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Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding **research on the potential benefits of school district participation in a statewide network**. Ask REL Southwest is part of a collaborative Ask-A-REL reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories (RELs). By design, this service functions much in the same way as a technical reference library, by providing references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations for research-based education questions.

**Please note that REL Southwest has not done an evaluation of the resources themselves but offers this list to you for your information only.**

## BACKGROUND

Partnerships in education are “collaborative arrangements and endeavors between and among schools and other entities (corporate enterprises, community agencies, student/parent/citizen groups, colleges, other schools, individuals, etc.) designed to share resources, achieve common goals, and foster educational achievement, improvement, and reform.”<sup>1</sup>

Following an established REL Southwest protocol, we conducted a search for research reports, websites, as well as descriptive briefs on potential benefits of district participation in a statewide network. **We searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.** The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, educational databases, and general Internet searches using Google and Bing. See the methods section at the end of this Ask A REL for additional information on how we identified the following sources.

## QUESTION

**What does research tell us about the benefits of school district participation in a statewide CoP (network)? (What are the benefits, if any, from being in a CoP?)**

## SOURCES

de Lima, J. A. (2010). Thinking More Deeply about Networks in Education. *Journal of Educational Change*, v11 n1 p1-21. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ872145>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “In education, initiatives to restructure and reculture schools through their involvement in intra- and inter-institutional networks have grown in number in recent years. Networks of teachers and schools (often linked to institutions outside

<sup>1</sup> ERIC’s Partnership in an Education Scope Note, <https://eric.ed.gov/?ti=Partnerships+in+Education>.

education) are becoming a key focus of change efforts promoted by professionals and policymakers. However, in current research, writing and policymaking, the use of the network concept has been generally vague, normative and mostly instrumental. This paper develops a discussion of network concepts and proposes more systematic, less normative ways of addressing and researching network issues in education. It outlines a set of key dimensions of intra- and inter-organizational networks and makes a case for more a comprehensive research approach to these phenomena.”

Finnigan, K. S., Holme, J. J., Orfield, M., Luce, T., Diem, S., Mattheis, A. & Hylton, N. D. (2015). Regional Educational Policy Analysis: Rochester, Omaha, and Minneapolis' Inter-District Arrangements. *Educational Policy*, v29 n5 p780-814. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1063738>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Although regional equity scholars have demonstrated how cross-jurisdictional collaboration on transportation, housing, and employment can promote opportunity for low-income families, few have paid serious attention to the potential of regional "educational" policy to improve opportunity for children. This study seeks to address this gap by examining inter-district "collaboratives" or cooperative agreements between school districts within a metropolitan area. These collaborative arrangements address two inter-related demographic shifts: the rising level of segregation in public schools and the shift from within district segregation to between-district segregation. This article examines three regional collaboratives (Rochester, NY, Omaha, NE, and Minneapolis, MN) that involve varying degrees of cooperation, funding, and legal force. Drawing on 60 in-depth interviews across the three sites, this analysis considers how each program's design features interact with local political dynamics to shape the degree to which these collaboratives are able to achieve policy goals.”

Holen, M. C. & Yunk, D. C. (2014). Benefits of 25 Years of School District-University Partnerships to Improve Teacher Preparation and Advance School Renewal *Educational Considerations*, v42 n1 p49-54. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1051772>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Generalizing about school district-teacher education program relationships across the long history and broad landscape of teacher preparation in America can prove challenging. However, if partnerships imply stable, long-term, mutually beneficial arrangements characterized by shared decision-making and resources, even a relatively cursory scan suggests that until about the past two decades few such relationships between schools and universities existed. Prior to the initiation of what evolved into the nationally recognized Professional Development School Model (PDS) for school district-university partnerships, the relationships between the College of Education at Kansas State University (KSU) and local school districts were fraught with the many shortcomings evident in the clinical aspects of teacher preparation across the nation. Yet, the KSU Professional Development School partnerships evolved to ensure that all relevant players realized enduring and important professional gains. This article details many of these partner benefits.”

Pscencik, K., Ebell, S., & McCulley, L. V. (2016). Neighbors Make Great Learning Partners: 4 Texas Districts Work Together to Build Strong Professional Learning Systems. *Journal of Staff Development*, v37 n6 p22-27.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1124681>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “When school district leaders attend instructional sessions about professional learning, they might take away a few ideas and strategies they want to try. But when experts provide those districts with ongoing coaching, the educators are more likely to gain the ability to create strong professional learning systems that benefit all educators. That is the shift taking place in four south-east Texas school districts working as part of a three-year initiative to improve professional learning in their districts. Clear Creek Independent School District, Friendswood Independent School District, Santa Fe Independent School District, and Galveston Independent School District--all in Galveston County--became part of Galveston County Learning Leaders in spring 2015 when Learning Forward launched the project with a grant from the Houston Endowment. This article introduces how four southeast Texas school districts are working together as part of a three-year initiative to improve professional learning in their districts. The community is based on the concept that districts benefit when they can share knowledge with each other.”

Russell, J. L., Meredith, J., Childs, J., Stein, M. K. & Prine, D. W. (2015). Designing Inter-Organizational Networks to Implement Education Reform: An Analysis of State Race to the Top Applications. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, v37 n1 p92-112. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1050966>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “This study sought to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of state designed Race to the Top (RttT) funded reform networks. Drawing on a conceptual framework developed from the networked governance literature, we analyzed the 12 state RttT grantees' applications. Our analysis revealed that states designed large implementation networks with potential to bring a wide range of resources to bear on reform efforts, particularly through participation of numerous nonsystem actors. However, coordinating large and diverse networks places state education agencies (SEAs) in a new and challenging role. The extent to which networks extend state capacity to support educational improvement or further complicate the work of SEAs remains an open question. We propose a model including a set of theoretical propositions to guide future research.”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Browne, D. (2015). Growing Together, Learning Together: What Cities Have Discovered about Building Afterschool Systems. Perspective. *Wallace Foundation*.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED559934>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “With many cities showing an interest in afterschool system building and research providing a growing body of useful information, this Wallace Perspective offers a digest of the latest thinking on how to build and sustain an afterschool system, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for this promising work. The report (a follow-up to a 2008 Perspective) focuses on the four

components of system building that the most current evidence and experience suggest are essential: (1) "Strong leadership from major players": There is no substitute for a committed mayor or superintendent, but for a system to thrive long term, city agencies, private funders, schools, program providers and families all need to "own" the effort to some degree; (2) "Coordination that fits local context": A system's coordinating entity can be a single public agency, multiple agencies working together, a nonprofit intermediary or a network of partners, depending on local needs; (3) "Effective use of data": Gathering and sharing data on a large scale takes both technology to track and organize information and a skilled staff to interpret and act on it; and (4) "A comprehensive approach to quality": Cities must decide what program quality means to them, how "high stakes" to make their assessments of it and how to support continuous improvement of programs. An infographic illustrates the elements and offers key facts about afterschool and systems building today. [For the 2008 report, "A Place to Grow and Learn: A Citywide Approach to Building and Sustaining Out-of-School Time Learning Opportunities. Perspective", see ED507224.]" NOTE: This source was not peer reviewed.

Gill, S., Yatsko, S. & Lake, R. (2016). Herding Cats: Managing Diverse Charter School Interests in Collaboration Efforts, *Center on Reinventing Public Education*.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED568161>.

*From the ERIC abstract.* "Since the first charter school law was passed in 1991, the relationship between charter schools and districts has been rife with conflict. To no one's surprise, districts have fiercely resisted competition from public schools of choice, especially when that competition grows beyond just a small number of schools and poses a real threat to the district's financial stability. For their part, charter schools have fought just as fiercely against any attempt to impose on their autonomy. As the charter school movement has matured and expanded over time, a growing number of district and charter leaders have slowly and quietly been forging agreements to work together. In many cases, mayors, superintendents, civic leaders, and others reach out to charter leaders to work across traditional charter-district divides. Collaboration touches one or more of these common themes: shared resources, shared responsibility, shared effort to build trust and collegiality, and shared work to ensure equal access to high-quality schools for all students in the city. More than 23 cities have signed District-Charter Collaboration Compacts--formal agreements between school districts and charter schools that aim to share resources and responsibility and build trust and collegiality to ensure equal access to high-quality schools for all students. Within the charter sector itself however, there are highly varied perspectives on and motivations for collaboration. Based on dozens of interviews and observations over four years, the authors look at why many cities have missed opportunities to create more lasting relationships between their district and charter sectors, and offer suggestions for fostering stronger partnerships that could help improve outcomes for all of the students in their cities. Key findings include the following: (1) Many well-intentioned partnership efforts fall short of their full potential because districts see and treat the charter sector as a monolith, rather than a group of distinct, independent actors with diverse motivations, interests, and perspectives; (2) Creating a unified coalition of charter schools led by independent-minded individuals is difficult but not impossible; and (3) Moving forward requires more

nuanced strategies tailored to the needs of the players on the ground. For that reason, collaboration agreements and approaches will necessarily vary from city to city. Suggestions for mayors, district leaders, and charter association heads to create more sophisticated collaboration strategies include: (1) Looking for unifying citywide "bread and butter" issues such as funding or enrollment caps that can involve all charter schools; (2) Creating school or network collaborations when a citywide approach is not possible; (3) Creating opt-in opportunities for highly contentious issues; and (4) Cultivating effective leadership to build coalitions." NOTE: This source was not peer reviewed.

## **METHODS**

### **Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Searches:**

Partnerships in education; Educational partnerships; School district cooperation

### **Search of Databases and Websites**

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) website (<http://www.ies.ed.gov>) and IES sources: Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Center for Education Research (NCER), What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)
- ERIC database ([www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov))
- Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>)
- Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com))
- Bing ([www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com) )

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

REL Southwest selected resources that provide research on potential benefits of district participation in a statewide network. When REL Southwest staff reviewed resources, we considered – among other things – three factors:

1. Date of Publication: The most current information (primarily published from 2010 to the present) is included.
2. Source and Funder of the Report/Brief/Article: Priority was given to publications written in relevant, peer-reviewed journals or reports or produced by well-known research organizations.
3. Methodology: sources include reported studies, literature reviews and policy reports.

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