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## Leading the Initial Implementation Phase of TandemEd in Relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools

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*TandemEd*

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## Leading the Initial Implementation Phase of TandemEd in Relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools

### About the Author(s)

Dr. Brian C.B. Barnes is the Co-founder and CEO of TandemEd. Dr. Barnes holds both a masters and doctoral degree in education leadership from Harvard University (Ed.L.D.); a Master of Divinity degree from Andover-Newton Theological School (M.Div.).

### Keywords

Educational leadership, school-community partnership, transformational leadership, youth mentorship, organizational change, urban education

### Cover Page Footnote

To my wife Keishana Barnes for all of your support and sacrifice to make this initiative possible. To my TandemEd co-founders Dorian Burton and Toks Adeshiyan, and the TandemEd crew and key supporters along the way leading up to the Pittsburgh initiative: Alexis Claytor, Claire Lee, Annalise Kontras, Janelle Bechdol, Adia Wallace, Cynthia Smith, Harvard Ed.L.D. Cohort 3, Mark Moore, Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Greg Gunn, Liz City, Kathy Boudett, Irvin Scott, Melanie Brown, and Mark Lewis. And to the Pittsburgh family who believed in Dorian Burton and me enough to open the doors of welcome to the city: Errika Fearbry-Jones, Jonathan "JE" Gamble, Sharnay Hearn, Maria Searcy, Dr. Michael Quigley, Jason Rivers, Carla Rivers, Brandi Taylor, Ryan Scott, Norlex Belma, Jonnet Solomon, Leon Ford, Drs. Alison and Jay Huguley, and all of the Pittsburgh youth in the TandemEd Leadership Academy and those who participated in the city campaign. Special thanks to key mentors along the journey, Rev. Dr. Gregory G. Groover, Sr., Dr. Kathy Boudett, Dr. Carol Johnson, and Charles Ogletree, Jr. Thank you all for being the foundation and support for this work.



## Leading the Initial Implementation Phase of TandemED in Relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools

Brian C. B. Barnes, TandemEd

### Abstract

TandemEd facilitates Black communities to create campaigns that highlight their positive racial identity and self-defined educational purpose. This article examines the leadership of the initial implementation phase of the TandemEd community initiative in relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), focusing primarily on the interactions with the superintendent and executive director of the superintendent's office. The results included ongoing support from PPS as TandemEd formed a citywide steering committee of highly community legitimated persons, executed a leadership and campaign academy for thirty-five Pittsburgh youth, and facilitated the design and delivery of various cable television commercials on identity and purpose in the Greater Pittsburgh region. It utilized the organizational framework established in *Reframing Organizations* by Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1991). The implication is that while a relationship with a public school district at the onset of TandemEd city entry is of value, more excellent value is found in establishing a strong community-legitimated effort and intersecting with the district more deeply in later implementation phases. Additionally, there is transformative value for school and district leaders to be responsive to Black community leadership of education.

**Keywords:** Educational leadership, school-community partnership, transformational leadership, youth mentorship, organizational change, urban education.

### Introduction

TandemEd is an enterprise that organizes Black communities to collectively assume the leadership of youth development and the provision of messages of efficacy and purpose for Black students in public schools. I conceptualized and founded TandemEd in 2013 as a Harvard Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) student, along with two others who joined me as co-

founders: my Ed. LD. colleague, Dorian Burton, and childhood friend, Tokunbo “Toks” Adeshiyan, who had recently earned a master’s in business administration (M.B.A) degree. Together, with support from my Boston colleagues, we sought to refine our theory of change, create an organizational business plan, and prepare outlines for a pilot that eventually would take place in the city of Pittsburgh, PA, which included a relationship with the Pittsburgh Public Schools and primary funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Heinz Endowments.

The purpose of this paper is to detail the early interactions with PPS, the subsequent sites of junction that occurred during initiative implementation, and reflections on the role of the school district versus the community. A brief analysis is then provided utilizing Bolman and Deals’ (1984) framework on why and how the relationships formed and functioned during the early implementation stages. Included are also relevant lessons that may be applied to further implementation.

### **TandemEd Beliefs and Theory of Change**

TandemEd’s approach is built upon the belief that the sector must recognize that the leadership needed to overhaul the educational outcomes of Black youth cannot be centered within the school or traditional parental and community engagement frameworks. Instead, the sector must investigate what it means to be a school that assumes and anticipates community leadership and is bold in responding to its achievement of more significant results despite the status quo. The sector should also explore what it means to have the community drive change and risk stepping aside so community leadership may flourish.

To take such strides, individuals within the sector must reevaluate their beliefs, acknowledging that Black communities can lead youth development and engage parents and families. This belief is in stark contrast to wrong assumptions that the school as an institution must be the replacement for parents and communities who do not care. Second, the revised beliefs must acknowledge that Black communities possess valuable assets and resources. This contrasts belief systems that these communities are only reservoirs for failure. This does not recognize the outstanding leadership and love that rests within these communities that are either already active or at the cusp of being released. Third, the sector must believe that Black communities can unite under a shared cause for a shared outcome. Too often, a picture is painted

that members of Black communities are only at odds with each other and cannot work together in a unified manner. However, there is past and present evidence to the contrary of this view, and the sector would do well to recognize this and rely upon unified action within the Black community as an aligned effort to improve educational outcomes.

We believe the sector must further affirm and support community-initiated action to support Black youth. These actions mainly include initiatives that promote a truthful narrative about positive identity in African American communities. Heretofore, such communal groups and their messaging have been seen as threatening the status quo. There has historically been societal aggression against Black communities when they assert their leadership and assets, even when independent of comparisons to other ethnic groups. The education sector must, however, begin to understand that its most significant ally in educating African American students are the very people, organizations, and initiatives that our society has deemed the most threatening.

This truth implies that institutions within the sector must publicly affirm these groups and initiatives when interacting with their existing stakeholders and seek alliances and partnerships. This must be approached with a sincere desire to be responsive to such community leadership as opposed to the typical engagement strategies of only working with them on the terms of the district leadership agenda.

This approach contrasts with the dominant practices of only conceiving initiatives from within the district and then seeking the Black community to support them, leaving the school at the center of youth development. Therefore, institutions within the sector must publicly take a position on controversial issues and debates with a slant toward affirming community assets and the capacity for community leadership. The courage needed to make these shifts in the sector should come from delving into the excitement of taking a new stance and reversing an existing frame in such a way that there is a chance that it holds the key to changing the life outcomes of Black youth.

Additionally, the courage for institutions in the sector can be drawn from the possibility of attaining improved learning environments with engaged, motivated, purpose-filled students, and energized teachers who focus more squarely on academic instruction. This approach offers greater sustainability, whereby change leadership is from within the community instead of from often disconnected bureaucracies. This type of reframing also offers superior accountability

whereby the onus and responsibility for success are not levied through state accountability systems but through community expectations and accountability that may exceed any measure of success that a state or a state test has to offer.

### **TandemEd Theory of Change**

The goal of *Leading the Initial Implementation Phase of the Relationship with Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)* is to understand the relationship with public school districts in general that would support TandemEd's goal of establishing a youth-led and adult-supported city-wide movement for Black youth development.

TandemEd's theory of action revolves around creating a youth-centered, adult-supported neighborhood-wide campaign on identity development and purpose, targeting ages 12-26. The theory of action proposes: if we (1) organize African American communities around reclaiming the collective leadership of youth development, (2) facilitate that community through a design process to customize a vision for collective youth development, an agenda, and the corresponding necessary messages, (3) align partners, resources, and policies to fund and complement these efforts, and (4) support the delivery of that customized content through both informal (outside of school) and formal (in school) delivery systems, then the youth will be motivated to engage the learning in the formal (in school) setting. In other words, if African American youth receive the necessary messages about their identity in general and as it relates to education and learning, they will enter school with the purpose and motivation to construct their sense of identity and engage in learning in ways that are meaningful to their overall goals, so if the school purposely makes strides to be fully responsive to that which has been identified and developed by the community. In the short term, this will result in an improved relationship between schools and the community; in the long term, it will result in significant improvements in youth's grade point averages, graduation rates, attendance, test scores, and post-secondary enrollment.

TandemEd offers an innovative theory of change that combines the finest of the public school and African American community while specifying responsibilities and assumptions for each. This theory has a core principle: The African American community should be responsible for the identity development of youth, not the public school. Any semblance of public school identity development should mirror community identity development and value messaging.

A former superintendent of Boston Public Schools commented on this theory:

The work before us is doing the best possible job to ensure the next generation's success. We must have a meaningful impact on the next generation with the community and the children owning their development. However, we also cannot do this without impacting the school to some extent because so much of the hope of the future is directly tied to whether the children are well educated and whether we change the trajectory necessary to get them ready and through to post-secondary . . . Schools can be an advantage or disadvantage. They can reinforce existing inequities or create the conditions for equal opportunity for all. In addition, schools have the potential to create a forum for different thoughts, ideas, and diverse people and cultures to come together. (Former Supt., personal conversation, August 10, 2014).

### **Beginnings: Initial Meeting with PPS Executive Team**

My initial meeting with Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) was in June 2014, via phone, with the Supt., the Exec. Dir., and Dorian Burton (TandemEd Co-Founder).

The invited attendees included the deputy superintendent (Dept. Supt.), chief of school performance (CSP), assistant superintendent of 9-12 Schools and principal of Pittsburgh Allderdice High School (PAHS Admin.), and principal of PPHS (PPHS Admin.).

In her introduction, the Supt., considering such a community-based approach, wanted to ensure she was not sending the message that parents were the problem and teachers were "off of the hook." She emphasized that she was accountable for students' academic success, regardless of parental involvement. She also noted that other urban schools were succeeding, so she knew "it can be done." It was evident that the superintendent was accustomed to hearing teachers criticize parents for their children's underachievement. Hence, she wanted to be sure that TandemEd did not exacerbate or reinforce a blame-the-parent culture.

The PPHS Admin. asked, "What is it exactly that you will do for my school?" In response, I stressed that TandemEd would not work within his school but outside to build circumstances with youth, parents, and families as leaders and that this would provide students with purpose and motivation to appropriate learning in a meaningful manner. In addition, I

explained that TandemEd would benefit schools by creating a counter-narrative where teachers would not be solely responsible for student motivation. To achieve this, I stated, learning would need to occur from both sides (community and school) to understand what the paradigm shift would entail, including what shifts would need to be made in how the principal leads.

Shortly after, the PAHS Admin. communicated concerns regarding the community's perception that PPS outsourced the critical work of community engagement due to a disinterest in the community. She believed that working with us would hurt leadership in the community. Further, school administrators would still be responsible for being the face of community leadership once the TandemEd initiative concluded.

At this stage of the meeting, it was clear that there needed to be more alignment between the thinking of the Supt.'s team and the TandemEd theory of change and action. As a result, I refrained from making any commitments. Instead, I conveyed my understanding that having a dramatically different vision and approach toward community engagement would carry a significant risk. The superintendent then proposed that Dorian and I meet separately with the PAHS and PPHS administrators to find a way to work together, a proposal to which I reluctantly agreed.

### **Meeting Follow-Up**

In our follow-up conversation a few days later, the Exec. Dir. shared her understanding that TandemEd was a community-based empowerment approach and not a tactic to improve or expand an existing element within the school.

On Friday, July 25, 2014, I had a follow-up phone conversation with Dorian, the Exec. Dir., and the PAHS Admin. I began the conversation by sharing that we viewed ourselves as allies of the district in their efforts to improve student outcomes and that we were open to the PPHS Admin. learning, along with us, what it means for a principal to be responsive.

Nevertheless, we would continue implementing the community-based work outlined in our business plan.

The Exec. Dir. responded affirmatively that she and the PAHS Admin. had similar perspectives and advised the PPHS Admin. to proceed with his school leadership agenda as he



deemed appropriate without partnering with TandemEd. The Exec. Dir. also disclosed that as the district's point of contact, she wanted our work to be successful and believed it did not necessitate a direct relationship with the PPHS Admin. However, she suggested that we stay abreast of his parental engagement. The meeting ended with us agreeing to work together.

### **Solidifying Support**

Three weeks later, in an impromptu meeting, the Exec. Dir. elaborated on her decision to endorse TandemEd. In addition to being a personal advocate, she expressed a desire for the Supt. to be seen favorably while acknowledging that our endeavor constituted such an opportunity. I agreed they could assert themselves as a supportive district without defining or controlling community leadership.

She also noted that she was proposing that the Board vote on granting \$20,000 to our initiative. She wanted to clarify whether she should continue, considering our theory of change prioritized community-based leadership over school-based.

From a growth perspective, the funding would benefit TandemEd as it could be helpful for future implementation in other contexts that require proof of district financial support. Receiving such funds, however, could convey that we were controlled by the district, which not only contradicted our theory of change but was also the narrative we were trying to avoid.

After deliberating, Dorian and I concluded that the integrity of our actions would demonstrate that we were in an alliance with the district but not subject to district authority. I gave the Exec. Dir. permission to proceed, and on August 28, she reported that the resolution was approved. The Board Resolution:

RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the School District of Pittsburgh authorize its proper officers to enter into a partnership with TandemEd, Education by Communities in Tandem with Schools. The organization's founders are current Harvard Residents; Brian C.B. Barnes, M.Div, Ed.M., and Dorian Burton, M.Ed. The mission and goal of TandemEd are to unite African American communities around leading the leading educational development of youth, strengthening them to become purpose-filled, motivated, and self-directed adults. Both men will obtain the proper clearances to interact directly with students, families, and

community members on the Northside. These relationships will be vital in assisting the district in our efforts with the Whole Child Whole Community Plan: Partner with the Community in a New Way. This pilot effort will allow the district to gain new insights into engagement strategies to reach parents that have yet to respond to traditional methods. (PPS, 2015b)

### **TandemEd's City Entry: Leading a Community Campaign**

This section details how establishing a supportive relationship with the district and building additional private and public relationships promoted implementation.

### **Refining Our Strategy**

In September, we determined more specifically how we would actualize the creation of a community campaign. First, we chose youth as our core community constituency to ensure they would develop and own the messaging on identity and purpose. We then enlisted adult sponsors and resource providers to ensure the youth's capability and community-wide leadership.

We asked city youth to launch a campaign to spread their messages of identity and purpose among 12–26-year-olds. This message would motivate youth to participate in all aspects of life, including learning and ownership of their education. Thus, our theory of action grew more defined and remained tied to educational outcomes: If youth develop an adult-supported campaign for educational identity and purpose, they will be more driven to appropriate learning spaces, including the schools they attend.

### **Steering Committee**

In October, we focused our efforts more on the community than the school district, meeting with individuals and groups as a part of the implementation plan and inviting several to join our TandemEd Pittsburgh Community Initiative steering committee.

Members of the committee included the citywide community liaison for the office of Pittsburgh's mayor, a community director for PPS A+ schools, the co-project manager for the PPS *We Promise* program, co-directors of the Black Male Leadership Development Institute, and leader in NEED's African American Male Mentoring Initiative at PPS' Barack Obama Academy of International Studies.

We were also fortunate to have one of the foremost active parents in the city and arguably the state. While being a parent in PPS, she was also a member of the PPS Equity Advisory Panel and the Title I State Parent Advisory Council (SPAC), created by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

Lastly, the Young Men and Women's African Heritage Association formed most of the TandemEd steering committee. Their collective role was to guide the initiative's growth by creating the campaign and building a larger coalition to garner broader involvement and support from the Pittsburgh youth and adult community.

### **Community Introduction**

The Exec. Dir., the leader of the NEED's African American Male Mentoring Initiative, was instrumental in connecting us with individuals within the Pittsburgh community.

On September 5, 2014, there was a community introduction at the Young Men and Women's African-Heritage Association. Approximately fifty community members, including twelve youths, the Exec. Dir., a state house representative and deputy chief of operations and administration for the mayor, were present to hear about our backgrounds and the work we proposed to do in partnership with their community.

In this meeting, Dorian and I shared our narratives. I highlighted my ability to overcome racism through the affirmation of a strong Black community. At the same time, Dorian recounted changes in his path to success when he was finally in an environment where education was the focus of dinner discussion (juxtaposed against his earlier years, where it was never identified as a significant lever for success). We disclosed how our stories reflected our previous professional work and how troubling narratives propagated in education reform, and some Harvard classrooms led to our forming TandemEd in response.

We told how we were finalists in 2014 Echoing Green competition and how we came to Pittsburgh through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We should have mentioned support from the Supt. as we were still determining whether defining our work within the school district context would mislead the community about our interest in building community leadership. We wanted to create our own personal and organizational legitimacy. So instead, we articulated our

theory about the need for the community to reclaim youth leadership development from a school-centered approach and our idea for a youth-designed campaign as a specific strategy toward this end. After presenting and answering questions, we received positive feedback and were encouraged to continue with our enterprise. The one constant exhortation was to acknowledge the efforts and workers in this region who had already established the Pittsburgh Black community.

Following the community meeting, I suspected our failure to mention PPS was seen negatively by the executive, who responded that everything was “great” when I inquired about our presentation. However, during a phone conversation weeks later, she provided feedback. Although she appreciated our visuals and clear descriptions of the sought-after paradigm shift, in which we transferred the focus of youth development from the school to the community, she asserted that we should have utilized this approach in our initial meeting with the Supt. She stated that this strategy would have helped us clarify our intentions, reduced the “uncomfortable” process, and prevented the district from attempting to fill our communication gaps.

She also enjoyed our narratives but was concerned that we did not acknowledge our relationship with the Supt. and the school district, especially since the funding they offered for our project was public record.

## **Results**

As a result of our initial interactions with the school district and the interactions that occurred as we moved more deeply into implementation, several events occurred. Arguably, these events were influenced by how the relationship was managed as it developed over time. Despite the difficult start and unfavorable feedback about our community introduction, the Exec. Dir. remained committed to supporting our TandemEd.

### **TandemEd Steering Committee District Support**

The district was willing to join or provide networking to help us form a solid steering committee. When I probed the Exec. Dir. in late November as to whether she would be joining our steering committee, she responded that she would be willing to do whatever would be the most supportive, given our theory of change. In this instance, I decided against her joining our initiative as a committee member. She could increase the risk of creating a wrong perception of

our independence. Nevertheless, she maintained a positive response and attitude in the learning of my decision.

While recognizing her strong connections and credibility in the community, I remained concerned that her key leadership role in the district might encourage some in our group to rely too heavily on her. This would be a response I had often seen in other settings, and I wanted to be careful not to promote these conditions too early in the process.

### **District Involvement in TandemEd Leadership Academy**

As a component of our implementation, we held a three-month TandemEd Leadership Academy with thirty youth from PPS and other schools across Pittsburgh to provide skills training in identity development, campaign marketing, and branding. This academy engaged youth in activities that prepared them to produce a final product of messages of identity and purpose to spark a community-wide campaign.

Dorian and I, along with members of the steering committee, managed the identity development portion while a Clemson University marketing professor provided training in branding and marketing. As an element of this academy, we considered establishing a connection between the students and the Supt. When we contacted the Exec. Dir. and the district, they were receptive, and the Supt. was eager to attend. In late October, as I shared with the Exec. Dir. that momentum was building around our engagement with youth, she responded, “We’re ready!” On November 25, 2014, after a phone conversation where she offered the possibility of having our partnership featured on WPXI (NBC affiliate), I emailed the Exec. Dir. the following note:

... thank you for taking time out today ... I also want to see if the Supt. will have any Saturday availability in February where we could get the young people to share what they envision for their own educational identity and development, as well as provide an opportunity for her to hear and begin to think about how she can be responsive. This is different from a youth group designed to inform the school district on policies, but instead would be more of an opportunity for the Supt. to hear what they envision and plan to bring into fruition apart from schools. February 7 and 21 would be the first choices. Please let me know.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a great time with your family! (B. Barnes, personal communication, November 25, 2014)

The Exec. Dir. replied affirmatively to this invitation and request. In January, we worked to schedule a time for the Supt. to interface with our youth. The only ask of the Exec. Dir. came as the following message:

... Will you be able to share an overview of the key points? She will not want to be surprised or put in a position to respond on the spot. There can be some "surprises," but she will want to know the general direction. We have done this with other groups, like the students who drafted the Student Bill of Rights that our Board later adopted. We got a draft of the document first. Thanks! (Exec. Dir., personal communication, January 23, 2015).

On January 27, 2015, per the Exec. Dir.'s request, I submitted a draft agenda for us to utilize in interfacing with the youth participants of the Leadership Academy with the Supt. and the Exec. Dir. I received feedback that they preferred the Supt. listen to the youth rather than begin by speaking, and then engage in conversation. I agreed as it reflected my intentions for their relationship. I requested her to speak first because I had heard her narrative and thought it was relevant to share, given the context of the discussion. Nevertheless, I adjusted the agenda, adding two points for the youth to ask the Supt.

### **District Involvement in TandemEd Advertisement Production**

The Exec. Dir. and the Supt. remained supportive of the TandemEd advertisement production distributed in regional Pittsburgh media. The youth in our Leadership Academy created four prominent ads, one of which was named *Black is Pittsburgh* (Gamble, 2015a). In this piece, they attempted to generate a narrative of what "Black is" by choosing representative adjectives and overlaying a visual with the Pittsburgh Black community. This represented the area of "identity" we were interested in exploring.

The TandemEd steering committee took the onus of contacting and organizing over 60 Black Pittsburgh citizens, including the Supt. and the Exec. Dir., from various neighborhoods, backgrounds, and professions to participate in this effort.

The Supt. was not in town during the week of filming, but the Exec. Dir. was filmed, along with her daughter, as the representative for *Black is Educated*. During the press release, the

Exec. Dir. indicated that PPS desired to be named as a partner in our public communication about the initiative and the ads.

This advertisement, along with two of the three others, was broadcast on Comcast-carried networks and channels, such as BET, Bravo, Syfy, A&E, AMC, Comedy Central, CNN, E!, Discovery, ESPN, Food Network, Fox Sports, History Channel, NBC Sports, Spike, TNT, truTV, the Weather Channel, and VH1 in the Greater Pittsburgh region from March 11–April 5, 2015. Within this timeframe, the ads were shown over 3,000 times, including during TBS March Madness basketball games, producing approximately one-half million impressions. This worked in our favor as the 2015 March Madness ratings reached historic all-time high ratings for the first Thursday airing since 1991 (Melbach, 2015).

The radio station, WAMO100.1, played the audio version of our ad for a minimum of 50 thirty-second commercials and ten 15-second live reads. It was also within their website for 30-second in-stream commercials and on all social platforms, producing an additional thirty-one thousand impressions.

### **“Own Your Story” Campaign and Other District Involvement**

The other ads we created followed a theme of youth and young adults sharing their stories of identity and purpose. These pieces included one of ten Black male youth and another of five Black females, both entitled “My Story Is.” (Gamble, 2015b). In these, each person shared a message of the words and symbols that best represented the story of their life positively, stressing purpose and identity areas central to TandemEd’s theory of action.

A final piece was written by a 22-year-old young adult and filmed in a classroom setting (Gamble, 2015c). He is shown sitting at a desk and encountering the inner frustration and distractions of life, realizing that “if there is no enemy within, then no enemies from the outside can harm me,” drawing from a popular African proverb.

Implicit in this ad was the background story of an adolescent who, in 2013, was shot and paralyzed during a traffic stop by Pittsburgh police officers who falsely identified him and subverted protocol in their engagement of him. Ironically, he was charged in this case and faced years in prison for this event. However, the district attorney eventually dropped the charges after his fighting and the community protesting over the police and court's actions.

In a twist of irony, this piece was filmed in PAHS with the permission of the PAHS Admin., whom we met in the initial executive staff meeting. When I arrived on set during the day of filming, she greeted me favorably and was very optimistic about the film airing in her building.

Other individuals in the district also participated, namely the *We Promise* program. In addition, we announced a video contest around the ad for what we entitled the "Own your Story" campaign and made \$500 prizes available throughout the city for one youth and one young adult who would post an ad telling their story.

In doing this, the program manager for *We Promise* was willing to publicly work together to expose their youth to these ads and invite them to participate in submitting. At the *We Promise* Summit on March 17, he invited me to help co-lead a session with approximately twelve youths and present TandemEd's work to the more than ninety students in the district program, advocating for them to participate in the contest.

I did this presentation in front of several school board members and the director of equity without concern, as they already knew me through my relationship with the Exec. Dir. After my presentation, the spouse of the program manager for *We Promise*, who worked with Urban Prep Academy through Neighborhood Learning Alliance, was committed to promoting the campaign and contest to the students in that school.

The Empowering Effective Teachers initiative leader for the district on which the Gates Foundation spent \$40 million also became interested. After being introduced to me by the Exec. Dir. and hearing about the progress of TandemEd, he wanted to have more discussion about the possible intersection with his work. He stated to the Exec. Dir. that TandemEd's outcomes in student engagement were aligned with the goal of the Learning and Teaching Environment of the Empowering Effective Teachers initiative of the Gates Foundation. In his exclamation, he referred to student readiness as contributing to teachers' success.

Additionally, the principal of Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts 6–12 (CAPA), a magnet school located in the Cultural District of Downtown Pittsburgh, shared her vision and plans to have students from across the city utilize their filming studio to create narratives and entries.



Furthermore, the Black student union students expressed their desire to have more time to develop and submit entries. Another example of responses from public schools includes a charter schoolteacher who opened the “Own Your Story” contest as an assignment to all her students. She sent the following message to the TandemEd website:

Hello! I am a social studies teacher in the Hill District of Pittsburgh at the Hill House Passport Academy Charter School. I want to get more involved in the work that you are doing as well as get my students involved... I have one student whom I am putting to the challenge of this video contest. I do not want to limit my partnership to just taking part in the opportunities TandemEd provides. I want my students to get involved so that they can be a voice of change within their communities . . . I would love more information on any opportunities for my students! (J. Noyes, personal communication, April 1, 2014)

The student produced an ad describing his story of the challenge to triumph, which became our winner for the youth age group of the Own Your Story contest (Noyes, 2014).

### **Reflection through Four Frame Model of Leadership**

Through analysis, using the four-point framework on organizational functioning offered by Bolman and Deal (1984), I understood why the relationship formed and functioned in the way it did.

The structural frame operates from beliefs that “reflect confidence in rationality and a faith that a suitable array of formal roles and responsibilities will minimize distracting personal static and maximize people’s performance on the job” (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 45). The structural frame, which includes an orientation of organizations finding comfort in working through established roles, helps to explain why there was an initial challenge in finding a way for PPS to partner with our work without being tied to the existing structures and roles at the district and school levels. Additionally, our theory held the possibility to be perceived as both a way to shift responsibility from the Supt. as well as the expectations of quality instruction and ownership of student outcomes from the teachers. Likewise, recognizing the limited capacity and time advance, a theory firmly situated in community leadership foiled any possibility that the TandemEd work would be a sub-component of the district initiatives.

The political frame addresses "organizations as roiling arenas, hosting ongoing contests of individual and group interests" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 188). One key assumption within this frame is that "coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 188). Another element that kept the two organizations from making initial strides was found in the political frame, where the protection of community relationships was of utmost importance to the district. Again there was concern about the political ramifications of adopting a theory that could be interpreted as blaming the problem on a lack of leadership in the Black community. Furthermore, the political frame helped to highlight the concern that the principals would have about community members believing that they had contracted the work of community engagement to a third-party organization.

While these challenging elements existed in the political frame, the frame also helped me to understand which elements of our actions and behaviors were of particular interest to the school district. They were drawn to later opportunities to have their support for the initiative publicly recognized, given the authentic community-based orientation from which we launched, namely being mentioned as a supporter in public forums.

The human resource frame emphasizes "people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment [as]... vital resources that can make or break an enterprise" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 117). One of the key assumptions within this frame is that "a good fit benefits both (people and organizations). Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 117). The human resource frame provided insight into the value that both organizations had to each other. The school district, for not much of an investment, became connected with two highly motivated persons seeking innovative methods to build community leadership in an area that impacted educational outcomes. TandemEd gained an opportunity to monitor and analyze how such a relationship is best managed during authentic community leadership initiatives.

According to Bolman and Deal (1984), the symbolic frame is one that "interprets and illuminates the basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful. It depicts a world far different from canons of rationality, certainty, and linearity" (p. 117). One of the key assumptions within this frame is that "events and processes are often more important for what is

expressed than for what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion" (p. 117). Similarly, the symbolic frame, which relies heavily on images as levers for leadership, gave TandemEd's reasonable level of comfort in being associated with a district. This is found in their claim to desire to partner with the community in a new way in their strategic plan, sustain the *We Promise* Program, and publicly support the inclusion of an Equity Advisory Panel in their work. The symbolic frame highlighted the district's responsiveness to perceptions of TandemEd's integration into the community that they hoped to engage, symbolized through elements such as the community-legitimated steering committee and the number of people who participated across Pittsburgh in the creation of the *Black is Pittsburgh* advertisement.

By analyzing PPS through the lens offered by Bolman and Deal (1984), Figure 1 best captures the key interests of which TandemEd should be aware in its dealings with a school district.

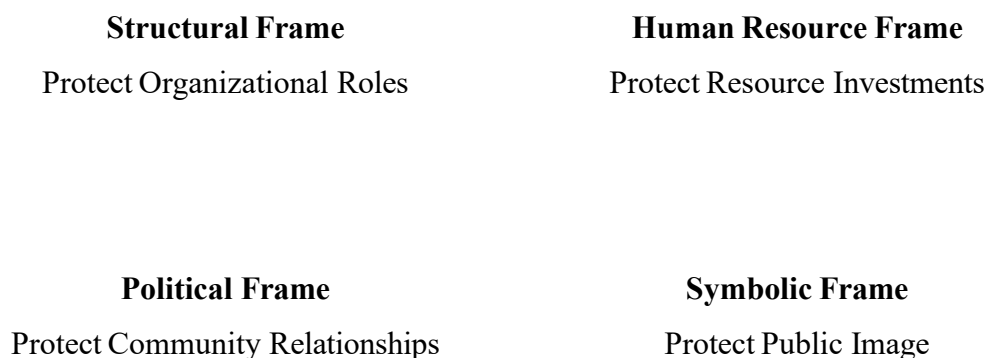


Figure 1. *Anticipated General School District Priorities while Partnering with TandemEd*

## Implications

### Implications for Site

The implications for TandemEd are numerous, particularly in understanding how to best intersect with a school district. The first broad implication is that in the early stages of

implementation, the school district should be approached similarly to other organizations that comprise the landscape. They are one of the many institutions within the context that could eventually be of value in coalition building to be responsive and supportive of community-led campaigns and actions. Therefore, during the early stages, the school district should be consulted.

If school administrators regard TandemEd as a respectable actor early on, program managers, principals, and teachers can have safe cover to augment the community-led campaign later in implementation independently. Numerous examples of this were observed within the PPS as they became comfortable integrating TandemEd into their work.

In some cases, such as program directors inviting our participation in *We Promise*, the assistant principal opening PAHS for filming, principals scheduling complementary campaign events, or teachers integrating the campaign into their classroom projects, each individual saw the value and was actively engaged without concern. They either were already aware of some established supportive relationship with the Supt.'s office or were unaware of any controversial or opposing public relationship that would work against them politically.

It is also important to include school officials during entry meetings as it potentially charts a course of relationship building that will cause high-ranking officials to be more comfortable in the later stages of connecting with TandemEd to find ways that they can further bolster the independent community leadership initiative. Once the initiative begins to build communal steam, the school district leaders would be familiar with TandemEd and able to think about ways to be more responsive and inclusive as policies are discussed, and educational decisions are established.

The warning, however, in opening the possibility of a relationship with a school district is that there should be no agreements with limitations on freedom or flexibility to pursue a community-led and legitimated effort. Regarding funding, it should only be received if there is clarity about the type of initiative component it can use. Equally important is not to be controlled by other partnerships or philanthropic interests with a particular ideology that may or may not be reflected in the community's interest.

With potential limited, restricted funding, TandemEd must be vigilant in ensuring that the terms are both clear and public so that it is correctly assumed that the district controls TandemEd

not to comprise community trustworthiness. This may be the model through which we accomplish our work with the support of school districts in future efforts, as they recognize the shared value of our efforts without feeling a need to take control.

Although we were in the piloting stage, the PPS board granted us funding and validated our learning phase through the language of the resolution. This allowed us to make pivots in our course of action that ensured success without feeling pressure to follow a rigid script or set of limitations. Additionally, we had an advocate in the Exec. Dir. who sincerely desired for us to be successful given our mission.

To retain the independence that TandemEd requires, our resource acquisition approach must involve one of two strategies. First, the funds may be solicited from an institution such as a school district, government agency, or foundation that recognizes or believes that the outcomes of an authentic community leadership strategy will align with their interests and advance their target outcomes. This strategy will be successful if we persuade institutions by showcasing our work in the Pittsburgh context (i.e., process, ads, relationship with a school district, and outcomes), sharing our theory of action, and forming a trusting relationship with them. The challenge in this approach is the potential hesitancy of institutions to release total funds to such a project in advance, essentially releasing all control. In doing this, the community leadership may choose to be directly opposed to their institution.

The second resource strategy is for TandemEd to serve as consultants to individuals and organizations that we will have confirmed as having true legitimacy in their community, desire to independently execute the TandemEd initiative, and have access to resources to pay for guidance. The advantage of this strategy is that consulting allows TandemEd to support individuals and organizations to implement our model's purest form without the funding source's attempts to compromise our service. The potential downside to this strategy is that the individuals and organizations who attain the funds to pay TandemEd for consultation will feel pressure from their funders not to implement the project in its purest form.

The second overarching implication is that the best time to be proactive in deepening a relationship with a school district to complement the community efforts is in the campaign implementation stage. At this time, as the TandemEd integration in the community becomes more fully realized, the legitimate community actors can co-lead in establishing the relationship

while also adding additional integrity to the formation of a relationship. Secondly, at this stage, for the sake of the school district actors, TandemEd must not only rely upon a theory or point to the work that occurred in another context but also point to a campaign and momentum already occurring in the given context. Although the timing is ideal, a school district may have different concerns than initially expressed by PPS. For this reason, the argument that TandemEd presents must be refined to consider these concerns.

First, in the argument to the school district, TandemEd must spend time emphasizing the benefits for the school district in building a relationship with the community more so than improving student outcomes. Community relationship building will be more interesting, and results will likely be attainable. There are public relations advantages for a school district leader to be able to make a public statement through support about their seriousness in community engagement. This is especially true for most superintendents and districts in urban settings that struggle with relationships with Black communities.

The second argument that TandemEd should emphasize is improving student performance, such as grades, attendance, graduation, or performance on high-stakes tests. This assumes that there is no community-wide rejection of these outcomes from a position of advocacy in which TandemEd would also not support these outcomes. In sharing the argument for student outcomes and the undergirding theory, this experience has helped me anticipate the public-school leadership concerns that may arise and has better prepared me to address them proactively.

First, to offset a concern that teachers are being given a theory that helps them blame parents, the TandemEd argument must repeatedly affirm the role of the teacher as critically important. The district must understand that our theory holds that the commitment, skill, and accountability to provide expert and quality instruction is irreplaceable. Teaching academic content is the primary role of schools, and the time to focus on this should be maintained while ensuring that there is cultural relevance and responsibility at the same time.

Second, to counteract the concern that our theory allows for an interpretation that the community and parents are to blame for failure, our argument must repeatedly affirm the current value of parental engagement efforts and advocate to strengthen the bond through our framing. The district must understand that our theory maintains that parents have already exhibited

leadership in many ways, and we seek to maximize it. Parents and communities have the most promise in youth development leadership, and schools must be responsive to their leadership as experts. We do not advocate blame but alternately accurate recognition of their leadership.

The third overarching implication is that once a relationship is established, TandemEd should always be alert about the interests that drive the behavior of school district leaders and be able to anticipate their responses and actions based on them.

The key implication for the sector (i.e., state and district superintendents, principals, teachers, education pundits, critics, and professors) is the need to invest in a new narrative and set of actions to address the challenges in urban education. This starts with asserting the value of community leadership, intellect, and ingenuity. The sector must acknowledge that persistently poor student outcomes indicate erroneous assumptions. Focusing on more significant funding, enhanced teacher effectiveness, or increased wrap-around services alone will result in minimal improvement.

Before beginning this project, I sought to test the following theory of action: If I can effectively establish and maintain a positive relationship with the PPS, we will be more likely to implement the TandemEd overarching theory successfully. The revised theory of action that I now assert after having the experience of *Leading the Implementation of TandemEd in Relationship with the PPS* is the following:

Suppose we implement the TandemEd Community Initiative with full fidelity and integrity. In that case, we will have tremendous success with community ownership and greater potential impetus for institutions, including public schools, to seek ways to be supportive and responsive. This revised theory of action ends by acknowledging the value of the responsiveness of institutions, including school districts, so the next component of change must center on the ability of institutions to reframe their roles and approaches.

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