

Partner Recognition

Recognition of partners was identified as an important component of partnership sustainability: "Collaboration isn't easy. It often takes many resources and a 'give and take' of both parties for successful collaboration. We let our collaboration partners know that we value and appreciate their partnerships." Another participant explained, "We are all in this together. We want to keep the community feel. I stress to younger administrators that relationships are important."

Teachers are an important component of partnership efforts and need to be empowered:

> I believe in empowering teachers to make a difference. One of our teachers, a P. E. teacher, developed an afterschool program called "Impact." Teacher input is absolutely necessary. Efforts must fit into the school day when possible. We must consider, "How will kids benefit?"

Participants stressed the need for all collaboration partners to be open-minded and willing to listen, explore possibilities, and try new things, as well as to maintain a positive attitude.

> I know it's cliché—but really being open-minded, being willing to genuinely listen to and consider others' ideas and then being willing to come to some type of consensus…to really see and come to a consensus and say, "Okay, let's give that a try," and then being willing to follow through and not be negative.

Hearing the partners' voices—their viewpoints—is essential to a successful partnership:

> I try to make sure that…I hear their voices. I try to really think outside the box and, when at all possible, listen to and follow through on [what they say], to support and see some of their efforts come through to fruition—the walk to my talk.

Evaluation

Although responses regarding formal evaluation of partnership endeavors were mixed, evaluation was perceived to be important. Informal evaluation practices were used by one district: "We really don't [evaluate]. We really haven't gone through a formal evaluation. We haven't had a lot of our collaboration projects that have folded—we measure success by their continued existence."

One participant explained the evaluation his district uses for partnerships:

> We are using a character education program with 11 principles as our measuring stick. We were named an honorary state school of character at

> the high school last year. We are not doing it for that piece; we are doing it as an assessment piece to measure our growth.

He continued, "Grants require accountability. We consider ourselves as partners with the community. Eastville chooses *Leader in Me* to meet 11 principles. We use this as an assessment for our overall program. Our *Leader in Me* is our partnership paradigm." Overall, the comments of most participants in regard to evaluation aligned with the sentiments expressed by one participant, "We don't evaluate programs as much as we should. It is all informal; [there is] nothing formal." Nonetheless, partnerships were deemed to be an important aspect of schools—the "collective efficacy that changes the school—makes it more of a 'we' place instead of a 'me' place."

Discussion

Findings from this study suggest that these administrators, all of whom initiated and sustained successful partnerships, understood the importance of a collaborative leadership approach to reach educational goals. Collaboration was vital to their leadership efforts; developing relationships with reciprocal benefits was central to sustained collaboration. These leaders described partnership efforts as embedded in the structure of "the way the school operates." Partnerships were not something "added on" to an already full agenda; rather, partnerships were part of the functioning and operation of the school (Gross et al., 2015).

Shared influence was evidenced in a variety of ways. The most important means of creating a culture of shared influence included sharing decision-making, listening to others' ideas, and supporting open dialogue during team meetings. The common understanding about shared influence held by these educational leaders indicated that developing and sustaining partnerships was an essential component for student and district success (Gross et al., 2015). These leaders allowed partners to be involved in ways that were meaningful to both the district and their partners (Gross et al., 2015). They truly valued the input and suggestions they received from other stakeholders, and they listened intently to ideas generated through collaborative efforts. Equally noteworthy was that these leaders did not perceive partnership efforts as simply a means to help them (or their schools) reach district or organizational goals. Rather, leaders emphasized the needs of all stakeholder groups in partnership efforts, achieving a "win–win" situation through effective communication, similar to previous findings in the literature (Gross et al., 2015; Hands, 2005). This type of communication and negotiation of partnership activities leads to benefits for all partners involved (Badgett, 2016; Radinsky, Bouillion, Lento, & Gomez,

2001). Specifically, when partners took the time to listen to each other, they often found that partner needs were complementary. For example, business leaders were supportive in the district that implemented a student program of "personal responsibility" because the program aligned with their hiring needs, providing benefit to their organizations. This finding supports previous findings in the literature that suggest that successful school–community partnerships can add value to both parties (Radinsky et al., 2001).

Another important finding was the discovery of the bonds that developed through a shared experience of devastation in the community. In the district that partnered with community service organizations following a devastating tornado, the school became a "hub" for the provision of food and water to meet physical needs as well as emotional support and psychological counseling to meet mental health needs. Mutch (2016) suggested that when individuals share a disaster-type experience, they often develop even stronger emotional attachments than they experienced before the event. This finding suggests that the time period following that critical event was an important time for district and building leaders to reach out to the community in meaningful and mutually beneficial ways (Mutch, 2016).

Shared responsibility was also clearly evidenced in the leadership practices of these educational leaders. For example, leaders not only listened intently to stakeholders, they also understood the importance of sharing responsibility for student outcomes with other stakeholder groups. Educational leaders in this study emphasized the importance of creating a shared vision for the district and shared understandings of "student success." Badgett's (2016) work supports the importance of establishing shared goals in partnership efforts, just as other research suggests that competing interests may, ultimately, undermine partnership efforts (Murray & Hwang, 2001). In one example from our study, school personnel and community members including business leaders in the Chamber of Commerce spent time with students developing leadership skills in an effort to achieve the goals of "personal responsibility" that the district had established, and they also provided internship opportunities for students during afterschool hours. The internships helped students connect the work they did at school to "real life" contexts (Hands, 2005). Community leaders, understanding their responsibility to develop successful student citizens, accepted the responsibility for this training rather than depending solely upon the school to provide it. These shared goals for student success created an environment where community members and the district worked together to achieve common goals.

Another example of shared responsibility occurred during parent–teacher conferences when students accepted the responsibility for reporting their own

progress during the meetings. Administrators explained that this process was "the way we conduct parent–teacher conferences here. Teachers and students understand that students are responsible." These findings support the work of Hands (2008) who found that a shared understanding of education as a "joint responsibility of the school and community" (p. 50) is necessary for sustainable partnerships. What this study adds is an understanding of the importance of leadership perceptions of shared responsibility for student outcomes. In the current high stakes accountability policy environment, where schools are held solely accountable for student progress, educational leaders may find it difficult to relinquish or share responsibility for educational outcomes (see Grant & Ray, 2016) even though NCLB and subsequent legislation (Race to the Top and Every Student Succeeds Act) required schools to build partnerships with stakeholder groups (Moles & Fege, 2011). Our findings suggest that clearly communicating shared responsibility through the development of shared vision and goals, as a foundation for partnerships, is essential for sustainability. Our findings also suggest that shared responsibility enhances community partner commitment to partnership efforts.

Two additional findings related to developing relationships and shared responsibility deserve additional discussion. These findings address the importance of clear shared goals and recognition of partnership efforts. The leadership characteristic of vision casting was evident across all aspects of partnership efforts. Effectively and consistently communicating shared goals and a vision of success helped to motivate stakeholders to take responsibility in partnership efforts. Similar to findings by Hands (2008), partnerships in this study created important opportunities for character and values education, and partnerships were strengthened through a shared vision of student success related to character and values. For example, one district leader emphasized "democratic citizenship" as a common goal across stakeholder groups, and another emphasized "personal responsibility" as its partnership paradigm. One district leader described the paradigm as a "cause bigger than oneself." When communicated clearly through effective leadership efforts, these values served as the "glue" that strengthened partnership efforts. This finding also supports findings by Mole and Fege (2011) that partnerships organized around shared vision and values are strengthened because they lead to collective action. Developed out of the concept of shared responsibility, the second additional finding was the understanding that each partner in the relationship deserved recognition for facilitating the achievement goals. Each side of the partnership was recognized as making important contributions toward student success, and these educational leaders expressed the importance of consistently recognizing other stakeholders for the contributions that they made. This finding is supported by the work of

Sanders (2009) that suggests that expressions of gratitude and recognition can serve to strengthen partnership efforts.

Finally, although these educational leaders recognized the significance of evaluating the effectiveness of partnership efforts, little evidence existed of tangible plans for evaluation. This supports Epstein's (2013) finding that formal evaluation is a strategy missing from most partnership efforts. Most evaluative efforts were "informal" or simply assumptions made based on the satisfaction of stakeholder groups in partnership efforts. This finding indicates that more attention is needed in these districts to understand the quality of partnership efforts and the implementation of partnership activities. As expressed by Sanders (2009), "collaboration is a process and not an event" (p. 37); therefore, a definitive point in time appropriate for evaluation may not clearly be evident unless leaders specifically identify evaluation as a priority. Further, Sanders suggested that principal leadership is a crucial factor for ensuring that partners evaluate the quality of interactions and implementation of partnership activities. Engaging in "reflective action" (Sanders, 2009) or periodic, planned evaluation of partnership efforts can enhance the effects that partnership efforts have on schools and students.

Conclusions

Educational leaders need to recognize and understand the diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources available in their school communities in order to develop positive relationships and sustainable partnerships with community stakeholders. Recognizing the resources stakeholders bring to the educational process is critical to developing productive partnerships. Leaders who emphasize social justice coupled with an intentional school- and districtwide emphasis on collaborative efforts encourage the shared influence and shared responsibility necessary to support student learning.

Developing a shared vision and shared student outcome goals can provide the foundation and motivation for collaborative efforts and enhance the sustainability of partnerships. District leaders in this study emphasized core values shared throughout stakeholder groups that helped to define intended student outcomes. Shared goals and vision resulted in student-centered partnerships rather than partnerships that were school- or community-centered.

Proficiency in communication and organizational skills are central to fostering and sustaining collaboration between schools and communities. All participants emphasized the importance of communication as a key tool for sustaining partnerships. Sustaining productive relationships with stakeholders requires focus on endeavors that address not only the needs of the school, but also the needs of the community.

Partnership efforts became embedded in the culture of these districts. Rather than an "agenda item," partnerships were considered to be "the way we do things." The norms of shared influence and shared responsibility provided the social support necessary for sustained interactions between school and community actors. One leader's statement illustrates the impact of normative conditions of cross-boundary leadership in partnership efforts: "It has become so ingrained that it is no longer 'something we do'—it is 'something we are.'"

References

Adams, C. M., & Jean-Marie, G. (2011). A diffusion approach to the study of leadership reform. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(4), 354–377.

Allen, J., & Kinlock, V. (2013). Create partnerships, not programs. *Language Arts, 90*(5), 385.

Alliance for Education. (n.d.). *Everything you need to know about the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Retrieved from http://all4ed.org/essa/

Badgett, K. (2016). School–business partnerships: Understanding business perspectives. *School Community Journal, 26*(2), 83–106. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Blankstein, A. M., Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2010). Building sustainable leadership capacity. In A. M. Blankstein (Ed.), *Failure is not an option* (2nd ed., pp. 189–214). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Blankstein, A. M., & Noguera, P. A. (2015). Engaging families to enhance student success. In P. D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Leadership for family and community involvement* (pp. 1–12). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Boris-Schacter, S., & Langer, S. (2006). *Balanced leadership: How effective principals manage their work*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Brown, J., Muirhead, M., Redding, S., & Witherspoon, B. (2011). *Changing the conversation with families in persistently low-achieving high schools: Guidance for implementation of school improvement grants*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement. Retrieved from http://www.adi.org/publications.html

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Casto, H. G. (2016). "Just one more thing I have to do": School–community partnerships. *School Community Journal, 26*(1), 139–162. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Covey, S. R., Covey, S., Summers, M., & Hatch, D. K. (2014). *The leader in me: How schools around the world are inspiring greatness, one child at a time*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Curry, K., & Krumm, B. (2016). Cross-boundary leadership: A framework for understanding leadership preparation. *Education Leadership Review, 17*(1). Retrieved from http://www.ncpeapublications.org/index.php/volume-17-number-1-spring-2016

Donaldson, G. A. (2006). *Cultivating leadership in schools: Connecting people, purpose, and practice.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Epstein, J. (2009). School, family, and community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. In J. Epstein (Ed.), *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed., pp. 9–15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Epstein, J. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Epstein, J. (2013). Ready or not? Preparing future educators for school, family, and community partnerships. *Teaching Education, 24*(2), 115–118.

Grant, K. B., & Ray, J. A. (2016). *Home, school, and community collaboration: Culturally responsive family engagement* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Graves, S. L., & Wright, L. B. (2011). Parent involvement at school entry: A national examination of group differences and achievement. *School Psychology International, 32*(1), 35–48.

Gross, J. M. S., Haines, S. J., Hill, C., Francis, G. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Turnbull, A. P. (2015). Strong school–community partnerships in inclusive schools are "part of the fabric of the school…we count on them." *School Community Journal, 25*(2), 9–34. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Gutierrez, K. (2006). *Culture matters: Rethinking educational equity*. New York, NY: Carnegie Foundation.

Hands, C. (2005). It's who you know and what you know: The process of creating partnerships between schools and communities. *School Community Journal, 15*(2), 63–84. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Hands, C. (2008). Circles of influence: The role of school–community partnerships in the character formation and citizenship of secondary school students. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 54*(1), 50–64.

Harris, A. (2011). Distributed leadership: Implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management Development, 31*(1), 7–17.

Hill, N., & Craft, S. (2003). Parent–school involvement and school performance: Mediated pathways among socioeconomically comparable African American and Euro-American families. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*, 74–83.

Ishimaru, A. M. (2014). Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district–community collaboration. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*(2), 188–216.

Jean-Marie, G., & Curry, K. (2011). Cross-boundary leadership: A reform model in Title I elementary schools. In J. Aiken & C. Gersti-Pepin (Eds.), *Defining social justice in a global context* (pp. 287–304). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Jean-Marie, G., Ruffin, V., & Burr, K. (2010). Leading across boundaries: The role of community schools and cross-boundary leadership in school reform. In S. Horsford (Ed.), *New perspectives in educational leadership: Exploring social, political, and community contexts and meaning* (pp. 217–238). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Jeynes, W. (2005). *Parental involvement and student achievement: A meta-analysis* (Family Involvement Research Digest). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Jeynes, W. (2011). *Parental involvement and academic success*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lewis, A. C., & Henderson, A. T. (1997). *Urgent message: Families crucial to school reform*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED418480.pdf

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Moles, O. C., & Fege, A. F. (2011). New directions for Title I family engagement: Lessons from the past. In S. Redding, M. Murphy, & P. Sheley (Eds.), *Handbook on family and community engagement.* Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. Retrieved from http://www.adi.org/publications.html

Moller, G., & Pankake, A. (2006). *Lead with me: A principals' guide to teacher leadership*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Murry, J. H., & Hwang, E. I. (2011). For-profit corporation limitations for social entrepreneurs. *University of Miami Law Review, 66*(1), 14–16.

Mutch, C. (2016). Schools as communities and for communities: Learning from the 2010–2011 New Zealand earthquakes. *School Community Journal, 26*(1), 115–138. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2014). *Concentration of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch*. Retrieved from http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clb.asp

Panasonic Foundation. (2007). *Growing roses in concrete*. Retrieved from http://www.panasonic-toolkit.org/foundation/Site.nsf/#TB_inline?height=200&width=400&inlineId=item5

Pounder, D., Reitzug, U., & Young, M. D. (2002). Preparing school leaders for school improvement, social justice, and community. In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The educational leadership challenge: Redefining leadership for the 21st century* (pp. 261–288). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Public Impact. (2007). *School turnarounds: A review of the cross-sector evidence on dramatic organizational improvement.* Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation and Improvement. Retrieved from http://www.adi.org/publications.html

Radinsky, J., Boullion, L., Lento, E. M., & Gomez, L. M. (2001). Mutual benefit partnership: A curricular design for authenticity. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 33*(4), 405–430.

Rhim, L. M. (2011). Engaging families and communities in school turnarounds: When students can't wait. In S. Redding, M. Murphy, & P. Sheley (Eds.), *Handbook on family and community engagement.* Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. Retrieved from http://www.adi.org/publications.html

Sanders, M. G. (2009). Community involvement in school improvement: The little extra that makes a big difference. In J. Epstein (Ed.), *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Sanders, M. G. (2012). Sustaining programs of school, family, and community partnerships: A qualitative longitudinal study of two districts. *Educational Policy, 26*(6), 845–869.

Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steiner L., & Brinson, D. (2011, May). *Fixing failing schools: Building family and community demand for dramatic change*. Retrieved from Public Impact website: http://publicimpact.com/images/stories/building_demand_for_change_in_failing_schools-Public_impact.pdf

Warren, M. R. (2005). Communities and schools: A new view of urban education reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 75*(2), 133–173.

Yan, W., & Lin, Q. (2005). Parent involvement and mathematics achievement: Contrast across racial and ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Research, 99*, 116–127.

Zacarian, D., & Silverstone, M. (2015). *In it together: How student, family, and community partnerships advance engagement and achievement in diverse classrooms.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Bernita L. Krumm is an emeritus faculty member of the College of Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. She is a former P–12 educator and public school board member. Her research focuses on leadership, school–community collaboration, and Native American education.

Katherine Curry is an associate professor and school administration program coordinator in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. Her research focus is parent–school–community collaboration, parent social networks, and culture/climate indicators in schools. She is a former P–12 educator. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Katherine Curry, 306 Willard Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, or email Katherine.curry@okstate.edu