

May 2017

Thank you for your request for **research on whether talent-based partnerships with public school districts contribute to school improvement and increased student achievement.** Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on 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

“Successful school turnarounds—characterized by quick, strategic changes in school culture and systems that result in dramatic improvement in student achievement in persistently low-performing schools—are hard work and difficult to achieve and sustain. Further complicating the issue, few states and districts have a clear, robust definition of turnaround success, which would enable states, districts, and schools to:

- Identify successful turnarounds and examine factors that contribute to success, creating lessons useful to other schools.
- Determine as early as possible when a turnaround attempt is off-track in order to respond more quickly and effectively.”<sup>1</sup>

“School districts in several large cities, including New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and post-Katrina New Orleans, have implemented an urban school decentralization model generally known as “portfolio districts.” Others, including those in Denver and Cleveland, are following suit in what appears to be a growing trend.... The premise of the portfolio strategy is that if superintendents build portfolios of schools that encompass a variety of educational approaches offered by different vendors, then over time school districts will weed out under-performing approaches and vendors; as a result, more children will have more opportunities for academic success.”<sup>2</sup>

Partnerships between schools, districts, and businesses as well as those between districts and teacher preparation programs can be found in schools and districts both large and small. Successful partnerships benefit students, teachers, and the communities they serve.

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<sup>1</sup> Lutterloh, C., Cornier, J.P., & Hassel, B. C. (2016). “Measuring school turnaround success.” The Center on School Turnaround. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

[http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/resources/Measuring\\_School\\_Turnaround\\_Success.pdf](http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/sites/default/files/resources/Measuring_School_Turnaround_Success.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Saltman, K. J. (2010). Urban School Decentralization and the Growth of “Portfolio Districts.” National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/portfolio-districts>.

“Creating a successful community school partnership is a complex, challenging, and time-consuming task. To be effective, partnerships need to engage in a thoughtful process to define a vision and clear goals. Partnerships need to have effective governance and management structures to ensure that programs operate efficiently and the partnership is responsive to community needs. Community school partnerships also need to draw from a broad range of perspectives and expertise—from inside the school as well as from other organizations and individuals within the community. Finally, community school partnerships need to connect, coordinate, and leverage resources from a variety of sources to support and continue their work.”<sup>3</sup>

Following an established REL Southwest protocol, we conducted a search for research reports, websites, as well as descriptive briefs on talent-based partnerships’ contributions to school improvement and increased student achievement. **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

**Portfolio Districts—Do talent-based partnerships with public school districts contribute to school improvement and increased student achievement?**

## SOURCES

Aidman, B. & Baray, S. N. (2016). Leveraging community resources: Creating successful partnerships to improve schools. *Educational Forum*, 80(3), 264-277. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1102047>

*From the ERIC abstract:* Educational leaders increasingly acknowledge the importance of developing partnerships to address pressing and persistent educational concerns. This article reports the results of a qualitative case study that examined an exurban district’s efforts to improve educational outcomes through the development of multisector partnerships with community organizations and private-sector businesses. The results highlight key aspects of successful collaborations and suggest a need to include the study of partnership development in preparation programs for educational leaders.

Coburn, C. E. & Penuel, W. R. (2016). Research-practice partnerships in education: Outcomes, dynamics, and open questions. *Educational Researcher*, 45(1), 48-54. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1091883>

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<sup>3</sup> Blank, M. J. & Hanson Langford, B. (2000). Strengthening partnerships: Community school assessment checklist. Coalition for Community Schools and The Finance Project. <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/csassessment.pdf>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Policymakers, funders, and researchers today view “research-practice partnerships” (RPPs) as a promising approach for expanding the role of research in improving educational practice. Although studies in other fields provide evidence of the potential for RPPs, studies in education are few. This article provides a review of available evidence of the outcomes and dynamics of RPPs in education and related fields. It then outlines a research agenda for the study of RPPs that can guide funders’ investments and help developing partnerships succeed.”

Corsello, M., Sharma, A., & Jerabek, A. (2015). Building assets reducing risks: Academic success for all students through positive relationships and use of real-time data. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, April 16–20. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED557932>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR) is a social emotional model that achieves academic outcomes through combining use of real-time student data with proven relationship-building strategies and intensive teacher collaboration to prevent course failure. BARR is a recipient of US Department of Education “Investing in Innovation (i3)” Development and Validation grants. This paper presents results of the first two years of BARR implementation, including a randomized controlled trial in the first year. Students who experienced BARR earned significantly more credits toward graduation and had a lower core course failure rate than students in the control condition. By the second year, the achievement gap between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students had closed. Implications of combining positive intentional relationships with academic rigor are discussed.”

Hartman, S. L., Stotts, J., Ottley, J. R. & Miller, R. (2017). School-community partnerships in rural settings: Facilitating positive outcomes for young children who experience maltreatment *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(3), 403-410. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1134931>

*From the ERIC abstract:* Challenging conditions put young children at risk for maltreatment around the world, including in rural, southeastern Ohio. To combat these situations, several strategies are helpful in facilitating positive outcomes for young children. Specifically, when community entities and local school professionals work together, there is a greater likelihood of positive outcomes for children. This article describes meaningful partnerships that contribute to increased school success in rural settings and offers suggestions for developing effective school-community partnerships in other regions of the United States, as well as in other countries. The benefits of the practices described in this article may be felt across multiple layers of a community and are advantageous for all stakeholders.

Klute, M., Cherasaro, T., & Aphorp, H. (2016). Summary of research on the association between state interventions in chronically low-performing schools and student achievement. REL 2016-138. *Regional Educational Laboratory Central*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565613>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “This report summarizes the research on the association between state interventions in chronically low-performing schools and student

achievement. Most of the research focused on one type of state intervention: working with a turnaround partner. Few studies were identified that examined other types of interventions, such as school closure, charter conversion, and school redesign. Most studies were descriptive, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the effectiveness of the interventions. Results of studies of turnaround partner interventions were mixed and suggested that student achievement was more likely to improve when particular factors--such as strong leadership, use of data to guide instruction, and a positive school culture characterized by trust and increased expectations for students--were in place in schools. Studies in California examined the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program or its successor, the High Priority School Grant Program. Ten studies examined interventions in states other than California. Studies varied somewhat in the details of the interventions studied, including whether additional funding was provided to support implementation of reforms. Unlike interventions in California, studies in other states did not describe school participation in interventions as voluntary. The following are appended: (1) Literature search procedures; and (2) Characteristics of studies included in the literature review.”

Perkins, T. (2015). School-community partnerships, friend or foe? The doublespeak of community with educational partnerships. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, 51(4), 317-336.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1070331>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “In recent reform efforts, school-community partnerships have been touted as a means for promoting student success (Decker, Decker, & Brown 2007; Epstein 2010) and meeting student needs (Hands 2010). Yet, despite any accolades, the motives and results of school-community partnerships are contested. Gary Anderson (1998) points out that partnerships tend to be designed to graft members into prior objectives and goals instead of being designed to facilitate staff members in working together to redefine goals. Auerbach (2010) echoes this concern, suggesting that the literature regarding school partnerships focuses primarily on academic achievement while operating under "limited school agendas or mandates for collaboration" which do little to promote "socially just" schools (p. 729). And, schools are egregiously unjust. Thus, in this article, I first evaluate the school-community partnership in a new light by broadly conceptualizing how "community" exists as a term within the public education system and considering the impact of the historical situatedness of communities and political lines on renderings of community. Second, I offer an understanding of how school-community partnerships are discussed in terms of doublespeak, illustrating how the very word "community" can be employed across a spectrum of different meanings, interpretations, and implications. Last, I argue that community partnerships have been promoted as educational reform with little prospect of challenging meta-narratives that tell a story of who has something to offer to our schools and who does not.”

Peurach, D. J. & Neumerski, C. M. (2015). Mixing metaphors: Building infrastructure for large scale school turnaround, *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(4), 379-420.  
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1082546>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “The purpose of this analysis is to increase understanding of the possibilities and challenges of building educational infrastructure--the basic, foundational structures, systems, and resources--to support large-scale school turnaround. Building educational infrastructure often exceeds the capacity of schools, districts, and state education agencies and, thus, requires collaborating with "lead turnaround partners" with specialized capabilities for such work. However, there is little research to guide the selection or operation of lead turnaround partners. The analysis uses a descriptive case study of one organization with success operating as a lead turnaround partner (Success for All) to develop a framework to guide the selection of lead turnaround partners, support their operations, and structure further research. While base level achievement gains can be realized within 3 years, the analysis suggests that fully establishing school-level infrastructure is estimated conservatively as a 7 years process, and fully establishing system-level infrastructure has been an on-going, 40 year process. The analysis suggests a strong need to balance the rhetorical urgency of "turnaround" with the understanding that building educational infrastructure to improve large numbers of underperforming schools will likely require massive, sustained technical, financial, policy, and political support.”

Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2016). Typologizing School-community partnerships: A framework for analysis and action. *Urban Education, 51*(7), 719-747. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1109860>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “School-community partnerships are currently in the forefront of place-based urban reform efforts. But the literature on these partnerships indicates a variety of models that require different commitments and resources. Through a close review of the literature, we developed a typology of four partnership categories organized from the least to the most comprehensive in purpose and design. This typology reveals different theories of action as well as the conditions that facilitate or obstruct various models of partnership implementation. We argue that such a typology is a useful tool in guiding systemic educational reform, research, and evaluation.”

Willems, P. P. & Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R. (2012). School-community partnerships: Using authentic contexts to academically motivate students, *School Community Journal, 22*(2), 9-30. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1001611>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “The opportunities school-community partnerships pose for students' learning continue to generate the attention of educational stakeholders. Children learn through a variety of social and educational contexts, and the goals for student academic success are best achieved through the cooperation and support of schools, families, and communities. The purpose of this article is to examine several instructional approaches that use diverse contexts to facilitate students' meaningful learning of academic subject matter: authentic instruction, problem-based learning, and service learning. Building upon the premise of a community of learners, school-community partnerships within each of these approaches are discussed.”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Coburn, C. E., Penuel, W. R., & Geil, K. E. (2013). Research-practice partnerships: A strategy for leveraging research for educational improvement in school districts. A White Paper, William T. Grant Foundation. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED568396>

*From the ERIC abstract:* “Pressures are increasing on educational policy and practice to use research to guide improvement. Recently there have been concerted efforts to forge new and different kinds of relationships between researchers and practitioners. School districts across the country are developing a new kind of partnership with researchers. These research-practice partnerships are long-term collaborations, which are organized to investigate problems of practice and generate solutions for improving district outcomes. This white paper will: (1) Define research-practice partnerships; (2) Identify the major types of partnerships that operate at the district level; and (3) Describe challenges partnerships face and strategies for addressing these challenges. To do so, the authors draw on a review of existing research and interviews with participants in research-practice partnerships across the country. Throughout, they illustrate the work of research-practice partnerships with portraits of partnerships in action.” NOTE: This source was not peer reviewed.

### Relevant organizations

Center on School Turnaround—<http://centeronschoolturnaround.org/>.

*From the website:* “The Center on School Turnaround (Center) is part of a federal network of 22 Comprehensive Centers. There are 15 Regional Comprehensive Centers, serving individual states or clusters of states, and 7 national Content Centers. The centers are charged with building the capacity of state educational agencies (SEAs) to assist districts and schools in meeting student achievement goals.”

The Education Trust—<http://www.edtrust.org>.

*From the website:* “The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those from low-income families or who are black, Latino, or American Indian—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.”

The Promising Practices Network—<http://www.promisingpractices.net>.

*From the website:* “The Promising Practices Network (PPN) website is a unique resource that offers credible, research-based information on what works to improve the lives of children and families. Sometimes referred to as a “best practices” site or a “model program” site, PPN is both of those things and much more. In addition to providing summaries of effective programs in our programs that work section, PPN also features Issue Briefs that summarize the current research on various topics, as well as Expert Perspectives, where child policy experts answer our visitors’ most pressing questions on a variety of topics. PPN also links to additional research information in all areas related to child well-being, including their physical and mental

health, academic success, and economic security. To promote successful implementation of best practices and model programs, PPN also screens and posts evidence-based information on effective Service Delivery.”

U.S. Department of Education OESE Office of School Turnaround—  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/ost/index.html>.

*From the website:* “The Office of School Turnaround (OST) is responsible for providing financial assistance and other support, including through the administration of the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, for state and district efforts to turn around the lowest-performing five percent of schools in each state. The OST uses knowledge of turnaround efforts, including those of SIG and Priority Schools, to inform its monitoring, technical assistance, and policy decisions. It focuses on building the capacity of states and districts to improve student outcomes, and sustain the reforms, in their lowest-performing schools. The OST is also responsible for helping to coordinate the Department’s programs and initiatives focused on the lowest-performing schools and for working collaboratively with other Department offices to develop strategies, guidance, and networks to assist those schools.”

### Other Relevant Resources to Consult

- The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center  
<https://www.charterschoolcenter.org/resource/assessment-and-accountability-comprehensive-center-special-populations-strand>
- The Center on Instruction—<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/>
- National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing  
<http://cresst.org/>
- National Center for Performance Incentives  
<https://my.vanderbilt.edu/performanceincentives/>
- School Turnaround Learning Community—  
<http://www.schoolturnaroundsupport.org/>
- U.S. Department of Education – School Improvement Grants  
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>
- Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement  
<http://www.sedl.org/expertise/historical/center-for-csri.html>

## METHODS

### Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Searches

- Partnerships and school improvements
- Partnerships in education
- School community partnerships

## 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 ([scholar.google.com](http://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 whether talent-based partnerships with public school districts contribute to school improvement and increased student achievement. 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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