

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Education:
Comparative Case Studies of Organizational Death and Persistence

Iris Daruwala

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2020

© 2020

Iris Daruwala

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Education:

Comparative Case Studies of Organizational Death and Persistence

Iris Daruwala

My dissertation is concerned with the organizational survival of cross-sector collaboration in education, a strategy that has long been present in education reform but has received renewed interest in recent years due to broader social and policy trends. In particular, my study is concerned with the environmental, organizational and individual conditions that contribute to the inability of cross-sector collaborations to sustain the “backbone”—or intermediary organizations—responsible for facilitating the collaborative work. In addition to exploring the characteristics that contribute to their organizational death, my study leverages stakeholder interviews and document analysis to build an understanding of the most important considerations for the survival prospects of future cross-sector collaborations. The framing of the study incorporates institutional, organizational and sensemaking theories to guide three tiers—the macro, meso and micro levels—of organizational analysis.

Using a qualitative, comparative case study design, I match three unsustainable or “dead” cross-sector collaborations with three surviving pairs that share a similar mission, vision and goals, but vary across a number of key conditions that interview data from the dead collaborations suggest are critical to survival. I conduct 53 new interviews with stakeholders from dead collaborations and draw on 69 interviews that either I or a collaborator conducted with stakeholders from the surviving collaborations as part of a previous study. My total sample includes 122 interviews with stakeholders across the six collaborations. I then build a case

narrative for each of the collaborations, using interview data and key documents, followed by a cross-case analysis of how the collaboration pairs differed in the characteristics, conditions, events and strategies they employed during coalition building, implementation and sustainability planning phases. I conclude with an analysis of the patterns across the three dead collaborations that undermined their organizational sustainability and an examination of the promising practices learned from the surviving collaborations.

The findings from my study have implications for policymakers, practitioners, philanthropic organizations and future researchers that are discussed in detail in the final chapter. I find four major patterns across the dead collaborations that contributed to their closure, including: institutional contradictions in funder-backbone relationships; perverse incentives for collaboration due to insufficient coalition building and continuous partner engagement; a backbone structure that is either too dependent on or too detached from the school district; and an inability to control alternate narratives about the work being produced by cross-sector partners, funders and community members. I generate theoretical propositions related to these findings for suggested use by future researchers.

Additionally, I find six promising practices across the surviving collaborations that have bolstered their sustainability prospects to date: diversifying their funding portfolios to avoid reliance on short-term grants; leveraging an effective leader to communicate a clear value proposition to funders; investing in iterative, partner engagement and collaborative governance structures from coalition building through implementation; creating a common narrative about the collaboration's identity, but tailoring communications with different stakeholders; buffering the backbone from environmental volatility by separating the roles of facilitation and

programmatic service provision; and leveraging network membership to share experiences and avoid replicating mistakes.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Cross-Sector Collaboration and Organizational Survival.....	5
1.1 What is a Cross-Sector Collaboration in Education?	5
1.2 Factors Related to Survival.....	7
1.3 Takeaway Patterns in Organizational Survival.....	19
Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework	20
2.1 Macro-level: Institutional Theory	21
2.2 Meso-level: Technical-Rationality and Resource Dependency	24
2.3 Micro-level: Institutionalism and Individual Sensemaking.....	27
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology	29
3.1 Research Design.....	29
3.2 Analytic Approach	35
Chapter Four: Lift Off and Community Schools, Thriving Students	45
4.1 Case Narrative of Lift Off.....	45
4.2 Case Narrative of Community Schools, Thriving Students.....	61
4.3 Comparative Analysis of Lift Off and Community Schools, Thriving Students.....	75
Chapter Five: Rise Up and All Hands Raised	103

5.1 Case Narrative of Rise Up	103
5.2 Case Narrative of All Hands Raised (AHR)	118
5.3 Comparative Analysis of Rise Up and All Hands Raised	127
Chapter Six: Harmon Students Succeed and Say Yes Buffalo.....	158
6.1 Case Narrative of Harmon Students Succeed (HSS).....	158
6.2 Case Narrative of Say Yes Buffalo (SYB)	173
6.3 Comparative Analysis of Harmon Students Succeed and Say Yes Buffalo	185
Chapter Seven: Emergent Patterns from the Dead and Surviving Collaborations	210
7.1 Major Findings and Themes from the Dead Collaborations.....	211
7.2 Promising Practices from the Surviving Collaborations	239
Chapter Eight: Discussion	253
References	261
Appendix A.....	269
Appendix B.....	270
Appendix C.....	280

List of Tables and Figures

<i>Table 1. Distribution of Stakeholder Types across Six Case Studies</i>	40
<i>Table 2. Summary of Lift Off Key Characteristics</i>	45
<i>Figure 1. Lift Off Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map</i>	52
<i>Table 3. Summary of Community Schools, Thriving Students (CSTS) Key Characteristics</i>	61
<i>Figure 2. Oakland CSTS Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map</i>	67
<i>Table 4. Summary of Rise Up Key Characteristics</i>	103
<i>Figure 3. Rise Up Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map</i>	109
<i>Table 5. Summary of All Hands Raised (AHR) Key Characteristics</i>	118
<i>Figure 4. AHR Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map</i>	123
<i>Table 6. Summary of Harmon Students Succeed (HSS) Key Characteristics</i>	157
<i>Figure 5. HSS 2014 Management Hierarchy Map</i>	164
<i>Table 7. Summary of Say Yes Buffalo (SYB) Key Characteristics</i>	173
<i>Figure 6. SYB Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map</i>	179
<i>Table A1. Variation in Characteristics across Collaboration Pairs</i>	269

Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank my committee, Carolyn Riehl, Jeffrey Henig, Michael Rebell, Aaron Pallas and Paul DiMaggio, for their continued support and constructive feedback throughout the dissertation process and doctoral program. The guidance and critical feedback from all of these individuals has enriched my learning and experiences in more ways than I could possibly explain here. Each of these individuals has lent me their time, expertise and suggestions in ways that have pushed me to grow throughout my time at Teachers College. Additionally, I owe a great deal of gratitude to Carolyn Riehl, Jeffrey Henig and Michael Rebell for bringing me on board a research study in 2015 that inspired me to more deeply examine the organizational persistence and sustainability prospects of cross-sector collaboration in education.

This entire process would not be possible without the loving support of family and friends, many of whom encouraged me to recognize my own potential and advocate for myself throughout this experience in ways that were unfamiliar to me before. I would especially like to thank my husband, Mathew Daruwala, for all of the sacrifices he has made to help me get to this point. He has provided unwavering support and been a constant voice of reason, qualities that I so greatly appreciate during a process that can at times feel uncertain and overwhelming. I could not imagine a better partner to join me on this long journey.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, who has provided me with strength, motivation and a few interesting thoughts in utero.

Introduction

Within the past decade, there has been a burgeoning movement towards a type of local education reform that aims to holistically address the needs of marginalized students and the communities in which they reside: cross-sector collaboration. These local collaborations have relied on coalition building strategies that coalesce stakeholders in both the public and private sector to create a common mission, goals and agenda for change. While cross-sector partnership is far from a novel concept, the most recent iteration of these reforms—which I refer to as cross-sector collaboration in education—is becoming a more commonly accepted means of improving local educational and social outcomes. Cross-sector collaborations bring together partners from the public and private sectors to provide a range of educational, social, health and other support services for children, youth and their families. Various models, such as community schools, the StriveTogether cradle-to-career model, and postsecondary pipeline models such as Say Yes to Education all constitute cross-sector collaborations, albeit in different organizational forms. As the collaborations and the networks charged with supporting their implementation continue to grow, there is a need to understand how effectively these efforts can embed themselves within the communities they serve, and alternatively, how easily they can be dismantled.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the most recent federal reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, makes cross-sector collaboration even more salient. The legislation explicitly supports the development and growth of local innovations, including “evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).” The flexibility afforded to states by ESSA helps them circumvent the chaos associated with compliance to federal mandates and importantly, empowers the development of alternative governance structures at the local level (Mehta &

Teles, 2012). This jurisdictional shift legitimizes the role of local actors in education reform and may very well increase local political and fiscal investment in cross-sector collaboration.

Other federal policies also suggest that cross-sector collaborations will receive increasing fiscal investment in the coming years. In 2017, the Investing in Opportunity Act created “Opportunity Zones” to spur long-term private sector investment in low-income communities nationwide (115th Congress, H.R.828, 2017). These Opportunity Zones provide a tax incentive for investors to re-invest their unrealized capital gains into dedicated “Opportunity Funds” that support community improvement work. By placing their money in Opportunity Funds, investors can defer the recognition of capital gains and become eligible for capital gains tax reductions or exemptions after five years. The act thus incentivizes an infusion of financial capital into organizations like cross-sector collaborations tasked with community improvement. In light of the aforementioned policies, there is a pressing need to build an evidence base on the operations, effectiveness and sustainability of cross-sector collaborations if they are to be considered a viable strategy for improving educational outcomes.

Although there is a vast body of literature on cross-sector partnership, there is a much smaller body of work pertaining to cross-sector collaboration in education. To date, public-private and cross-sector partnerships in education have not been thoroughly evaluated because research has focused on implementation and process studies conducted too early in their organizational lifespans (Hodge & Greve, 2007). Evaluations are not designed to measure long-term sustainability (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002), leaving funders and practitioners grappling with how to assess their achievements (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999). Furthermore, research has generally focused on individual case studies (e.g., Education Northwest, 2013) and descriptive implementation studies (e.g., Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2015; LaRocco et al., 2014), none of which

explicitly address survival and sustainability. This is despite the long history of various iterations of cross-sector partnerships in education in the United States, beginning with comprehensive anti-poverty efforts at schools in the early 19th century (Henig et al., 2015).

My study goes beyond the extant research by focusing specifically on the organizational survival prospects of cross-sector collaborations. There is a dearth of information on the nebulous transitions between coalition building, implementation, scale-up and sustainability, making it difficult to understand the conditions that contribute to their failure or success. While funding studies of organizational failure is often unpopular because of the time, money and energy invested by stakeholders in the organization's success, negating to examine the processes that have destabilized "dead" collaborations risks reproducing mistakes that do not allow these organizations to persist long enough to improve educational outcomes. Without understanding the conditions leading to organizational death, these collaborations could prove to be another ephemeral fad in the business of education reform.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I begin by describing cross-sector collaborations in education and their core organizational characteristics based on a review of the literature. I then review the literature on factors related to the organizational survival of cross-sector collaborations in education as well as in other fields, highlighting key takeaway patterns in organizational survival. Subsequently, in Chapter Two, I propose a theoretical framework for examining cross-sector collaborations in education at the macro, meso and micro levels of organizational analysis. In Chapter Three, I describe my methodological approach to conducting the study, including a description of how I constructed my sample, matched dead and surviving collaboration pairs, and conducted data collection and analysis. Interview protocols for key stakeholders in both dead and surviving collaborations, as well as descriptive tables of matched

pairs of dead and surviving collaborations, are included as appendices. Chapters four through six include case narratives of the dead collaborations and their surviving pairs, followed by a comparative, cross-case analysis of the key conditions, characteristics and approaches employed by each of the collaborations when navigating challenges during coalition building, implementation and sustainability planning. In Chapter Seven, I examine common patterns across the dead collaborations and introduce theoretical propositions about the conditions that may undermine the survival prospects of other cross-sector collaborations in education. Additionally, I introduce a set of promising practices learned from the surviving collaborations. Finally, Chapter Eight concludes with the implications of my findings for future researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropic donors.

Chapter One: Cross-Sector Collaboration and Organizational Survival

1.1 What is a Cross-Sector Collaboration in Education?

While cross-sector collaboration models can vary greatly across different localities, for the purposes of this study, I define cross-sector collaboration as a phenomenon where multiple stakeholders convene and form an entirely new, collective, mission-driven body in partnership with the local school district. This is in contrast to the more routine, contractual relationships that schools or districts often have with one or more service providers. Prior work in this area by Henig et al. (2015) has produced a set of criteria for defining cross-sector collaboration in education that I will employ in my study. The criteria include: place-based initiatives organized at the city, school district, and/or county level; the participation of leaders from two or more sectors; an explicit focus on educational outcomes; and some form of participation by school district officials (Henig et al., 2015). Some examples of cross-sector collaborations include initiatives following a strategy predetermined by a network organization, such as the StriveTogether or Say Yes to Education national networks. Others include district-wide community school collaborations or federally funded efforts, such as Promise Neighborhoods.

Since the early 2000s, there has been an increasing, renewed interest in cross-sector collaboration in education (Núñez & Oliva, 2009; Wohlstetter et al., 2003). Even more recently, since 2011, there has been a steep increase in the number of cross-sector collaborations self-identifying as “collective impact” organizations (Henig et al., 2016). This coincides with the publication of an influential article by Kania and Kramer (2011) outlining a collective impact model, or a collaborative solution to addressing complex social problems while simultaneously pursuing systemic change. The collective impact model called for increased coordination across

sectors to create: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities to increase coverage and efficiency; continuous communication; and the support of a “backbone organization” that facilitates partnership (Kania & Kramer, 2011). While not all cross-sector collaborations follow the collective impact model, most are centered on a “backbone” or intermediary organization. The backbone can be a new role assigned to a preexisting organization participating in the collaboration or could result in the creation of an entirely new organization. Unlike traditional coordinated service provision, what makes these backbone organizations unique is their focus on the coordination of numerous subparts that extend far beyond the coordination of one service or program, including: coalition building; creating collaborative governance structures; and facilitating working groups, meetings and tasks in service of multiple projects aimed at improving school district outcomes. Due to the range of subparts coordinated under this unique organizational form, these backbones and the collaborative efforts they facilitate can be largely characterized as complex organizations (Tolbert & Hall, 2009).

As this study is concerned with the sustainability of these complex organizations, I define their “organizational death” as the forced or voluntary closure of the backbone tasked with facilitating the collaboration. This includes collaborations that shut down, merged with other organizations, or those that were absorbed by higher capacity organizations and relegated to smaller-scale initiatives, losing their mission or organizational identity in the process. The deaths of the collaborations included in my study all occurred before each organization fulfilled its mission and goals. As some of the work initiated by these collaborations was handed off to other organizations during their closure, I want to emphasize that “organizational death” constitutes the death of the collaboration as an entity, not the complete discontinuance of the work itself. In

this study, the term “survival” will refer to collaborations that have been in existence since January 2015, are in operation as of March 2020, and show signs of sustainability.

1.2 Factors Related to Survival

As collaborations become more complex through greater inclusion of stakeholders and expanded roles and tasks, they also become more difficult to coordinate. The ability to manage this complexity over time may be related to their vertical complexity, such as hierarchical decision-making structures, or their horizontal complexity, such as the division of tasks into specialized subgroups. Many theorists have argued that as organizations become more complex, they tend to formalize, or make permanent, prescribed organizational processes (Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Haas et al., 1963; Pugh et al., 1969). If this is true, the way in which collaborations navigate this process of formalization over time may be critical to their institutionalization. While think tanks, consultant firms and advocacy organizations have put forth broad frameworks outlining collaboration phases (e.g., The Aspen Institute and FSG), no studies to date have identified distinctive stages of collaborations’ evolutionary trajectories, let alone the role that formalization might play in survival. In my dissertation, I seek to build a better understanding of the role that formalization, or the lack thereof, plays in three core stages in collaborations’ lifespans: initiation; implementation; and institutionalization.

I define initiation as the coalition building and start-up activities collaborations pursue once they have determined the need for the organization. Implementation encompasses the projects, initiatives and tasks undertaken in order to make progress towards collaborations’ mission, vision and goals. Finally, I define institutionalization as the stage when collaborations have achieved taken-for-granted status and legitimacy in their local environments. The factors bolstering or undermining organizational survival may very well differ across these broad stages.

Despite the gap in the literature on the evolutionary phases of cross-sector collaboration in education and the explicit factors that may contribute to their survival or closure, there is a wealth of general literature on cross-sector collaboration and coordinated service provision that has accumulated over the past thirty years. Much of this work highlights problems related to institutional deficiencies, incentives and rewards, attitudinal barriers to change and bureaucratic intractability (see literature review in Henig et al., 2015). While the extant literature suggests that there is no singular model for effective collaboration, it does underscore a number of elements that may contribute to its success or failure. The importance and potential consequences of these elements for organizational survival are discussed below.

Coalition building. Convening a diverse array of stakeholders around a common mission and goals is perhaps the most core task during the initial stage of a collaboration's lifespan. Researchers have theorized that organizations are only inclined to collaborate across sectors when they do not have the internal human, fiscal or resource capacity to achieve certain goals on their own (Hudson et al., 1999; Bryson et al., 2006). Thus, cross-sector collaboration would be more likely to form in localities with low levels of institutional support or fluctuations in the institutional environment that deplete the internal resource capacity of individual organizations (Ansell & Gash, 2008). In this case, collaboration across multiple organizations could create a buffer against conditions in the external environment by providing a more diverse portfolio of expertise, capacity and organizational assets. Moreover, the concept of collaboration has been legitimized as an acceptable means of problem solving, which is often reflected in the criteria for receiving public and private financial resources (Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Ostrower, 2005). Since organizations are becoming increasingly diverse and specialized, coalition building to access the same resources could be an advantageous route for narrowly-focused organizations.

Coalition building is also perhaps the most difficult task undertaken by cross-sector collaborations because of the time and energy it takes to continually engage stakeholders and sustain their commitment. Often, there is a lead organization that facilitates coalition building among various stakeholders. In order for these movements to be the most successful, some social movement theorists argue that the lead organization should rely on preexisting relationships with others in its network to build both organizational and social capital (see Davis et al., 2005). A number of scholars have similarly theorized that leveraging preexisting relationships and networks is a crucial part of the initial collaborative process because it builds upon a baseline foundation of trust that is difficult to create otherwise (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002; Jones et al., 1997; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Weiss, 1984). Taking advantage of these relationships facilitates faster coordination among stakeholders who can spend less time building goodwill and a shared vision. It thus follows that cross-sector collaborations with more linkages to powerful sponsors and preexisting networks have a greater chance of survival in their initial formative stages than those lacking such connections (Bryson et al., 2006).

Furthermore, case studies of coordinated service provision suggest that cross-sector collaborations may lose legitimacy if members do not engage in a bottom-up, broadly inclusive strategy for coalition building (Crowson & Boyd, 1996). In the specific case of cross-sector collaboration in education, there is scant evidence of the substantive involvement of students, teachers or parents in the work, while business elites, higher education leaders and other social service leaders constitute the highest proportion of representatives on top governing boards (Henig et al., 2016). Prior evaluations have found that coordinated-services collaborations had little impact on changing school processes (Cohen, 1991) and struggled with getting partners to re-conceptualize their roles and relationships within the new context (Johnson et al., 1980). Thus,

it could be the case that collaborative leaders are aware of this challenge and are intentionally minimizing the involvement of teachers, students and parents in the hopes of gaining momentum before becoming fully visible and vulnerable to their judgment.

Strategic inclusion and representation. Decisions about who to include or exclude from collaboration have implications for balancing power dynamics and sustaining coalition momentum throughout all three stages of initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Evidence on the advantages of partnering with governmental agencies during coalition building, for example, is somewhat mixed. Case studies of coordinated service provision suggest that collaborations are more likely to survive if they can leverage federal- or state-level support during coalition building (Crowson & Boyd, 1996). More recent research employing survival analysis, however, found that after a federal program has been enacted, partisan change and a divided government have statistically significant, positive associations with the death of federal programs (Berry et al., 2010). This could have important implications for the continuity of partnerships during the coalition building stages of collaboration as well as for the overall lifespans of collaborations that are dependent on government partnerships for support.

Power is an important consideration for cross-sector collaborations if they are to be broadly inclusive. It entails access to individuals and resources, as well as the exercise of control over information, communication and “weaker” members (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The members that participate in a cross-sector collaboration participate knowing that the collective mission and goals of the collaboration are secondary to the primary interests of their own organizations. Navigating these interests is critical to ensuring that more powerful organizations are motivated to participate, rather than block, collaboration (Gray & Hay, 1986). Furthermore, the literature suggests that members who are unable to participate in an equal manner due to the size,

resources or reputation of their own organizations can be more easily manipulated by the interests of powerful stakeholders during the collaborative process (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). This is one of the reasons that incentives must be identified, challenged and re-assessed throughout all stages of coalition building.

Engaging members in an equally representative manner is also necessary for ensuring that less powerful partners feel valued and maintain their long-term commitment to the collaboration (Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Merrill-Sands & Sheridan, 1996). If processes for comprehensive community participation are established early on, they can decrease conflict and facilitate smoother implementation in later stages of the collaboration's development (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). This consistency in participation could contribute to external perceptions of the collaboration's legitimacy, which is important for future institutionalization (Beierle & Konisky 2001; Geoghegan & Renard, 2002). While there is a gap in the literature about *how* stakeholders with varying degrees of power effectively participate in an equally representative manner, the literature generally suggests building a transparent, positive strategy of empowerment and representation (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). Cross-sector collaborations have a greater chance of survival if they can equalize power dynamics to prevent conflict (Reilly, 2001) or minimize the perception of unequal control (Mechanic, 1962).

Collective decision-making and sensemaking. Also likely to be present across initiation, implementation and initiation stages are collective decision-making structures and sensemaking processes which require careful thought to avoid alienating stakeholders. Milam and Heath (2014) conducted two interpretative case studies of inter-organizational community collaborations and found that decision-making strategies that did focus on visibility, shared ownership and respectful disagreement were more effective at building collective ownership than

those only focused on information exchange. The inability to implement effective, collective decision-making structures threatens the survival prospects of cross-sector collaborations by allowing opportunities for collapses in “sensemaking,” a process of individual cognition and social interaction based on the connection between “frames”—historical reference points—and “cues” —present experiences (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is intertwined with what Friedland and Alford (1991) originally conceptualized as “institutional logics,” the co-construction of categories, beliefs and motives through individual, organizational and institutional interactions. These institutional logics are responsible for creating routines and rituals that define order and reproduce the belief in the institution (Friedland & Alford, 1991). A failure to engage in collective decision-making around a common agenda has the potential to disrupt sensemaking, leaving individuals to default to their own sensemaking about what the collaboration represents, likely influenced by the institutional logics held by their own organizations. This could reduce stakeholder commitment and disrupt the collaboration’s ability to rationalize the need for its existence to both partners and the broader community.

A number of sociologists have analyzed case studies of organizations where collapses in sensemaking were at the crux of organizational failure. Diane Vaughan (1985; 1997) and Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe (2015), for example, studied failures in “high reliability organizations” where the consequences of mistakes were fatal. In her study on the failure of the NASA Challenger launch decision, Vaughan (1997) found that underlying cultural and structural frameworks shaped decision-making at NASA under unprecedented circumstances. The inability of engineers and higher level superiors to engage in impromptu problem solving when faced with anomalies was due to sensemaking frames and cues that overvalued hierarchical authority, rules

and procedures. Deference to their superiors' decisions manifested in communication misfires where signaling was interpreted differently by people at various levels of the organization.

Although the consequences of the NASA Challenger case were more immediate than those of failed education reforms, the failure to examine cultural frameworks that help classify membership in and across groups, as well as the failure to examine structural frameworks that shape our understanding of particular roles, can lead to the oversight of institutional contradictions. In studying an urban elementary school implementing accountability measures, Timothy Hallett (2010) found that teachers could no longer make sense of their roles or responsibilities at the school. The recoupling of loosely coupled tasks disrupted their routines and disconnected the frames and cues they once used to make sense of their work, resulting in turmoil. The myth of accountability—once it became real and inhabited teachers' workplaces—threatened previously institutionalized beliefs guiding teachers' sensemaking.

As exemplified by Hallett's (2010) case study, managing competing institutional logics is a critical part of building legitimacy and resolving individual- and organizational-level conflicts. It is likely that the stakeholders in cross-sector collaborations are already navigating competing institutional logics by simply participating in the work as individuals who represent diverse organizations. Managing these logics effectively could be critical to the survival of cross-sector collaborations due to the high level of involvement from the business sector and social services agencies (see Henig et al., 2016). How does a private bank reconcile its dominant institutional logics with those of the non-profit or government sectors? If a stakeholder from the bank believes an effective collaboration must demonstrate clear outcomes and a return on investment (e.g., Badgett, 2016), he or she may be less motivated to sustain involvement than a stakeholder whose dominant logic is that systems change takes years or even generations to achieve.

Similarly, a government stakeholder whose dominant logic reflects bureaucratic hierarchy might find the horizontally structured systems change work of cross-sector collaboration problematic.

One of the ways collaborations can reconcile these competing logics is through building “scripts” that guide meaning and behavior. As posited by Powell and DiMaggio (1991), these templates can help conceptualize new organizational arrangements and determine whether or not it makes sense to converge existing institutional scripts or to define new ones. Investing upfront in building these scripts could reduce later transaction costs associated with understanding how other service sectors operate in order to find common ground (Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Gray, 1989). Confronting these challenges could minimize stakeholder dissipation and facilitate smoother communication.

Affiliation with a cross-sector collaboration network. Cross-sector collaborations in education are sometimes attached to formal networks that provide general guidance and resources primarily throughout the initiation and implementation stages. Some examples include the StriveTogether network, Coalition for Community Schools and Alignment USA. The guidance from these networks ranges from prescriptive theories of action and technical assistance to conferences and events on emerging best practices. Attachment to these networks could strengthen the likelihood that cross-sector collaborations are successful, particularly in coalitions that lack prior experience facilitating such a complex operation (McGuire, 2006).

Attachment to a network might also have deeper implications for survival than the benefits touted on network websites, which usually purport tailored support, leadership development, and unique resources, tools and techniques. For example, networks could aid efforts to mobilize resources by signaling to funders that the collaboration is fully committed to implementation. Philanthropists and other funders may be more likely to provide resources to

these collaborations if they deem network attachment an appropriate solution to issues of educational or social inequity (Human & Provan, 2000). Networks thus also have the potential to structure the field of cross-sector collaboration by making the collaborations more homogenous in form. Coercive isomorphism to a network to increase institutional compatibility (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) could turn out to be a symbolic, rather than material, means of survival.

According to their websites, however, most networks provide more support during the initiation and implementation stages than the institutionalization phase. This is problematic because the bulk of the literature on sustainability planning suggests that it be incorporated into an initiative as early as possible (Bennet & Thompson, 2011; Bracht et al., 1994; Friedman & Wicklund, 2006; Pluye et al., 2004; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998). Continuously communicating the benefits of the collaboration (Bracht et al., 1994; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998), building community and civic capacity (Friedman & Wicklund, 2006) and reevaluating resource development throughout all stages (Freidman & Wicklund, 2006; Pluye et al., 2004) are practices that the literature suggests can bolster sustainability.

Resource dependency and systems change. A factor that may also be pervasive throughout the entire lifespan of collaborations, resource dependency on other organizations may affect the ability of collaborations to work towards their systems change goals in the ways they originally envisioned. In their seminal book, *The External Control of Organizations*, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that organizations are embedded in networks of resource interdependencies. Within their interdependent networks, some organizations are able to exercise more social power than others due to favorable institutional arrangements. Organizations are constantly negotiating constraints and interdependencies in order to tilt the institutional environment in their favor. Negotiating these external pressures could result in decisions to adopt

certain labels (e.g., “collective impact”), subscribe to network memberships, and alter tasks and technologies to exploit emerging opportunities (e.g., new grants).

Prior studies on 501(c)(3) and community-based organizations have documented these resource dependent effects. One large, charitable organization, for example, greatly influenced the internal organizational structures, technologies and norms of social service agencies that relied on it for support (Sedlak, 1981). Other community organizations have been coerced into developing organizational hierarchies in order to become more isomorphic to their donor organizations (Milofsky, 1981; Stone et al., 2001). Becoming “data-driven” organizations is one way in which collaborations could be responding to such institutional demands. In an era of accountability, collaborations must respond to the pressures of technical environments that evaluate organizations based on outputs (Powell, 1991). A tension that collaborations—many of which become 501(c)(3) organizations—must navigate is how to demonstrate effectiveness in their outputs despite nebulous or fluid technologies. This is necessary because garnering support from more powerful organizations influences their chances of survival (Singh et al., 1986).

Satisfying these demands will be easier for collaborations that can buffer their internal workings from environmental influences (Powell, 1991). This is difficult, however, because collaborations are largely dependent on short-term grants. Investors from the private sector often expect a short-term return on investment (Badgett, 2016; Koppenjan & Enserink, 2009) and could withdraw commitment if this expectation is not met. The focus on short-term grants could also compromise long-term sustainability planning in lieu of immediate funding (Rowan, 2006). Failing to map out long-term trajectories could result in an organization’s failure to influence the institutional environment in which it is embedded, inhibiting systems change.

Perhaps the most difficult and consequential issue that cross-sector collaborations will have to reconcile is the contradiction in external, institutional pressures and internal demands throughout different developmental stages. Initiatives that focus on small wins could secure member support by boosting morale and trust in the partnership, but this seldom results in long-term capacity building and broad-based change (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002). Although relying on small wins and short-term grants may thwart long-term sustainability, it is a major driver of partnership formation (Bazzoli et al., 2003). Furthermore, grants may be necessary to fund the backbone or lead organizations' staffing and operating costs (Wolff, 2016). As young organizations are much more susceptible to "death" than mature organizations (Carroll & Delacroix, 1982; Singh et al., 1986), focusing on securing grants to support infrastructure and partnership is a necessary part of their initial survival.

Cross-sector collaborations in education create new programs and initiatives as part of their work, but they are ultimately aimed at changing systems. In order to do so, they must balance small wins that can be easily translated into successes with work that moves them toward their long-term goals. The creation of small-scale initiatives may end up being more viable than systems change work due to complexity. Leaders and organizations faced with complex problems, for better or worse, must always find ways to simplify the work (Lindblom, 1959). This reductionism, while necessary, might ultimately derail the overarching, long-term mission and goals of the collaborations.

Effective leadership. Again a consideration across all three stages of initiation, implementation and institutionalization is effective leadership. Effective leaders who provide hope can galvanize organizational actors to become more invested in the turnaround process, particularly if leaders recognize and provide credit for long-term success (Crosby & Bryson,

2005). In the turnaround literature, these leaders are often able to minimize the negative effects of failure for their workers while communicating openly and directly. Effective leaders acknowledge previous mistakes and failings publicly and initiate conversations and collective problem-solving (Milam & Heath, 2014; Rein & Schön, 1996). The literature on cross-sector leadership indicates that effective leaders are also those who can guide sensemaking and broker diverse interests (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Rein & Schön, 1996; van der Heijden et al. 2002). Transparent communication chains and in-person meetings are mechanisms that inform employees of the rationale and urgency of change. As cross-sector collaborations are complex organizations with multiple moving pieces, they also require leadership stability and simultaneous scaffolding for members of the organization. Careful planning and preparation for leadership turnover is critical to effectively manage shifts in power and maintain the strategic direction of the organization (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

A major component of turning around failing organizations is retaining employees or members who are adaptive, effective and hardworking (Murphy & Meyers, 2009). These employees, along with strong leadership, can create a culture that embraces change and adaptive problem solving. Actors at all levels, however, must be empowered to participate in problem solving, regardless of their expertise. This is a lesson that could be directly applied to cross-sector collaborations, which are characterized by mixed horizontal and vertical decision-making structures. These collaborations can build collective ownership of the organization's success or failure through team-building at all levels and participation in problem-solving (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Furthermore, successful turnarounds provide continual training and development, so that all actors learn from the organization's mistakes and invest in their own continued personal growth as well as that of the organization (Murphy & Meyers, 2009).

1.3 Takeaway Patterns in Organizational Survival

Despite the dearth of empirical studies on the sustainability of cross-sector collaboration, the literature on education reform, cross-sector partnerships and organizational survival provides insights into the potential pitfalls of these local reform efforts. The failure to invest time upfront in identifying institutional differences in norms, structures and participation incentives can later turn into division and conflict. The literature suggests that after acknowledging hidden, taken-for-granted norms, leaders and partners must work collectively to redefine their roles in the collaboration while determining which aspects of their original routines, traditions, cultural and institutional norms should remain. This will make it easier to respond and conform to external pressures imposed by the broader, institutional environment.

Imbalanced power dynamics, particularly in decision-making contexts, can also lead to the withdrawal of “weaker” partners, delegitimizing the community-based reform. Maintaining the investment of “stronger” partners, however, is also critical to ensure symbiotic, rather than competitive, relationships over turf. Strong formal and informal leadership is needed to broker these dynamics, guide sensemaking, and map out sustainability and leadership transition plans from the outset of the collaboration. Most importantly, the literature suggests that the prospects for organizational survival will be much higher if collaborations can insulate their work from external pressures and limit resource dependencies. Focusing on long-term funding streams and relationships with local policymakers might increase collaborations’ survival if they can convince local institutions of the value and accomplishments of their work.

Through this literature review, I have identified a number of conditions, circumstances and behaviors that are likely to influence the survival prospects of cross sector collaborations in education. In subsequent sections of this dissertation, I will examine how these factors have

influenced, if at all, the life trajectories of three formerly existing and currently persisting cross-sector collaborations.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

The review of the literature on organizational survival and cross-sector collaboration informs the theoretical frameworks I draw on to guide this study. Organizational theory has been moving away from a static focus on one or two levels of analysis and towards an analysis of the ways in which environments, organizational processes and individual cognition co-construct realities that evolve over time (Binder, 2007; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Hallett, 2010). As organizational sociology continues to move towards a more process-based rather than entity-based field (Scott, 2004), it is critical to interrogate the changing, multi-directional relationships between the environmental, organizational and individual level processes that converge to produce organizational death. I refer to these multiple tiers as macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, in full acknowledgment that these different tiers often overlap with one another. My theoretical framework for this study will draw from the relevant literature on organizational persistence across these three levels of analysis to address the following research questions:

1. What environmental, organizational and individual conditions contribute to the organizational death of cross-sector collaborations in education?
2. How have these conditions interacted to undermine the sustainability of three formerly existing cross-sector collaborations, in comparison to three persisting collaborations with similar missions, visions and goals?
3. What do key stakeholders claim are the most important considerations for the survival prospects of currently existing and future cross-sector collaborations in education?

In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the salient theories from the macro, meso and micro levels of organizational analysis that will help me interrogate these research questions.

2.1 Macro-level: Institutional Theory

The broadest environmental conditions and constraints that influence an organization—including political regimes, laws, regulations, economic conditions and cultural norms—constitute what I refer to as the “macro-level.” Institutional theory is a particularly useful framework for understanding the ways in which organizations adapt and respond to these broader environments. As articulated by Meyer and Rowan in the late 1970s, institutional theory posits that organizational survival is driven by how well organizations conform to the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts about the organization, regardless of efficacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As such, formal organizational structures often reflect the “myths” —the rationalized forms, functions and practices that are adopted ceremonially—of their institutional environments, as opposed to the demands of actual work activities. In theory, the incorporation of these myths and ceremonies maximizes an organization’s legitimacy and increases its resources and survival capabilities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). My study will build on this hypothesis by examining how cross-sector collaborations in education successfully adapt to these myths and ceremonies throughout the various stages of their evolution.

In order to understand where the collaborations fit within institutional theory, it is helpful to frame them using Scott’s (1995) three pillars of institutionalism: cognitive, normative and regulative. The cognitive pillar refers to thoughts and understandings arrived at via sensemaking, which would include individuals’ interpretations of the mission and vision of cross-sector collaborations. The normative pillar describes moral and ethical responsibilities, such as the pressure for collaborations to adopt the “collective impact” label or other best practices promulgated by a well-respected network. Finally, the regulative pillar includes policies, laws and other regulations with which organizational actors must comply. Examples of regulative

logics include state and local policies that cross-sector collaborations must adhere to, as well as rules laid out for membership to a network. This framework may be useful in examining the strength and variation of institutional logics across time and settings. In theory, institutionalization should occur when Scott's three pillars take on a rule-like status in social thought and action, forming institutional logics.

Coercive isomorphism, a mechanism embedded within institutional theory, is another helpful heuristic to understand the relationship between cross-sector collaborations in education and the networks to which many of them belong. Isomorphism describes conformity to the broader environment in order to increase an organization's compatibility with prevailing institutional norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argued that this type of isomorphism can result in the homogenization of organizational forms, such as the rise of bureaucratization. This theory helps describe the rapidly increasing adoption of the label "collective impact" among education and community development organizations. The StriveTogether Network, for example, has adopted the term "collective impact," which has structured the field of cross-sector collaboration by defining the criteria that these organizations must conform to in order to receive the benefits of membership. In theory, this would increase the homogeneity of the structures and strategies undertaken by cross-sector collaborations. The few prominent networks that cross-sector collaborations can join renders them vulnerable to this type of coercive isomorphism, as networks are often looking to expand their membership and leaders of cross-sector collaborations are often seeking legitimacy.

Further, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggested that organizations with uncertain technologies—or tasks that do not clearly connect to desired outcomes—will model themselves after organizations that they perceive to be successful. It would be reasonable to predict that in

some instances, this type of isomorphism might result in a collaboration adopting practices associated with already socially acceptable organizations, such as network-affiliated collaborations or nonprofits that have been successful at sustaining and institutionalizing their work. In the case of cross-sector collaboration, this might occur in settings where an already institutionalized organization (e.g., Catholic Charities or the United Way) exists in competition with nascent or maturing collaborations.

When it comes to seeking and attaining legitimacy, cross-sector collaborations must also grapple with the multiple, competing demands imposed by their diverse constituents (e.g., school leaders, parents and funders) and their environments (e.g., federal, state and local governments). Scholars have long documented that schools—as a consequence of adapting to this same type of pluralism—have had to “loosely couple” their organizational tasks and structures from outcomes (Meyer et al., 1992; Weick, 1976). In some cases, loose coupling might reconcile some of the discrepancies between institutional myths, ceremonies and organizational technologies, providing a buffer from external examination. However, for cross-sector collaborations, this may be an ineffective strategy once organizations become more publicly visible. For cross-sector collaborations that have ill-defined or weak technical cores, loose coupling could mask their inability to demonstrate outcomes in the incipient stages of their work. The potential danger is that after a certain number of years, loose coupling could undermine their ability to more tightly link their tasks, technologies and goals in a way that produces outcomes. As has been the case with schools subjected to more rigid accountability standards (e.g., Hallett, 2010), cross-sector collaborations may be forced to tightly couple their internal processes in order to produce outcomes that match institutional pressures imposed by funders or other stakeholders.

Although the bulk of literature on institutionalism focuses on how institutional status is achieved, it is equally important to understand how institutional status is taken away. This is of particular relevance for dead cross-sector collaborations that were in existence for more than a decade. In some instances, high levels of institutionalization might preclude deeply embedded collaborations from evolving, rendering them more vulnerable to internal or external shocks. Jepperson (1991) described this phenomenon in the context of coal mining and manufacturing industries, both of which exemplify highly institutionalized sectors that became destabilized when renewable energy and globalization shocked their industries. For collaborations, their dependence on a number of “non-fixed” institutions¹ that fluctuate in terms of influence and resources leaves them vulnerable to sudden shocks in their political, social or economic environments. This is particularly relevant for cross-sector collaborations, many of which are dependent on the support of foundations and political leaders.

2.2 Meso-level: Technical-Rationality and Resource Dependency

The “meso-level” refers to the organizational level characteristics—such as management structures, decision-making, tasks and processes—that are affected by and responsive to both macro- and micro-level conditions. As cross-sector collaborations are complex organizations, it will first be helpful to first understand how collaborations embody elements of open, natural and rational systems. Natural systems are focused primarily on the collective, non-rational, informal elements of the organization, such as nurturing interpersonal relationships among stakeholders (Blau, 1956). This is likely a core characteristic of collaborations due to their very nature of coalition building and forging new networks. Collaborations can also embody characteristics of

¹ The term “non-fixed” institutions refers to organizations, such as foundations and nonprofits, whose existence varies depending on broader environmental volatility. The term “fixed” institutions refers to institutions characterized by more long-term sustainability, such as many governmental offices.

open systems, which are complex, loosely coupled organizations focused on sensemaking and information flows (Scott & Davis, 2005). The focus on the reciprocal, interdependent relationship with the environment under an open system makes coordination of activities and tasks more challenging, but is important for navigating multiple demands and changing institutional dynamics. Finally, technical-rational systems have more tightly coupled roles, responsibilities and tasks than natural and open systems. These characteristics are likely to be found in collaborations seeking network membership or those mimicking network-affiliated collaborations to gain legitimacy.

Technical-rationality refers to the ways in which a series of actions are organized to achieve predetermined goals with maximum efficiency (Scott & Davis, 2005). Under this framework, actions are purposeful and coordinated, goals are specific, and roles and responsibilities are formalized, allowing for more predictability. Incorporating technical-rationality by adopting the “data-driven” mindset, for example, is one way in which collaborations might gain credibility in the eyes of their funders and stakeholders (Hwang & Powell, 2009). This could become problematic for cross-sector collaborations that struggle to incorporate these rational elements into their cultural and systems change work. Technical-rationality—as a means of accountability and goal attainment—could become deprioritized in order to meet cross-institutional coalition or culture-building to ensure network cohesion.

In a similar vein, the nesting of cross-sector collaborations within multiple local and global ecologies makes resource dependency a particularly useful theory to understand how collaborations adapt their internal tasks and structures to gain legitimacy. Resource dependency posits that organizations heavily dependent on other entities for resources, particularly in uncertain environments, will be responsive to the external entity’s demands in order to enhance

their own survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The result of this dependency is the adoption of codified rules, positions or procedures that fulfill the demands of the organization's benefactors (Scott, 1995). In the case of cross-sector collaborations, most of which are heavily dependent on diverse funding streams from multiple organizations, adjusting internal processes or goals in this way could prove problematic. Altering the goals or strategies of the collaboration in order to meet the requirements of a specific grant may ensure their survival in the short-term, but compromise their long-term trajectories toward their mission and goals. Further, these types of internal organizational changes could create disruptions in individual sensemaking and other unintended consequences for long-term stakeholder commitment.

An important aspect of resource dependency, particularly for organizations situated within local ecologies, is navigating both symbiotic and competitive relationships. Symbiotic interdependence refers to situations where the output of one organization is the input of another (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In cross-sector collaborations, however, this type of interdependence may either not occur or may occur alongside competition. This is due to the fact that partnering stakeholders must balance their primary organization's best interests in addition to those of the collaboration. Symbiotic relationships could take place when a partnering stakeholder advances the work of the collaboration while expanding their own organization's network and access to resources (i.e. forming new relationships with other partnering organizations). In cases where collaborations are simultaneously partnering and competing with organizations over scarce resources or turf, however, collaborative leaders must provide participation incentives without threatening partners' resource pool or influence. Examining the coexistence of these relationships could shed light on how partnership dynamics might bolster or thwart the survival prospects of cross-sector collaborations.

2.3 Micro-level: Institutionalism and Individual Sensemaking

The most granular level of analysis, the “micro level,” draws primarily from concepts related to social psychology. Sensemaking is one such concept: a process that takes place through individual cognition and social interaction, rooted in “frames” or prior reference points, “cues” or present moments of experience, and the connection between the two (Weick, 1995). The process of sensemaking is an important aspect of building collective goals and ensuring buy-in from stakeholders because it provides a shared rationale for pursuing the work. As cross-sector collaborations evolve and become more complex, sensemaking will become even more critical because stakeholders will likely rely on frames and routine cues to process increasingly diverse information (both internally and in the broader environment). The difficulty of sensemaking, however, is that it is not dictated by the environment or the organization. While environmental and organizational norms can penetrate and shape sensemaking, individual cognition and behaviors can similarly shape broader institutions (Binder, 2007).

One means of rationalizing past events and predicting future events is through retrospective sensemaking. Theorists have argued that individuals form assumptions that guide predictions; however, events that deviate from those assumptions cause a breakdown in sensemaking where individuals must retrospectively interpret and cope with the unanticipated outcome (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). To cope, individuals synthesize multiple possible meanings, working backwards from an event. In their work studying the failure of High Reliability Organizations (HROs), Weick & Sutcliffe (2015) found that a loss of contextual information led to the inability of organizations to manage unexpected events. Thus, interviewing stakeholders about systematic routines that contribute to sensemaking, such as meeting facilitation or information dissemination, is one way of understanding how meaning is

co-created, contested or reinforced. Breakdowns in sensemaking in these contexts warrants investigation, as collaborations likely vary in how they navigate discrepant sensemaking processes across different organizational arrangements.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodology and analytic approach employed for my dissertation, which have been determined by my focus on the following research questions:

1. What environmental, organizational and individual conditions contribute to the organizational death of cross-sector collaborations in education?
2. How have these conditions interacted to undermine the sustainability of three formerly existing cross-sector collaborations, in comparison to three persisting collaborations with similar missions, visions and goals?
3. What do key stakeholders claim are the most important considerations for the survival prospects of currently existing and future cross-sector collaborations in education?

3.1 Research Design

My research questions necessitate an interpretive research design that reconciles stakeholders' accounts of why their cross-sector collaborations closed or have continued to be sustainable with an analysis of key organizational documents. To a large degree, my study is concerned with understanding how individuals make sense of a certain phenomenon and how they understand the confluence of environmental conditions, inter-organizational and interpersonal dynamics shaping the processes and ultimate trajectory of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). However, it is not purely phenomenological in nature. An interpretive design allows me to build a more holistic understanding of the conditions contributing to a phenomenon through cross-checking stakeholders' accounts with key documents that shed light on organizational timelines, structures, contracts and processes that may be missing from interviewees' recollections. This in turn provides important information about discrepancies in what was documented as occurring at the collaborations and how stakeholders make sense of the collaboration's closure in retrospect. Further, instead of generalizing to a population, my

research design calls for the in-depth examination of multiple case studies to reach conclusions that can instead be generalized to theoretical propositions (Maxwell, 2012).

Data and case selection. One of the greatest obstacles to examining cross-sector collaborations in education is identifying their presence across the country. This is due to the fact that there are no public, comprehensive databases containing such information. As a starting point, my study will leverage a recently-constructed dataset from Henig et al. (2016) that identified 182 cross-sector collaborations in a 2015 scan across the largest 100 American cities and 100 largest school districts. The scan identified existing cross-sector collaborations as those with live, public-facing websites, bounded by the criteria in the aforementioned section. Collaboration websites—such as staff biographies, missions, goals, data indicators, newsletters and reports, among others—were downloaded and preserved as PDF documents in 2015. Each “case” in my study will constitute one cross-sector collaboration bounded by the parameters in the Henig et al. (2016) national scan:

1. Cross-sector collaborations in education are place-based, meaning that they are organized at the city, school district, and/or county level;
2. Cross-sector collaborations in education involve the participation of leaders from two or more sectors, including but not limited to the education, government, or civic sector; and
3. Cross-sector collaborations in education have an explicit focus on educational outcomes and include the participation of school system officials in some manner.

I identified 10 collaborations of the 182 in the national scan dataset that have closed since 2015 based on the disappearance of their online public presence. These 10 collaborations served as the starting point for building my sample of dead cross-sector collaborations to be matched with surviving counterparts. Prior to selecting surviving collaborations to include as matched pairs in my sample, I first needed to confirm that these 10 collaborations had in fact closed, which required sifting through archived website materials and online materials to find the names

of key stakeholders. Although I was able to find the names of many individuals and partnering organizations for all 10 collaborations, I was not able to connect with stakeholders in four of the 10 collaborations due to turnover or retirement. Often, the individuals I spoke with over the phone could not share information with me about where key stakeholders had gone, and in some cases, were not aware that the dead collaboration ever existed.

Of the remaining six dead collaborations, my outreach to a key stakeholder in one of these six collaborations suggested that the organization would be difficult to study due to an embezzlement scandal that became very public. The stakeholder did not believe many individuals would be willing to speak with me as part of the aftermath of the scandal. In another, outreach to one stakeholder yielded new information: the organization had not died, but had simply been rebranded during a period of growth and scaling. I chose to exclude this collaboration from my sample in order to focus on the characteristics specifically related to organizational death. With four viable options remaining, I cold-called alumni associations and former partnering organizations to get the contact information for key stakeholders from each. I was able to connect with key stakeholders from three dead cross-sector collaborations who provided me with the names and contact information of staff, consultants, board members and partners they formerly worked with. These three dead collaborations—each of which was distinct in mission, goals and approach—formed half of my cases.

A major consideration in determining whether or not I would include a dead collaboration in my sample was initial agreement to participate from at least three key stakeholders. Once securing the participation of these individuals, I employed snowball sampling after each interview to broaden my list of potential interviewees. Whenever an interviewee revealed that they were biased against a particular individual (e.g., shared that they did not think

the person would be helpful to speak with or attributed the failure of the organization to an individual's behavior), I made an effort to reach out to that individual and invite them to participate in an interview. This was one way in which I tried to reduce the inevitable selection bias associated with snowball sampling, as individuals might be inclined to recommend others who share similar perspectives to their own (Given, 2008).

The literature and theory on organizational survival does not directly speak to cross-sector collaboration in education, but suggests that political maneuvering, institutional alignment, resources and capacity are among the key independent variables that are important to survival. Due to the lack of literature specific to the phenomenon at hand, I chose not to match my three dead cases with surviving pairs until I completed data collection with individuals from these former collaborations. This allowed me to select matched pairs based on variation in the key conditions that influenced the organizational outcomes of the dead collaborations. As I learned throughout my interviews, these conditions included funding arrangements, the organizational form and structure of the backbone, coalition building processes, network membership, and communications and branding strategies.

Selection of surviving cases. Additionally, I wanted to ensure meaningful variation across some of the sociodemographic characteristics of the collaborative pairs as well as the entire set. To avoid minimizing the variance across cases, I selected surviving collaborations that varied in terms of geographic region, racial demographics and jurisdiction of the collaboration (e.g., county vs. city scope). I included variables from the national scan (i.e. geographic region and jurisdiction) and merged in data from the 2012-2016 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (i.e. racial demographics) to ensure meaningful variation across these characteristics. Racial demographic information were derived at either the county or city level,

rather than at the school district level, due to the fact that many collaborations worked with multiple districts or districts that were consolidated or expanded. While local philanthropic wealth is also an important indicator of the resources that can be leveraged for cross-sector collaborations, I did not find the aggregated financial contributions, gifts and grants received by non-profit charitable organizations in a region—reported in the 2013-2014² city- and county-level charitable donation data from the Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) IRS core files—to be a reliable indicator of local wealth due to the unclear jurisdictional boundaries in the dataset.

The result of this purposive sampling was the selection of three surviving cross-sector collaborations whose leaders have agreed to their identification by name: Oakland Unified School District’s Community Schools, Thriving Students (CSTS) was selected as a surviving pair to “Lift Off”; Multnomah County’s All Hands Raised as a surviving pair to “Rise Up”; and Say Yes to Education Buffalo as a surviving pair to “Harmon Students Succeed”. The names of the dead collaborations, reported in quotations, are pseudonyms that I have created to mask the identities of these organizations. Assigning pseudonyms to the dead collaborations and the cities in which they resided—“Frankel”, “Raboin” and “Harmon”—was essential to securing the agreement of interviewees to participate in my study. Additionally, de-identifying stakeholders (e.g., removing their names and reporting their positions in tiers—“board member”, “executive leader,” “middle manager,” “funder”, etc.) were a means of protecting individuals and incentivizing their participation and candor in the interviews. Importantly, I chose surviving pairs whose general mission and goals were similar to those of their dead counterparts. In the case of Rise up and All Hands Raised, I learned in interviews that Rise Up had a number of internal

² 2013-2014 is the latest year of released IRS Core Files.

“cradle-to-career” goals guiding the work they took on, but never incorporated this language into their public-facing mission statement. While their mission statement remained more narrow and specific than that of All Hands Raised on paper, backbone staff spoke to the expansion of several “cradle-to-career” initiatives two years into the organization’s existence. Table A1 in Appendix A depicts the meaningful variation in these characteristics across collaboration pairs, with the dead collaborations shaded in gray with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Additional data sources. In addition to key stakeholder interviews, I incorporated descriptive information from the Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) and the Open Data for Nonprofit Research databases to contextualize each of my case studies. The NCCS Data Archive includes information on active, tax-exempt, individual organizations—including public charities, private foundations, 501(c)(3) organizations, social welfare organizations and trade unions—from 1989 to 2016. The IRS business master files, which include income and asset data from 990 filings, allow me to identify the financial characteristics of the backbone organization in the years leading up to its death. One limitation to these files is that the most recent public release of IRS 990 forms is 2016, which does not reflect how the surviving collaborations have grown and scaled their efforts since this time.

For all six collaborations, I collected website information (archived in the case of the dead collaborations), including annual reports, newsletters, events, organizational charters, and press releases, among other information, for key document analysis. Of the three surviving cases in my sample, I had access to the internal strategic planning documents and facilitation notes from an intermediary organization supporting the implementation of one collaboration. In the two others, I was able to observe meetings of the governance bodies of the backbone organization and smaller, collaborative team meetings from 2015-2016 as part of a previous

study that I worked on (Riehl et al., 2016). These observations provided valuable context and insight into how the two collaborations operated in practice.

In each of the three dead case studies, at least one interviewee offered to provide several internal documents that were instrumental in cross-checking stakeholders' accounts of events that unfolded during the organization's lifespan. This was critical to identifying discrepant understandings of *why* a collaboration failed. For example, an internal archive of Rise Up's board documents and programmatic folders helped me cross-check chronological timelines that were presented in different stakeholder accounts and separate interviewees' perspectives about the sequence of events leading up to its closure. In the case of Harmon Students Succeed, I was able to supplement stakeholder accounts of the reason for the collaboration's closure with non-disclosure forms and dissolution agreements provided by a couple of interviewees. I was also provided access to internal board documents and monthly progress reports by another interviewee, which gave me a window into their internal organizational planning. For Lift Off—which began as a mayoral initiative—I had access to a public archive with all the email correspondence between the mayor's office and the backbone organization, meeting notes, the original memorandum of understanding, and other agreements delineating the financial and programmatic responsibilities of all partners. A full list of the types of documents I accessed and analyzed pertaining to the three dead cases is included in Appendix C.

3.2 Analytic Approach

My primary analytic approach involves interview research—a structured space in which the interviewer asks a targeted line of questioning to an interview participant in order to understand how they make sense of a phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The goal of interview research is to understand how individuals think about a topic, event or process. While

the labor intensiveness of interviewing does not lend itself well to large-scale studies aimed at generalizing to a population, it is well suited to yield findings that could be generalized to a theory about why or how a phenomenon occurs (Maxwell, 2012). As many of the interviewees from the dead cases had moved on to different opportunities spread across the country, I conducted phone interviews with these stakeholders instead of in-person interviews. While there are drawbacks to conducting phone interviews, such as fewer chances to build rapport and good will prior to the interview, I found this method particularly fruitful because it created a buffer between myself and the interviewee. The phone interviews—like the case of computer-assisted interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015)—seemed to create a sense of increased privacy and facilitated intimate conversations about sensitive topics that participants may have felt too embarrassed or hesitant to share in person.

To guide the creation of semi-structured interview protocols for dead and surviving cases, I drew from a Comparative Case Study (CCS) design (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). The CCS approach calls for the examination of three overlapping, process-oriented axes. The horizontal axis focuses on how similar phenomena play out across diverse environments, the vertical axis compares how processes play out within the same institutional environment, and the transversal axis compares the historical evolution of the events, policies and processes surrounding a specific phenomenon (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). A CCS design is well suited to my research questions because it calls for a comparison of cross-sector collaborations across geographic space and time, allowing for a more complex, deep dive into the convergence of conditions influencing organizational survival. The interview protocols I used for surviving and dead collaborations are presented in Appendix B.

Data collection and sample. As previously noted, I prioritized outreach and data collection among my dead cases prior to determining their surviving pairs to better understand the most consequential conditions that influenced their survival. These interviews took place between February and November 2019. I used snowball sampling, in which one respondent suggests another respondent to interview (Given, 2008), to increase the number of stakeholders I interviewed in each case. Prior to snowball sampling, however, I created a list of interviewees that I would ideally like to speak with based on the positions they held in relation to the collaboration. I tried to interview as many backbone staff as possible (the core individuals charged with executing the collaboration's mission), representatives from partnering organizations, board members, and school personnel, when possible. As students and parents were often described by stakeholders as not involved in or knowledgeable about the work of the cross-sector collaborations, I decided to exclude these individuals from interviews.

There were sometimes circumstances that prevented me from interviewing the types of stakeholders that I believed would provide helpful insights. In one of my dead collaborations—Lift Off—I was only able to speak with a representative of one nonprofit partner who later assumed a school-level role in the collaboration. A major nonprofit partner I reached out to was unresponsive after several attempts and Lift Off staff did not feel comfortable connecting me to him personally. In the case of another dead collaboration—Rise Up—there was so much political turmoil and turnover among school leadership that former state-appointed emergency managers running the district were not available for interviews. One district interviewee on my list, for example, is currently in jail. Despite these small setbacks, I was able to interview at least one stakeholder from the successor organizations that absorbed, replicated or fully replaced the work of the three dead collaborations.

The number of interviews I conducted for each of the dead cases depended in large part on the size of the backbone organization. Lift Off was the smallest of the three initiatives and I ultimately interviewed 13 stakeholders (14 total interviews conducted). For Rise Up, I spoke with 16 individuals (17 total interviews conducted). In Harmon Students Succeed—the largest of the dead cases—I interviewed 21 individuals (22 total interviews conducted). The response rate for Lift Off (i.e. the number of stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed divided by the number I invited to participate) was 76%, the response rate for Rise Up was 94% and the response rate for Harmon Students Succeed was 91%. In total, I conducted 53 interviews across these cases.

After completing data collection and matching the three dead cases with surviving counterparts, I turned to All Hands Raised (AHR), Community Schools Thriving Students (CSTS), and Say Yes to Education Buffalo (SYB). I leveraged the interview transcripts of previously conducted interviews—some of which I conducted and others which were conducted by former collaborators—to include in my analysis. In the previous study I worked on, we conducted over 150 interviews for these three specific collaborations, an amount that would have been infeasible to analyze in addition to the newly conducted interviews with stakeholders from the three dead cases. I thus went through a labor-intensive process of combing through all of the transcripts from the three surviving cases and selecting those that yielded the most relevant information to organizational survival. The specific topics I looked for, based on the themes from my dead cases, included: financial and programmatic sustainability; data usage; coalition building and incentives for continued partner engagement; network benefits and drawbacks; and visibility, marketing and communications strategies. I ultimately included 69 total interviews across the three surviving cases.

I re-coded the selected interviews (a process which I will discuss further in the Data Analysis section below) and subsequently reached out to a small number of key stakeholders from each of the surviving collaborations to follow-up on lingering questions, ambiguities and changes that occurred since the data were originally collected between 2015-2017. With the surviving cases, the six follow-up interviews were more pointed and less exploratory than with the dead cases, as I was filling in gaps in information rather than learning for the first time. These follow-up interviews were essential, as the surviving collaborations had continued to evolve since 2017 and had undergone important shifts in their trajectories. Overall, my total sample included 122 interviews across the six cases. The table below shows the distribution of stakeholder types among those I interviewed across the six collaborations. The dead collaborations are shaded in gray followed by their surviving pairs in white:

Table 1. Distribution of Stakeholder Types across Six Case Studies

Type of stakeholder	Lift Off	Community Schools, Thriving Students	Rise Up	All Hands Raised	Harmon Students Succeed	Say Yes Buffalo
Backbone members	6	4	8	6	6	8
Governing board members	0	0	5	7 ³	4	9 ⁴
District and school personnel	3	8 ⁵	0	4	3 ⁶	4
Community partners	1 ⁷	7	2	5	1	5
Public sector officials	2	0	0	2	0	3
Funder organizations	0	0	3 ⁸	3	5	1 ⁹
National network leaders	0	0	0	0	1	5
Successor organizations	2	0	1	0	2	0
Total individuals interviewed	13	15	16	20	21	28
Total interviews conducted	14	16	17	23	22	30

³ All board members include individuals sitting on the AHR Partnership Council or Board of Directors; two of the seven are double-counted as school personnel; three are double-counted as community partners; and two are double-counted as funders.

⁴ Board members include Operating Committee and Community Leadership Council members; two of the nine are double-counted as public sector officials; two are double-counted as community partners; one is double-counted as a funder; and two are double-counted as district and school personnel.

⁵ Four backbone members are also district personnel; double-counted under both categories.

⁶ One individual, a former superintendent, is double-counted as a governing board member.

⁷ Individual moved to school district role; double-counted under both categories.

⁸ The three individuals representing funder organizations were also board members; double-counted under both categories.

⁹ In Say Yes Buffalo, the national network is the major funder of its local affiliates. The funder included in this category represents a local foundation rather than the national network.

Retrospective sensemaking. An important point to acknowledge about my study is that it required interviewees from the dead collaborations to engage in retrospective sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Although the analytic approach of retrospective sensemaking is not novel in educational or organizational research, it poses challenges by asking a participant to recall older and potentially emotionally-charged events. Retrospective sensemaking can sometimes lead to individuals backwards rationalizing an outcome to fit a narrative that feels most plausible, rather than accurately recalling an event (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). Although the recent closure of the three dead organizations—all within the past three years—mitigated some of these issues, I tried to further reduce the potential threat to validity this posed through the careful construction of a narrative arc in my semi-structured interview protocols.

First, I created an arc in my interview protocols that asked interviewees to begin by recalling basic information, such as their position, responsibilities, and understanding of the collaboration's mission. After providing the interviewee enough time to recall these basic aspects of the organization and their role, I would move on to questions about the mechanics of the organization, followed by their experience and perception of the organization. I would then ask the interviewee to tell me how they remember the year leading up to the organization's closure, using various landmark events as contextual cues (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). For example, what was the first red flag they can remember that indicated the collaboration was going to close? What project were they working on at the time that this occurred? While this strategy cannot completely eliminate the potential manipulation of retrospective sensemaking, it can create more helpful conditions for interviewees to recall an event and the context surrounding it.

Data analysis. After each interview, I wrote a memo that contained brief notes about how the interview went. These memos included moments when the conversation became tense,

when an interviewee paused for an extended period and changed their response, when an interviewee's tone became defensive, and when I thought the way I asked a question needed to be revised. I then built a coding tree consisting of “emic” codes—or codes based on interviewees' own, indigenous understandings of a specific topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2015)—to begin the coding process. Examples of emic codes include “funding sources,” “data usage” and “tasks, roles and responsibilities” that capture stakeholders' own interpretations and accounts of these topics. I imported this coding structure into NVivo 12, a qualitative software analysis tool, and used it across all six of my case studies. As I coded each individual transcript, a number of interesting themes emerged that I wanted to capture in my case profiles and cross-case analyses. I added in several “etic” codes—or codes that reflect my own analysis and thinking about a participant's response (Maxwell, 2012)—as these themes emerged. Examples of etic codes include “discrepant institutional logics,” “visibility” and “best organizational form for sustainability.” I then went through each transcript a second time to ensure that I had appropriately captured all interviewees' responses related to these emergent themes under the new etic codes. Finally, I wrote an Nvivo memo for each individual transcript that posed ground-level analytic questions—questions that emerge from the individual transcript data rather than the research question (Neuman & Pallas, 2015)—to each transcript and summarized the codes in which answers to such questions could be found.

The emerging patterns in individual transcripts led me to the development of six major intermediate (Level 2) analytic questions across my sample of dead collaborations. After coding the interviews in one case, I reorganized the data around the following analytic questions:

1. How does grant-dependency—particularly on foundations—undermine the sustainability of cross-sector collaboration?

2. How did resource and capacity constraints alter the decisions made by collaborative backbone staff and funders?
3. How did stakeholders navigate coalition building to secure cross-sector engagement and what were the implications for their long-term survival prospects?
4. What organizational form do stakeholders think is best suited to perform backbone work?
5. What rationales do stakeholders provide for the sector and organizational form best suited for institutionalizing the backbone's work?
6. How do stakeholders think about the trade-off between the high and low visibility of their collaborations? How have their public relations and community and partner engagement strategies influenced their survival prospects?

Following the Bush-Mecenas and Marsh (2018) DIVE approach to analyzing multiple case study data, I created standalone profiles of each of the individual cases—a “case narrative”—before beginning cross-case analysis in pairs. After completing the iterative rounds of coding and identifying the significant theoretical and empirical themes related to organizational survival, I overlaid evidence from each case onto one of the aforementioned analytic questions to refocus my analysis on these areas (Bush-Mecenas & Marsh, 2018). Chapters four through six each contain the case profile of a dead collaboration, the case profile of its surviving pair, and a cross-case analysis focused on major divergences in decisions made or strategic approaches taken on the themes that were described by stakeholders as most consequential for survival. In this analysis, the dead cases are examined in the foreground and compared to their surviving counterparts in the background. In Chapter Seven, a cross-case analysis of the entire case set presents major patterns and learnings across both surviving and dead cross-sector collaborations. This is what Neumann and Pallas (2015) refer to as a third level analytic question—the implications of sample claims that can be generalized to a theory. I present theoretical propositions about the conditions that bolster or undermine the sustainability

of cross-sector collaborations in education in this chapter, followed by best practices learned from the surviving pairs.

Shortcomings of analytical approach. It is likely that there is selection bias in the types of individuals who agreed to participate in the study. They may be fundamentally different from stakeholders who refused to participate in ways that matter (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), posing a risk to the validity of the data. For example, individuals who were willing to participate may have felt more wronged by the collaboration's closure than those who declined to participate. Conversely, interview participants may have been more invested in defending the reasons for the organization's closure than those who declined interviews. Recruiting participants through snowball sampling may have also further biased the sample, as interviewees are more likely to constitute a particular social network (Given, 2008). As previously mentioned, I attempted to mitigate some of these selection bias issues by taking note of the individuals that stakeholders recommended I do not reach out to and including those individuals in my list of prospective interviewees. Often, these interviewees had dissenting opinions or critical perspectives about the sustainability of the organization that differed from the stakeholders who advised against speaking with them. I found that adding these perspectives often provided more richness and nuance to the data collected from each of the dead cases.

Chapter Four: Lift Off and Community Schools, Thriving Students

In the following three chapters, I begin by briefly describing the history and organizational characteristics of the dead and surviving cross-sector collaboration pairs. After each case narrative, I present an analysis of the key conditions, characteristics and events that undermined the survival prospects of the dead collaboration and compare the divergent conditions, decisions and strategies undertaken by their surviving counterpart.

4.1 Case Narrative of Lift Off

Table 2. Summary of Lift Off Key Characteristics

Pseudonym	Lift Off
Lifespan	2010-2015
Geographic region	Northeast
Jurisdiction	City
Backbone	501(c)(3)
Network membership	No
Funding arrangement	Bank grant
Coalition strategy	Reliance on preexisting relationships
Communications strategy	Small budget; no clear strategy
Racial demographics*	31% white; 33% black; 29% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. The idea for Lift Off was born out of a broader, citywide education reform effort in Frankel that originally called for three major pillars of education reform: attracting talent through new teacher recruitment and principal pipeline strategies; a “portfolio of schools approach” that allowed for flexibility in school management, school and teacher evaluation; and the creation of a college-going culture through a citywide Promise program guaranteeing last-dollar scholarships to high school students. The goals of these three pillars were to close the achievement gap, increase high school graduation and increase college access. This larger reform effort was spearheaded by a unique partnership between the mayor and

superintendent, who had cultivated a decades-long relationship in the city somewhat unusual in urban politics. At the time that this reform agenda was being set, the mayor sat on the board of education and exercised mayoral control over a board he appointed himself. As put by the former mayor's education aid, this partnership and centralization of authority allowed more to get done in the district because they "could do all the politics for [the superintendent]" (L8). The strong relationship the superintendent and mayor had with one another and the trust built over a number of years contributed to the success of pushing the reform agenda forward. As described by the mayor, superintendent and several other stakeholders involved in the collaborative, these two leaders considered this three-pronged education reform effort to be their final act together nearing the end of their respective tenures.

Mission and vision. It is in this context that Lift Off emerged as a somewhat separate, additional piece of the school reform effort, characterized by one stakeholder as "Strategy Four," following the three other strategies of attracting talent, the portfolio of schools approach and the citywide Promise program. Locally, the topic of wraparound services¹⁰ was gaining traction in Frankel as a means of leveraging the resource-rich community of over 500 nonprofits and community organizations for the purpose of well-coordinated partnerships with district schools. As shared by the mayor and his education aid in separate interviews, the saturated nature of the nonprofit sector in the city meant that they were constantly competing with one another over service provision. If these agencies could instead be coordinated by a backbone agency to match them with schools that needed their particular services, then perhaps the community could create a more equitable and copasetic environment in which both nonprofits and schools benefitted.

¹⁰ The term "wraparound services" refers to a set of comprehensive educational, behavioral, health and other support services that are intended to "wrap around" a child to support their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Complicating this task was the historically tense relationship between the district, its schools and the nonprofit sector. Even though nonprofit and school partnerships had existed for decades in the city prior to Lift Off, breakdowns in communication and misunderstandings were described by nonprofit and district stakeholders as prevalent. One nonprofit leader shared that the different norms and understandings of schools and nonprofits, such as how often to communicate information with one another about school programming, were among the chief complaints she heard about these relationships (B6). Additionally, a Lift Off leader described school and nonprofit relationships as largely determined by “principal personality” and their connections or proximity to neighborhood nonprofits, rather than partnerships formed because they were the best fit (L1). According to a former superintendent of the district, there was a “fortress school district mentality” with poor lines of communication in and out of schools, in part because of a “pathological defensiveness in public schools being blamed for everything that can go wrong in a child’s life” (L9). To avoid all involved parties talking past each other and to build a more systematic way of facilitating the creation of partnerships, the mayor believed an external, intermediary organization like Lift Off was necessary to coordinate efforts between all parties. The mission of Lift Off was thus to ensure that the community would work together so that students are physically, socially, and emotionally healthy, ready for school and attending consistently, with engaged families that are supporting their children’s success. Through this “Fourth Strategy,” Lift Off was intended to meet the goals of the broader education reform by closing the achievement gap.

Coalition building. Rather than engage in a coalition building process, the mayor and superintendent directly reached out to the local “Collective Pathways”¹¹—an affiliate of a large,

¹¹ Collective Pathways is a pseudonym for the local affiliate of the large, charitable organization operating Lift Off.

nonprofit organization that pools charitable fundraising and support in several locations across the country—to lead Lift Off as part of a three-way partnership between the mayor’s office, the school district and Collective Pathways. The mayor’s education aid believed coalition building was unnecessary in this case, as its purpose is to ensure buy-in from powerful institutions, which she believed had already been accomplished through the strategic selection of Collective Pathways, a well-known and well-resourced convener and funder of community programming in the city, as the backbone agency. According to an executive leader at Collective Pathways, they agreed to take on the initiative because it “was right in alignment with the issues that [they] cared about and were focused on...And given that it was this kind of a backbone role—convening and coordinating lots of partners around a common agenda—that felt very in line with work that we had been doing and were interested in doing” (L10). With the Mayor’s office and the school district already bought in, the small number of stakeholders at the table signed a Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2010 and began envisioning what Lift Off would look like—a local adaptation of the community school model.¹²

Shortly after Collective Pathways agreed to be the backbone agency, nonprofits were introduced to the idea of Lift Off. One of the first actions undertaken by the three-way partnership was to create an inventory of all the nonprofits in the city working with children and families, followed by the development of “school asset maps” and a “needs assessment” to better understand the landscape of current school and nonprofit partnerships and the gaps between schools’ needs and current services. Subsequently, five schools were chosen by the board of education—varied by performance level and geographic distribution—to pilot the Lift Off wraparound service model just six months after the MOU was signed by the steering committee

¹² The community school model is a place-based strategy that leverages a range of partnerships between the school and other community resources to support improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.

(the mayor, superintendent and Collective Pathways leadership). Importantly, all of this planning, design and implementation work was led almost exclusively by Collective Pathways. The mayor's office was adamant that an external, non-public office take ownership of the initiative and handed the effort off almost immediately after it was set up. This was in part to insulate the collaborative from leadership changes, as the mayor approached the end of his term and the superintendent retired shortly thereafter. As put by an education aid from the mayor's office, it was also a way to prevent the district from being overwhelmed by all the other pillars of the education reform effort that were being put in place; the district simply did not have the capacity to do the coordination work. After Lift Off began in 2010, the assistant superintendent was chosen to fill the position of the retiring superintendent and took ownership of the citywide education reform, while Collective Pathways took ownership of Lift Off and hired a vice president of education to lead the collaborative.

Organizational Structure

Staff roles and responsibilities. There were never many staff members at Collective Pathways charged with implementing Lift Off. In the beginning, there was a vice president for education who designed and implemented Lift Off, who then hired a Lift Off director with whom she worked closely. In 2011, these positions experienced turnover and a new vice president and director were brought on board. That same year, the district hired a wraparound services director to support Lift Off implementation at schools and liaise with Collective Pathways. Former Lift Off staff shared that at its largest, there were four core staff positions housed at Collective Pathways: a vice president for education; a Lift Off director; a community partnerships coordinator; and a Lift Off service corps manager. A Lift Off coordinator position—who was

either an employee of the school already (e.g., a Vice Principal) or an AmeriCorps VISTA—worked out of schools to coordinate on-the-ground work with nonprofit partners.

The original vice president for education at Collective Pathways was charged with staffing Lift Off, identifying funding sources and designing the overall initiative, a heavy task to execute after the handoff of Lift Off to Collective Pathways just six months after the Partnership MOU was signed. During the first year of the initiative, the vice president identified four Lift Off wraparound service domains to focus on in order to support academic performance: social and emotional health; behavioral health; physical health; and family engagement. From 2010-2011, there were regular, detailed status updates from Collective Pathways to the Mayor's office about Lift Off implementation.

Although the specific roles and responsibilities shifted over time with changes in leadership, generally, the Lift Off Director reported directly to the Vice President and was responsible for creating the school and nonprofit partnerships, coordinating resources based on school needs through a Request for Information (RFI) sent to nonprofits to understand their core services and expertise. With an awareness of the historically tense relationship between schools and nonprofits, the director would facilitate school and nonprofit partner meetings using a Partnership Agreement Form with a lengthy list of terms intended to get partners and schools on the same page regarding norms and expectations. The form itself includes a series of questions for different scenarios regarding who is responsible for which issues during particular situations, including snow days, behavioral issues, and other types of emergencies. This level of detail in communication was described by the second Lift Off director as an entirely new way to facilitate collaboration between these partners. When these expectations weren't met or the partnership

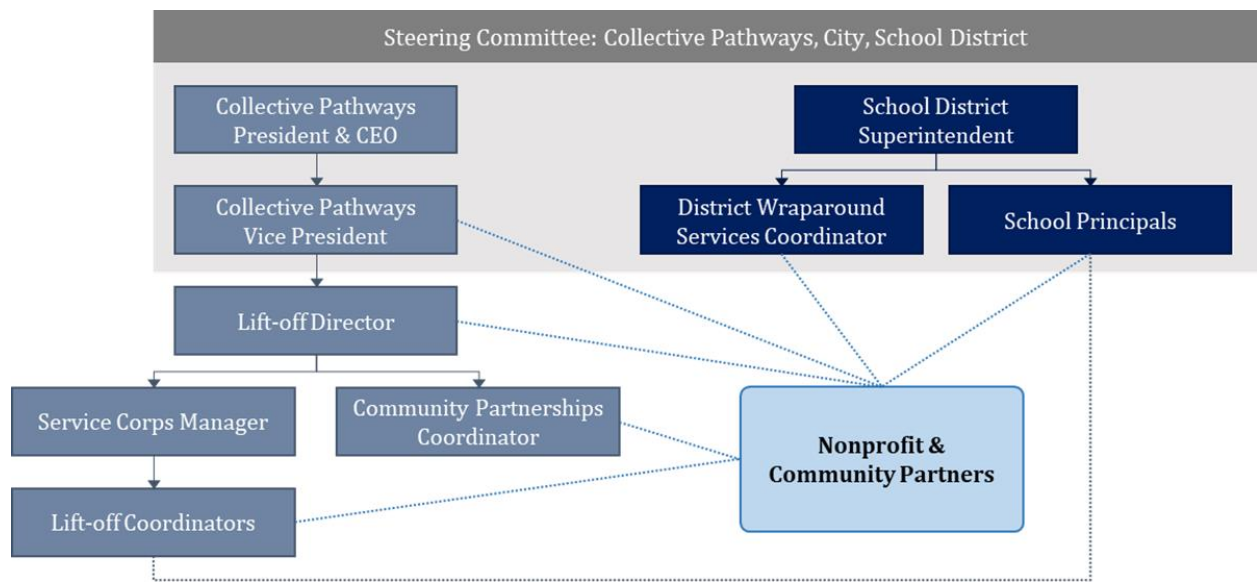
was not working, it was also the director's responsibility to facilitate difficult discussions among partners.

As Lift Off expanded to more schools, the director no longer had the capacity to carry out all of the aforementioned partnership coordination and a community partnership coordinator was hired to pick up a portion of that work. This staff member reported directly to the Director and was charged with maintaining relationships with the community organizations, sending the RFI out to nonprofits, creating a portfolio of community organizations for each school to review, and supporting partnership needs when raised. The director's primary focus shifted to maintaining good relationships with school leadership and overseeing the work of the initiative. In 2011, a wraparound services director position was created at the school district to marshal cooperation and accountability from the schools—breaking down some of the walls of the “fortress school district mentality.” This individual coordinated the wraparound support services, supported the Lift Off coordinators and met regularly with Lift Off leaders to talk about implementation and scaling of the work, reporting to the superintendent.

A critical part of Lift Off was the hiring of AmeriCorps VISTAs and other service corps members to fulfill the position of Lift Off coordinators. These coordinators were responsible for a wide array of tasks based on the particular needs of a school. For example, tasks and responsibilities included creating and fielding school surveys, answering contract-related questions, recruiting children for in-school and after-school programming, creating program schedules, and data collection and entry on various data indicators, such as program attendance. While Lift Off Coordinator responsibilities varied by school, their role was modeled after a community school coordinator position and intended to support nonprofit and school partnerships. One major challenge of relying on service corps members to fulfill these positions,

however, was their one-year contract, which the Lift Off director believed created instability in nonprofit and school relationships: “You had to be really careful because if they were too good, then they were the ones that made the relationship with the non-profit, and they were only there for a year” (L1). During the expansion of Lift Off, a Lift Off service corps manager was hired to train and directly supervise all of the Lift Off coordinators (one per school). By 2014, Lift Off had expanded to 16 schools throughout the district.

Figure 1. Lift Off Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map



Organizational capacity. Staff members at Lift Off—from the vice president down to the community partnerships coordinator—did not feel like they had enough capacity to do their work. The vice president left Lift Off after one year due to the stress of feeling under-resourced; she felt it was “an impossible job” that she “was doing single-handedly” without sufficient financial resources or commitment from the school district (L11). In fact, all Lift Off staff members I spoke with noted that their limited capacity was a barrier to thinking about

sustainability. Financial resources to hire additional staff and better support the facilitation work was cited by four out of five former Lift Off staff as a major capacity limitation. Two Lift Off leaders and a middle manager also claimed that the AmeriCorps VISTAs who filled the Lift Off Coordinator positions were critical to keep the work going, but counterproductive to the sustainability of the work, as many of them were from outside the community and only remained for one year. In that one year, they could not change the culture of the school or create a healthy, sustainable partnership among nonprofit providers and the school before they left. Thus, every year, this relationship would have to be reestablished. The Lift Off director argued that by the third year of Lift Off, schools had to have funding in place to really continue and sustain the work, which required knowing how to look for and apply for grants. She believed that the heavy workload and a culture of working in silos rather than collaborating within Lift Off itself undermined their ability to support Lift Off schools in building their own capacity.

Data focus. Data was *supposed* to be leveraged in support of Lift Off in the three following ways: to fulfill its mission, to secure partner and potential funder investment, and to guide operational decisions. The collaboration's mission to more systematically connect community organizations with schools in need of student services entailed building an accessible, central data warehouse to keep track of all the programs and services offered.¹³ At the school level, the goal was to track improvement in indicators such as attendance, behavioral outcomes and academic performance. In attempting to create these data systems, Lift Off and district staff ran into two major problems. One was that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws complicated Lift Off's access to individual, student-level data, muddling their ability to measure

¹³ The Cincinnati Learning Partner Dashboard served as a model of what Lift-off hoped to create.

the influence of school partners' programming on the specific students participating. The second was that many schools did not have a data-driven culture with effective systems in place for managing data. Due to the aforementioned data sharing issues, Lift Off staff relied on accessible data from these pre-existing systems at schools, the data management systems used by each of their community partner organizations, and district data on school-level academic performance, attendance, behavioral outcomes, and in some cases, physical health data like Body Mass Index (BMI). Parent attendance at Lift Off events was also tracked to capture family engagement, but it was unclear to what end. District, Collective Pathways and Lift Off leaders alike stated that the data warehouse never came to fruition, with the first Collective Pathways vice president sharing that they "were never able to get the school district to do what we were trying to do in terms of data sharing, among other things" (L11). The first wraparound services director believed this was incredibly consequential to the collaboration's survival, as "effective collaboration only happens when you're actually talking about individual, student identifiable data" (L3).

According to Collective Pathways and Lift Off leaders, grappling with these data sharing challenges during its early years of existence distracted Lift Off leaders from determining which measures they would ideally want to focus on and use to motivate partners and funders to collaborate. Several Lift Off staff stated that the most consistent type of data collected was program enrollment and attendance data. The struggle around data sharing and the limited capacity of the small Lift Off staff took time and energy away from other data collection efforts where program feedback could have been collected, such as from school or parent surveys. Summarized by one Lift Off middle manager: "We knew nothing. We had no idea about whether these programs were really benefiting the schools, or the principals, or the communities. We had no information on whether or not the principals were actually happy about the programming"

(L5). Without a logic model that could explain how different data indicators would be used to reach certain outcomes, and how that information would ultimately lead to systemic changes, Lift Off became a difficult initiative to promote to funders.

Thus, using data to secure funding was a major hurdle described by Lift Off staff members because they could not present school or individual outcome measures related to partners' programming. A former Lift Off leader described communication efforts as focused on "low-hanging fruit" or "small wins" that they could share with potential funders as well as partners and community members. These stories were meant to build shared ownership of Lift Off by showcasing its value as a worthy investment of time and resources. As there were no compelling outcome measures that could be linked back to school-partnership programming, the focus of these stories was on interim data indicators.

Finally, the third way in which data was intended to be leveraged for Lift Off was for operational purposes. In correspondence between the mayor and a Collective Pathways executive, Lift Off was supposed to be using the "Results Based Accountability" (RBA) method to guide Lift Off investments.¹⁴ As described previously, however, the extent to which this kind of data-driven decision making occurred is unclear. Two Lift Off staff members believed that decisions were determined by the personality and interests of their leader at the time, rather than by data or feedback about Lift Off. When asked about how data drives operational decisions, an executive leader at Collective Pathways noted that they normally use data to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and make determinations about its continuity. There was no "hard and fast" answer about the time needed to demonstrate improvement on outcomes that

¹⁴ Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA) uses a data-driven, decision-making process to help communities and organizations solve problems. See <https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/>.

would make or break their decision to continue initiatives; however, she acknowledged that it would take at least “three to five years” before initiatives would see meaningful change (L10).

Funding. The seed funding for Lift Off was raised by the mayor’s office and Collective Pathways and came in the form of a \$300,000 bank grant. Only a small portion of the bank grant went towards staff salaries and partially funding AmeriCorps VISTA positions¹⁵, with most of the funding being allocated to the community partners providing services at Lift Off schools. These schools were given \$30,000 a year to determine how they would spend this money with which partnerships, first submitting a proposal to Lift Off that broke down the role and associated costs of the partnerships within each of the four Lift Off domains. Collective Pathways would then distribute the school’s \$30,000 among community partners. In the second year of being a Lift Off school, the amount would diminish incrementally to \$20,000 and then \$10,000 in the third year. The incremental decreases in funding were intended to motivate schools to build internal capacity to maintain the partnerships once the funds were completely depleted. None of the stakeholders with whom I spoke believed that schools’ community partners would receive these funds in perpetuity. In fact, according to a publicly available Fundraising Plan from 2011, Collective Pathways explicitly states that “to sustain these efforts over the long term will require the identification of other revenue streams—most likely public dollars, either new or existing.”

After this seed funding ran out, the Mayor’s understanding was that Collective Pathways would be primarily responsible for fundraising to continue the work. In publicly documented correspondence between an executive at Collective Pathways and the Mayor, the Collective Pathways executive proposed a \$15 million dollar budget from 2010-2015 to support Lift Off: \$5

¹⁵ Costs were shared by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

million for capacity-building to expand Lift Off partnerships and leverage match dollars for school direct services; \$5 million for creating an integrated data warehouse for the school district and external community partnership organizations; and \$5 million for professional development to support wraparound services at the district.

One red flag in this correspondence is the strong emphasis on sustainability concerns, as the Collective Pathways executive leader highlights the importance of “using existing resources more efficiently and effectively” and a “desire to build a wraparound system that is sustainable and not dependent on short-lived, grant-funded programming” (L10). In a 2011 Partnership Update to the Mayor, Collective Pathways shared that they had invested \$150,000 of their own funds for staff and grant-writing, and in another 2011 memo, identified potential funders (banks and foundations) to whom they planned to submit grant proposals. A five-year budget forecasting document shows that in the first two years of implementation (2010-2012), the school district was meant to budget \$250,000 per year of their own funds for a part-time Lift Off Coordinator—a contribution that would increase by \$250,000 each year after that. Only \$5,000 per year was allocated towards communications and marketing from the Collective Pathways budget and \$5,000 per year intended to come from the district’s budget.

Despite the MOU signed by the three major partners in the collaborative (the mayor’s office, school district and Collective Pathways), there were mixed understandings about who would play a role in fundraising for Lift Off. Small corporate grants funded some of the work after the handoff to Collective Pathways, but the vast majority of funding came from the bank grant. Very little in terms of government grants (only for the VISTAs) or public dollars supported the continuance of Lift Off as a convener and backbone for the wraparound services work. The general expectation expressed by the former Mayor and his office staff was that

Collective Pathways would be responsible for fundraising to third parties that the organization otherwise wouldn't go after for their own programs, supplementing the already existing revenue stream of Collective Pathways. According to the MOU, however, the school district and city also agreed to support fundraising efforts, albeit not as the lead agencies responsible.

Once the funding from the bank was depleted, the bank would not renew the grant and Collective Pathways was unable to secure another major grant to support it. One district leader argued that the more resource-rich institutions, such as a local private university, were tied up in financial support to the coinciding college scholarship program, which was described as a much easier, more visible and attractive selling point to funders. In the words of the second Collective Pathways vice president, “I think what everybody discovered was there was not in fact a lot of appetite for funding something like this” (L4). From the perspective of the first Collective Pathways vice president, the value proposition was difficult to pitch to funders because “it's a very complicated equation to spell out that doesn't feel as urgent or compelling or sexy as other fundraising messages” (L11).

According to a Collective Pathways executive leader, their “overall shared goal was to incorporate Lift Off into existing, ongoing school budgets because [they] felt like that was really the path to sustainability, versus having it be something that had to be supported in perpetuity by philanthropy” (L10). In order to do so, they first needed to show that it was effective. Due to the data sharing limitations above and the failure to build a centralized data warehouse, this proved very difficult. A school district leader similarly argued that Lift Off was not meant to simply be a funding stream from Collective Pathways, but a mechanism to bring people together to work more collaboratively on integrating and leveraging existing funding streams. After the third year

in Lift Off, only the schools that saw its value figured out how to either fundraise or work with the central office to adjust their budgets and maintain their partnership programming.

Closing of the Collaborative

In 2015, Lift Off disappeared by name. The role of backbone was transferred to the school district, which despite having a relatively new wraparound services director role, did not have the capacity or willpower to absorb the role that Lift Off once played. Stakeholders shared mixed understandings of whether or not Lift Off was always meant to be transitioned to the district. For example, the former mayor and superintendent believed that the district was never intended to absorb the backbone role, a mayoral education aid claimed they had never discussed institutionalization, and three Collective Pathways executive leaders believed it was the only path towards any kind of sustainability. According to both of the wraparound services directors, the incremental decreases in Lift Off school-partnership funds over time and the creation of their wraparound services director position at the district were clear indicators that the district was expected to fulfill this role. According to the Lift Off director, a Lift Off middle manager and the second wraparound services director, the district and most Lift Off schools defaulted to their normal partnership practices, with only a couple examples of schools whose principals made organizational adjustments to maintain Lift Off coordinators.

According to the former superintendent and second wraparound services director, the district never created a strategy to maintain what had been started by Lift Off. The closure of Lift Off was quiet and there were no formal documents I could collect or that stakeholders were aware of that indicated its termination. It came as a surprise to Lift Off middle managers, but as a highly anticipated event to the Lift Off director and Collective Pathways executive leaders. These leaders attributed its closure to the inability to fundraise beyond the initial bank grant, but

as will be examined later in this chapter, its closure implicated much more than unsustainable funding. Rather, it had to do with the cultivation and maintenance of strong partnerships, the extent to which it could create cultural changes in the way stakeholders from different sectors thought about their own work, Lift Off's control over its own narrative about the work, and the organizational form best suited to carry out this type of work.

Even though Lift Off was ultimately unsustainable, an executive leader at Collective Pathways took the model to another city in their state. Though the Lift Off initiative has a different name, the nonprofit operating it in this new city follows the Frankel model somewhat closely. According to a district stakeholder in Frankel, Collective Pathways branded the Lift Off strategy as their own and claimed proprietorship over the model. When asked why Collective Pathways would pitch an unsustainable model to another city, the second wraparound services director responded, "because they believed that it could be sustainable, but I don't think it was sustainable in [new city] either. It's sustainable for the amount of time you have money. After that, if you're not able to shift your dollars to pay for these expenses, you're really setting schools up for disappointment, right?" (L6). To follow-up on how the strategy had been repackaged for the new city and how it was being implemented, I interviewed the nonprofit director and coordinator responsible for its implementation. They had not spoken with anyone from Collective Pathways about lessons learned in Frankel, nor had they heard that schools did not continue with the model after it was transitioned. Diverging from the implementation timeline in Frankel, the director and coordinator from the new locale were engaged in a much longer community outreach process to educate families about the importance of the work.

4.2 Case Narrative of Community Schools, Thriving Students

Table 3. Summary of Community Schools, Thriving Students (CSTS) Key Characteristics

Collaboration name	Community Schools, Thriving Students
Lifespan	2009-present
Geographic region	West
Jurisdiction	School district
Backbone	School district
Network membership	Coalition for Community Schools
Funding arrangement	Shared across district, schools and CBOs
Coalition strategy	Multi-year strategic planning process
Communications strategy	District-led community engagement
Racial demographics*	27% white; 25% black; 29% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. The vision for a full-service community school district began in 2009 when a new superintendent came to Oakland with the idea that every public school in the district should be a place where children and their families could receive the behavioral, health, social-emotional and academic supports they needed in order for their children to succeed in school. Despite this ambitious vision, the social, political and economic context surrounding the city and district at the time was highly contentious, posing many constraints to the feasibility of implementing his vision. The superintendent was the first to be hired by the local board of education after the school district emerged from six years of state receivership and \$100 million in state debt from an emergency management loan.¹⁶ During this time, the state appointed three administrators to take over management of the district. California and the country as a whole were also reeling from the 2007-2009 recession, which constrained the resource pool available to accomplish such an ambitious vision. Shortly after local control was restored and the board hired the superintendent, teacher contracts were imposed that froze teacher salaries at current rates,

¹⁶ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/08/us/dream-ends-for-oakland-school-chief-as-state-takes-over.html>

eliminated numerous Adult Education staff, and called for the closure of multiple schools, fueling tensions between the district and the teachers union.¹⁷ In the midst of this chaos, the superintendent pushed forward with his vision and convened a broad task force of county and city agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), foundations, university researchers, parent organizing and advocacy groups, and other community members from 2010-2011 to engage in a collective strategic planning process. Without a broad base of supporters and buy-in from all of these stakeholders, one former board of education member believed the community school district vision would not have taken root.

Coalition building. A local foundation provided the first planning grant to establish 14 community school task forces, many of which the superintendent asked a respected leader of a local CBO to facilitate. With this organization in charge of the strategic planning process, it would garner more credibility as a serious initiative, as asserted by one local foundation leader: “If people aren't walking the talk, [the CBO leader] will make sure and bring in community members to let them know that they're not” (C7). To reinforce ownership by the district, however, the task forces were often chaired by a district department leader, sometimes alongside a CBO. The members of the task forces were pre-identified by the superintendent, but represented several different interest groups that met monthly to plan the district strategy. During this process, the task forces provided recommendations for different aspects of the reform, each charged with a specific area such as operations, budget, enrollment, academic performance, high school, behavioral health, and balanced literacy, among others. There was crossover among members of different task forces, with roughly 20-30 people identified to sit on each. The current

¹⁷ See <https://oaklandnorth.net/2010/04/22/ousd-imposes-last-best-and-final-offer-for-teacher-contract/>

community schools director estimated that meeting attendance fluctuated, but there were always at least 10 stakeholders in regular attendance.

According to the community schools director and a couple of CBO leaders, the task forces were advisory bodies and did not have any direct decision-making power over the direction of the work, which was left to the district. One CBO leader explained that during the task force meetings she attended, the agenda and decisions made about the structure of the meetings was not determined by consensus, but by the degree to which people could live with a decision, only allowing for deeper debate when a stakeholder vehemently disagreed with a decision. As reported by this leader, the district and county had a more weighted vote when it came to decision-making among coalition members, likely related to the fact that the county and the school district were the main actors fundraising for the community school strategy.

In addition to these task force meetings, about 10 school-based community engagement efforts with family members were put together during this same period to disseminate information about the district's vision and solicit feedback from families. This was one means to collect recommendations and secure buy-in from the broader community. The current community school director noted that the teachers union was only peripherally engaged in the task forces and the community schools reform. As described by the director, some union members were concerned that the effort would take resources away from the technical core of schools—classrooms—and others were only supportive of small pockets of the community school model, such as family engagement liaisons and parent-teacher home visits. One CBO leader further argued that framing community schools as “addressing the life circumstances of children” was language that helped garner support from some union members.

The outcome of the year-long task force process was a five-year strategic plan for implementation, which called for the creation of a Community Schools Partnership Department within the district (with a director and dedicated staff), and a slew of district initiatives that required collaboration across school district departments, CBOs, social service agencies and community members.¹⁸ The school board adopted the strategic plan in 2011. While the task force process was intentionally broad to garner widespread support, one former board member believed that the lack of board participation and representation in these meetings made the task of implementation much harder. He stated that “once it got to the board, it was way too cooked already. And I think one of the things that came out of it was sort of the magnitude of the plan. I think there were 100 plus priorities” (C3). This former board member believed that had the board been more involved, the strategic plan would have had a clearer theory of action on how to operationalize many of the recommendations put forth.

Mission and vision. The mission that came out of the strategic plan, which was aligned with the original vision of the former superintendent, was for all public schools in the district to become community schools that “serve the whole child, eliminate inequity, and provide each child with excellent teachers everyday.” The long-term vision was that all students would graduate from high school as “caring, competent, critical thinkers, fully-informed, engaged and contributing citizens” who would be “prepared to succeed in college and career.” This was at first defined by the placement of a community school manager (CSM) at the school site, who coordinated direct service programming alongside the principal and a site-based coordination of services team (COST). As time passed and deeper needs assessments into the district’s schools were conducted, the district adjusted this goal to focus its existing resources on 50 of its 86

¹⁸ See 2011 Strategic Plan: <http://cshca-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Community-Schools-Thriving-Students-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

schools in 2017 that were most in need of a CSM. In 2017, they had managed to create this position and the community school structure at 35 public schools. In 2019, they had hired a CSM for 42 of the public schools—close to the target goal of 50 by 2020.

The adjustment of the mission throughout the past eight years has been in large part due to the variability in school and CBO partnerships across the district. Some schools had pre-existing relationships and programming that were already well-coordinated by a school-based employee or CBO, while others were more affluent and did not need a community school structure to better support academic performance. The schools that fell into the 50 priority schools in 2017 were those that had the highest needs based on attendance outcomes and academic performance. According to the current district chief of staff, the goal to have all public schools become community schools allowed for flexibility, and was about leveraging resources effectively and shifting the school’s mindset to one of the “whole child” (C1).

Organizational Structure

Staff roles and responsibilities. Although a Community Schools Department was created after the Board adopted the strategic plan in 2011, it was reshuffled organizationally through various district leadership changes. The district cycled through five superintendents since the community school strategy was first implemented in 2011. It is now an office called “Community Schools & Student Services,” nested within the broader Academics Department under the Chief Academic Officer. The community schools director leads Community Leadership Councils (CLCs) for the community school managers (CSMs) to support and train them, providing them with a district toolkit on community school priorities and continuous improvement efforts. According to a university researcher who studied the implementation of the strategy, the CLCs are meant to “cohere the expectations of the community school manager and

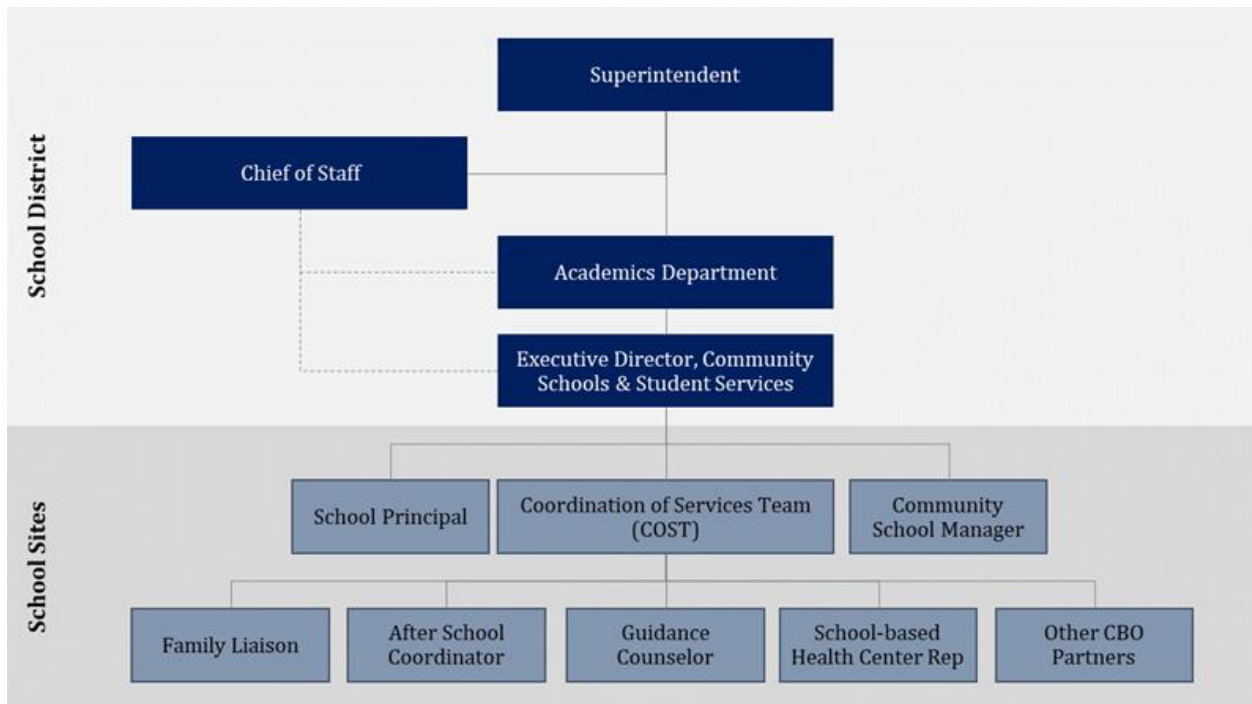
also allow for knowledge-sharing between community school managers so they can troubleshoot” (C8). Generally, the director oversees the community school direction at the district and is responsible for cultivating partnerships with CBOs and various funders to sustain the work. This position was formerly occupied by the current chief of staff to the superintendent, who identified partnerships and funding to scale the effort. The current superintendent hired the chief of staff knowing his relationship with community partners and hoping to continue leveraging them in support of the district’s initiatives. For the past five years, however, the community schools director position has been filled by a different individual who had worked closely with the current chief of staff.

The linchpin of the community school strategy is the community school manager (CSM) at each site, who operates at the same administrative level as the principal, essentially serving as their “right hand” so that the principal can focus more on instruction. As previously noted, there are currently 42 CSMs at community school sites across the district. The hiring process for this role was described by the current Chief of Staff as rigorous and competitive, with annual salaries ranging from \$75,000-\$95,000. While the relationship between the principal and the CSM varies across schools, CSMs were described by one researcher studying the district as empowered to make school decisions, but always in consultation with the principal. The first task of CSMs is to conduct a school needs assessment to understand what has been successful or difficult at their school site. Subsequently, their other responsibilities involve communication with the school community about current work and successes, developing partnership agreements, managing COST, and supporting and building community engagement efforts.¹⁹ Overall, the responsibilities of this position are tailored to the needs of the school.

¹⁹ See <https://www.ousd.org/Page/13989> for a detailed description of CSM responsibilities.

The CSM manages the Coordination of Services Team (COST), which usually includes the principal, CSM, a guidance counselor, family liaison, after school coordinator, and key partners from other leading agencies—such as school-based health centers—who make student referrals for specific programs and services as part of a tiered intervention approach. At each school, the current Community School Director described four to six major partners who would sit on COST, even if a school has upwards of 20 partnerships. COST members communicate with teachers through meetings or online messaging, who will then recommend students to be considered for referrals. At one mature community school in the district, the CSM reported that COST met weekly to discuss student referrals. Although the COST structure preexisted the community school strategy, as of 2019, it has been scaled to all public schools in the district.

Figure 2. Oakland CSTS Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map



Initiatives. An important characteristic of OUSD is that prior to this ambitious community school district vision, there were already a number of cross-sector collaborations in place across the district. Thus, in many ways, the district’s reform was building on top of other efforts that had established norms and expectations around collaboration. One prominent collaboration was a mayoral initiative that consisted of players from the mayor’s office, school district, and high-profile foundation and CBO leaders throughout the city to advocate for various educational priorities. Another was a “Promise” collaborative, another partnership between the mayor’s office and school district aimed at increasing college matriculation by building a “cradle to career” pipeline of programs and college scholarships for graduating seniors. One of the most noteworthy initiatives that already existed across the district was the creation of a three-way “cross-agency strategy” in 1995 called “Elev8” between the city, county and school district to improve early childhood outcomes, provide behavioral services for children exposed to violence, and provide school-based services for adolescents at risk of dropping out. This work ultimately morphed into the creation of a nonprofit organization that facilitated school-family-community partnerships at five of the highest need middle schools in the city, coordinating mental health services, case management, after-school, family engagement and social-emotional learning programs in the mid-2000s. The history of cross-agency partnership at these five Elevate schools created a foundation for community school implementation. The former superintendent strategically chose these schools to be the first implementers of the community school model.

The first substantial initiative the district implemented was the creation of school-based health centers at the Elevate schools. Several other schools were added in the following years, with the effort expanding to 16 school-based health centers in 2017 at schools identified as “high needs” in terms of academic performance, attendance and discipline issues. The school-based

health centers provide services to children and families related to immunization, trauma-focused behavioral healthcare, individual and family therapy, vision and dental care. These centers were intended to address the fact that many of the district’s students and their families did not have time to visit the doctor’s office. There were never goals to expand the health centers beyond the 16, which now serve students and families from all schools throughout the district.

Simultaneously, the district worked with CBOs and funders to cull resources to ensure that all these schools and others identified to become community schools would have a full-time CSM and COST responsible for identifying struggling students and referring them to services.

While the range of initiatives at community schools is vast and varies by site, other common initiatives that district leaders noted were parent-teacher home visits—where teachers opt in to the program and are trained on how to conduct a home visit to establish a direct connection with their students’ parents—and academic parent-teacher teams, where the teacher holds a workshop with all parents in the classroom to model an activity that the parent can do with their child at home. Many of the district’s community schools also have Linked Learning,²⁰ after school programming, restorative justice, behavioral interventions and supports, and attendance and discipline support services.²¹ According to the current director of community schools, however, implementation of the community school vision is more focused on strategically coordinating the existing nonprofit and CBO resources across the city and county than it is about creating new initiatives: “[We] been doing community schools for a long time. We just didn't name it community schools. So we've had school-based health centers for many, many years prior to community schools becoming a topic. We've had mental health in our

²⁰ Linked Learning is an approach organized around industry-sector themes that integrates rigorous academics and college-ready standards with sequenced, high-quality career-technical education, work-based learning, and student supports. See <https://www.ousd.org/domain/4354> for more details.

²¹ See <https://www.ousd.org/Page/15122> for a full list of initiatives associated with the community school strategy.

schools for a very long time. [The state] has a very robust afterschool program. So we had a lot of the components of community schools, and have been doing many of the elements, but didn't quite call it community schools” (C2).

Network membership. The primary network the district leaned on during the design and implementation stages was the Coalition for Community Schools, a national community schools network that provides technical assistance and other resources for schools interested in adopting the model. District leaders had positive reflections to share about attachment to the network, citing lessons learned from other initiatives and access to other leaders who were farther along in the work as part of the “Community School Leadership Network.” A foundation leader who was deeply involved in the origins of the community school vision claimed that “without the National Coalition, and all of the partners, and all of the networks that people were able to join, it would have been very, very difficult to keep the movement towards becoming a full-service community school district” (C4). This leader believed the network’s core benefits were helping district leaders clarify their identity as a community school district and providing a clearinghouse of information and resources they could tap into to troubleshoot problems and solicit advice. Similarly, the district’s family engagement coordinator noted that the network’s “Family Engagement Leaders Network” helped her learn from what other districts were doing and field questions. She shared that the idea for one of the community school district’s initiatives—parent-teacher home visitation—was borrowed from this network.

Use of data. When the community schools vision was introduced in 2009, a district employee shared they were only systematically collecting academic and attendance data at that time. By 2017, the district was working on building a central data warehouse that included community school indicators and outcomes. According to several district staff, a number of

databases to track programs and services existed, but they were not yet centralized and schools and partners were still working on data sharing agreements. One CSM explained, “The data exist in six different places. That is a headache...That part, we gotta step it up at a district level, so we can make moves” (C10). District leaders stated that the primary outcome indicators being tracked at the time were referrals made by COST teams and student participation in programs, access to healthcare services and student attendance. Data collection systems for family engagement and COST referrals were described by the director as somewhat rudimentary, being collected through spreadsheets that were eventually uploaded to the district’s data dashboard. In 2017, the district had begun to think about a systematic way to collect data on parent engagement through a partnership with a local research university.

In a 2019 interview follow-up with the current chief of staff, he described how they are still working towards the creation of a centralized database that includes all of the aforementioned data on community school indicators and outcomes. Through a partnership with a large, locally-based tech company, the district was working on creating a standardized tool that COST could use across all community school sites. The purpose of the tool would be to allow COST to track all students and understand which outcomes are associated with which partnerships, to proactively drive decisions about partnerships and programming. This vision would also allow COST to see what's happening with a particular student in real time to better coordinate with partners and to be available to all adults involved in that students’ development.

In terms of funding, the current chief of staff stated that positive correlations between access or participation in programs and school-level outcomes were enough to satisfy funders while they thought about improving the district’s data systems. A research partner also explained that they were able to cull the district’s data and provide information on trends to “continually

legitimize” the community schools work by showing results. She explained that her research center can “link new data with archived data and look at the administrative trends over time. So academic trends, disciplinary trends, and so what the schools really like about that is that it allows them to see, and to be able to say, ‘Oh, these students who participated in X, Y, Z programs have X, Y and Z improvements in their outcomes’” (C8). This researcher believed that her university’s research center—the same one helping the district think through a parent engagement database—would be responsible for creating a way to better link the data indicators and outcomes for the district. In terms of evaluating the community school strategy, a 2015-16²² implementation study was conducted by the same university research partner and an evaluation of the school-based health centers was conducted by a different university partner in 2018.²³

Funding. In Oakland Unified School District, funding has been braided from a number of different public and private sector sources to support the community school strategy. A \$10,000 planning grant from the San Francisco Foundation supported the launch of the strategic planning task forces. Shortly thereafter, the district leveraged a \$50,000 grant from Bechtel to continue to pay for the task force process and creation of a strategic plan. The core source of funding for community schools has been provided by the Kaiser Foundation since 2010 to support the initial development of four school-based health centers. Through a contract with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), the county healthcare agency provided roughly \$113,000 to the school-based health centers, leveraging their FQHC Medicaid rate. The health centers expanded to 16 schools in 2017, functioning as a \$700,000 indigent health operation. Funding was renewed from the Kaiser Foundation in 2019 for another three-year grant cycle to

²² See <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573279> to download the full study.

²³ See https://healthpolicy.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra756/f/wysiwyg/USD%20Impact%20Brief%202016_17%2007%2006%2018.pdf for research brief.

continue supporting the operation of 16 school-based health care centers. To date, the district has received \$44 million from the foundation since 2009.

The current chief of staff, through his relationships with prominent foundations and agency leaders, played a central role in securing many of the aforementioned grants. He also wrote the proposal for an \$11 million grant from Atlantic Philanthropies in 2014 to expand the district's health career pathways. As part of that grant, the philanthropy contributed \$30 million to the city and \$11 million to the school district. The county healthcare agency operating many of the school-based health centers received around \$3.5 million, while a county hospital received \$12 million to develop student internships.

The current chief of staff was also instrumental in securing a substantial, 10-year grant from the Packard Foundation to implement a systems change strategy addressing health issues from birth through early childhood. This resulted in the formation of another collaboration with CBOs that fit into the community school strategy. The chief of staff also won a communications grant from Atlantic Philanthropies to identify gaps in stakeholders' understandings of the community schools work. Through this grant, they hired a communications firm that identified teachers as the stakeholders who were the least informed about what it means to be a community school, which shaped the district's future communications and engagement efforts.

Foundation, private donor and federal dollars initially paid for the CSM position, but after the first year, schools were expected to start absorbing the cost. In 2015, an anonymous donor gifted \$32 million to the city overall, \$6 million to the school district and \$2.8 million to the specific cause of expanding the community school model. The district used this money to focus on funding the CSM position, as well as expanding restorative justice and early childhood work. Funding was originally disbursed centrally from the district to pay the salaries of the CSM,

gradually shifting the responsibility to schools to cover 25 percent of the cost in the second year, 50 percent in the third year and 75 percent in the fourth year. Schools were ultimately expected to self-fund the CSM or work with CBOs that were able to cover the costs of the position. Currently, the majority of schools contribute roughly 50% of the position's salary, while a small number of schools fully pay for their CSM, and a small group still rely on central district funds to pay for the position. The chief of staff noted that the district's goal is to move toward a shared public-private funding model to sustain the position.

In addition to private sector grants, there were federal, state and city sources that the district leveraged in order to support the community school strategy. The district tapped into a federal community schools grant to support the identification of neighborhood feeder patterns to create a pathway of student and family services. Additionally, grant funding from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program was leveraged to support parts of the community school strategy in high schools, as the program is explicitly intended for cross-sector collaborative efforts.²⁴ At the state level, the After School Education and Safety Fund (ASES) program granted roughly \$90,000 per community school,²⁵ which is matched by a voter-approved, citywide general fund—the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY)²⁶— which provides funding to CBO partners leading direct service, after school work at district community school sites. To date, the district has pulled in roughly \$40 million from OFCY-supported

²⁴ See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/fundingop.asp#centurycommunitylearningcenters21st>

²⁵ See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ex/fundingop.asp#afterschooleducationandsafetyprogram>

²⁶ The Oakland Fund for Children and Youth was established in 1996, when Oakland voters passed the Kids First! Initiative (Measure K), an amendment to the City Charter, to support direct services to youth under 21 years of age. In 2009, Measure D replaced Measure K and reauthorized funding for the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth for an additional twelve years (2010-2022). Measure D established OFCY funds as 3% of the City's unrestricted General Fund and required a three-year strategic plan to guide the allocation of funds. In 2019-2020, City Council and Oakland voters will decide to reauthorize the fund for a third 12-year cycle. See <https://www.ofcy.org/> for further details.

partnerships. At the city level, parcel taxes were passed—notably Measures N and G²⁷—to increase funding for the school district. Embedded in each of these measures was support for wraparound programs and supplementary services aimed at bolstering student achievement, among other intended purposes.

Continuation through superintendent turnover. From 2009 to the present day, there have been five different superintendents managing the district. Despite all of this turnover and the instability that comes with it, community schools managed to make its way into the 2015-2020 school district strategic plan and have continued to expand. The chief of staff, who left the district because a prior superintendent consolidated the Community Schools Department, was brought back by the most recent superintendent to “plug the holes” in the financial and operational challenges the district faced and serve as a right hand to the superintendent. When the current superintendent took over, the district was again on the brink of bankruptcy and state receivership, yet the community schools work continued. As an original champion of the community schools effort, he noted that “with our new strategic plan, the one complete nonnegotiable is that we are not changing our mission and vision for the district, which is grounded on being a full service community school district concerned with the whole child. We’re just kind of seeing it as full-service community schools 2.0, the next iteration” (C1).

4.3 Comparative Analysis of Lift Off and Community Schools, Thriving Students

Community Schools, Thriving Students (CSTS) was chosen as a surviving pair to Lift Off because of their similar modeling of “community schools” partnerships, resource-rich local environments (i.e. both regions benefit from a wealth of community-based organizations and at least one prestigious, private research university), and their shared systems change missions.

²⁷ See <https://www.ousd.org/Page/12995> for more information.

They did not just seek to expand coordinated service provision, but to create systemic and cultural changes in the way that CBOs, schools and the district worked together towards a collective goal. Both Lift Off and CSTS strove to introduce a community schools model to their respective districts as a strategy to support academic outcomes, graduation and college readiness and matriculation. In both cities, the reform strategies were initiated in the same school-year amidst tight fiscal constraints coming out of the 2007-2009 recession; however, stakeholders hoped to take advantage of pre-existing community resources to support the success of each. While the scope of CSTS was much broader and more encompassing than the scope of Lift Off—the district’s *main* strategy rather than a *branch* of a broader education reform strategy—both efforts shared a similar goal of systematically improving cross-sector coordination of place-based, wraparound services and supports for students and families.

Despite having these organizational and environmental characteristics in common, Lift Off and CSTS diverged from one another in important ways that were consequential to their survival. In Frankel, the long-standing relationship between the former superintendent and mayor, coupled with mayoral control over the school district, facilitated a more streamlined path to initiating Lift Off than was the case in CSTS. Absent from Lift Off was the year-long coalition building process that guided the work in Oakland; nonprofits in Frankel were not introduced to the idea until it was almost fully formed. Moreover, the selection of Collective Pathways in Frankel was intended to create de facto buy-in from CBOs, many of which received some type of funding or programmatic support from Collective Pathways. The hasty way in which the reform was put together and almost immediately handed off to Collective Pathways, with only six months to plan and solicit feedback on the effort before implementing it in five pilot schools, was the first critical juncture that undermined the long-term sustainability of the effort.

In the sections below, I begin by exploring the primary reason that Lift Off was unsustainable—funding constraints—and compare the strategies employed by leaders from CSTS in securing funder commitments. Moreover, I explore several other conditions that likely would have undermined Lift Off’s long-term survival prospects, regardless of whether or not it could have altered its funding strategy to meet its needs. These conditions include: circumventing the coalition building process, resulting in discrepant institutional logics and sensemaking; the type of organization chosen to be the backbone; and divergent institutionalization plans.

Funding and Effective Leadership

More consequential to survival than any other feature of Lift Off was the inability of its leaders to secure funding in addition to the short-term bank grant on which it relied. One major finding from my interviews with Collective Pathways and Lift Off staff was their inability to pinpoint whose responsibility it was to fundraise for Lift Off: was it the board of Collective Pathways? Perhaps the vice president of education? Or was it really a shared fundraising responsibility between the mayor’s office and the district? This ambiguity in the division of fundraising roles and responsibilities required me to turn to original partnership documents and correspondence between Collective Pathways, the district and the mayor’s office. In examining the initial agreements, it was clear that the fundraising responsibility was shared across the three major sectors, with a commitment from Collective Pathways to identify new funders outside of its current portfolio for Lift Off. Archived email correspondence also indicated early concerns by Collective Pathways leadership that Lift Off would not be sustainable unless they could secure more financial support from the school district.

In another email correspondence, Collective Pathways provided the mayor's office with a list of potential funders they would target outside of their current resource pool; however, no follow-up correspondence was ever documented regarding whether or not these funders were pursued. In interviews, Collective Pathways executive leaders, the Lift Off director and the former mayor all spoke to the difficulty of pitching Lift Off to funders, but not one of these individuals could provide details of specific fundraising efforts to support the initiative between 2010-2015. Moreover, aside from the creation of the wraparound services director position, no interviewees could speak to other resources contributed by the district. The identification of funding constraints as the primary cause for closure on the one hand, and the inability to identify any specific actions taken to rectify this concern on the other, signaled to me a gap in communication that could have been rectified through structured spaces to negotiate sensemaking. The fact that leaders from the three major organizations on the Steering Committee could not recall any in-person discussions around fundraising and sustainability planning also signals that this governing body may have been more symbolic, rather than substantive.

When asking interviewees about their perceptions of Lift Off fundraising responsibilities, Collective Pathways leaders and the mayor expressed concerns that seemed to contradict their actions, as documented in archived correspondence. For example, a Collective Pathways executive leader suggested three strategies to course correct for year two of Lift Off implementation in a memo to the mayor's office, but ended up choosing the most unsustainable of the three—expanding to more sites despite the acknowledged funding shortages. In an interview with the mayor, he noted that “One set of red flags had to do with the perception that this was about incremental funding²⁸ and from the start I tried to push against that because I've

²⁸ In this quote, “incremental funding” refers to the partial funding of a contract, with additional funds anticipated to be provided at a later time if criteria are met.

seen it enough times. When things are about incremental funding, incremental funding goes away” (L7). However, again in archived correspondence, incremental funding was baked into the fundraising plan proposed by Collective Pathways, who had identified organizations accustomed to short-term grant arrangements. Collective Pathways itself was also an organization that historically relied on incremental funding for its other programmatic work, making it an odd choice of backbone if the mayor hoped to create more enduring, long-term funding streams. Ultimately, Collective Pathways ended up providing the vast majority of the resources for Lift Off, through the bank grant funds transferred to Lift Off schools and applications for public service corps members (e.g., AmeriCorps VISTAs) to fill Lift Off coordinator positions.

In contrast, OUSD took a diversified portfolio approach and leveraged district-paid grant writers and other leaders to fund CSTS through diverse private sector grants and governmental funding. The effective leadership of one district stakeholder—the former community schools director and current chief of staff—played a key role in securing diverse funding sources for the strategy through the strong relationships he had built with other community members. The current community schools director shared that “[he] was particularly skilled at making a lot of connections around resources” (C2). Others similarly believed that this individual was integral to the sustainability of the community school strategy, with another county health care leader claiming that “people like him have a vision and really get the connectivity that’s needed in order to get this whole thing to unfurl” (C14). This effective leadership was absent from Lift Off. While both OUSD and Lift Off struggled in a challenging economic climate, the effective leadership of the chief of staff and his clear communication of the value proposition of the work appeared to support him in securing systems change grants from funders, without needing to demonstrate short-term movement on individual student outcomes. His promotion of CSTS as a

long-term, systems change effort helped him renew many of these grants from the same funders. While Lift Off staff struggled to prove their value to funders without individual student data, CSTS funders were satisfied with school-level outcomes because of the long-term framing by the chief of staff and other district grant writers.

Lacking an effective leader to fundraise for Lift Off had far-reaching consequences, as concerns about funding constraints shaped organizational decisions that undermined its sustainability. For CSTS, private funds and public school district dollars supported the CSM position at schools, with a plan to taper off funding for the position over time so that schools and CBOs would ultimately absorb the cost. Similar to the CSM but operating with a smaller scope of work and at a smaller scale, Lift Off coordinators were responsible for shepherding school-nonprofit partnerships, collecting data and supporting schools with the logistics of these partnerships. Since Lift Off never had the funds to sponsor the Lift Off coordinator position at schools, they relied on funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to support AmeriCorps VISTA and Public Allies fellows, who were only obligated to remain in the position for a one-year contract. The temporality of this position contributed to the fragility of the partnership between the Lift Off coordinator, nonprofit partners and school administrators because a new relationship between the principal and Lift Off coordinator would need to be established again the following year. A former Collective Pathways executive regretted not finding the funds to hire full-time administrative-level individuals for this position. In order to achieve systemic change, there would need to be stronger incentives for schools to continually re-establish these relationships, for Lift Off coordinators to renew their contracts, or for the schools to reallocate their resources to create and fund the position themselves. In OUSD, the CSM operates at the same level as the principal—endowing them with more authority and

legitimacy, as well as a comparable salary for the position. The core difference is the CSMs became integrated into the fabric of the schools, whereas the Lift Off coordinators operated as an “add-on” or appendage to school sites.

Discrepant Logics

The dependency on the bank grant, lack of an effective leader to sell the work to different funders, and ambiguity over whose responsibility it was to fundraise put Lift Off in a financially unsustainable position. However, additional factors emerged during the interviews that may have undermined the survival prospects of Lift Off regardless of whether or not they could have changed course on fundraising. From the very beginning, a consequential outcome of circumventing the coalition building process in Frankel was that stakeholders missed a critical opportunity to understand the cultural norms, beliefs, operations and organizational dynamics reinforcing different logics held by the district, schools and nonprofit partners. Discrepancies in how stakeholders across these agencies described their roles, the purpose of Lift Off, and their perceptions of the intentions of other actors shed light on some of these underlying logics. Failing to explore and address these differences in sensemaking appeared to undermine the trust between Lift Off and its partners, making it harder to penetrate nonprofit and school norms to catalyze the cultural and structural changes that needed to make Lift Off successful. Before diving into the unique logics characterizing each sector, one limitation worth noting is that I was unable to interview school-level staff in Frankel due to the district’s IRB restrictions. I was also only able to conduct an interview with one nonprofit partner. As a result, their direct perspectives are underrepresented in this analysis. District and Lift Off staff did, however, speak to their own perceptions of how these stakeholders thought about the work.

Lift Off staff logic. All five Lift Off staff interviewed and one executive leader of Collective Pathways made sense of their work in a way that was not shared by district stakeholders—nor, as district stakeholders claimed, by principals or nonprofit partners. The purpose of Lift Off was described by staff members as capacity building and its existence as temporary. None of the former Lift Off staff believed that the initiative would exist in perpetuity. They argued that institutionalization of the work would in fact require substantive investment from the school district. According to one former Collective Pathways executive, this institutionalization was intended to occur through scaffolding the partnership work for schools and training school administrators how to use data to integrate the service coordination into their routines. This was meant to be entirely different from the service provision relationships with which schools were accustomed, described by the second Collective Pathways vice president as, “We think your school needs X, Y and Z, we found a non-profit for you. Here it is” (L4). Lift Off was to facilitate systemic changes in schools’ culture and routines that would require them to take more responsibility in meeting their students’ nonacademic needs.

The decision to house Lift Off at Collective Pathways also meant that the logic of Lift Off was largely reflective of that of Collective Pathways, a charitable organization accustomed to providing funding and primarily short-term programming. When asked about whether or not they believed Lift Off to be a program, initiative, reform or other type of effort, Lift Off staff consistently responded that it was either a program or initiative. One Lift Off middle manager claimed that when he was hired, Collective Pathways framed Lift Off as a separate entity, almost as if it were a “nonprofit within a nonprofit” (L2). The same manager noted that Lift Off almost never interacted with other prongs of the broader citywide education reform effort, operating in a somewhat disconnected space that contributed to the feeling that Lift Off really was a program.

How then, were Lift Off staff supposed to accomplish systems change when they understood their initiative as a temporal program?

Nonprofit logic. According to a former superintendent, it did not help that Collective Pathways was viewed by the nonprofit community as a funder, rather than as a convener and facilitator. As documented in previous research, large, charitable organizations like Collective Pathways are historically known for imposing strict fiscal and programmatic requirements on their recipient nonprofit grantees (Stone et al., 2001). Thus, the perception of Collective Pathways as a funder came with a set of assumptions about how nonprofits would interact and benefit from the partnership. Many nonprofits in the community have depended on Collective Pathways for grants in the past—an important power dynamic that likely influenced nonprofit partners’ sensemaking about the role of Collective Pathways in supporting Lift Off. Their philanthropic reputation in the community and provision of incremental funding for schools to partner with nonprofits may have set nonprofits’ expectations that the partnership would fade once Lift Off money for schools was depleted. Thus, the way that Collective Pathways had traditionally worked with nonprofit partners may have provided perverse incentives for participating that weakened long-term strategizing. A Collective Pathways executive leader believed participation was based on nonprofits’ funding self-interests rather than buy-in to a coordinated service system. The former Lift Off director similarly described her interactions with nonprofit partners as if “they would rather have just been a regular old [Collective Pathways] grantee. Where it’s just like, give me the money and let me do my own program with the kids. Why do I have to jump through all these hoops and this partnership agreement form and all this stuff with the school?” (L1). Changing this dynamic would have required Collective Pathways to

not only focus more attention on branding Lift Off, but to rebrand their own identity as a backbone rather than a program funder.

Despite these statements about nonprofit perceptions, the mayor believed that the reputation of Collective Pathways would be a logical advantage in implementing Lift Off, as he characterized the organization as a “neutral benefactor” well-known to nonprofits in the city (L7). What he overlooked is that pre-existing relationships can in fact facilitate smoother collaboration (Davis et al., 2005), but the type of relationship between a funder and grantee does not cultivate the same level of trust or reciprocity as one between two mutually benefitting partners (e.g., Milofsky, 1981). This power dynamic was called into question by the second district wraparound services director who eventually transitioned to working at a partnering nonprofit. She claimed that nonprofit partners told her it was confusing for Collective Pathways to lead the work; that there was a degree of suspicion for why a funder would become so involved in direct programmatic work. As described by Lift Off and the two wraparound services directors, this suspicion also stems from the nonprofit logic of necessary separation between funders, direct service providers and schools, allowing for each to specialize in what they do best. This may have left nonprofit partners struggling to understand what new value Lift Off could add to the cross-sector partnerships.

District logic. At the school district, the former superintendent noted a “fortress mentality,” a point which was reinforced by two other district stakeholders. The “fortress mentality” refers to the district protecting against “outside forces” influencing its internal operations to avoid disruption, which the former superintendent believed defaulted to closed lines of communication between the district and the wider nonprofit community (L9). This logic is meant to insulate the district from external volatility, buffering it from external pressures

where it could be held accountable for more than the district is able to control (Powell, 1991). He shared, “every time you pick your head up and open the door a little bit, there's a tendency for the asks and the attention demanded by the surrounding community to be fairly relentless and distracting....and that can be immensely distracting from the core work of the district” (L9). This “fortress logic” reinforced the notion that schools should have their own level of operational autonomy. One way in which they accomplished this was by leaving key decisions, such as who would fill the Lift Off coordinator position at the schools (e.g., a paraprofessional, vice principal or AmeriCorps VISTA) up to schools to determine.

District stakeholders and even Lift Off staff were aware that Lift Off was being perceived as too top-down by principals and school staff. A former district wraparound services director described how a former Collective Pathways executive wanted “more control than they should have” at school sites and more discretion in telling schools how they should run the partnerships (L3). The director also claimed that some schools provided this feedback to Collective Pathways, but would get mixed responses—sometimes satisfactory and other times negligent—depending on who was involved. The main concern was that Collective Pathways wanted to impose a rigid model of the work on schools, rather than collaborate with the district and schools on more locally tailored approaches. Since the purpose of Lift Off and the role of Collective Pathways was not consistently understood across stakeholders, trust that Collective Pathways would address these concerns hinged on the personalities of the staff interfacing with nonprofit and school partners. Another wraparound services director noted that the former Lift Off director was effective and well-liked by schools because she was familiar with the culture of nonprofits and their relationships with schools, but the Collective Pathways vice president was perceived as a

controlling person who would "shove it down your throat with a smile" (L6). Three other Lift Off staff described the Collective Pathways leader in a similar way.

Under these circumstances, it was critical that the conduit—the person interfacing with schools—was perceived as an insider, not an outsider, in order to build any trust across sectors and penetrate school cultural norms. It is likely that the schools' association of Lift Off with the Collective Pathways vice president undermined its legitimacy. According to three interviewees from Lift Off and the wraparound services director, the vice president was "manipulative," "narcissistic," and someone who "burned bridges," creating deeper divisions between Lift Off and the district. Again, by negating an inclusive coalition building process to establish norms and sensemaking, as well as the lack of a collaborative governance structure where cross-sector stakeholders could negotiate these logics, these tensions were never resolved.

School logic. The few former district stakeholders I interviewed similarly claimed that schools did not interpret Lift Off as an effort to build capacity, but as a top-down initiative being done to them. They claimed that schools also struggled to look beyond the historical role of Collective Pathways in the city, and according to the first wraparound services director, school leaders felt conflicted about the role of Collective Pathways as both a funder and operator of the work. She believed that the perceived duality of Collective Pathways' role in Lift Off—as a funder and programmatic operator—contributed to school leaders' concerns that their autonomy would be impinged upon by yet another outside initiative:

I think we all wanted the same thing, we just kind of had different agendas to get there. It felt a little bit like a power struggle. The [city] didn't really have much in it. They were just the entity, it was mostly between the school district and [Collective Pathways]. I think [Collective Pathways] was trying to be more active outside of being a fiduciary, if that makes sense. I think that a lot of people weren't...They weren't used to that. They weren't ready for that. You're not used to a funder wanting to have that much input in direct work. It was hard for me to try to find a balance between meeting the needs of the funders but also respecting the needs of my schools. (L6)

Moreover, the former superintendent and the two wraparound service directors argued that many of the Lift Off schools perceived it to be another free service being offered and *done* to them, rather than a collaborative effort in partnership with them. The former superintendent explained how “reform fatigue,” in which a new intervention is imposed on teachers and schools year after year, limited school stakeholders’ openness to the idea of Lift Off in the first place:

One of the real frustrating things to me about this was at the beginning, a lot of the veteran teachers and administrators were kind of rolling their eyes. They were like, ‘Another thing.’ Like, ‘Oh, every couple of years there’s some new initiative that we all have to get trained in, we have to do it, and then, we’re asked for three or four years. And then, it just all of a sudden disappears and no one talks about it ever again.’ And they’re like, ‘Here it is again!’ We were trying to say, ‘No, this is different because it’s really going to be integrated and woven into the way the school works. It’s going to be part of the evaluations. It’s going to be part of your data system.’ But they were right. (L9)

Overlooking this fundamental piece of the school logic—the desire for relative autonomy and the distrust of outsiders looking to reform them—likely left school stakeholders defaulting to the way they would normally make sense of a “new initiative.” Failing to cultivate a deeper understanding or awareness of how Lift Off would be different than other cyclical initiatives and how it would benefit school personnel missed an opportunity to build a new “script” to bring together different institutional interests across sectors, or at least the opportunity for Collective Pathways to conform to the scripts already being used by schools (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). When faced with uncertain circumstances, individuals tend to default to prior “cues” and “frames” that guide their sensemaking, which are built on prior experiences and interpretations (Weick, 1995). In Frankel, as in other sites (e.g., Hallet, 2010), school personnel had experienced short-term initiatives, or innovations, that created more work for them and then disappeared. This helps to explain why district and Lift Off staff described many school stakeholders as merely complying with Lift Off, rather than embracing it.

Principal commitment to Lift Off was described by Lift Off and district staff as mixed. The wraparound services director believed that principals were similar to nonprofits in their understanding of the purpose and longevity of Lift Off. She argued that principals similarly viewed Lift Off as an additional funding stream, rather than a strategy to improve the coordination of wraparound services. The first wraparound services director similar asserted that “some principals didn't really embrace what we were trying to do and others just wanted money for after school programs that their people would run. They weren't interested in whatever else we were trying to do, and building community engagement and partnership. They just were like, ‘Give us money, we'll run programs the way we used to’” (L3). The Lift Off community partnerships coordinator, however, believed that some principals were incredibly receptive to Lift Off, but that commitment would only last the length of that principal's tenure.

In this context, Lift Off was already at a disadvantage in asking schools to change how they operate and in particular, how they collect and leverage data in support of students. Schools had just recently begun systematically using data to drive educational interventions and decision-making as part of the accountability prong of the broader education reform (i.e. the “portfolio of schools” approach). Lift Off hoped to cultivate the same cultural changes around data usage, but for wraparound services. Asking the schools to shift to a more data-driven mindset, as described by a former Collective Pathways executive leader, felt like another top-down imposition on the way schools operate. It may have unintentionally communicated a feeling of distrust from Collective Pathways of the schools, which were used to having autonomy in making such decisions and may have felt they knew the students better than a new data system.

Discrepant logics and institutionalization. The mayor's vision that the culture of schools and the district could be better changed from the “outside in” did not come to fruition.

This was in large part because of the defenses put up by schools, the district, and nonprofit partners premised on their prior experiences with Collective Pathways. Thus, using an outside agency to spur interest in a community schools model of wraparound services seemed to relegate Lift Off to a lower status than other prongs of the citywide education reform, particularly those with built-in accountability to the district, rather than to an external organization. The belief that each organization should stick to its own expertise was a pervasive theme, with schools dealing with academics and educating children, nonprofits dealing with mental and physical health and enrichment, and Lift Off remaining a program funder.

Despite this aversion to outside influences, in a somewhat contradictory way, the former superintendent believed that it was necessary for an external organization to take on the role of cross-sector coordination of services for the district because the district did not have the capacity to take on the role itself. Institutionalization, to the superintendent, meant that they would have an external agency perpetually responsible for coordination of services and that schools would *change their cultures to be more open and accepting of this*—a job he felt could not be taken on “in addition to the district and school’s core academic work” (L9). Ultimately, however, the lack of trust between schools and Lift Off—as an outside force—made it incredibly difficult to penetrate school norms and create structural and cultural shifts to accommodate Lift Off. A former Collective Pathways executive leader shared, “we still needed an internal player from the school district to marshal the kind of cooperation and accountability with the school” (L10). The second Collective Pathways vice president similarly noted that the most successful Lift Off schools were those that assigned an insider, such as a vice principal, to the Lift Off coordinator role because “having it under somebody who was that important and tied into the decision-making at the school showed that it was a priority” (L4).

What Could Have Mitigated these Discrepant Logics?

“If you’re not out there telling your story, someone else is telling a story about you.”

- Former mayor

Without a coalition building process to establish norms, responsibilities and trust, the district and schools defaulted to the logic of guarding school autonomy to protect against conforming to Collective Pathways logics that would disrupt their own sensemaking, raising important questions: can an “outside force” penetrate the culture of schools without establishing a baseline level of trust? What could have been done to compensate for the missing coalition building that would have cultivated more broad-based commitment? Could the Steering Committee have been more effective if organized differently? A comparison of Lift Off and CSTS’s communications and branding strategies can shed light on some of these questions.

One important mitigating factor in an environment with discrepant institutional logics may be the ability to tightly control both public and internal narratives about a collaboration’s work (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011). At the outset, Lift Off focused on disseminating information about the initiative with nonprofits primarily through a Request for Information (RFI); however, prioritizing information exchange over other types of more reciprocal, engaged communication efforts with nonprofit and school partners likely limited a sense of shared ownership (Milam & Heath, 2014). With only six months between the signing of the three-way partnership agreement and implementation in schools, Lift Off had little time left to focus on branding itself as more than an opportunity for funding. The former mayor believed it was critical for the work to be highly visible because “if you're not out there telling your story, someone else is telling a story about you” (L7). Conversely, the first Collective Pathways vice president charged with initial implementation of Lift Off argued that being visible without adequate resources put the initiative at risk, describing the dilemma as a “chicken and egg” situation where both were necessary, but

in some ways interdependent on one another (L11). She believed that it would have been more beneficial to its branding if they focused on securing more funding before sharing their work with the broader community.

According to both the mayor and this Collective Pathways executive, the initiative was well-known in the philanthropic community, but not easy to brand as something worth investing in because of its “fuzzy” outcomes. Other education reform strategies, such as the citywide Promise program, should not have been in competition with Lift Off, but were more attractive to funders because of the clarity and tangibility of their goals (supporting college-going). Lift Off was described as overshadowed by this competing strand of the education reform. Further, the inability to get schools to share their data with Lift Off and adopt new data systems made it even more difficult to point to metrics that could demonstrate to funders what they were doing and what value they added. In acknowledgment of their need to publicly communicate their successes with the philanthropic community and with partners, the first Collective Pathways vice president worked on creating school report cards that strategically leveraged stories about Lift Off partnerships to demonstrate the importance of the work. The report cards were intended to publicize their positive influence on student outcomes, but were never rolled out after the executive left Collective Pathways, ironically due to the urgency to focus on funding.

It proved difficult to focus on communications and branding without solid access to data and heavy interest from new funders who were not already tied up in other Collective Pathways portfolios. Despite the fact that the Lift Off handbook states family engagement as a top priority, this lack of communication and engagement with the community resulted in very few parents or teachers knowing Lift Off. One Lift Off middle manager who was also the parent of a child in a Lift Off school asserted that the new partnerships were thought of as just “new activities” (L5).

Conversely, in Oakland, there were serious efforts to apply for grants focused on communications and community engagement strategies from the very beginning of implementation. This allowed the district to more deeply understand how different stakeholders thought about community schools, how they would fit operationally into the systems work, and how they would benefit from the strategy. The current chief of staff described the communications case studies that emerged from their communications grant the following way:

We did a cross-cutting piece. We got our swag together for the first time around all of our community school model. But the key piece, when we hired [the communications firm], they definitely identified that our biggest gap and where there was the least understanding of community schools was among the teacher ranks. And so a lot of the things we started developing afterwards were very much trying to message something. And also, the work we do at schools, it really helped us to refocus. Because that was always our goal. And [the former superintendent] was very adamant that we didn't want community schools to be what he called a donut, which is all this great stuff swirling around, but the hole in the middle was the classroom. (C1)

In six of the 15 interviews conducted with CSTS stakeholders from the district, foundations and community partners, interviewees consistently referred to the community school strategy as providing services for children and families that support the “whole child,” with the ultimate purpose of improving academic outcomes. This was one indication that the district had created a cohesive identity that characterized the work across sectors. One CBO leader claimed that “the district was active in driving the vision” for the strategy and intentional about pulling in all interest groups that would be touched by it (C7). The clear understanding of what the strategy is and why it benefits students and families persisted throughout multiple superintendents, speaking to the importance of these engagement and communication efforts. As one district stakeholder shared, “even if you're not the coordinator, your operating mindset and framework should be that of a community school” (C9). That identity has remained strong not only because it was premised on a broad coalition building process, but because the district has continued

community engagement efforts, messaging and partnership negotiation throughout implementation.

Additionally, as the backbone, OUSD was able to complement the community school strategy through the passage of district-wide policies. Through these structural policy changes, the district was better able to situate schools for the cultural changes that would need to take place to fulfill the community schools vision. For example, the district passed a school site governance policy that emphasized parent and student engagement in decision-making around the allocation of resources and vision of the school. The passage of a shared principal leadership model also provided the conditions for another administrative-level staff to serve as the CSM in partnership alongside the principal. This aimed to change the culture of a “principal going off on their own, writing a plan and coming back and getting it rubber stamped by a few handpicked people on the school state council,” as shared by the Chief of Staff. OUSD also leveraged state-level policies, like the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)²⁹ to engage parents and students in district-level decision-making through a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).³⁰ Through these concerted efforts, students and community members were engaged and shared ownership of the direction of the district.

Whereas the lack of a coalition building process and stakeholder engagement left Collective Pathways to their own devices to figure out how to operate the “fourth strategy” of the citywide education reform, in Oakland, the district identified a broad range of stakeholders to be

²⁹ The 2013-14 local control funding formula (LCFF) establishes base, supplemental, and concentration grants in place of the previously existing K–12 funding streams, including revenue limits, general purpose block grants, and most of the 50-plus state categorical programs that existed at the time. See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp> for more information.

³⁰ The LCAP is a three-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priorities. It required California districts to have a district advisory council. In Oakland, the Board chose to adopt a parent and student LCAP advisory council made of nine elected student representatives and 28 parent representatives].

involved in each of the 14 different task forces over the course of one year. This contributed to a sense of shared ownership, particularly through the creation of the district’s five-year strategic plan. Lift Off, through its hasty implementation and preoccupation with funding needed for its immediate survival, missed the opportunity to build “scripts” (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) to guide meaning and behavior across sectors. Both the district in Oakland and Collective Pathways in Frankel were perceived by some as “top-down”—one Oakland researcher noted that “implementing [the district’s vision] is a really tricky balance of wanting to push everything forward, but also respecting autonomy.” The creation of platforms to negotiate these issues in Oakland—whether it be the site governance meetings, LCAP meetings, Community Leadership Council (CLC) meetings or others—provided a space for OUSD to adapt to these scripts in a more flexible way than Lift Off, which acted, albeit reluctantly, in a somewhat unilateral way.

Could Another Organizational Form Better Operate and Sustain Lift Off?

Another key difference between Lift Off and CSTS is the type of organization responsible for facilitating the work. Did the selection of Collective Pathways as the backbone, with its reputation as a large, charitable organization and funder, make the strategy impossible to stick? I asked interviewees about the perceived advantages of having an organization like Collective Pathways lead the work over another type of organization, such as the school district or the mayor’s office. The mayor, who created Lift Off and selected Collective Pathways himself, explained his rationale the following way:

Iris: Why was it by design that it wouldn't be run by the school district? What was the logic of having [Lift Off], for example, housed under another organization?

Mayor: We knew a majority of the resources, whether they be services or financial, would not be coming from the district and the city—and also a strong sense that they shouldn't come from the city. That if this city and the district and its work forces were reinventing how it was approaching the academic and emotional wellbeing of our kids, that the community at large had some responsibilities in this area as well. And that were

we to limit the way we deliver these services to solely the school district, we would not be promoting the kind of thought and cultural change that needed to happen in the city to institutionalize these changes over time beyond a mayor, a school superintendent, a school board, a union leader.

The mayor believed that an outside organization had a better chance of “acculturating” the broader community and creating shared ownership than his office or the district, which experienced political volatility with leadership turnover. Housing the strategy at an external backbone was thus one way to insulate it, to some degree, from political self-interests. With only Collective Pathways fully owning the vision of Lift Off and the mayor and superintendent retiring shortly after its initial implementation, however, there was very little room for collaborative discussion or contestment over the way the program should be thought about or operated. The fact that an executive leader at Collective Pathways stated that “[Lift Off] became our education strategy for those five years” speaks to how Collective Pathways internalized the initiative as their own (L10); however, in some ways, the mayor set them up to fail by withdrawing so quickly and contributing to both the appearance, and reality, that Collective Pathways was acting more unilaterally than collaboratively. On Collective Pathways’ part, they also failed to minimize the perception of unequal power or control, leading district and ostensibly school stakeholders to think of Lift Off as just another Collective Pathways program.

It was clear in our interview that the mayor truly believed selecting Collective Pathways was an effective, de facto way of involving the community; that their wealth of resources and visibility in the community were assets and would carry more respect and longevity than a public agency. By not acknowledging the unequal power dynamic premised on a history of resource dependency, the mayor missed another opportunity to plan a coalition or task force process that could more substantively involve other community organizations and ideally create a sense of shared ownership rather than resentment of or indebtedness to Collective Pathways.

The mayor also emphasized that the city should not be responsible for fronting the majority of the financial or programmatic resources for Lift Off. A major part of the reason that the mayor believed this was his reflection on other reform efforts housed at his office or the district that experienced waning government commitment. He compared these efforts to the Promise strategy, which was operated by and largely funded by a private research university. The Promise strategy was highly visible in the community and according to the mayor, cultivated a better sense of shared ownership, as evidenced by the commitment of several different funders. Two executive leaders at Collective Pathways were aware of the mayor's rationale and shared very similar understandings of why he chose their organization. The problem, according to one of them, was that the mayor's perception of the resources the Collective Pathways could raise didn't align with reality. Much of this circled back to the difficulty of fundraising for backbone work, which an executive leader claimed "is a very challenging role to fundraise around...and doesn't translate very well to the kind of fundraising that Collective Pathways has traditionally done like workplace fundraising, which tended to be sort of obvious and 'give this money and clothe a child'" (L10).

Similarly agreeing that the backbone should not have been a public sector agency, a former superintendent further argued that the school district was not best equipped to be a backbone because it is more focused on academics and "the things they can control and the problems that are in front of them" than outside organizations with a fresh perspective that can support their academic mission. He asserted that districts were hard to change internally, but bringing in another organization to focus on the issues that school stakeholders do not have time to attend to presents a more realistic opportunity for change. When asking a Collective Pathways executive leader whether or not it would have been more stable to house the strategy at the

district or mayor's office first and then transition to Collective Pathways, she was skeptical that either would have been up to the task:

I don't think that the public sector is necessarily always able to be as nimble, just because of their layers, you know? So in terms of responding to needs, or you know, being able to respond to let's say the opportunity to apply for VISTAs, that came up pretty quickly and we were able to be responsive to that. I think it's sometimes harder for government entities to respond that quickly. (L10)

In CSTS, the district never allowed any other organizations to compete for the role of backbone. Instead, the district convened a Community Schools Steering Committee with the executive directors of nonprofits and CBOs over the course of two years to structure collective buy-in for the strategy and partnership. Through this process, they were able to look at contracts, how to develop a partnership database, and figure out how the systems could become friendlier to each other to deliver services for kids, while the district maintained ownership of the work. The district was able to mitigate the perception of being “top-down,” as noted by one former Board member, by engaging in collaborative committees and task forces. Not everything the district did as the backbone went smoothly. According to a former board member, the CSM position was imposed upon schools before any real engagement was done—somewhat backwards—which created the feeling of the position as an “add-on” (C3). This was addressed in later years of implementation. With the district in control of the strategy's progression, they were able to clarify the role, engage school-level administrators and build momentum in subsequent years. Ironically, the local Collective Pathways office in Oakland was interested in this role, but according to the chief of staff, “were never serious about raising enough money to contribute at the high-level” for systems-change efforts and “were dabbling in different things” (C1).

Institutionalization Intentions and Failures

“I don't know if other people consider it have failed. But [Lift Off], well, it did fail.”

- Former mayor

Interviewees shared a range of reasons for why Lift Off was not successfully absorbed by the district, including principal disinterest, limited school resource capacity and superintendent turnover at the district. The second wraparound services director asserted that the Lift Off coordinators were not only responsible for facilitating school-nonprofit partnerships, but for transitioning their roles to school personnel so that the work could be sustained after they left. She could only point to a couple cases in which this truly occurred. At one school, the school hired their AmeriCorps VISTA for a full-time position after their one-year contract ended. In another, the principal saw the value in the Lift Off coordinator role and reassigned a paraprofessional to the role of service coordination.

In 2015, when Collective Pathways announced that Lift Off would transition to the school district, the Lift Off director felt as if it left a “huge question mark” in the community about what that meant for the current school-nonprofit partnerships:

Everybody [nonprofit partners and schools] knew that it was going to fail. It got very complicated because we still had money left over. Schools still technically had money that they hadn't spent that would have typically rolled over to the following year. If you're a school and you had \$30,000 last year and you only spent \$26,000, the following year you'd have that \$4,000, you'd then have \$34,000. (L1)

Without the continuation of these funds, she believed school and nonprofit stakeholders expected the partnerships to disappear or default to the way they were five years prior.

The former mayor and superintendent did not intend for Lift Off to be transferred to the district—a sentiment inherited by the successor superintendent during the period when Lift Off closed. Without superintendent buy-in for the transition, the public announcement of transitioning the work seemed more of a euphemism for Lift Off's closure than a genuine effort to absorb the work. This was the original fear of the mayor, who believed that if the work was

transferred to the school district, “it would eventually get lost” due to political winds (L7). Institutionalization, according to the superintendent, would have ideally changed the culture of the district to one that was “more open to other people doing work in the district,” but he believed that it would take “a particular kind of muscle” to operate Lift Off they had not yet developed (L9). A mayoral education aid reflected that sustainable change would have required a longer, more structured handoff from the mayor’s office and more time to secure principal buy-in than the five years of Lift Off funding.

Victim to the “spinning wheels” of political leadership. As previously noted, the core reason that the former mayor did not want the school district or mayor’s office to be the backbone of Lift Off was to protect it from volatility in the broader political environment. When Lift Off was abruptly transitioned to the district in 2015, a few Lift Off and district stakeholders expressed their concerns about how it would survive through a different mayor and superintendent. According to a Collective Pathways executive, since Lift Off was branded as an initiative of the previous mayor, the new mayor and superintendent were not as motivated to continue promoting it. Shortly after coming into office, the new mayor created an initiative focused on collecting data on students in the district at risk of dropping out as part of a case management model. The superintendent also prioritized this initiative and revived an older district policy. To the second Collective Pathways vice president and one district stakeholder, this validated concerns that even if Collective Pathways had continued to operate Lift Off, they could not have forced it to be prioritized over these other initiatives. While this was one explanation for the inability to sustain Lift Off at the district, the red flags for Lift Off’s closure really began as early as its first year of implementation when Collective Pathway shared these concerns in a memo to the mayor.

CSTS is a particularly helpful counterfactual in this case because it was similarly situated in a volatile political, social and economic context. When CSTS began, OUSD had just emerged from state receivership and through the present day, has gone through five different superintendents. In 2018, the district was on the verge of bankruptcy once again and undergoing tumultuous structural changes to find the money to keep operating. Some such changes included eliminated nearly 150 central office staff and cutting millions of dollars from their operating budget. How then, was OUSD more successful in sustaining CSTS through political leadership turnover than Lift Off? The core difference appears to be that: (1) key staff members at the district-level persisted through multiple leadership changes, preserving the importance of the work; (2) they had an effective leader who continued to support the work in his positions at the district and outside of it; (3) OUSD had branded the community school district as a systems change effort and were able to renew long-term grants and financial support; (4) OUSD, by operating as the backbone, had the power to maintain and promote a cohesive district identity; and (5) their coalition building and community engagement strategies were long-lived, iterative efforts that safeguarded the work from being completely dismantled by new leadership.

Some of these safeguards were intentional and others were, at least to some extent, a result of luck and coincidence. The persistence of key middle managers at the district throughout the tumult, including the current community schools director, family engagement coordinator, health and wellness director and chief of staff (who was involved at the district, then shifted to work out a foundation, then returned to the district), was critical in ensuring that new leadership and staff would understand the importance of the work and the community schools theory of action. This was not intentional, but appeared to support the sustainability of the strategy.

Without these key players intact at the district, it is possible that effort could have been discarded as part of the “spinning wheels” (Hess, 2011) cycle.

Most importantly, there are intentional safeguards that district stakeholders thought through from the very inception of the strategy that could be replicated in other collaborations. The coalition building process and five-year strategic plan set the tone for how CBOs, public agencies, and other entities would collaborate with the district to achieve its community school vision. Where there was ambiguity in how Lift Off would be institutionalized—by Collective Pathways, the district or some other means—CSTS explicitly spelled out a districtwide systems change strategy. This eliminated a degree of uncertainty about how the work would be implemented and the role that different actors would play in achieving specific goals. For example, school administrators knew from the first year of implementing the community school strategy that they would have to eventually absorb the cost of the CSM position or partner with a CBO that could. The continual engagement of stakeholders and community members through different avenues during implementation ensured that partners would continually make sense of the work together, again reducing ambiguity that could increase the risk of failure. With so much community visibility, it would have been unpopular for an incoming superintendent to eliminate the work because of the broad coalition base invested in it. These safeguards helped not only preserve, but expand the work during political and economic uncertainty.

Currently, there is no succession plan for the chief of staff or community schools director, but the chief of staff explained that he wanted to “bake it into [their] system” (C1). When asked parting advice for how to institutionalize a cross-sector collaboration like that of OUSD, he asserted that in Oakland, it was more about building stability than it was about introducing new interventions:

You want to keep the ship moving forward and not continue to have these big jerks in the system with 180 degree shifts in strategy or management style or focus. Because one of the big issues at Oakland has been doing a great job on the front end, developing plans, having the right focus, but it just never lasts long enough to see the outcome. A lot of that's because of the incredible turnover of the superintendent. When I look at the districts that have really done something, I really feel like the stability has been a big part of that. It hasn't been a big reformer coming in and grabbing something and then bowing. I'm not saying that some of that disruption can't be helpful sometimes, but the system is so traumatized and has a history of instability that to me, the innovation would be getting committed to stability. (C1)

Overall, the major lessons learned from these cases is that shifts in normative belief systems, policies, incentives and accountability structures must be thought through in a meaningful way in order for individuals to prioritize stability and commitment over short-term incentives like additional funding. Where OUSD made an effort to address all of these issues in tandem, Lift Off focused on its immediate survival interests, which precluded staff from continually engaging schools and nonprofit partners in collective sensemaking and long-term sustainability planning with the district.

Chapter Five: Rise Up and All Hands Raised

5.1 Case Narrative of Rise Up

Table 4. Summary of Rise Up Key Characteristics

Pseudonym	Rise Up
Geographic region	Midwest
Lifespan	2010-2017
Jurisdiction	City
Backbone	501(c)(3)
Network membership	No
Funding arrangement	Short-term foundation grants
Coalition strategy	Foundation-driven; became Rise Up board
Communications strategy	High visibility through school scorecards
Racial demographics*	10% white; 80% black; 7% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. Rise Up emerged as a result of a convergence of national politics, local political turmoil, economic instability and poor educational outcomes in the city of Raboin that applied public pressure on local stakeholders to improve their schools. Nationally, as is the case with other collaborations in this study, the country was reeling from the 2007-2009 economic recession. The local context at the time had proven to be even worse: the city had been experiencing an economic downturn for decades and was on the precipice of bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the school district was shifting into state-run emergency management after racking up a multi-million dollar deficit. In 2009, a damning article published the district’s 2008 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)³¹ scores—among the lowest scores in the entire country. According to one Rise Up leader, “the scores were so bad that it was almost as if the kids had never attended school at all” (R2). Shortly thereafter, Raboin was identified by federal

³¹ NAEP is a nationally-normed assessment that measures the educational proficiency of fourth and eighth grade students across all states.

government officials as a national focus for education reform. In an effort to create a local response, a local foundation galvanized philanthropists and activists to join a new coalition and set an aggressive education reform agenda. The foundation convened stakeholders for a regular meeting every three or so weeks for nearly a year to brainstorm solutions.

Coalition building. The urgency of responding to the low NAEP scores brought together some unexpected bedfellows in 2009 to participate in the coalition. Over two decades of school choice and traditional public school tensions had created fragmentation in the school district, but charter management organization (CMO) leaders found themselves at the same table with teachers unions, emergency district management, city leadership, CBOs, parent advocacy networks, Communities in Schools (CIS),³² foundations, banks and other private sector leaders. A Rise Up leader explained that over 30 organizations were represented as part of the coalition, with the corporate sector and political leaders the least represented among the organizations present. A different Rise Up leader asserted that attendance at these regular meetings fluctuated, but the sense of urgency and national attention were the main incentives driving partner buy-in. She described the process as “a time-out to take stock of what’s going on right now with schools in our city” (R12). According to another coalition member who was hired as a middle manager at Rise Up, political and financial self-interests were also driving the participation of smaller, community organizations in the coalition, who knew larger foundations would be present.

A leader from the foundation convening the coalition described how stakeholders would discuss lessons learned and best practices from other states, the gaps that needed to be filled to create educational change and review as much data as they could (with the help of a research and consulting firm) to drive their ultimate priorities. This resulted in a pledge document that

³² Communities in Schools (CIS) is a national community schools network with local affiliates. The model relies heavily on site-based community school coordinators and collaborative partners.

outlined a three-pronged approach: the creation of a new citywide accountability system for schools; the creation of new “quality” schools and the closure of failing ones; and a focus on recruiting talented teachers and principals. Additionally, the coalition came up with three secondary priorities: parent engagement; strengthening community supports through community schools; and expanding early education programs. The coalition members were expected to commit their institutional resources towards implementing these goals. Additionally, the lead foundation recognized the need for an intermediary organization to facilitate partnerships and drive the work. This was thought to be best accomplished by a new, 501(c)(3) that could operate with some separation from the philanthropic sector and the school district.

Mission and vision. Rise Up was thus created as the first of the coalition’s goals to be accomplished by the end of 2010. In addition to creating this new entity, the coalition finalized a 10-year Reform Pledge (a high-level, 20-page document) that coalition members were to sign onto. The overarching vision laid out in the pledge was to ensure that all students in the district were attending a “high quality school” by 2020, an ambitious goal that the coalition recognized would require fast and dramatic changes to the city. The mission statement—left broad in this study to protect the identity of the collaborative—was even more aggressive: to have nearly all of the city’s students graduate from high school, enroll in postsecondary education and succeed with minimal remediation. According to the original pledge, milestones were set for 2010, 2015 and 2020 to achieve the vision. For example, a goal set for 2010 was to create an accountability group to define quality standards, set citywide goals for every school and help parents make better choices for their children, and a 2015 milestone was to open 40 new high quality schools. In a 2015 archived version of Rise Up’s website, the bulk of information is focused on presenting these school reviews over other initiatives related to Rise Up’s long-term vision.

The mission of Rise Up changed over time, as new developments in the local political and educational landscape created competition over resources and rendered some of the Rise Up goals irrelevant or obsolete. For example, the second Rise Up director explained how the goal to create new schools was a mistake the coalition could not have anticipated, as the state lifted the cap on charter schools one year into implementation. This catalyzed the opening of many of the same types of schools, rather than the new designs for “high quality” schools that Rise Up envisioned. The coalition had also overlooked demographic shifts in the city across several decades, which showed a decreasing population and fewer student enrollees in the city, again rendering the goal to open new schools irrelevant. Simultaneously, the state had created a turnaround school district for failing schools that encompassed many of the city’s schools. Just one year later, the city of Raboin went into emergency management. In 2014, the state began discussing its own school quality scorecard, which made the local school quality scorecards Rise Up produced redundant. Thus, only four years into the 10-year plan, Rise Up board members and one Rise Up leader believed the issues they were working on needed to be synced up with those of the state, pivoting the direction of their work to increased state legislative advocacy.

Throughout all of this chaos, Rise Up staff expanded their mission from 2010-2014 to address a number of different issues that were still salient and to prove there was still a need for the organization. Some board members and Rise Up staff felt this was appropriate, particularly considering how broad Rise Up’s vision was to begin with, while other Rise Up staff believed their work became unsustainably large and unbounded. Rise Up middle managers described the expansion of their projects in different work streams—parent engagement, early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary success—as spreading them too thin for the size of the organization. One middle manager asserted that Rise Up essentially became an incubator for new projects related to

school improvement and community awareness in addition to an intermediary for the work, leading them to stray further from their mission.

Organizational structure

Staff roles and responsibilities. The size of Rise Up fluctuated as the organization grew and took on more projects. At its inception, only a couple staff were working at Rise Up, which grew to eight staff in 2012 up to 15 staff in 2016. Rise Up staff estimated that there were roughly 10 full-time staff members at its largest, with additional staff hired as consultants or contractors for specific projects. Some Rise Up staff worked across teams, such as early childhood and K-12, but each project team was described as having between three to seven core full-time staff at its largest. The first Rise Up director only lasted one year at the organization due to disagreements with the board and in 2011, the organization was reset when they hired the second director. The second director described his primary responsibility as getting the organization financially sound and out of the debt it incurred under the previous director, which he described as “restarting an organization from a hole in the ground” (R5). The director was also responsible for interfacing regularly with the board and leading the overall direction of the organization. Two vice presidents—one of Early Learning and one of K-12—led their own teams and reported directly to the Executive Director, sometimes attending board meetings. Within the K-12 team, a Program Manager reported to the K-12 Vice President and was responsible for piloting, coordinating and incubating projects. This team member also interfaced somewhat regularly with school stakeholders. In general, Rise Up staff described a level of trust and autonomy to make their own decisions about the direction of their projects within their own teams.

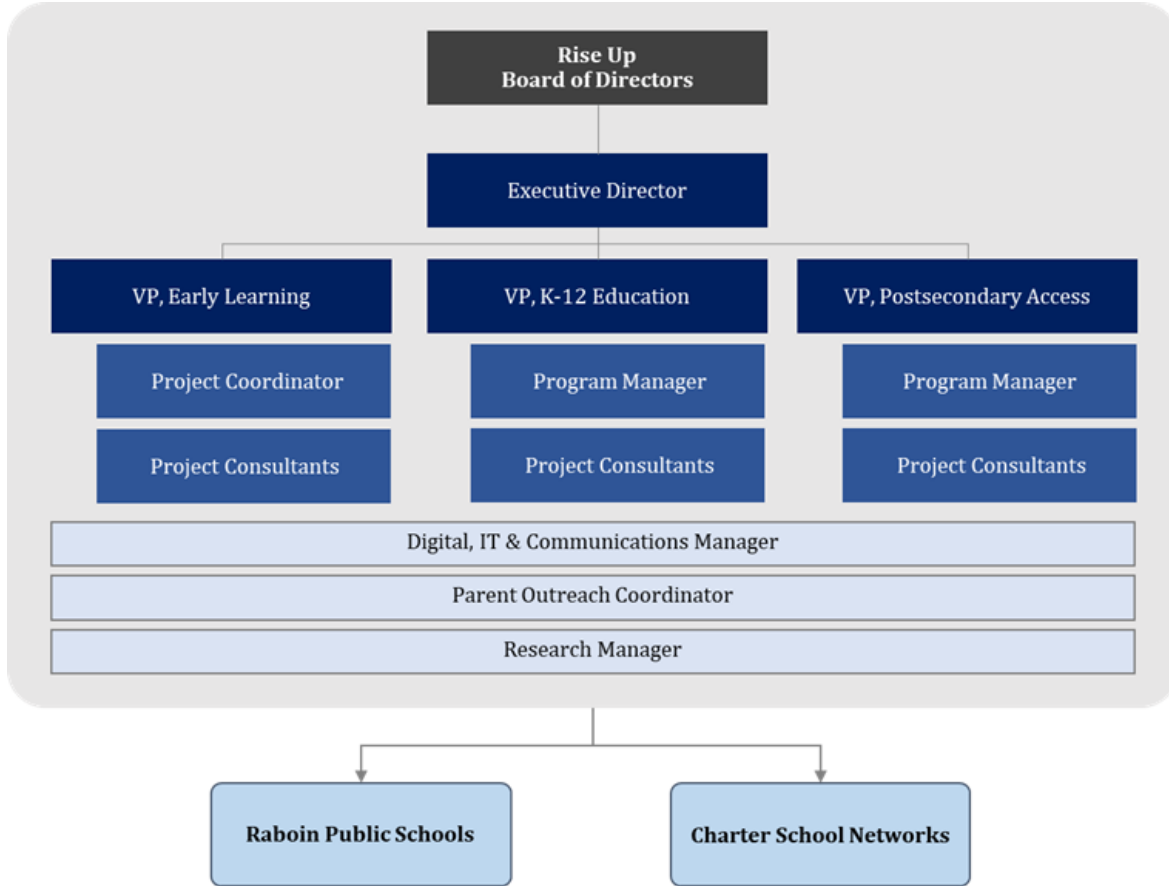
A collective impact director who originally supported the school scorecard work shifted to leading the organization’s postsecondary access team, a separate work stream from K-12 and

Early Learning. Of all the positions at ESD, this individual interfaced the most frequently with school stakeholders, including high school principals, counselors and college advisors. Operating across teams was a manager responsible for digital engagement, IT and communications.

Additionally, a research manager collected and produced data for the K-12 school scorecard and analyzed data across Rise Up projects. To fulfill their parent engagement goal, Rise Up hired a parent outreach coordinator who trained parents on what a safe and caring environment looked like in schools. Several Rise Up staff described their colleagues as smart, collaborative and adaptive, characterizing most staff as people who could move across projects, with a handful of specialists (often contractors) who supported specific tasks.

Board leadership. The broad coalition that created Rise Up ultimately transformed into its board, with a representative from the foundation that drove the coalition assuming the role of the first board chair. As is the case in other 501(c)(3) organizations, the board's responsibilities consisted of guiding the strategic direction of Rise Up and holding regular meetings to discuss the organization's progress. The composition of the board was as diverse as the coalition, representing a number of different perspectives about how to approach the work, how the organization would identify, and determining which priorities and projects to take on. It included the CEOs of all the major philanthropic organizations of the city (many of whom were funders), the Chamber of Commerce, CMO leaders and district emergency managers, representatives from the turnaround school district, a couple of grassroots CBOs and a small handful of parents who were eventually brought on due to criticism about Rise Up's approach being too top-down. Notably, Rise Up board members also sat on the boards of other nonprofits and education improvement initiatives in Raboin.

Figure 3. Rise Up Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map



Initiatives. There were several initiatives that were incubated at Rise Up throughout its brief lifetime: the K-12 school quality scorecard and early learning quality scorecard; the creation of a college access network; the creation of a parent organizing network; a districtwide common enrollment system; a school talent recruitment pilot; and early childhood coaching and resource-sharing initiatives. Some of these initiatives were described by a middle manager as driven by the pressure from foundations on the board to take on certain work, while others were the result of collectively identified needs in Raboin and some were supportive efforts for other organizations’ initiatives happening in parallel. This latter point is important to note, as many Rise Up board members sat on the boards of other nonprofits, coalitions and community

initiatives across the city that were often undertaking similar work. Thus, there were often overlapping interests advocated for across organizations.

The talent recruitment pilot involved re-convening the original coalition to whittle down ideas to three that could be feasibly implemented: a board fellowship program; a school leader fellowship program; and a master teacher mentoring program. In the early learning work stream, Rise Up developed an early childhood coaching model, an early childhood investment center meant to identify and coalesce resources for early childhood education, and an initiative that trained early childhood educators of children from birth to age eight on how to implement their respective curricula in educational settings. Additionally, the early learning scorecard was created, which involved scoring early childhood settings based on environmental and educator characteristics along with training parents on what early childhood education should look like.

The K-12 school scorecard—the initiative that Rise Up was most publicly known for—also operated under a rubric that scored schools on safety, school climate and importantly, state test scores. Development of the K-12 scorecard began in 2010 and the first one was released to the public in 2011. Parents and community members were trained on how to do school site visits and rate them based on their environments, as a supplement to the school-level test score data. Rise Up would also organize trips for parents to visit schools and assess whether or not they were a good fit for their children. As described by a Rise Up middle manager who worked on the K-12 scorecards, the organization struggled to figure out how to convince schools to release the report cards themselves, particularly because many were scoring poorly based on the A-F rating system. This is likely why the Rise Up website was primarily dedicated to presenting the school scorecard results over its other initiatives.

One of the final projects piloted by Rise Up prior to its closure in 2017 was an initiative to support parent choice in school selection through a K-12 common enrollment system. This involved the creation of a centralized, common enrollment application through which parents could apply for their child to attend a particular school. The intention was to enroll at least 2,000 students through the system; however, only 200 parents submitted applications. Continuing the birth through career pipeline, another initiative incubated at Rise Up was a college access network intended to prevent at-risk high school students from dropping out and to help high school graduates enroll in college. Part of this initiative was focused on increasing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates through site-based support teams, as only 50% of 12th grade students in the city had completed the form. The initiative also involved a “college signing day” to motivate students to commit to higher education.

Organizational capacity. Rise Up staff unanimously expressed that they did not have the capacity to execute all the projects they took on. One Rise Up leader explained that they navigated these constraints by hiring people who were “jacks of all trades” and could “learn how to do everything” (R2). They also attempted to mitigate this issue by bringing in consultants to support specific projects and provide expertise in the areas they were lacking. Many of the projects that were piloted were modeled after other organizations or initiatives in different states. Rise Up hired consultants from these other initiatives to share their best practices to inform their own implementation. Additional staff were also hired on a per-project basis when initiatives called for more human capacity. For example, Rise Up hired 10 additional staff to serve as enrollment specialists for the common enrollment initiative who provided families with information about the system and encouraged them to apply. The time and energy spent managing and training these individuals, however, took time away from Rise Up staff to coalesce

the “big, key players” who could motivate families to show up at enrollment centers in the first place (R11). A middle manager working on the pilot regretted this particular decision, claiming that these additional hires were “sitting there twiddling their thumbs” after all their training (R11). Meanwhile, the manager explained that it left Rise Up staff with little capacity to cultivate buy-in from CMO administrators and the district’s central office staff, who could have opted their organizations into participating in the common enrollment system.

Data use. Data was primarily leveraged for two core reasons at Rise Up: to convince the board of the organization’s value and to produce helpful information to families through the K-12 and early learning scorecards. According to two board members, Rise Up was not held accountable for the direct impact of their efforts on school quality outcomes. One board member asserted that Rise Up’s impact was more about raising awareness about the schools and “less about the influence of that work in changing the arc of academic progress in the city or an evaluation of [Rise Up] itself” (R4). No interviewees from Rise Up could speak to the specific theory of action or metrics that were used to demonstrate the work they were doing had an impact on student or school outcomes; however, board members did claim that they held staff accountable for interim benchmarks and goals they set. Only one Rise Up middle manager spoke to the use of operational data for internal purposes to guide the direction of their initiatives.

Rise Up most thoroughly collected and analyzed data for its public-facing school scorecards. In the original pledge, the coalition defined an “excellent school” as one that had excellent leaders, teachers, high quality curriculum and instruction, and safe, positive conditions for learning. Each of these categories had a number of criteria that had to be met in order to determine a school’s score, which was measured by surveys, interview data and the three-year averages of school-level assessment scores on state Math and English tests. The goal locally was

to produce a uniform assessment of schools (similar to the underlying rationale for NAEP) that provided a standardized way to assess school quality. Eventually, the K-12 scorecards included academic achievement data, high school graduation rates, and a school climate survey to differentiate among schools not yet academically performing on a scale of A-F. Data tools, such as a professional development tracker for one of the early learning programs, were also created in-house and fielded as part of Rise Up initiatives.

Funding. According to internal financial statements presented to the board, there were two major funders of Rise Up throughout its lifespan: the foundation leading the original coalition and another large foundation that offered major financial support each year. Throughout its seven years of existence, Rise Up staff also applied for and received smaller one-year and multi-year grants from other foundations, charitable organizations and sometimes schools to support specific projects. The largest grants were secured to create products, such as the school scorecards or the back-end algorithm for the common enrollment initiative. These were the general reasons that Rise Up staff believed funders were interested in giving them grants in the first place, with the expectation that parents and families would access information about these materials or initiatives and use them. Near the end of its lifespan, internal financial statements and an IRS 990 form indicate that Rise Up's 2015 revenue stream was roughly \$2.5 million, with its total annual expenses exceeding total revenue by over \$500,000. The 2015 IRS 990 form also indicates the organization received roughly \$34 million in grants, gifts and contributions from 2011 to 2015, with the bulk of these grants received in 2012 (~\$22 million). Notably, over \$45,000 was spent on advertising and promotion in 2015 alone, nine times more than the \$5,000 per year that Lift Off allocated to communications and advertising.

Rise Up staff cited competition and the broader political environment as reasons that funding fluctuated and became unsustainable near the closure of Rise Up. Other collaborative initiatives cropped up during the same time as Rise Up, with board members also sitting on these boards or providing funding to these other initiatives. From the perspective of one of Rise Up's leaders, the dependency on these funders created an incentive for the organization to align its interests with those of its funders. For example, a different Rise Up leader claimed that foundations were shifting their early childhood resources elsewhere, which led to a relegation of the early learning work because "folks head to where they think the money is going to be" (R7). Simultaneously, the creation of the state-run turnaround district, the state lifting of the charter school cap, and changes to the state's school funding formula threatened Rise Up's funding pool by dividing the board's interests among a number of efforts that were investment-worthy. A former board chair, for example, assumed a fundraising position for the turnaround district, diverting fundraising attention away from Rise Up.

Closing of the Collaborative

Rise Up closed its doors in 2017 after seven years of operation. Stakeholder awareness that the organization would be shut down—as well as understandings of *why* the organization had to shut down—varied greatly across board members, Rise Up leaders and middle managers. According to one Rise Up leader, leaders of the organization had proposed to the board a "legislative reset" in 2014 that called for the closure of the organization in favor of supporting broader, statewide legislative efforts that would advance their local goals. This recollection was not shared by the second Rise Up director, who acknowledged the increased investment in state-level legislative advocacy in 2014, but denied there was any intention to sunset the organization once those policy goals had been achieved. Shortly after many of their policy recommendations

were passed in state legislation, the second Rise Up director left the organization for another opportunity. He had discussed a plan with the board to hire another executive to develop a new strategic plan for the organization because he felt that he had “run his leg of the marathon,” but was not aware of any plans to close it down (R5). Shortly after he left, an interim director was brought on board who initiated the closure of the organization.

Board members shared different perspectives about why the organization needed to close its doors. One Philanthropic leader believed that its closure was not necessarily about successfully advocating for state legislative reforms, but a result of waning attendance and support from other board members. This board member explained that major partners in the school system, such as representatives from CMO networks, had stopped showing up to board meetings, threatening the credibility of the organization. From the perspective of one CMO leader, waning attendance began as early as 2013, leading him to question the community’s commitment to advancing the work of Rise Up. Two other board members further noted that there were competing coalitions and efforts underway that were getting more attention than Rise Up and shared the same funders. As summarized by one of these board members, it did not make sense to try to revive Rise Up when these other parallel efforts were underway: “The board came to the conclusion that it really wasn't sustainable at this point, and it wasn't necessary for it to be sustainable, because there were all these other entities doing work” (R13). Since a number of board members had not been attending regularly scheduled meetings, they received the news of the organization’s closure via email.

Middle managers had a very different recollection of how Rise Up closed. These stakeholders stated that the closure of Rise Up was never explicitly stated until a few months prior to the organization shutting down. The new executive director who was brought on after a

key Rise Up leader left was thought of by staff members as someone who would assume the prior leader's role and responsibilities; however, three Rise Up staff described her new role as more focused on assessing their finances and bookkeeping. The executive's lack of interest in Rise Up's programming and the fact that they had not taken on any new projects since 2015 were red flags that she was brought on to close the organization:

You know we always asked, 'so what's happening next?' And [the new executive] always focused on finances. [A Rise Up leader] told us that she was overlooked for the position, and her assessment was that they would likely close it. I think that's where we were getting a lot of our information...And so that's why we had that impression. I think folks were disappointed and surprised, given all the whispers that had happened. Especially being in such a small nonprofit, where everyone built a relationship with each other really closely. There were a lot of very personal emotions that came up about actors in leadership. So much disappointment, heartache, anger, and cries. (R11)

One Rise Up middle manager described the intense emotions that “the loyal few” felt about the seemingly abrupt shift to closure led some staff to refuse to sign non-disclosure agreements about the work (R1). Another middle manager claimed she was told about its closure just one month prior to the organization's sunset. Up until that point, the staff had been told by the board that the new Rise Up leader would reimagine the organization, revamp the board, and narrow the focus of its work. One Rise Up leader spoke to the tension of how to communicate this to staff without demoralizing them, stating “it's a very weird thing to tell your team or to work on an agenda where you're saying openly, ‘Hey. This will probably end this organization’” (R14).

Interestingly, there were divergent understandings about whether or not Rise Up was meant to be sustained in the first place. Only one out of five middle managers believed that the organization was meant to temporarily exist until 2020. Other middle managers were largely under the impression that they would need to sustain the work until their goals had been met. Put by one middle manager, “I wanted to work myself out of a job until that goal was reached” (R11). Meanwhile, some board members and one Rise Up leader believed it made sense to close

the organization. Regardless of its 10-year plan and goals for 2020, a Rise Up leader argued it was a flawed assumption to think that the organization needed to be sustained in its current form. The leader offered the school scorecard reports as an example of why sustaining the organization did not make sense. Production of the scorecard required school and district buy-in and ultimately, public funding to continue its production in perpetuity. Leaving that work at a nonprofit dependent on philanthropic dollars would have jeopardized the long-term impact of the work. Summarized by a former board member who represented the lead foundation, “if it needs to splinter off to do something else, or new iterations, you have to be open to that” (R8).

Most of the initiatives incubated and supported by Rise Up were spun out into different organizational forms. In the parent organizing and engagement strand of work, staff and partners transitioned the work into a nonprofit, neighborhood advocacy organization—described by a Rise Up leader as a better fit because it was less “institutionally-driven” than Rise Up. The college access network work broke off to become its own collective impact organization housed at the Raboin Regional Chamber, led by the same champion who spearheaded the work at Rise Up. Much of the early learning work was adopted by the state. The K-12 scorecard work was transitioned to a new nonprofit organization housed at the mayor’s office, with a mayoral-appointed board that mirrored the board of Rise Up. The organization retained the same Employer Identification Number (EIN) as Rise Up as well as the same fundraising model, undergoing more of a symbolic rebranding than a substantive change. An interviewee who ended up working for the new organization even noted that her first check was paid by Rise Up.

5.2 Case Narrative of All Hands Raised (AHR)³³

Table 5. Summary of All Hands Raised (AHR) Key Characteristics

Collaboration name	All Hands Raised
Lifespan	2010-present
Geographic region	West
Jurisdiction	County
Backbone	501(c)(3)
Network membership	StriveTogether
Funding arrangement	Over 200 organization and individual donors
Coalition strategy	Started by Leaders Roundtable; continual
Communications strategy	Only visible to executive and systems leaders
Racial demographics*	70% white; 6% black; 12% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. All Hands Raised (AHR) came to be following an effort to create a more collaborative approach to coalesce business, higher education, public sector and school district stakeholders in Multnomah County, Oregon. For roughly 25 years prior to the creation of AHR, a Leaders Roundtable would convene somewhat regularly to discuss educational issues. The members of this table also sat on other cross-sector partnership tables, such as the Mayor’s Education Cabinet, and came to the conclusion that the same people were sitting in duplicate meetings about the same topics. This realization occurred alongside an increase in racial and ethnic diversity in many Multnomah county schools districts and recognition that six of the Multnomah County school districts had some of the lowest academic performance outcomes in the state. In search of a more effective and streamlined form of collaboration to address educational inequity, in 2008-2009, local higher education leaders traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, to learn about the StriveTogether model and evaluate whether or not it would be a good fit for

³³ Information used to build this profile was collected from interviews conducted as part of a multi-year study examining the implementation of cross-sector collaborations for education. A more detailed profile of Say Yes Buffalo can be found in its final research report: “Building Impact: A Closer Look at Cross Sector Collaborations for Education” (Riehl et al., 2019).

Multnomah County. Shortly thereafter, leaders applied for a StriveTogether replication grant, which required a champion organization to serve as a “backbone”³⁴ for the collective impact work. Competitors for the role included the United Way, Portland State University and the Portland Public Schools Foundation (PPS). Ultimately, PPS was chosen as the right type of organization to be the backbone. One Leaders Roundtable member described PPS as the former mayor’s preference because he might be able to exercise more influence over the organization than he could a university or the United Way. Other stakeholders believed it was chosen for its perceived independence, relevant experience and the openness of its leadership to the new role.

Higher education faculty and other Leaders Roundtable members then collectively came up with a set of key indicators along the “cradle-to-career” pipeline and agreed on the dissolution of the Leaders Roundtable and the Mayor’s Education Cabinet to avoid duplication of efforts. The former AHR CEO explained that the community indicators and strategic priorities were voted on at a meeting of all these diverse stakeholders. The top priorities were identified as birth weight, kindergarten readiness, kindergarten attendance, third grade reading, English Language Learner (ELL) annual progress, equity in school discipline, sixth grade attendance, eighth grade math, ninth grade credit attainment and attendance, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and a career pathway. Community stakeholders determined that these indicators needed to be disaggregated by school district, race, ethnicity, and other demographic factors. After the indicators were chosen, in 2010, PPS rebranded itself as “All Hands Raised,” a regional, cradle-to-career collaborative intended to convene cross-sector partners, including superintendents from six of the eight school districts in Multnomah County.

³⁴ Although the specific role of a backbone organization varies across cross-sector collaborations, the Collective Impact Forum defines as a backbone as an intermediary organization responsible for: guiding vision and strategy; supporting aligned activities; establishing shared measurement practices; building public will; advancing policy; and mobilizing funding.

Coalition building. As PPS transitioned into All Hands Raised (AHR), its leadership conducted outreach to a variety of sectors—meeting with representatives from school districts, higher education, CBOs, the business community, culturally specific organizations, and city and county governments. From the outset, AHR established that there were no financial incentives for participating in the cross-sector partnership. Collaboration in the partnership was on a voluntary basis, with one incentive being access to other community organizations who could become potential partners in other work. This also meant that there was a disincentive for lower resourced organizations, such as grassroots and smaller, activist organizations, to participate due to their limited capacity to volunteer as much time or resources as larger organizations. Grassroots community members, such as parents and students, were excluded from these coalition building efforts. According to AHR leaders, they relied on CBOs and culturally-specific organizations to advocate and represent the interests of community members at this level. In an effort to engage more district superintendents, AHR worked with a former Portland Public Schools superintendent to promote the expansion of AHR’s focus to five neighboring school districts. The superintendent’s preexisting relationships with other district superintendents helped build trust in AHR and secure buy-in. Currently, superintendents from seven participating school districts are actively involved in AHR. Schools in each of the seven districts serve as pilot demonstration sites for projects launched by ground-level, School Community Site Teams.

Mission and vision. The top priority of AHR is to promote racial equity in educational opportunities and outcomes—a value which undergirds their ground-level, School Community Site Teams. Their mission to promote “education, excellence and equity from cradle-to-career” is left intentionally broad to allow room for the many different approaches taken by the School Community Site Teams on the ground; however, AHR emphasizes the systematic connection of

preexisting community resources and new ways of collaborating to achieve its mission of a more equitable, cradle-to-career pathway. Over the years, the language AHR has used to describe its mission and goals has shifted to become more broad and encompassing. Previously, its mission involved: building “a shared community vision of long-term impact;” putting actionable data into the hands of schools and community partners; “aligning resources to the practices that get results;” and focusing on equitable outcomes and eliminating disparities (Riehl et al., forthcoming). While these are still overarching goals at AHR, their mission is presented as more broad and simple on their public-facing website.

Organizational structure

Board leadership. AHR is a 501(c)(3) organization with two main governing bodies: the AHR Board of Directors that oversees the CEO and budget; and the Partnership Council that provides strategic guidance on how to continually engage different sectors, analyze and report data, and make local policy recommendations. AHR is governed by a racially diverse 21-member board representing corporate, philanthropic, nonprofit and CBOs, higher education and public sector organizations. A new board chair is elected annually to rotate leadership responsibilities. The Partnership Council engages 42 executive and systems leaders across business, government, CBOs and education, including the superintendents of the seven districts with which it works. This body only meets three times per year and is largely responsible for providing additional expertise, resources and guidance on partnerships.

Staff roles and responsibilities. Over the years, AHR has also created Work Area Leadership Groups that help identify key findings and themes at and across sites where School Community Site Teams are doing pilot demonstration projects, essentially “cross-pollinating” best practices. The Work Area Leadership Groups report these findings to the governance bodies

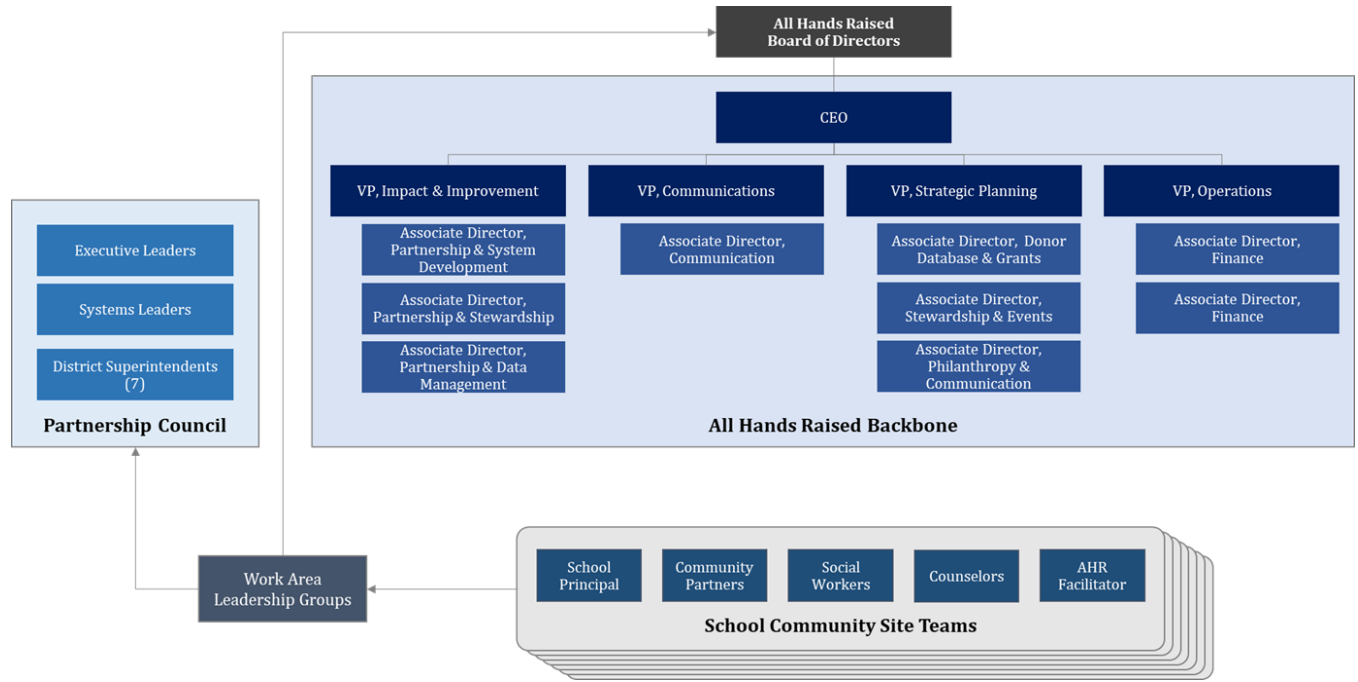
to inform policies and budgeting. At the ground level are the School Community Site Teams, which are the cross-sector collaborations charged with executing the work of pilot projects in one of the seven AHR areas of focus: reducing disproportionate discipline and building positive school culture; building bridges to kindergarten; improving student attendance and engagement; helping ninth graders stay on track; increasing access to postsecondary education; improving postsecondary completion; and forging pathways from school to career.³⁵ These teams are the implementers of the initiatives and meet regularly to identify root causes, create action plans, and use continuous improvement to redirect the organization.

The number of AHR staff has increased throughout the years as staff have identified new needs. Currently, there are 13 backbone staff members doing administrative and operational roles. At the executive level, there is the CEO, Vice President of Strategic Planning, Vice President of Communication and Vice President of Operations. Middle management includes the Associate Director of Partnership & System Development, Associate Director of Grants & Donor Database, Associate Director of Communication, Associate Director of Partnership & Data Management, Associate Director of Stewardship & Events and the Associate Director of Finance. Reporting to the Associate Director of Partnership & System Development is a Manager of Partnership & Stewardship, and reporting to the Associate Director of Finance is a Manager of Accounting and Operations. The organization also has an executive assistant and board liaison. The executive level staff (CEOs and vice presidents) all interface externally with cross-sector partners on the governance boards. Additionally, the Associate Director of Partnership & Data Management, Associate Director of Stewardship & Events and Associate

³⁵ See AHR website for further details: <http://allhandsraised.org/shared-work/>

Director of Partnership & System Development interact with cross-sector partners on the governance boards and the Community School Site Teams.

Figure 4. AHR Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map



Initiatives. The thread of racial equity runs through all of AHR’s initiatives. Originally, AHR established working groups tasked with designing initiatives in each of its five goal areas, which has since expanded to seven. They began this work by convening meetings with interested CBOs, researchers, advocates, educators and practitioners, inviting partner organizations to apply as conveners of the School Community Site Teams that would choose strategies to address each initiative’s priorities (Riehl et al., forthcoming). Each of these collaborative teams developed its own charter and action plan. Currently, their Building Bridges to Kindergarten Team consists of culturally-specific partners, healthcare providers, principals, kindergarten teachers, family

advocates and Head Start teachers who work on developing holistic supports to help kids thrive in kindergarten across three school sites.

On the Reducing Disproportionate Discipline & Building Positive School Culture Team, the focus has primarily been on reducing suspensions and expulsions, particularly among students of color, across the seven participating school districts. Teams work with culturally-specific community partner organizations, principals, counselors, teachers, community advocates, and mental health professionals to put together professional development to build awareness of racial disparities in discipline. Improving Student Attendance & Engagement is another collaborative focused on tracking absenteeism and experimenting with interventions that keep students attending and engaged in school. As this is one of the oldest collaboratives at AHR, attendance best practices have already been established and cross-pollinated at other school sites. County health care partners, the state department of human services, culturally-specific partners, social workers, counselors and psychologists, principals, teachers and school secretaries work together on these School Community Site Teams.

Ninth Grade Counts—a collaborative that was established by the former mayor prior to AHR—works with nonprofits, schools and other partners to put kids on the path to graduation through summer programming that targets eighth grade students transitioning to high school who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out. Students receive half a credit for participating in the program. Moving through the cradle-to-career pipeline, the Increasing Access to Postsecondary Education Team includes principals, teachers, counselors, mentors, culturally-specific partners and college faculty and staff who primarily work on FAFSA completion rates. Similar to the work of the Attendance & Engagement Team, this particular collaborative is one of AHR's oldest and has resulted in a set of proven practices associated with higher FAFSA

completion rates. The most recently added collaborative is Improving Postsecondary Completion, which has two partnering community college teams working on increasing degree completion among students of color, immigrant and refugee students with faculty, advisors and counselors, social workers, community advocates, potential employers and peer mentors. Finally, the last collaborative, Forging Pathways from School to Careers works on improving the transition to postsecondary career training and partnerships with industry trades. Examples of partners include apprenticeship program representatives, shop teachers, local manufacturers, school counselors and principals.

Network membership. The StriveTogether network was not only influential in the creation of AHR, but has provided a basic theory of action, organizational identity (i.e. collective impact), operational structure, and continued financial and technical assistance over the years. Facilitation tool kits and the rapid cycle continuous improvement process, for example, were strategies that AHR borrowed from Strive. The network also offers periodic convenings that bring together leaders from cross-sector collaborations across the country to troubleshoot problems and share best practices. Despite the help and support from StriveTogether, AHR leaders asserted that they adapted the guidance or sometimes did not follow it in order to be more adaptive to the needs of their local environment.

Data use. More than the other five collaborations included in my study, AHR has relied on the systematic collection of data not just for the purpose of measuring outcomes, but to routinely evaluate operational strategies and make course corrections. AHR asks each School Community Site Team to identify interim data measures that will link their work to their broader community-wide indicators, essentially serving as a theory of action for each team. At monthly meetings, AHR provides the data to these collaborative teams so that they can interpret it and use

it to inform their next moves. Much of this process has been borrowed from the StriveTogether network, which initially provided technical assistance to AHR on the plan/do/study/adjust cycle (PDSA) and rapid cycle continuous improvement. The former strategy is intended to guide discussions over the division of team responsibilities, decisions regarding interim and outcome metrics, interim evaluation of data and adjustments for the team's next steps. PDSA is intended to be used in the short- and long-run, while rapid cycle continuous improvement is a data-driven approach meant to report on progress every three to four weeks. The rapid cycle begins with a clearly defined question and a work plan designed to test that question, supported and facilitated by AHR staff. Eventually, AHR staff members take a step back from this process and allow the team to own the data and the decisions that come from interpreting it, but continue to provide facilitation support (Riehl et al., forthcoming). Best practices learned from both these data-driven processes are shared across teams, school sites and districts.

At the governance levels of the organization, AHR provides data from its Community School Site Teams and countywide, longitudinal data on its community-wide indicators to facilitate partnership discussions and drive decision-making. Often, AHR staff will use data visualization to set the tone and agenda for each meeting. Keeping with their equity mission, AHR has been able to secure data sharing agreements with each of the districts that disaggregates data by race and ethnicity and other sociodemographic characteristics. In addition this type of data, AHR staff bring feedback from Community School Site Teams to higher-level governance meetings to make decisions about the structure and purpose of different collaborative teams. For example, feedback from several AHR partners indicated that the Data Committee was redundant with the work of the Community School Site Teams. Based on this feedback, the committee was disbanded and its work absorbed into the Community School Site Teams.

Funding. A characteristic that sets AHR apart from other cross-sector collaborations and StriveTogether network members is its democratic approach to funding. AHR explicitly fundraises for the purpose of supporting the sustainability of its work as a backbone organization, *without* providing funding to any of its Community School Site Teams. While in many cases, AHR has helped identify funding opportunities for these teams, it has never provided the funding for the ground-level work itself. The fundraising for AHR comes from an array of corporate, philanthropic, and public sector grants, as well from a large number of individuals and families who are publicly acknowledged for donating at least \$500 to the organization each year. In the 2018-2019 year, over 200 individuals and organizations donated varying amounts to AHR, with the largest number of donors constituting individuals and families, followed by corporations, public and community organizations, and finally, foundations.³⁶ The organization’s annual “Party with a Purpose” fundraising event, which often includes an evening of stand-up comedy and musical performances, is one of AHR’s most successful fundraising events. According to AHR’s 2016 IRS 990 form,³⁷ the organization received nearly \$500,000 in gross receipts from this event in 2016. The 2016 IRS 990 form also indicates that the organization received nearly \$5.6 million in total gifts, grants and contributions to pay for backbone staff salaries and operational expenses. That amount has been relatively stable since 2012, never dipping below \$4.8 million.

5.3 Comparative Analysis of Rise Up and All Hands Raised

Both Rise Up and All Hands Raised (AHR) aimed to provide cradle-to-career supports for students and their families to improve better academic and postsecondary outcomes, albeit in

³⁶ See <http://allhandsraised.org/learn-more/donors/> for more information.

³⁷ Public IRS 990 form data were derived from the Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics. See <https://nccs.urban.org/> for more information.

very different ways. The cradle-to-career language was never formally incorporated into the mission of Rise Up, which remained explicitly focused on improving the city's high school graduation rate, postsecondary education enrollment rates and minimal remediation in higher education. However, that thinking was reflected in the types of initiatives that Rise Up chose to take on (e.g., the creation of a college access network and early learning work stream), particularly after the creation of the state-run turnaround district and the city's decreasing student population rendered their focal goal of opening new, quality schools moot. AHR, on the other hand, very intentionally followed the StriveTogether model by focusing on a number of different cradle-to-career initiatives since its inception.

The two collaborations differ greatly in what they ultimately deemed the ideal path to institutionalization. For AHR, leaders articulated that institutionalization meant existing in perpetuity as a facilitator of cross-sector collaboration focused primarily on cultural, rather than policy, change. In the face of challenging and volatile environmental conditions, Rise Up determined that institutionalization would better occur through state-level policy advocacy, their own dissolution, and the hand-off of their initiatives to other local entities. One might simply conclude that the political, social and economic conditions surrounding Rise Up are what made it impossible to sustain the organization; a cross-case comparison with AHR—characterized by a more stable environment—would thus be untenable for this reason. However, the interviews with stakeholders from both cases shed light on how the organizational structures, strategies and dynamics of the two organizations differed in meaningful ways. In the section below, I elaborate on how the different organizational arrangements and strategies leveraged by AHR could have potentially insulated Rise Up from some of its broader environmental volatility, bolstering the organization's long-term survival prospects.

Funding Arrangements

Goal displacement as a result of grant-dependency. The concentrated resource dependency of Rise Up on a few major funders empowered the board to shape the content and strategic approach of Rise Up's work. A common issue raised by Rise Up staff was the dependency on these key players for initiative-specific funding. As admitted by two Board members representing one of the major foundation donors, the funding for Rise Up was tied to specific projects that the organization would take on, rather than any kind of backbone work. From the perspective of several middle managers, it felt like these short-term grants drove the agenda of Rise Up more than other considerations, such as collective decision-making among Rise Up staff. Even a couple of Rise Up leaders suggested that the interests of foundation donors were put at the forefront of the organization's work. This organizational dynamic is particularly important because foundations embody technical-rational elements that can be at odds with systems-change work. From a technical-rational system perspective, roles, responsibilities and tasks should be more tightly coupled than in an open system to increase efficiency (Scott & Davis, 2005). This is reflected in the annual grant reporting structures that require staff to report back on the outcomes or interim indicators tied to specific projects. When these expectations are not met, foundations have the power to withdraw funding and eliminate the projects. This creates a resource-dependent relationship in which long-term, systems change goals can be displaced in favor of conforming to the expectations and norms of foundation donors seeking short-term results from projects (Milofsky, 1981; Rowan, 2006).

A couple of board members, Rise Up leaders, and several middle management staff spoke to this grant dependency as forming part of the organization's culture. A board member representing a large, nonprofit organization noted that "anytime a foundation is in the room with

large assets and is investing in that space, I find their voice can be disproportionately large” (R4). One middle manager further asserted that the grants would determine which initiatives to prioritize and which to relegate. This middle manager and two Rise Up leaders described how the early learning work was deprioritized as a result of this system, despite the fact that it was thought of—at least by these three stakeholders—to be one of the more important strands of Rise Up’s work. The K-12 scorecard and the common enrollment initiatives were described by Rise Up staff as priorities due to the size of the grants received for these specific initiatives.

The common enrollment initiative was described in detail by one middle manager as an example of how grant-dependent fundraising undermined long-term sustainability by displacing the organization’s goals with pilot projects that did not clearly link to a broader theory of action. The manager explained that the common enrollment initiative moved at an unnecessarily accelerated pace and with a strong sense of urgency from funders to show where all their money was going, which applied pressure on Rise Up to hurry the implementation of the initiative: “There were lots of statements like, ‘Oh yeah, they might not give us another grant because we haven’t met the terms of this grant’” (R15). According to a different middle manager, a massive amount of the grant was spent on the common enrollment pilot without putting in enough time and effort to strategically engage schools across sectors. This poor engagement and communication undermined the success of the pilot by failing to produce an adequate number of common enrollment applicants as promised to the funder: they received only two hundred applications instead of the anticipated two thousand. The rushed process to meet grant expectations occurred alongside the transition of the school district to a new community district with a new emergency manager; as a result, Rise Up was not able to respond appropriately to

these changes and strategize how to best engage district and school stakeholders. One middle manager summarized the consequences of this grant-dependent relationship:

We were driven more by money. I mean the reason we pushed forward with [common enrollment] despite myself, others on the team, some community members, some external partners, the organization we worked with to build out the technology site of the system, saying, ‘Hey, pause. Okay, let's not go yet.’ Because that's ultimately what's going to be better for kids and families...we don't want to be another thing that causes chaos, which is what we were saying [common enrollment] would help solve for, some of the chaos. We were causing more, and we all said that at some point or another, louder and louder. It just wasn't an option for us to not go. (R11)

This grant-dependency not only hurried the implementation of some initiatives, but completely relegated or muted others. A middle manager shared that it seemed as if foundations would go through their annual strategic planning process and an entire work stream would either emerge or disappear. The early learning work was a concrete example of this trend. A middle manager and Rise Up leader argued that Rise Up had hired a research firm to help with the design of their early learning coaching initiative, including an evaluation to see if the coaching was making a difference in educational settings. Even though they could demonstrate clear positive outcomes for early childhood teachers receiving the coaching, funders shifted gears and no longer wanted to focus on early childhood. As such, it appeared to one middle manager that the focus and direction of the work was not tied to rigorous data, but “what was sexy.” (R6)

The pressure to satisfy their funders by conforming to grant criteria altered the strategies that Rise Up staff pursued in the short-term and distanced them from their long-term mission and goals, all of which were ambitiously related to getting the majority of the city’s students to graduate from high school, enroll in postsecondary education and succeed with minimal remediation. In this grants-based environment, Rise Up chose to forego investment in activities that stimulate long-term growth in favor of more visible, short-term successes that guaranteed funding. This contributed to long-term resource instability because foundations, as demonstrated

by their shifting investments among other collaboratives in Raboin at the same time, did not necessarily maintain interest in a topic after the grant cycle ended. A Rise Up board member from one of the lead foundations admitted, “[foundations] say it's long term, but in the way they behave, it's really short term” (R13). This board member explained that the grant criteria shifted the focus to annual reporting on results, which distracted Rise Up from zooming out to assess the overarching direction of the organization and their citywide impact. One middle manager called out this cycle explicitly:

Education organizations come up with unattainable, ambitious goals, fund certain things heavily for a year or two, then go through the whole process again with a new strategic plan, funding, goals and a new name. That’s not to say that people are doing it intentionally, but recycling is happening. People have short attention spans and memories, or at least they think people do, so [we] have to do things according to quick timelines to reset and reframe. (R15)

A more democratic approach to funding. In the case of AHR, the organization made an intentional decision to convene, facilitate and support collaborative teams, rather than run projects on their own. AHR does not provide funding to stakeholders involved in any of its collaborative teams—who leverage funding from cross-sector partnerships and grants—and only raises money to support its staff salaries and the backbone’s operational costs. In that way, AHR has created a level of stability that is in no way dependent on its initiatives. Even when presented with the opportunity to run a state regional collaborative hub, AHR declined to avoid muddling their organizational identity with a funder role. As opposed to the handful of foundations upon which Rise Up is dependent, AHR’s core funding comes from incredibly diverse sources, with a small amount of funds from the StriveTogether network, a roughly \$50,000 biennium grant from the state’s regional achievement collaborative support, and numerous corporate, foundation, public, community organization, individual and family donations. As of June 2019, funds to

support the explicit backbone work of AHR from 2018-2019 came from over 200 sources, totalling over \$1.5 million.³⁸

One of the results of AHR's decision to not take on a funder role is increased flexibility to experiment with different strategies to most effectively reach their School Community Site Teams' goals. Unlike foundations, which are often more prescriptive about requirements through their RFP process, AHR leverages a model of continuous improvement where approaches and strategies are re-evaluated based on interim measures captured in their data. Characteristic of an open systems approach, this progress-based, rather than outcome-based, routine provides a more fluid way to adapt to changing circumstances at the schools and in the broader environment. As described by one AHR leader, the space for continuous improvement gave them more flexibility to "let the room figure it out; really mean that the room is smart and that you're supposed to back away from that" (A9). Moreover, by avoiding the funder role, AHR has been able to provide in-kind support to initiatives regardless of whether or not they have fully met target goals. One principal described their value add as the following:

When you have a partner like All Hands Raised that has connections to Multnomah County, your work continues to be validated, even when the results may not look like you're being as effective as you should. Like, we had goals for 75 percent improvement. And I think we came in – our first claim was, like, 60 percent improvement...But All Hands Raised quickly said, 'You guys are doing great things. Look at how many students improved. That's still a win, even though a lot of students might not have improved, you can still learn from that.' (A18)

Alleviating the threat of decreased support as a result of not fully reaching certain metrics allows collaborative team members to focus on moving towards substantive change, rather than focus on superficial indicators, which a former AHR leader believes funders are more likely to request. Importantly, AHR's continued provision of in-kind support, as expressed by the

³⁸ See <http://allhandsraised.org/learn-more/donors/> for more information.

representative of one funder, also signals to funders that the School Community Site Teams are worth continuing to invest in. This particular funder noted that many other collaborations had failed to accomplish similar goals in the county, but the level of enthusiasm, buy-in and participation by the partners involved in the collaborative teams was a new and clear value add.

Furthermore, AHR's diverse funding streams to support the backbone work signal a widespread, community commitment that allows it to be sustained in the "local marketplace." This is what one former AHR leader described as a key advantage over allowing "one or two foundations decide if they like [AHR] or not" (A1). AHR also publicly acknowledges all of its funders on its website and in an annual fundraising event, which one AHR leader described as an effective way of demonstrating widespread commitment and maintaining it. The intermediary role that AHR clearly defines, which is funded by multiple, diverse revenue streams, allows the organization to have its own "firewall of protection" from scrutiny in the broader environment and the changing interests of funders. This is in direct contrast to cross-sector collaborations that are embedded within organizations, such as charitable organizations, that already have a particular point of view about project-based funding. The former AHR leader summarized the importance of this independence, particularly in contrast to foundation-driven collaborations:

...When are we going to have the courage, if you will, to say that unregulated industry [foundations] – the most unregulated sector in our country – when are they going to be brought together to have some accountability about their behavior? And are they ever going to be willing to look at change and how they could align and really listen to what's going on on the ground and start to think differently about how they make their investments? (A1)

Thus, the more democratic nature of AHR's fundraising and the strict allocation of funds only for backbone operations have not only allowed it to experiment more freely with strategies that work, but have insulated it from the technical-rational expectations of foundation funders and the

political conflict amongst funders, board members and on-the-ground staff about how to approach the work—issues that heavily influenced the trajectory and sustainability of Rise Up.

Communications, Visibility and Stakeholder Buy-in

Interviews with Rise Up staff and board members yielded insights about the organization's communications and branding strategy that contributed to the waning commitment of board members and school stakeholders, negatively affecting the organization's credibility and ultimately, its survival prospects. One of Rise Up's primary goals was to provide useful information to parents about quality schools across the city—data which was also meant to catalyze the process of improving schools or closing them down to open more effective ones. From this standpoint, Rise Up staff were intentional about being visible to parents and community members invested in sending their child to a high quality school. A Rise Up leader claimed that the board applied pressure on the organization to develop its own direct communication strategy with these community members, which reallocated the organization's communications budget towards outreach to these stakeholders rather than the engagement of school personnel. This communication involved distributing hard copies of the scorecards to parent and community organizations, as well as sending the scorecards out to various email list serves. Despite the focus on parents and the community, several stakeholders still described Rise Up as highly visible to school principals, CMOs and policymakers because it was the only entity at the time producing a scorecard of the city's educational landscape.

More than any of their other initiatives, Rise Up staff consistently claimed that the organization was best known for producing the annual K-12 school scorecard. When it came to public communications and messaging, Rise Up's website was largely focused on presenting the school scorecards over information about their other cradle-to-career initiatives. In each of these

K-12 scorecards, the highest and lowest performing schools are ranked according to state Math and Reading test scores, college entry exam scores and graduation rates. Although in later years, Rise Up started incorporating more qualitative data into the annual scorecards, the focus on holding schools publicly accountable for student test scores created tension between schools and Rise Up, which had their logo branded on each of these public scorecards. As many of the worst performing schools were public schools, public education advocates attacked the organization for having a pro-charter agenda. This perception undermined the credibility of Rise Up, despite the fact that the organization identified as “governance-neutral” (R5).

The narratives produced by advocates and other organizations stirred some negative media attention and fear of what Rise Up was capable of accomplishing—school closure. As Rise Up’s communications efforts were more focused on disseminating information rather than telling a story about the purpose of their work, their ability to address the negative media attention and take control of their own narrative was limited. According to one middle manager, the original pledge was a public-facing document that was invoked by Rise Up’s critics as evidence that Rise Up was stacked with pro-charter players. At one point, this middle manager stated that Rise Up hired a communications firm to try to take back the narrative and produce positive press releases about Rise Up’s other cradle-to-career initiatives. One Rise Up leader claimed that these public relations strategies were never able to successfully drown out the criticism from the scorecard because of the low ratings, stating, “You got to really own the narrative, but it’s got to be an asset rather than a deficit narrative. And how do you create an asset narrative when so many of the schools have F’s?” (R2)

Rise Up was thus put in an impossible position: they were a project- and funder-driven organization whose main product was the creation of annual school scorecards, but this task also

depended, at least to a degree, on stakeholder buy-in to produce and disseminate this information. The conflicting role of being highly visible to the community and schools, while simultaneously holding schools accountable for their poor performance, diminished their local policy influence by inhibiting their access to certain schools. As described by a Rise Up leader who worked on the scorecards: “I think it's one of the first educational organizations in [Raboin] to call people out. You can't call people out and tell them to come to the table. You got to pick one. You can't say, ‘Hey, you suck but come over here and sign this MOU with us’” (R2). According to three former board members and a couple of Rise Up leaders, one major consequence was that it became difficult to maintain partners at the table from the district and charter sector. A middle manager reflected on how the overtly political nature of their work tarnished the organization’s brand, noting that many systems leaders and community members believed in their initiatives and work, but did not want to be associated with it. Another Rise Up leader shared that it also became harder to communicate the information to parents without the willingness of school stakeholders to release the scorecards themselves.

While one Rise Up leader believed they may have been more successful if they were “quieter” about how they branded their school scorecards—an observation that three middle managers and this Rise Up leader made about the current organization producing the same school scorecards—the leader argued this would have resulted in a lack of transparency and would not have aligned with their overarching mission, asserting: “Shame on the organization that chooses to forego its mission [for survival]” (R5). While no stakeholders could speak to the intentionality of this decision, in future initiatives, such as the common enrollment pilot, Rise Up decided not to explicitly brand or market the initiative. The nonprofit housed at the mayor’s

office which ultimately took over the scorecard work, assuming the same employer identification number (EIN), notably does not brand the scorecard with the organization's logo.

Strategic buy-in and selective visibility. In contrast to Rise Up, AHR was able to avoid the consequences associated with high levels of visibility through very strategic communication targeted at different community stakeholders. AHR leaders spoke consistently about how community engagement among parents and students—those at the ground level of the work—was not the role of the backbone organization. A former AHR leader believed that this level of grassroots community engagement would have been duplicative, as many other organizations (e.g., culturally-specific organizations) were already taking on this work and had developed an expertise that AHR could not claim. Although a few AHR partners noted that this invisibility on the ground level sometimes created confusion about the purpose of their work, this strategy also mitigated the issue of ownership by giving credit to the cross-sector actors involved in the ground-level work in each of their School Community Site Teams.

Unlike Rise Up, AHR staff believed that it was far more important for their value proposition to be apparent to the superintendents, principals and other school stakeholders engaged in their “demonstration sites.” As of fall 2019, one AHR leader who has continued at the organization since its inception explained that their community engagement strategy is still evolving to become more visible to teachers and counselors at school sites, but not to parents or students. Similar to what other AHR staff noted, this leader believed that the most effective communication strategies would be those that shone a light on the work of their cross-sector partners, making those partners more visible to parents and students:

If we're invisible to some people, that's okay. If they feel more engaged with their school or they're getting their kid to school more, awesome. If they attribute that to All Hands Raised, that's fine. I'm more concerned that the principal and the team and the superintendent attributes it. (A5)

While not all AHR board members or leaders agreed with this approach because of its passivity, it does allow AHR to focus on the systems and executive leaders needed to sustain the work. For example, their event “Principal for Almost a Day” recruits corporate sector leaders to visit a school to build a better understanding of how AHR works on the ground and how complicated the work can be at the school level. Moreover, AHR’s invisibility to parents and students allows them to experiment with continuous improvement, creating an environment where principals and school stakeholders can feel safe to try new strategies without being scrutinized by these community members. Visibility made Rise Up vulnerable to “pro-charter” attacks from community members; invisibility insulates AHR from such criticism.

One AHR leader referred to their strategy as “communications to program,” centered on results-based communication to keep important leaders and practitioners at the table (A5). AHR primarily focuses on producing “chapters” of its work, which it publishes on its website and disseminates to partners. The production of the chapters and communication via email and meetings are prioritized over social media and public press releases. The target audience of the chapters is in fact the funders of AHR’s work. As opposed to the Rise Up scorecards and website, which were focused primarily on disseminating information, the AHR chapters emphasize the identity and value of AHR as a way of working together in the community rather than a “product” or a “thing” (A1). The work is framed as a process, beginning with the history of the effort, progress to date, current work and future work, all with data visualizations that accompany its story. Through these chapters, AHR also intends to engage its systems leaders in the work by creating a sense of shared ownership of the narrative:

We named it [chapters] on purpose, rather than the All Hands Raised report, which relatively speaking, would signify a result versus chapters and the next installment. And

it's about a very careful selection to suggest that this is an unfolding story—that if it were easy, this would have been figured out a long, long time ago. (A5)

While the story of Rise Up was communicated primarily through the scorecards and website, in the case of AHR, backbone staff build a narrative arc that emphasizes the role of all stakeholders in improving a set of community-determined indicators. The chapters chronicle the movement on data indicators, the purpose of the work, the involvement of School Community Site Teams in every school district and credit to their cross-sector partnerships. The chapters are also an opportunity to describe the cultural change that AHR desires to achieve through its work.

If both Rise Up and AHR were responsible for reporting movement on data indicators, how was AHR able to better navigate the delicate relationship of producing data linked to collaboratives' work and not alienating collaborative partners when the outcomes were not as favorable as they had hoped? As opposed to the “loudness” produced by the Rise Up scorecards, AHR leaders actively engaging school stakeholders in the continuous improvement process and shared the outcomes with the district first before ever reporting them publicly. Through this relationship building, AHR leaders believe they have been able to create shared ownership over *why* the outcomes look the way they do, with one partner noting “AHR is at its best when it's engaging with these tension points” (A2). They do so, however, quietly. As a result, AHR has been able to continue producing data and holding stakeholders accountable while also maintaining their commitment and buy-in—all are equally on the hook and blame is not attributed to any one party. Overall, AHR's strategy is distinct because it serves dual purposes: (1) it minimizes the damage that a perceived failure could bring to the sustainability of the organization through its strategic visibility; and (2) it minimizes issues of credit attribution, so stakeholders and partners can feel ownership of what they accomplish.

Maintaining stakeholder buy-in through effective meeting facilitation. Numerous Rise Up board members and a couple of leaders attested to the fact that as the work progressed, fewer board members would show up consistently to monthly board meetings. This waning commitment is captured in internal server documents shared with me by one staff member, which contain board meeting minutes, attendance, presentations and action items. For example, in July 2011, these minutes indicate there were nine board members in attendance across philanthropic, nonprofit, parent engagement, and charter and public sectors, including a charter network leader and the district emergency financial manager. In October 2016, only five board members were present, with representatives from the district and charter networks absent. Without these stakeholders at the table, the success of Rise Up initiatives were compromised, particularly when Rise Up staff has to engage with principals and schools stakeholders about their poor scorecard rankings.

More than the public visibility and scrutiny of Rise Up, one former leader believed that the greatest downfall of partner commitment was that funders—many of whom were board members—allowed their political self-interests to take precedence over alignment with the goals and initiatives of Rise Up. According to a middle manager who had been involved in other collaboratives prior to Rise Up, he observed an attitude of, “if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” motivating stakeholder participation (R15). One CMO leader on the board spoke firsthand to this issue, sharing his suspicion that other board members at the table who had a history of supporting traditional public schools were promoting the development of a school scorecard algorithm that disproportionately penalized charter schools. This type of distrust was never fully resolved and this particular board member stopped showing up to meetings. A former board chair corroborated this distrust, noting that a few organizations stopped coming when they

felt like they could not prioritize their own organization's interests. According to this board chair, there was an aura of competition amongst board members, who were aware that "under different circumstances they would be competing with one another over resources" (R12).

A foundation representative on the board argued that the inability of Rise Up to establish a baseline level of trust and build a collective identity for stakeholders to latch onto were the primary reasons that engagement waned over the years. It was also never clear, according to a couple of Rise Up leaders and one board member, how much was needed in order to keep stakeholders at the table. Small wins were sometimes reported at board meetings, but the board did not request data linking Rise Up's work to school improvement. One middle manager refuted the idea that they needed to produce data to convince board members and partners of the importance of the work in the first place. From this individual's perspective, organizations that agreed to be partners should have been willing to change their own organization's internal practices to align with a common agenda:

If we decide we're going to do a common enrollment system as a board, then your organization should be automatically on board with a common enrollment system. If we decide we're going to do this type of thing in a middle school space then you run 10 middle schools, they all should be on board to do this. Why should I have to come back and convince you to do that later on? (R11)

Overall, Rise Up leaders described being torn between the ideas and interests of the board members and the ideas and goals of the Rise Up cross-sector partners.

The incentives driving stakeholder engagement at AHR, as well as the greater breadth of cross-sector participation and representation, differ greatly from Rise Up. Part of this difference is that, as previously noted, AHR established itself clearly and consistently as a collective impact, backbone organization. On its board of directors, AHR engages 21 members representing corporate, philanthropic, nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs),

higher education and public sector organizations. On their Partnership Council, AHR engages 42 executive and systems leaders across business, government, CBOs and education, including the superintendents of the seven districts with which it works. Since the core backbone work of AHR is fostering a cross-sector collaborative governance process, rather than a specific project or initiative, one might expect it to be more difficult to maintain such a diverse array of stakeholders when the success of the backbone is not quite the same as the success of its pilot projects. Despite the nebulous nature of backbone work, AHR has managed to continually engage diverse stakeholders through two primary means: effective meeting facilitation and the strategic use of data. These practices have mitigated the threat of waning commitment as AHR, according to a former leader, is “building the plane while flying it” (A1).

AHR hired a skilled facilitator as a consultant who ran collaborative team meetings with their partners. These meetings shifted as the needs of the collaboratives shifted, but would often consist of monthly meetings in which co-conveners of the School Community Site Teams (e.g., the AHR facilitator and a partnering agency or CBO) would discuss implementation at school sites, data, goals and rapid cycle continuous improvement efforts. The communications vice president would be involved in facilitation of these meetings, with the role of holding stakeholders accountable for moving the work forward and committing to future goals. The AHR facilitator would provide technical assistance for the meetings, creating an agenda and working with the team ahead of time to study the data, draw conclusions and readjust their plans moving forward based on those conclusions. The temperament the facilitator brought was described by one nonprofit partner as critical to getting the collaboratives off the ground because she created a safe space and the conditions necessary for people to express their *personal* motivations until they became the motivations of the collective whole.

The AHR facilitator described the communications vice president as offering helpful observations in meetings and cross-pollinating successful lessons from other demonstration sites. Complementing this role, the communications vice president described the AHR facilitator as teaching team members how to analyze the data and leverage it for decision-making. Both AHR staff and two former AHR leaders heavily emphasized the need to defer to the intelligence in the room rather than draw conclusions themselves. This helps build a sense of shared ownership over the data, while AHR kept the agenda focused on a “Plan/Do/Study/Adjust cycle.” To remove the institutional barrier to school sites, a school administrator often attends these collaborative meetings, simultaneously serving as a form of built-in accountability.

A nonprofit partner further described how the facilitation of decision-making during collaborative meetings would solicit more substantive feedback than in other meetings she had attended for different collaboratives. She explained that issues were never put to a vote, but were determined by the “Fist of Five,” in which stakeholders could share their degree of agreement or dissent on how to move forward. According to this partner, this made team members feel like their presence held more influence and incentivized their participation. Another school administrator stated that the facilitation never resulted in AHR driving outcomes, just driving the discussion about which areas to focus on. Partners were always given the decision-making power to develop a plan that aligned with student outcome goals.

The AHR Board of Directors and Partnership Council meetings were also described as well-run according to systems leaders and board members. The communications vice president noted that AHR spent a lot of time preparing for each of these meetings, even organizing seating charts to provoke different stakeholders to engage with one another. In the Partnership Council meetings, co-chairs facilitate the meetings and AHR provides preparation assistance and vision

to guide the meetings. One board member shared that there were often working sessions that were built into board and Partnership Council meetings that gave stakeholders content and data to think about. The board member explained how AHR's collective accountability engagement style reduced the chances of conflict amongst board members:

Whenever they do start pounding their fists, and they don't, but if they were, they would be pounding their fist to themselves...And so I think there's some brilliance there that's really important, a nuance maybe. I think that piece is working very well and is guarding a bit against there being anybody throwing up their arms like it's not happening fast enough, you know? I don't hear that when I go to the council meetings. The art and science of stakeholder engagement, All Hands Raised has down in spades. (A13)

Moreover, AHR has been adaptive to the feedback of partners about the value of meeting structures and facilitation. When AHR had a data committee, stakeholders complained that the meetings felt duplicative and AHR quickly adapted by discontinuing the team and incorporating its functions into the other collaborative teams.

Similar to Rise Up, some AHR partners did describe stakeholder engagement as self-interested. One nonprofit partner that decided to leave an AHR collaborative team claimed there was a fear of missing out among CBOs and organizations not involved in AHR. This fear was related to missing out on new partnership opportunities and potentially resources from being exposed to other organizations that they had not previously built relationships with. The collective accountability built into facilitation, however, kept this from consuming the purpose of meetings. An AHR leader shared that they incorporated "data walks" into many of their meetings, where data would be visually presented and partners would be asked one or two key questions to discuss in pairs or small groups. This forced partners to build an understanding of what the data represent, what interim indicators or other variables might be missing, and how to use the data to inform actionable items written onto a "hustle board" for the next meeting.

While outcome indicators were collectively determined at the onset of AHR, the rapid cycle continuous improvement approach used by AHR is a way for collaborative teams to use data every four weeks or so to “test” for small changes in behaviors and operational practices. The operational data indicators that came out of the rapid cycle process motivate partners to make small, measurable changes towards loftier, long-term outcomes measures, like birth weight and graduation credits, which require much more time to demonstrate improvement. These indicators have thus served as the collaborative team logic model connecting actions and outcomes from start to finish. As described by the AHR facilitator, “the indicators are the big scoreboard, but you can’t move the score if you don’t have all this hustle activity” (A7). These interim measures would consist of signing up for “Principal for Almost a Day” or making a certain number of phone calls home to parents related to attendance. In addition to these operational, interim measures, the collaborative teams would build an action plan outlining longer term goals across different years, how progress would be measured towards these goals and which baseline data would be used. Without the plan/do/check/act and rapid cycle continuous improvement frameworks, one AHR partner believed the organization would fall into the same trap as other organizations held accountable for the ambitious systems-change goals they create. Instead, accountability became built into the organizational fabric of the School Community Site Teams through active modeling of this collaborative governance structure.

Organizational Form

Clashing perspectives of organizational identity. One of the most notable findings from the Rise Up interviews is that from very beginning of the organization, Rise Up board and staff members had discrepant understandings of what type of organization Rise Up was designed to be. In the pledge, members describe their focus as one on *students, not institutions*, but do not

explicitly describe the organization as a backbone, intermediary or other type of entity. As time progressed, board members and Rise Up leaders attempted to define this organizational identity. The identity of collective impact³⁹ was front and center of this negotiation, with one Rise Up leader advocating for a collective impact structure and several board members expressing mixed feelings about whether or not that was the appropriate way to approach the work. From the perspective of one board member, collective impact was “too focused on institutions rather than the individual being served,” (R4) a statement that aligned with the language in the coalition pledge. He further argued that collective impact does not understand nor leverage informal networks that are more influential than institutions in a politicized environment like that of Raboin, where enduring solutions were more challenging than in other places.

Another board member described the differences in opinion on the board about how Rise Up should identify—as CI, a “Harbormaster”⁴⁰ or something else altogether. She and the second Rise Up director argued that those who were the most resistant to collective impact were the original coalition members because they believed some of the data-driven and institution-focused aspects of the framework were in tension with the coalition’s “reform” framework. A CMO leader on the board summarized this conflict over organizational identity the following way:

I think we were *trying* to be a [collective impact organization]. Part of the issue was that [Rise Up] could never figure out really what their priority was...To a certain degree, I don't know if they could figure out what their purpose was and it became like this, what do we want to be as an organization? Do we want to be the third party organization that's rating schools? Do we want to somehow be a provider providing things like early childhood? So there was lots of sort of inciting [this] throughout the board, like nobody

³⁹ Popularized by Kania and Kramer (2011), the “collective impact” model calls for increased coordination across sectors to create: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities to increase coverage and efficiency; continuous communication; and the support of a “backbone organization” that facilitates partnership.

⁴⁰ The term “harbormaster” comes from Mind Trust and is defined as an organization staffed by local leaders with deep ties to their city who work in service of local students and educators. According to this model, by aligning vision, resources, talent and political will, these organizations become the strategic leaders of their community’s efforts to create more great schools.

could ever get everyone to agree. I remember being in a number of strategic planning meetings with them and I don't even remember us having a strategic plan or any real vision of what we were going to do. So I think they wanted to be a group, a collective impact organization, but they could never really figure out how to. (R16)

Adding to this confusion on the board, Rise Up staff had different impressions about whether or not the second director of the organization wanted to move Rise Up in the direction of a collective impact organization. One Rise Up leader claimed that this was in fact the organization's goal, with a middle manager reasoning that the early learning work came into existence because Rise Up leadership were leaning on the StriveTogether framework. A handful of other Rise Up staff, however, did not think that the organization ever embraced the collective impact label. According to a middle manager working on the common enrollment initiative, Rise Up always claimed to be a *coalition*, which she believed was fundamentally different than a collective impact organization. She believed that collective impact organizations are committed “to data-driven systems of decision-making” and the “organizational commitment of resources,” while coalitions only solicit organizations to come to the table, but lack the built-in accountability to get the work done (R11). A Rise Up K-12 work stream leader explained that they even tried to resolve these shifts and tensions with organizational identity by bringing in Jeff Edmondson—a leader from the StriveTogether network—as a consultant. Despite doing so, the organization could still not agree on aligning its purpose with an approach or identity:

[Rise Up] was started to drive a reform agenda, but it started as a coalition...And so, it was set up with a governance model that looked like Strive, which makes it really difficult to drive work fast while keeping a coalition onboard. I think there's actual tension there. Real, serious tension. Insolvable tension in my mind. But then you had organizations like a big district or a foundation that doesn't necessarily...that kind of move a little bit faster and doesn't necessarily adopt all the collective impact protocols and was much more interested in the Harbormaster orientation. (R14)

Interestingly, in analyzing a number of Rise Up's financial statements to the board, the documents include a column of functional expenses dedicated to “Collective Impact,” indicating

that the board, at the very least, should have been aware that this was a specific and intentional approach that Rise Up leaders were trying to leverage from 2012 onward.

The conflict over organizational identity made it even harder for Rise Up to protect itself from the immense volatility in its broader, urban environment. With so many immediate concerns about education swirling around the city—the rotation of emergency district managers, city managers, consolidation and redefinition of the school district, and state-level politics focused on accountability and educational improvement in the city of Raboin—the organization could have benefitted from a more flexible institutional arrangement. Specifically, becoming an “open system” organization with a more collaborative governance structure and a less resource-dependent relationship on a few major foundations may have enabled Rise Up to flex with these volatile circumstances and insulate itself from some of the chaos. It would have allowed Rise Up to have more fluidity in adapting its mission to new environmental needs as they emerged without being beholden to the interests of its largest funders. As summarized by one middle manager, “We started building the mission thinking all kids need shoelaces, but then learned that kids had no shoes! If the mission changes, we should have permission to change too” (R1).

Muddled identity contributes to mission creep. The discrepant understandings of Rise Up’s organizational identity created confusion about the type of work they were supposed to take on. One middle manager was under the impression that the board did not want Rise Up to become a direct service provider; however, this impression was inconsistent with the actions of the board, which pushed Rise Up to apply for short-term grants tied to direct service projects. The more influential players on the board—the leaders of the two main foundations funding the organization—were described by Rise Up leaders and two middle managers as driving these

decisions. As such, these charitable organizations were structuring the organizational configuration of Rise Up as a dependent, recipient organization (Milofsky, 1981; Sedlak, 1981).

The result of this muddled identity and the outsized influence of funders on the board contributed to mission creep that extended the organization's work beyond convening and school quality scorecard production into the role of incubating projects and performing direct services for certain initiatives. While there were mixed opinions among Rise Up staff about whether or not they should take on a direct service provider role, middle managers and two leaders spoke to the difficulty of executing the project incubation work due to their already limited capacity. As described by one Rise Up leader: "We found ourselves trying to set the conditions, but then also realizing we had to actually do the work, had to actually model it" (R7). In taking on so many roles, Rise Up staff were charged with going both wide and deep into the work.

What role should the board play? Rise Up was never able to resolve the tensions over its identity or organizational approach. Much of this appeared to be rooted in staff confusion over whether or not the board, which was originally the coalition, should have been acting as a traditional nonprofit board or a true coalition. The entanglement of fundraising, political interests and competition among sectors (notably the charter networks versus traditional public schools) resulted in the board not quite acting like either. According to one Rise Up leader, some board members believed the organization couldn't "convene [its] way" to its goals because of its ambitious three-pronged mission, which involved building an accountability system (R14). Other board members were more concerned about fundraising in the city of Raboin more broadly, again muddling the purpose of Rise Up: were they to be a fundraiser for other organizations doing work they supported or were they raising funds solely for their own projects?

The second director reflected that in retrospect, solving the appropriate governance structure of the board could have sustained the work of Rise Up. This leader argued that separation between the backbone and provider roles was essential to sustainability; the less involved the backbone is in direct, programmatic work, the more involved different coalition members can be in strategic decisions. He argued that when the backbone is forced to also engage in programmatic work to address gaps in service provision, it runs a higher risk of butting up against the interests of coalition members in *how* to approach the work, weakening their commitment. Since the core project of Rise Up was the production of the K-12 school scorecards for the public, they had trouble clearly delineating these roles. The result, according to the director, was the inability to do either role well. To be a more successful backbone, the director believed Rise Up needed a narrower board focused on traditional nonprofit governance.

Major questions about the structure of Rise Up still remain: could Rise Up have survived the extreme tumult of its broader institutional environment had it taken on a different organizational form? If it had operated with a broader, more collaborative governance structure, with diverse funding streams that were not concentrated in the pocketbooks of a few foundations, would it have been able to navigate the rocky terrain of Raboin and the state and reify its value proposition? Would this have allowed it to persist long enough to achieve its goal of dramatically improving its schools? Although it is impossible to construct an alternate path that would have resulted in more favorable outcomes for Rise Up, lessons from AHR's "open system" approach provide examples of how a clear identity and governance structure can help buffer the organization from changes in the broader environment.

The AHR open system approach. AHR operates as a primarily open system with some technical-rational elements guiding its operations and decision-making structures. The

organization is highly focused on sensemaking and information flows (Scott & Davis, 2005), working constantly to ensure that they put forth a consistent organizational identity and value proposition to their cross-sector partners. They have particularly focused on controlling their communications and information flow with school-level stakeholders and cross-sector partners, while intentionally trying to guide the sensemaking of systems and corporate leaders on their governance boards through effective meeting facilitation and data. Characteristic of an open system, school stakeholders described AHR as a neutral body that both holds them accountable, but provides them with enough autonomy to make their own decisions. As previously noted, AHR creates a clear separation between their convener role and the work of the School Community Site Teams charged with doing pilot work at demonstration sites—loosely coupling the actions of these stakeholders with the backbone work. This loose coupling provides a buffer between AHR and any negative feedback produced by the broader environment, limiting the impact of changing external conditions on the backbone’s organizational survival.

Overall, AHR has invested heavily in creating affective ties among its partners and common interpretive systems (e.g., continuous improvement) to understand the purpose of the work. As a result, they have been able to better control information flows and reduce the risk of discrepant sensemaking over their organizational identity. For example, AHR staff, board and council members consistently identified AHR as a collective impact organization whose primary purpose is to change adult behavior and create a culture of collaboration through being a backbone convener. This clarity has protected them from the mission creep experienced by Rise Up. Further, it has translated well to leaders on their governance boards, many of whom have sustained their commitment to AHR for the past 11 years.

Network membership has given AHR a sustainability advantage over Rise Up by providing a framework—the StriveTogether collective impact framework—to organize their sensemaking and information flows, as well as introduce some technical-rational elements into the organization. StriveTogether has brought some technical-rationality to AHR through continuous improvement workshops and trainings and the introduction of a collaborative governance structure for AHR, which has since undergone some local adaptation. AHR leaders described the network of collaboratives across the country that StriveTogether connected them to as invaluable. One AHR leader shared that this was an excellent opportunity to troubleshoot local problems with other collaborative leaders and brainstorm solutions that might potentially work in their local context. Being a StriveTogether member grounded in the technical-rational practice of rapid cycle continuous improvement also gave them more safety to “fail forward” in a way that was less consequential than experimentation was for Rise Up.

Pathways toward Institutionalization

One final divergence in the approaches of Rise Up and AHR is how stakeholders from each organization have thought about and dealt with institutionalization. In both cases, the collaborations were interested in influencing policy at the local level—with Rise Up interested in influencing the closure of poor performing schools and the opening of higher quality ones, and AHR interested in influencing school-site policies through cross-pollinating best practices from their demonstration sites. However, their commonalities stop at this point. As the external environment in Raboin became increasingly chaotic, one Rise Up leader and all board members interviewed noted a shift in their approach to one of state-level policy advocacy and lobbying. One Rise Up leader strongly argued that shifting to this politically-charged, advocacy role was the best chance at navigating the local chaos and ensuring their work would count. The leader

described the shift in Rise Up strategy as a means of supporting a “legislative reset” that required the splintering off of the work to different entities:

...In 2014, when we went to our board, what we essentially said is, ‘[Raboin] Public Schools is in so much financial distress that none of this stuff is working. All these other efforts aren't working, collective impact, talent, new schools, et cetera. We actually need the legislature to reset the governance. Essentially, we have to take [the school district] out of bankruptcy, structured bankruptcy. And because there's too many authorizers in [Raboin], which is creating chaos for parents opening and closing schools, we need to strengthen the charter authorizing laws in the city because they were so fragmented. There was also this need to dissolve the [state turnaround district]. So this recovery district that the governor had set up. We have to dissolve that. Finally, we have to create an entity in the mayor's office because we now have a powerful, strong mayor who wants to get involved. (R14)

From the perspective of this Rise Up leader, this shift in prioritizing policy advocacy implied that Rise Up had reached a natural expiration date prior to meeting its ambitious 2020 goals.

Moreover, the leader argued that it had never been a goal of Rise Up to sustain the organization in the first place. This sentiment was not shared by middle managers and two Rise Up leaders, one of whom had left the organization prior to its closure and another who stayed on board until the end. The Rise Up director who had left prior to its closure did not recall any meetings to sunset Rise Up during his time at the organization, while the other leader who remained until the end did not anticipate the state-level policy advocacy having any consequences for the initiatives they were executing at the time. Middle managers were also surprised by what appeared to be the sudden close of Rise Up; as evidenced in Rise Up server documents, they did not stop work on their other initiatives in the final years of the organization's lifespan. A few board members did, however, claim that Rise Up had served its purpose as “coalition 1.0” and considered the spin-off of the work to organizational entities as part of “coalition 2.0” (R8; R9; R13).

It is possible that being “governance-neutral,” as originally stated in Rise Up’s Coalition Pledge, was no longer a possibility because of how enmeshed the organization became in the

local politics of the city and changing political headwinds at the state level. Rise Up was operating in a substantially more tumultuous environment than AHR based on political leadership turnover, bankruptcy and other citywide crises. A Rise Up board member, leader and middle manager argued that these conditions overwhelmed the work of Rise Up, undermining its effectiveness. The leader who expressed this sentiment also argued that a “long-term collective impact game” would not have been a viable strategy for Rise Up, as the broader environment compromised the organization’s work and forced them into a political role (R14).

My comparative analysis of these two collaborations still leaves a couple of lingering questions: Did the urgency of the political environment in Raboin trump any chance that a collective impact strategy would be effective? Does the collective impact strategy require a baseline level of stability in the broader environment to work? As described in the sections above, challenges related to Rise Up’s organizational identity, structure and strategies contradict the notion that their fate was inevitable. For example, Rise Up never successfully organized around collective impact because other organizational arrangements, such as the composition and governance of the board, made it impossible, not the environment. Even though AHR has not dealt with the same degree of urgency and tumult in their external environment, the intentionality of their backbone identity, communication and messaging, collective impact strategy and open system approach have insulated them from mayoral leadership turnover and superintendent turnover across all seven of their participating school districts.

Further, if Rise Up as an organization no longer made sense, why would a new iteration of the same organization—with the same EIN and the same board—open shortly after its closure? This action suggests that the work of Rise Up remained important, but needed to be repackaged and rebranded in a new way. Symbolically housing the new 501(c)(3) at the mayor’s

office, whose only true responsibility was to appoint the board, creates a sense of legitimacy that was missing from Rise Up. The scorecards the new organization produces, unlike those produced by Rise Up, also exclude any branding or logos. This suggests that there were lessons taken from Rise Up that influenced a slightly different iteration of an organization with the same purpose.

What sets AHR apart in their thinking about institutionalization is the type of change they consider to be more sustainable and enduring: cultural change. Three AHR leaders believed that both policy and cultural change were important and complementary to one another; however, they all consistently argued that cultural change through “adult behavior work” would create a more sustainable, lasting impact that could not be easily dismantled by political leadership turnover at the city, county or school level. AHR has been working towards making something historically unnatural in the county—convening diverse stakeholders around a common shared agenda—natural. Since they have allowed themselves to protect the narrowness of their identity, they have been able to prioritize cultural change work over other tasks. Involving themselves in political lobbying or ballot initiatives was described by two leaders as a distraction changing adult behavior and breaking down the barriers to collaboration between community-based organizations and school personnel. The adult behavior work is intended to accustom systems, executive leaders and practitioners to *want* to work together routinely and effectively, without the promise of funding or support for their own self-interests.

As opposed to Rise Up, challenging the status quo and managing expectations across diverse partnerships is a role that AHR leaders do not see as temporal. One leader explained that it is important to have an organization outside of the cycle of grants, contracts, legislative budgets and revenue cycles that can elevate and weave together a system: “we need a big cultural shift in how we think about how we work together to change systems that’s counterintuitive to

American capitalist culture” (A1). Without AHR, another leader believed that collaboration would default to the top-down “old system” of having a superintendent determine how organizations collaborate with schools (A9). In two 2019 follow-up interviews with AHR leaders, however, they shared that the organization was shifting into a slightly more policy-influential role. In the past, one critique of AHR by a board member was that they “shied away from fundamental education pathways issues” (A11); however, one AHR leader explained that in recent years, AHR has started to gather data on schools to influence state policy on career and technical education programs to align incentives for encouraging students into this pathway. Overall, despite this recent shift, AHR has remained focus on local cultural change and “small p policy” at the school level to institutionalize their work (A5).

Chapter Six: Harmon Students Succeed and Say Yes Buffalo

6.1 Case Narrative of Harmon Students Succeed (HSS)

Table 6. Summary of Harmon Students Succeed (HSS) Key Characteristics

Pseudonym	Harmon Students Succeed (HSS)
Lifespan	2000-2015
Geographic region	South
Jurisdiction	School district
Backbone	501(c)(3)
Network membership	Students Succeed Network
Funding arrangement	Scholarship reserve; short-term grants
Coalition strategy	Superintendent-driven
Communications strategy	High visibility to donors and community
Racial demographics*	37% white; 52% black; 5% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. Harmon Students Succeed (HSS) began as a local affiliate of a national postsecondary pipeline network in the early 1990s. The network was launched in response to the popularity of a pilot organization in a southern city that leveraged cross-sector collaboration to improve postsecondary access and outcomes. After receiving funding from a large foundation and the U.S. Department of Education in the late 1990s, leaders of the pilot organization created the national network—the Students Succeed Network—to provide technical assistance and funding to support other civic and business leaders hoping to implement the cross-sector collaboration model in their own cities. In return for this support, local affiliates were expected to follow a set of criteria for the model to ensure that it would be implemented with fidelity. HSS was one of the first organizations to adopt the model, hiring its first executive director in 2000 to spearhead the work.

In the late 1990s, Harmon Public Schools was characterized by low academic performance, a decade of frequent superintendent turnover and low graduation rates. In 1999, a

new superintendent was hired who remained at the district for 10 years. The superintendent wanted HSS to be the hallmark of her superintendency and sat down with Harmon business and philanthropic leaders to discuss the program. Rather than engaging in an extended coalition building process, the superintendent championed the advocacy efforts and subsequent adoption of the program. She targeted businesses, including major Fortune 500 companies, as well as prominent local foundations to support the organization, all of whom contributed to a scholarship campaign for students and seed funding for HSS operations. In 2000, HSS officially opened its doors as a postsecondary tuition scholarship program, offering a handful of other programs intended to support middle and high school students' academic success, graduation, college matriculation and persistence.

Mission and vision. At the broadest level, the mission and vision of HSS has always been to collaborate with Harmon Public Schools to provide support for at-risk, marginalized students to graduate high school, access, pay for and complete postsecondary education. When it first began, the mission consisted of five key components that were derived from the national network model: a K-8 reading model; a K-8 math model; a K-12 classroom management model; a partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS) to provide family support services; and a scholarship program with requirements (e.g., grade point average and HSS summer institute participation) that students had to fulfill in order to receive the scholarship upon high school graduation. These components were thought to increase high school graduation, college matriculation and graduation rates, with the ultimate goal of creating a college-going culture and an educated workforce to improve economic development in Harmon and its metropolitan region. Originally, the organization focused on a cluster of eight, low-performing K-12 schools.

As described by several stakeholders who worked at or partnered with HSS from 2000-2015, the scope of the mission and vision fluctuated as the organization evolved through different stages of the work. It also flexed as broader environmental conditions changed, posing new constraints on plans to institutionalize the work. The focus of the first eight years under the original executive director was on the five aforementioned components and a plan to institutionalize the programmatic support work within the school district. From roughly 2008-2012, under a new executive director, the mission expanded to follow Harmon students through college and support their persistence through graduation. Other complementary activities, like tutoring and social events, were also added to the scope during this time. Around 2009, the organization added two more school clusters to its scope, resulting in a total of 25 schools. However, due to factors discussed in the “Funding” section below, the organization was unable to sustain its funding and programming for this larger scope of work. As a result, the K-8 reading and math programs and K-12 classroom management initiatives were cut.

In a parting letter written by the second executive director in 2013, she wrote that HSS still envisioned institutionalizing the work at the school district. That same year, a new interim executive director was hired who ended up leading the organization until its closure in 2015. Due to a lack of district commitment to absorb HSS programming, the association with a highly visible cheating scandal and waning funder support, the mission and goals narrowed during these final years to focus exclusively on supporting 11th and 12th grade students in one smaller cluster of schools. According to one foundation donor’s grant report, as of December 2014, HSS only had a caseload of 500 students at three high schools and 264 scholars receiving a scholarship for that academic year.

Organizational structure

Board leadership. The board of HSS functioned similarly to the boards of other 501(c)(3) nonprofits. According to the four board members I interviewed, the board's primary responsibilities were fundraising and providing strategic direction for the organization. The board requested monthly financial reports from the executive director and annual audits to assess the overall financial health of the organization. Additionally, the board would request data from the executive director on signed student contracts with HSS and attendance at HSS initiatives, such as their summer institutes focused on exposing students to postsecondary options. One board member admitted that despite their role of being a "financial steward," the composition of the board was not well suited to fundraising, particularly because many board members were retired and lacked leverage with funders (H12). Board members included former and current college deans, the sitting superintendent of Harmon Public Schools, a handful of business representatives, an executive from the College Board and a small number of civic leaders. Notably, a representative from the largest funder of HSS, a foundation, did not sit on the board. In general, there were between 10 and 16 HSS board members at any given point in time.

Staff roles and responsibilities. HSS operated as a backbone organization with cross-sector partners in Harmon Public Schools, local philanthropists and businesses, AmeriCorps VISTAs, select colleges, and at times, other nonprofit partners. The roles and positions at the organization fluctuated, but there was usually an executive director, assistant to the executive director, four to five executive-level directors (e.g., a research and evaluation director and a program director), and at least one accountant. During the first eight years of the organization, the first executive director explained that there were only five backbone staff the first year of implementation, peaking at 20 backbone staff at its largest. Between 2009 and 2015, HSS began

leveraging AmeriCorps VISTA staff as an affordable way to continue college counseling in high schools. The second executive director noted that during her term (2008-2013), there were about 20 AmeriCorps VISTAs working for HSS and 10 fulltime backbone staff. When the third executive director came on board in 2013, she estimated there were nine backbone staff working in the office, which she reduced to six staff prior to its closure in 2015. This claim matches an archived version of the organization's website from 2015, just prior to closure.

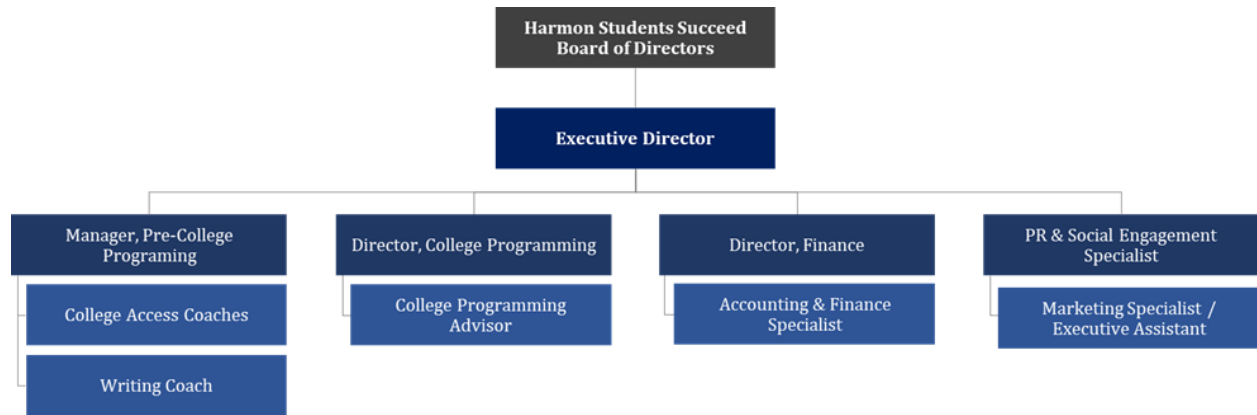
The role of executive director primarily entailed fundraising for the organization, establishing and maintaining cross-sector partnerships with the school district, colleges, and private sector partners, and staff management. All three former executive directors of the organization shared that strategic planning was also a core responsibility, but described this process differently. The first executive director created a plan for institutionalizing the work at the school district, which the second executive director claimed to operationalize and sustain during her term. The third executive leader described a complete revamping of the organization and development of a new strategic plan for how to sustain the work, organizational consolidation, and the development of new marketing strategies to get more funders back on board—all of which were sidelined when the main foundation funding HSS decided to only fund the organization through a transition to a new entity in 2014.

The director of evaluation and strategic partnerships was another role that remained stable from 2005-2013. This director was responsible for internal program evaluation, which included creating interim data indicators and outcomes and monitoring progress towards goals. The director of evaluation and strategic partnerships was part of a management team that included the executive director and the director of college programming, a team that was comprised of more individuals at different points in the organization's trajectory (particularly in

the early years when it was focused on K-12 instead of just high school). The director of college programming was responsible for liaising with schools and principals, overseeing staff who would support college access coaches and the scholarship program, and overseeing initiatives in support of college access and persistence. At the time of its closure in 2015, there was a manager of pre-college programming who oversaw the AmeriCorps VISTA college access coaches and a writing coach, a finance director and accounting specialist, and a public relations specialist who was tasked with improving the reputation of HSS among the philanthropic community after the fallout from a districtwide cheating scandal in 2009.

The backbone staff were not the only ones executing the mission of HSS. At the school district, there was an HSS Department with a leader paid for by the district who reported to the district's chief academic officer, who reported to the superintendent. The superintendent from 2011-2014 eventually eliminated this department within the last few years of HSS because he did not see the need for the district department in addition to the nonprofit. Within each HSS school, there was an AmeriCorps VISTA college access coach responsible for supporting high school juniors and seniors marked as potential HSS scholars eligible for the scholarship. One former college access coach claimed that the role came with a large degree of autonomy, with little interaction among the coaches across schools and between his school's administrative staff and HSS. Additionally, there was a scholarship coordinator at select HSS schools, which was at one point a line item in the schools' budgets, supplemented by private funding sources. The position was eventually eliminated from schools around 2011.

Figure 5. HSS 2014 Management Hierarchy Map



Initiatives. As previously discussed, the initiatives undertaken by HSS fluctuated throughout the years as its funding and goals expanded and then contracted. Despite these fluctuations, the core initiative of HSS was always the scholarship program intended to encourage high school graduation and support students through college. The scholarship was a small amount—\$4,000, or \$1,000 per year over four years—granted to all HSS students who participated in the program and met the following criteria: enrolling in the program through signing a contract their sophomore year of high school; completing two summer institutes meant to expose students to postsecondary opportunities and college-going culture; graduating from an HSS high school within four years; completing the ACT or SAT their junior year of high school; and graduating with at least a 2.5 GPA.

Around 2008, HSS formally transitioned all of its programmatic initiatives that were not directly related to the scholarship and college access (i.e. the math and reading programs and classroom management interventions) to Harmon Public Schools, although the initiatives did not persist. Other academic program pilots were experimented with from 2008 onwards, but the scope of work remained limited to middle and high school, and was eventually reduced to just

11th and 12th grade high school students. Public events, while not necessarily initiatives, were also put together throughout the year to support the work of HSS. Examples include a “college signing day” where students mimicked the signing contracts of professional athletes to get them excited about college, and a “lock for success” event to promote awareness of the scholarship program and the HSS covenant to ninth grade students. The latter event involved walking around the neighborhood with a marching band, going door-to-door and asking parents and students to sign the scholarship covenant. These events were often put together by HSS, Communities in Schools (CIS), the school district and other business partners.

Network membership. The Students Succeed Network was officially established in 1995 to bring the Students Succeed model to other cities and support them by offering seed funding and technical assistance for implementation, including identifying local champions or sponsors. As explained by a former CEO of the network, the model sought to replicate: the CIS social service model at school sites; a reading intervention program focused on elementary children; a math intervention program focused on the use of manipulatives; classroom management and cooperative approaches to student discipline; and the scholarship program of at least \$1,000-\$1,500 per student per year of college. Roughly \$20 million was fundraised per year and distributed to local affiliates based on the number of students served in each locale. The former CEO described the criteria for network membership as prescriptive, with only some room for modification based on the local context. The purpose of the rigid criteria was to ensure the integrity of the model and in some cases, local affiliates were dropped from the network because they introduced aspects of the program that contradicted the integrity of the model. This happened mostly during the first decade of the network’s existence as it tried to prove its effectiveness outside of its original pilot city, but became more relaxed over time. The former

CEO shared that the network monitored progress on student achievement, graduation, college matriculation and discipline rates among its local affiliates.

In Harmon, the national network provided professional development support through hosting different conferences related to college access and success. Additionally, they convened an executive director network that held teleconferences on a regular basis. The director of evaluation and strategic partnerships explained that the network provided guidance on many of the metrics he ultimately used for local data collection and analysis. HSS staff and school system personnel participated in train-the-trainer sessions related to the five components of the national model. Further, the network helped HSS identify and apply for certain grants from large foundations; however, the primary contribution of the network was described by several HSS stakeholders as more technical than financial.

Funding for the network from a large foundation and the U.S. Department of Education waned over the years as they decided to prioritize other areas of educational improvement. As a consequence, the network had to modify its own criteria and strategy to demonstrate to its major funders that it could still fit into their portfolio of work. A former CEO of the network explained that adapting to those changing priorities meant broadening the type of wraparound supports the local affiliates should be incorporating into their models. However, as school districts took increasingly more ownership of the local Students Succeeds collaboratives and established their own levers of change, the CEO claimed it became harder for the network to appeal to its own funders for more financial support. Due to unstable funding, the national network permanently closed shortly after HSS dissolved in 2015.

Data use. At HSS, data on graduation rates, scholarship program contracts and FAFSA completion were used internally to inform the program team about which schools were

accomplishing more than others. These data were also shared with the board along with information about the financial health of the organization. A “balanced scorecard” was used for operational purposes to track organizational goals, interim data indicators, and progress made per quarter and at the end of the year. These scorecards included a different set of measures based on each department’s priority. For example, in the Finance department, a 2014 goal was to “raise 70% of the board approved budget from external resources” and in the Program department, the 2014 goal was to “increase the percentage of scholars who meet or surpass [state] requirements for high school graduation.” While the number of departments varied over time, in 2014, there were five different departments: scholar support; high school to college readiness; evaluation; finance; and communications. Eventually, these scorecards were shared with funders in grant reports in the final few years of the organization’s existence.

Externally, the director of evaluation and strategic partnerships claimed that data were shared with the school district on their former students’ college matriculation and persistence rates at different colleges; however, according to a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis done by a consultant in 2014, one of the organization’s weaknesses was its ability to collect data beyond high school graduation and follow up on student matriculation and persistence through college. In an interview, the consultant claimed this presented a level of dissonance between “what they said they could do and what they could actually prove they were doing” (H7). One board member, consultant, and the director of evaluation and strategic partnerships reported that the organization received feedback from various stakeholders that they were not collecting the right data. In the SWOT analysis report—which presents this information in a more sanitized way than described in the interview—the

“Threats” section of the report states, “it is unclear that the initiatives of this organization are successful mostly due to what appears to be a lack of publicly available results evaluation.”

Funding. The funding for HSS came from a combination of corporate and philanthropic grants and a small amount of initial funds from the national network. Harmon Public Schools had contributed just under \$5 million from its own budget initially toward HSS programming at the district, including an HSS district office, school scholarship coordinators, and math and reading programming. According to one HSS leader, this as part of an “80/20 flip” strategy from 2000-2008, in which the private sector would initially provide 80% of the funding to get HSS started with the scholarship and operations and the district would contribute only 20%. This would gradually transition to the school district shouldering 80% of the operational funding, while 20% of the funds would continue to be raised by the private sector for the scholarship. This arrangement was eventually dismantled after the superintendent championing HSS resigned and her successor was left to repair the district’s reputation from a cheating scandal.

According to the first executive director, from 2000-2006, the focus of HSS fundraising was on a campaign to build up a scholarship reserve—funds which were eventually drawn from to also support operational costs. The goal of the campaign was to reach \$20 million, which was accomplished through support from multiple philanthropic and corporate donations. The second two executive directors explained that the organization—particularly under the leadership of the second executive director—had trouble replenishing the pool of funds after the scandal. A couple of funders argued that the board was not following through on its fundraising responsibilities, while three other backbone staff believed the cheating scandal had undermined their ability to fundraise.

While large corporations initially invested in HSS, there were three main foundations that continually supported the organization throughout its existence. Grants from each of these organizations usually ranged anywhere from \$300,000 to 700,000 per year, with the largest donor providing as much as one million dollars to the organization in a given year. In examining past grant reports from HSS, one funder noted a dip in the amount of funding HSS raised starting in 2006-2007, near the end of the first executive director's term. As explained by another funder, part of the reason HSS' scope of work contracted during this time is that it became difficult to convince funders to support "reform strategies" focused on classrooms and curriculum because they are perceived as the responsibility of the school district (H11). This was part of the original rationale for why HSS wanted to institutionalize some of its programmatic work at the school district, rather than continue to raise private funds to support it. As a result of the elimination of funding from the district and the difficulty of raising private funds, the second half of the organization's lifespan was focused on private fundraising for backbone operations and the college access component of the work. In order to fund college access coaches without a sufficient operating budget, HSS entered into a partnership with a local nonprofit that placed one-year AmeriCorps VISTAs in schools as coaches, with much of the AmeriCorps salaries paid for by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

By the time the third executive director came on board, HSS had hired strategic and public relations consultants to help them figure out how to raise the funds they needed to stay open. This led to the development of different strategies for approaching funders. For example, one consultant shared that they made an initial list of prior funders with whom they would provide data-based updates and lay out more detailed plans for future efforts. Since HSS did not own any facilities, they focused on capital fundraising specifically for programs. This was a

change from the prior years' focus on the scholarship campaign. Accompanying these approaches was a feasibility study to determine how much money the organization could raise in a capital campaign, which was completed in 2012. At this point in time, HSS was only looking to raise two million dollars. One foundation donor claimed that they were funding them to "keep them alive," (H4) while the largest foundation donor of HSS ended up contributing one million dollars in 2014 only to support its transition into a different entity. A representative from this second foundation argued that their funds would be better spent if concentrated into higher scholarship amounts per student and delivered through a different type of organization with a fresh reputation, broader scope and a separation of direct service work from the backbone role through cross-sector partnerships with more nonprofits. Without the support of their primary funder, HSS was forced to close its doors.

Closure of the Collaborative

HSS officially dissolved in 2015 due to internal, organizational issues and the inability to salvage its reputation to funders after the cheating scandal associated with the former superintendent tainted its brand. The third executive director, after working with an external consultant to create a three-year sustainability plan, was informed of the main donor's decision to replace HSS with "Harmon Collective" halfway through 2014. The two organizations coexisted for a brief period of transition. According to a representative of this foundation and another donor, conversations about closure had been happening since the end of the second executive director's term, but were not made clear to the third executive director until 2014. Middle managers at HSS were not aware that the organization was unsustainable and had only heard rumors about its closure around this time. In the spring of 2015, the executive director spoke with all staff members individually to inform them of the organization's dissolution. Only

one HSS staff member—an AmeriCorps VISTA at the time—was hired to work at Harmon Collective. One funder claimed was an attempt to ensure that the “talent” issues experienced at HSS were not transferred over to Harmon Collective.

According to the official dissolution letter signed by the board chair and executive director in 2015, “the Board of Directors have decided that the mission and objectives of [Harmon Students Succeed] can be better achieved through the dissolution of the corporation and the transfer of its assets and some of its services to newly formed [Harmon Collective, Inc.]” Reflected in the dissolution letter is a list of contracts and agreements that either expired with HSS or were transferred to the new 501(c)(3), Harmon Collective. Perhaps most importantly, the outstanding scholarship liability for students who had joined the HSS scholarship program—roughly \$1.4 million—is stated to be paid out to them over the course of seven years. Remaining scholarship funds would be transferred to Harmon Collective. Additionally, \$300,000 of remaining programmatic funds were transferred to the new organization.

Harmon Collective effectively replaced HSS, but did not replicate many aspects of its organizational structure beyond the scholarship component. The board of Harmon Collective is intentionally small and comprised primarily of college presidents and CEOs who are not responsible for fundraising. Instead of applying for grants from several different corporations and foundations like HSS, Harmon Collective is funded almost entirely by the lead foundation that funded HSS. Due to a substantial increase in concentrated funding from this foundation (\$15-\$16 million total per year), the student scholarship amount increased dramatically—from \$4,000 over four years under HSS to \$20,000 over four years at Harmon Collective. The scholarship criteria remain largely the same; however, there is more flexibility to offer technical and two-year scholarships to students with above a 2.0 GPA.

In addition to a significantly larger scholarship resource pool, Harmon Collective is an explicit intermediary organization: they contract wraparound service provision to other nonprofits who already have expertise in particular areas—a role that HSS attempted to take on itself as a backbone organization. Another key distinction is its use of “rapid cycle continuous improvement,” a StriveTogether strategy for making data-driven decisions about course corrections in operations, initiatives and strategic direction. Finally, in order to maintain more separation from the school district and avoid close association with a specific superintendent, Harmon Collective pays for positions, such as scholarship coordinators and coaches, at high schools with no expectation of the district and schools to fund them.

While the new organization operates differently than HSS, it continues the same mission of college access, persistence and success. It is also similarly focused on high school juniors and seniors and postsecondary education, as opposed to a broader “cradle-to-career” pipeline. The organization still provides college coaches through the College Advising Corps, although these positions are paid for by Harmon Collective. In terms of scope, Harmon Collective works in all Harmon high schools as opposed to the limited clusters that were targeted under HSS. Extending further than HSS, the new organization also partners with organizations that provide support services to college students, rather than just high school juniors and seniors. The decision to retain or reimagine some of HSS’ organizational arrangements are reactions to its failed sustainability, which will be explored later in this chapter.

6.2 Case Narrative of Say Yes Buffalo (SYB)⁴¹

Table 7. Summary of Say Yes Buffalo (SYB) Key Characteristics

Collaboration name	Say Yes Buffalo (SYB)
Lifespan	2012-present
Geographic region	Northeast
Jurisdiction	City
Backbone	501(c)(3)
Network membership	Say Yes to Education National
Funding arrangement	Network; scholarship reserve; braided funds
Coalition strategy	Foundation-driven, “grasstops” coalition
Communications strategy	High visibility throughout city
Racial demographics*	56% white; 29% black; 8% Hispanic

*Note: Racial demographic information derived from the 2012-2016 ACS.

Origins of the Collaborative

History of creation. A history of deindustrialization and school segregation have been influential in leading local civic and philanthropic leaders in Buffalo to seek out a cross-sector collaboration model like Say Yes to Education. Additionally, low high school graduation rates—less than fifty percent in 2015—also caused concern, as leaders grew concerned that this would negatively affect local economic revitalization and deter families from moving to the area. Civic leaders and members of the business and philanthropic community had been looking for solutions to what they feared would be a mismatch in the future workforce needs of the city and its poor graduation rates and academic outcomes. Competition to become a member of the Say Yes National network—a postsecondary access and support network boasting a last-dollar scholarship model and college compact agreement with over 100 colleges—appeared to be a practical, long-term solution. According to one foundation leader who was heavily involved in the search for solutions, the Say Yes model was more appealing than other collective impact

⁴¹ Information used to build this profile was collected from interviews conducted as part of a multi-year study examining the implementation of cross-sector collaborations for education. A more detailed profile of Say Yes Buffalo can be found in its final research report: “Building Impact: A Closer Look at Cross Sector Collaborations for Education” (Riehl et al., 2019).

models, such as StriveTogether. She explained that Strive requires one to “buy a manual, buy the parts, and fix it [your]self” whereas “Say Yes is the plumber,” offering pre-structured support, guidance and \$15 million in seed funding (S9). A call between this foundation leader and an executive at Say Yes National began an 18-month process of coalition building and planning that resulted in Buffalo being named a Say Yes chapter.

Coalition building. Say Yes National had already started a chapter in Syracuse, New York, prior to Say Yes Buffalo and learned that the core requirements for the model to work included adequate fiscal capacity and civic willpower. Thus, the strength of these components in Buffalo were vetted by Say Yes National before they determined it would be a chapter. Leaders from Say Yes National convened several meetings and events with community leaders to discuss the model and gauge support. Despite a history of frequent superintendent turnover, one Say Yes National leader shared that the buy-in of the mayor, school district, teachers’ union, other public agencies and the quiet fundraising among local foundations and businesses demonstrated sufficient civic and fiscal capacity. Locally, two main foundations were responsible for coalescing partners in conversations around this work and committing their resources to the scholarship. Key players, who mostly represented “grasstops” executive and systems leaders rather than “grassroots” organizations, signed onto a proposal to make Buffalo a Say Yes chapter. Parents, students and other community members were largely left out of this initial process to ensure that key players were not overpromising on what they could deliver for the city. Prior to announcing Buffalo’s membership near the end of 2011, the national network established a local scholarship committee and required the adoption of the network’s sustainability plan and a data sharing agreement with the school district, city and county.

Following this announcement, a small planning team continued to meet to create Say Yes Buffalo, a 501(c)(3) organization, and hired its first executive director in 2012.

Mission and vision. Say Yes National requires all of its chapters to follow its overarching mission: to leverage a last-dollar tuition scholarship model and wraparound support services to remove barriers for students to access, persist and succeed in postsecondary education.⁴² Ultimately, this strategy of promised financial support and wraparound services is aimed at producing a citywide, college-going culture. To achieve this mission, Say Yes National requires its chapters to implement a specific fundraising and sustainability strategy, data sharing agreements among Say Yes and the school district, and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between partnering cross-sector agencies. In Buffalo, the mission and vision of Say Yes Buffalo (SYB) are more tailored to the local context. Specifically, the organization's mission is to strengthen the local economy through investing in the education of students who will form its future workforce through employing the Say Yes strategy.⁴³ Additionally, the SYB mission purports that its primary purpose is to convene cross-sector stakeholders to collectively work towards increasing high school and postsecondary completion rates. In a recent grant proposal shared by the executive director, SYB described its theory of action as one rooted in collective impact, with five key principles that will support postsecondary access, completion and local economic revitalization: 1) using the sustainable scholarship incentive as a lever to drive collaboration; 2) strategic collection of student data along a preschool-16 pipeline; 3) the provision of comprehensive student supports to remove barriers to high school graduation; 4) a collaborative governance structure; and 5) a plan for sustainable funding.

Organizational structure

⁴² See <https://sayyestoeducation.org/strategy/> for more information.

⁴³ See <https://sayyesbuffalo.org/about/story-mission/> for more information.

Governance bodies. The small, core group of stakeholders who worked to establish SYB following its announcement as a chapter transitioned to the highest-level governing body of the nonprofit, the Operating Committee. This committee currently consists of 17 individuals who represent the school district, public agencies, civic leadership, parent groups, higher education institutions and the philanthropic sector. At first, a leader from Say Yes National also sat on this body, but this individual no longer actively participates. The inclusion of representatives from the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization and District Parent Coordinating Council is intended to support a broad base of collective ownership over the work, rather than leaving high-level decisions up to grassroots stakeholders. Operating Committee meetings are facilitated by the SYB executive director and convene every three weeks to discuss progress to date, challenges, and opportunities related to SYB programming and operations.

One level below the Operating Committee is the Community Leadership Council (CLC), which consists of over 60 elected officials, business leaders, educators, parents, school district officials, public agency representatives, community leaders and faith leaders. While there are over 60 CLC members currently, any member of the community is welcome to attend and participate in these meetings which occur three times per year. Seven co-chairs representing different organizations and sectors lead this council, with meetings again facilitated by the SYB Executive Director. Unlike the Operating Committee, the purpose of the CLC is not to make strategic operational and programmatic decisions to support the organization's trajectory. Rather, this group serves a more symbolic purpose to SYB and is an opportunity to disseminate information on the progress and outcomes of the work to date, equip CLC members with messaging points to bring back to their communities, and provide a forum for community members to engage with SYB leaders, ask clarifying questions and share feedback.

Finally, a third governing body of SYB is its local scholarship committee consisting of business and philanthropic leaders, which was formed during the coalition building phase to calculate the funds needed over the next 25 years for eligible students to receive the last-dollar scholarship. The local scholarship committee continues to manage the upfront scholarship investments and scholarship fundraising for SYB to this day. In a 2019 follow-up interview with an SYB leader, she shared that the committee estimated the last-dollar scholarship, which is intended to close the gap between a student's financial aid awards and their college tuition bill, required \$130 million in fundraising for the endowment by 2024.

Staff roles and responsibilities. SYB has expanded dramatically since its inception in 2011. The backbone organization had grown to 20 fulltime professional staff in 2016 and as of January 2020, boasts over 80 staff members (including a few interns and volunteers).⁴⁴ On the Leadership Team, there are 10 core staff members who lead administrative operations and programmatic initiatives. Examples of key leadership team members include the SYB executive director, the senior director of community schools, the senior director for development and strategic partnership, and the senior director for operations and communications. The executive director, who has remained at SYB since 2012, is the main liaison with Say Yes National and responsible for relationship-building with cross-sector stakeholders in the community. With the exception of soon adopting the Say Yes National Postsecondary Pathway Analytics data platform and maintaining consistency with the Say Yes National mission, the SYB leadership team has a great degree of local autonomy in determining priorities, executing a local communications strategy and expanding its programmatic work.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed description of each of the 80 staff members' roles, visit <https://sayyesbuffalo.org/about/team/>.

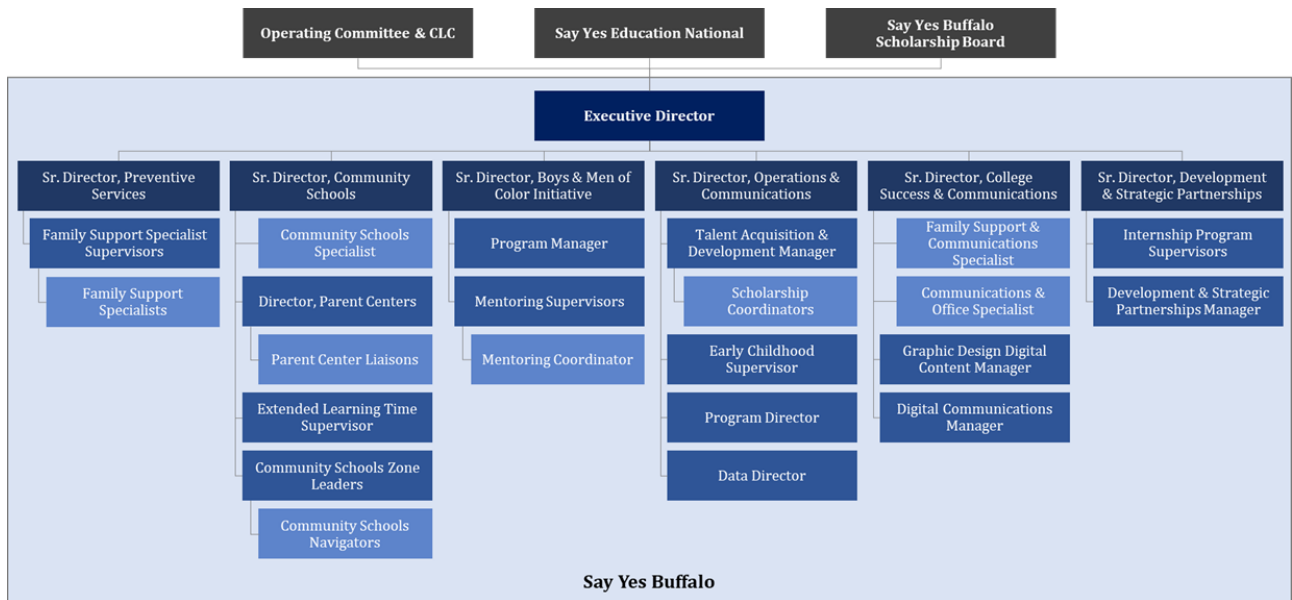
On the Administrative Team, there are 13 staff members who are largely responsible for supervising and executing the logistics of the programmatic work at SYB. The Preventive Services Team houses 23 staff members, many of whom are Family Support Specialists (FSSs) who work with a caseload of students needing behavioral support and intervention services in high schools. These FSSs are responsible for working with school personnel to identify students in need of such supports, refer them to available school-based services (e.g., school-based mental health clinics), and create a plan for each struggling student. The Home Health Team, which overlaps with members of the Preventive Services Team, is a newer addition to SYB and involves health home coordinators who provide targeted supports for a caseload of students who have two chronic health conditions, such as HIV. Many of the FSSs have transitioned to this role and schools now have a mixture of FSSs in schools doing preventive care on certain days and home health coordinators covering other school days.

The most recent team added to SYB is the Community Schools Team, which formed as a result of a state grant won in 2016 to support Buffalo becoming a community school district, with SYB serving as the facilitator of the work. The team consists of three community school zone leaders who report to the senior director of community schools. These zone leaders supervise community school navigators in their geographic purview—one per school—who coordinate non-academic, wraparound services and community school initiatives onsite at elementary, middle and high schools. Currently, there are 20 community school navigators listed on SYB's website; however, in a 2019 follow-up interview with an SYB leader, she noted that they have hired an individual to fill this position at all Buffalo Public Schools.

Another essential role at SYB comes in the form of various task forces responsible for planning and supporting key programmatic areas, as well as serving as a mouthpiece for the

consistent messaging of SYB work. A Legal Task Force supports the planning and expansion of SYB legal clinics, which a Mental Health Task Force does in parallel for the SYB mental health clinics. An Afterschool Task Force and Scholarship Task Force also exist, with the latter focused on disseminating information to community members about the scholarship program. A Religious Task Force comprised of faith leaders continues to be a mechanism for SYB to connect with the broader community, as these leaders are essentially ambassadors that share information about the scholarship, wraparound services and are trained to answer clarifying questions about SYB programming. Each task force consists of volunteers who represent community organizations and service providers, organized by an SYB staff member. A representative from each of these task forces usually sits on the Operating Committee, providing strategic input for the direction of the work.

Figure 6. SYB Management Hierarchy and Partnership Map



Initiatives. The last-dollar college tuition scholarship is the most visible initiative of SYB and one of the clearest incentives for cross-sector collaboration. It was the focus of the SYB chapter announcement to the public and the core part of initial messaging about SYB. Each year since the program's inception, the number of students who meet eligibility criteria and apply for the scholarship has increased. In addition to the scholarship program, SYB offers a number of wraparound support initiatives intended to remove barriers to postsecondary access and success. Such initiatives include: after school programming; legal clinics; mental health clinics; summer programming related to college access; a Boys & Men of Color initiative; early childhood development services; preventive services related to behavioral health; health home coordination; a college transition network; an internship and career pathways program; and facilitation of the community school model in Buffalo. Together, these wraparound initiatives are meant to address student needs along the continuum of a pre-kindergarten through postsecondary completion pipeline.

Nearly all of the aforementioned initiatives are in partnership with coalitions and organizations that have been involved in the work prior to the existence of SYB. The Boys & Men of Color initiative, for example, is in partnership with the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, which has focused on increasing the capacity of boys and men of color through empowerment, capacity building and targeted cradle-to-career supports. The school-based mental health clinics are also in partnership with longstanding mental health care agencies that employ experienced and licensed clinicians. Further, the early childhood development initiative is in partnership with a local university and CBO that have a wealth of child development community resources and are now offering free developmental screenings for children. Similarly, the SYB legal clinics partner with local attorneys to provide free legal advice at

schools around the city. Some initiatives, such as the internship and career pathways initiative, coalesce a new set of partners around a different agenda to provide workforce opportunities for SYB students. With the exception of facilitating the newer community schools work—essentially an expansion of SYB’s expertise in convening partners and facilitating wraparound service provision—SYB staff generally rely on the expertise of their partners.

Network membership. Becoming a Say Yes chapter involves substantially more fiscal support (\$15 million in seed funding from the network) and prescriptive guidance to members than other cross-sector collaboration networks, like StriveTogether. The large amount of seed funding comes from the background of the Say Yes National CEO, who previously held a career in finance. The grants, charitable contributions and investment money supporting the national network are more substantial than many cross-sector collaboration networks—roughly \$35 million in net assets according to its latest 2016 IRS 990 filing. Say Yes National requires its chapters to adopt a citywide change strategy, its theory of action, a comprehensive data system tracking indicators along a postsecondary access pipeline,⁴⁵ and its scholarship investment and sustainability strategy to fund last-dollar college tuition scholarships in perpetuity. Becoming a Say Yes chapter is a competitive process and the network exercises a large degree of scrutiny in determining which cities have the appropriate fiscal capacity and community leadership in place to support the implementation of the strategy. Once deemed a chapter, the national network prescribes a set of wraparound services that can remove barriers to high school graduation and postsecondary access. After the first five years or so, the national network withdraws most of its implementation oversight and allows leaders of its local chapters more autonomy in decision-making around these services, programs and other operational matters. As was the case with

⁴⁵ As of December 2019, this data system--Postsecondary Pathway Analytics--had yet to be fully completed and was not yet being used by Say Yes Buffalo.

SYB, the national network also funds core backbone staff positions at its chapter sites until the organizations are able to do so themselves.

Data use. Data-driven decision-making is a core function of SYB derived from the national Say Yes model. At the time of the 2015-2016 interviews with SYB stakeholders, a Say Yes National data system was still being created to track academic, health, behavioral and attendance data on individual students. The purpose of this system—now called Postsecondary Pathway Analytics—was to link student-level data from the district with Family Support Specialists (FSSs), select SYB staff and some school personnel who could use the platform for student case management and decision-making about the effectiveness of interventions. Overall, the data system was being developed to track key indicators along the postsecondary access pipeline. Common to many cross-sector collaborations seeking to build centralized data systems, some teacher resistance and technical challenges with creating the database stalled the completion and deployment of the tool. According to a 2019 follow-up interview with a Say Yes National leader, the data system will be fully operational and available to SYB in 2020.

Since the data system has yet to be implemented in Buffalo, SYB stakeholders have relied on partnering with researchers to cull data from a number of sources, including: Buffalo Public Schools; the City of Buffalo; Erie County; the New York State Department of Education (NYSDE); the National Student Clearinghouse; and eScholarship, a database used by Say Yes National to track outcomes related to college persistence for its chapters. These outcomes and indicators were jointly determined by the Operating Committee and CLC, with an eye towards the best practices suggested by prior research. Measurable outcomes from these sources include: English and Math proficiency; high school attendance; high school graduation; suspension; postsecondary matriculation; and postsecondary graduation, all of which are included in an

annual, public report card on SYB's progress. Data on outcomes and programmatic indicators (e.g., the rate of participation in an after school program) are presented at CLC meetings to create a sense of transparency and accountability to the public. Outcome and programmatic data are also made available through an online dashboard. Data on the scholarship endowment and the internal health of the organization are generally reported in Operating Committee meetings. To guide SYB leaders' understanding of when and where to course correct, data are presented as part of a logic model (a visual framework) linking partners with activities, outputs and outcomes.

Funding. Say Yes National has specific financial strategy that all its citywide chapters must follow that includes an initial seed funding amount of \$15 million to fund: 1) the financial analytics that must be completed in order for its chapters to gain membership; 2) the establishment of core partnership and operations to get its chapter 501(c)(3) organization running; 3) the initial implementation of wraparound support services for students; and 4) deployment of the network's Postsecondary Pathway Analytics system. The financial analytics include a fundraising feasibility analysis to ensure the city has sufficient fundraising prospects for the Say Yes scholarship over the next 25 years. A local scholarship committee of business and philanthropic leaders is assembled to calculate the funds needed over the next 25 years to support eligible students for the scholarship based on a number of criteria. A Higher Education Compact between Say Yes to Education and several universities further supports Say Yes scholars by providing them tuition discounts. Chapter sites are then expected to be able to raise roughly sixty percent of these funds through a "quiet" fundraising phase. Say Yes National also requires its chapters to agree to an audit of public agencies to identify dollars that could be reallocated for Say Yes purposes.

In Buffalo, the local scholarship committee has raised roughly \$30 million for the endowment to date. Based on the aforementioned tuition gap calculations and student enrollment projections, the local committee determined they needed to raise another \$100 million to provide the scholarship in perpetuity, which would be managed by the local community foundation. According to one SYB development leader, after reaching the \$100 million, SYB will transition to fundraising regularly to cover the backbone.

Say Yes National has continued to pay the salaries of five SYB backbone staff to date, including the executive director. The network, which held nearly \$35 million in net assets in 2016 according to its IRS 990 filing form, has the fiscal capacity to offer this type of support. Starting in 2021, the responsibility for these salaries will be transitioned to SYB. In a 2019 follow-up interview with one SYB leader, he reported that the backbone organization leverages braided funding to support its staff salaries, operations and programming. Short-term grants constitute only a small portion of these funds, with nearly all the programmatic work being funded by public agencies and built into their budgets as line items. As of 2016, SYB's IRS 990 filing form indicates that the backbone received just over \$2.6 million in total gifts, grants and contributions to pay for other staff salaries and operational expenses, with net assets of roughly \$3.6 million. While SYB initially supported the implementation of its wraparound programming, over the years, it has transitioned this responsibility to the public agencies and organizations with which it partners. District, city, county, state and federal funding streams are all being leveraged to support the mental health clinics, preventive and home health coordination services, after school and summer programming, the Boys & Men of Color initiative and the community schools facilitation work, among other initiatives.

6.3 Comparative Analysis of Harmon Students Succeed and Say Yes Buffalo

Of all the cross-sector collaboration pairs in this study, Say Yes Buffalo (SYB) and Harmon Students Succeed (HSS) have the most closely aligned missions and visions. Similar to SYB, HSS aspired to improve the economic wellbeing of its city through a scholarship program and range of support services aimed at helping students successfully graduate. Both the cities of Harmon and Buffalo have suffered from low graduation rates and particularly poor outcomes for their students of color. Further, SYB and HSS are affiliates of national graduation networks that required them to meet a number of criteria in exchange for financial and technical implementation support from the network. As was the case with the Students Succeed network, Say Yes to Education National has allowed a large degree of local autonomy in operating the collaborative throughout the years. In general, both collaboratives have also benefited from the fundraising support of a couple of key foundations.

These commonalities aside, there are key differences in how HSS and SYB approach their work that are consequential to their survival. Through interviews and document analysis, it became clear that the specific criteria of the models they followed, the funding arrangements they pursued, the backbone and governance models they chose, and the ways in which they leveraged data to build stakeholder buy-in and create a narrative about their work were different in important ways. Unique to my dead cases, the survival prospects of HSS were most clearly affected by the unfolding of one critical event. Exploring the differences in the strategies employed by the two organizations within the context of this critical event sheds light on a number of lessons about how HSS could have protected itself from closure. The end of 2019 was a particularly interesting time to undertake this analysis and conduct follow-up interviews with SYB and Say Yes National stakeholders, as SYB is nearing the end of its original 10-year

implementation plan in 2021. It was near the 10-year mark that the sustainability and institutionalization plans of HSS fell through with the district and funders, in large part because of a cheating scandal that the organization was not built or equipped to recover from. As explored below, there may be lessons from the structure and approach of SYB that could have led HSS to an alternate outcome, regardless of the scandal.

The Aftermath of the “Scandal”

“Anything related to [the superintendent] seemed like it had to go, and [Harmon Students Succeed] was that last thing that was related to her...so it was like when there was no more [superintendent], there was no more [Harmon Students Succeed]. It died with her.”

- HSS middle manager

The 2009 “scandal” in Harmon was a highly public event that gained national attention because it was emblematic of a broader problem in the age of educational accountability: teachers in Harmon Public Schools had been changing students’ standardized test scores in order to show improvement that would ostensibly guarantee their job stability. The immediate result of the perception of improvement was praise for the district leadership and its teachers, as well as praise for the superintendent’s signature initiative: Harmon Students Succeed (HSS). Many of the district’s schools had adopted HSS as their “reform” model, and its package of reading and math interventions, classroom management interventions and graduation support services was perceived as a major success based on the improved test scores. Shortly after HSS received this praise, suspicion began to build about the likelihood of such dramatic improvement within a short timeframe, prompting a state investigation and the eventual indictment of the superintendent and several teachers at nearly all of the district’s schools. Every stakeholder I interviewed about HSS brought up this scandal as the primary reason for the organization’s closure. Several HSS staff claimed this critical event had an impact on the organization that

could not have been anticipated; however, findings from interviews with both HSS and SYB stakeholders suggest it could have been mitigated by alternate organizational arrangements.

It matters who owns the work. One of the most significant factors that made HSS vulnerable to attack following the scandal was its perception as “the baby” of the former superintendent, who circumvented the typical coalition building process and directly appealed to corporate and philanthropic funders to support the work. According to the first HSS director, one of her requirements for becoming the district superintendent was that “she be allowed to implement [HSS] as a reform initiative” (H14). Thus, from the very beginning, she was perceived as the champion and face of HSS. Accordingly, HSS was perceived as the district’s main reform strategy. When the superintendent resigned following the scandal, the interim superintendent was charged with repairing the reputation of the school district. Two former HSS leaders and the interim superintendent referred to his main task as eliminating the taint of the former superintendent. While no interviewees claimed there was a direct connection between the scandal and the new superintendent’s de-prioritization and subsequent elimination of the HSS department at the district, the interim superintendent explained in an interview that he did not understand the purpose of housing HSS both at the district and at a nonprofit. He argued that he had more pressing financial and academic matters to deal with than HSS and eliminated the district’s HSS department because of “resource allocation” and “needs associated with the new direction of the district” (H19). Three stakeholders involved in the transition from HSS to its successor organization, Harmon Collective, explained that the separation from the school district and superintendent were built into their new model, so that the new organization would always operate as an external entity not dependent on the politics of the district.

HSS struggled to survive after the scandal because its identity was so entangled with the reputation of the former superintendent: it was described by a former HSS leader as the main talking point of the superintendent at community-facing events. However, the sparse community engagement or coalition building efforts among a broader base of community, school and district partners failed to create a sense of shared ownership of HSS. At SYB, this problem has been largely avoided due to intentional, local coalition building among the city, local philanthropies, businesses and community organizations in competing for the chance to become a Say Yes chapter. This coalition building process and the cultivation of widespread support did not hinge on the buy-in of the superintendent position, which experienced frequent turnover in Buffalo. Shared by a leader from the Say Yes national network, “there is always a superintendent transition in Buffalo” and “through all these transitions, it’s the [Say Yes] governance structure that’s kept this thing on track, and the ownership across sectors and the way they’re brought together” (S2). Unlike HSS, SYB was designed to withstand the spinning wheels of superintendent-driven reforms by operating as an external entity from the school district.

Quiet and loud stages of SYB coalition building and engagement. The distinct coalition building strategy to become a Say Yes chapter began quietly amongst the grassroots leaders of local foundations, businesses, public agencies and a handful of CBOs. The quietness of this initial approach was intended to avoid demoralizing the public in the case that Say Yes National did not determine that all the elements needed to make the local chapter a success were aligned. After support among these key stakeholders was committed and fundraising and sustainability plans were put in place (described in *Could the SYB funding and sustainability strategy survived such a scandal?* section below), grassroots leaders, such as religious leaders, the head of a district parent group and leaders from smaller CBOs were brought into the fold.

The widespread branding efforts that took place once SYB was revealed publicly formed the first step in building collective ownership of the initiative and a shared understanding of its value proposition to the city.

With some support from Say Yes National, a local communications strategy was implemented that focused first and foremost on the scholarship promise, which is what four SYB partners and one SYB leader referred to as the “north star” of the initiative. These individuals described the scholarship as a tangible incentive that helped garner buy-in from the community. As purported by one SYB leader, “without the promise of that scholarship, the rest of this would not be happening” (S1). Consistent use of key words like “hope” in interviews—echoed by several interviewed stakeholders as the main value add of SYB—further indicated a consistent messaging of SYB. The current mayor asserted that SYB made it clear through promotion of the scholarship program that students had the “opportunity to attend and complete college regardless of their financial circumstances” (S4). Other wraparound services and programming provided by SYB were known amongst some key stakeholders, but at the onset, widespread support was predicated on the high visibility of the scholarship component.

Sharing stories about the work was a key component of the initial communications strategy. According to the current mayor, it was essential that Say Yes “market aggressively” when it came to stories of hope and opportunity (S1). Part of this marketing has manifested in billboards across the city, banners and other branded materials visible in schools. More importantly, SYB has and continues to employ task forces, such as the Religious Leaders Task Force, to disseminate information about the cross-sector collaboration’s work and in particular, about the scholarship. Members of this task force disseminate information about SYB’s benefits to students and families and dispel rumors and misinformation about the initiative. According to

the SYB scholarship director, SYB held a couple of “train-the-trainer” sessions that religious leaders attended. In these sessions, each one of the SYB department directors provided an in-depth orientation of their specific program areas. Afterwards, leaders would share this information with their churches and communities, in addition to some SYB brochures and other materials. This strategy was implemented to garner trust in SYB and differentiate it from the school district leadership, which religious leaders believed parents in their communities had historically distrusted. Through these outreach efforts to inform community members about their programming, SYB has been able to fold in its identity, branding and messaging about its value.

In a follow-up interview with one SYB leader in 2019, the most recent iteration of this strategy involves an expansion of the SYB communications team. The new team members include a new communications director, a graphic designer responsible for producing SYB materials and handling their social media presence, a team member responsible for creating podcasts and video materials for social media, and a part-time writer. As of December 2019, the same SYB leader claimed that the common narrative being told by the communications team is consistent with their messaging during the first years of implementation, but with more emphasis on its wraparound programs. According to this leader and aligning with how information about SYB is presented on their website, the organization is loud about their work, but quiet about claiming credit. This communications and credit sharing strategy have helped build a broad base of support for SYB that would be difficult to dismantle if an unanticipated event were to break out at the district or city level.

Formal and informal SYB collaborative governance. In addition to its communications and engagement strategies, the collaborative governance structure of SYB, regardless of the depth of participation of stakeholders, creates at a minimum an aura of shared

responsibility and ownership. The Operating Committee functions as a board-level group for SYB and includes a small number of strategic stakeholders, including school board members, a representative of the district parent coordinating council, a Say Yes national representative, county agency leaders, the superintendent (who does not always attend), the local chief of police, a state college president and the leader of a local foundation. In October 2015, I had the opportunity to sit in on one of these meetings and observed that they were largely driven by the agenda of the SYB executive director, who would then solicit feedback on data, the implementation of programs and sustainability issues. It was not clear if these decisions were being made collectively; however, it was clear that the opinions and feedback of those attending were heard and taken seriously by the SYB director. These biweekly meetings are an important means of building trust and shared ownership, so that the continuance of the work is not dependent on the transition of any one individual.

Additionally, the Say Yes national network calls for a Community Leadership Council (CLC), which consists of a broader array of local community stakeholders who meet three times a year to inform the public about SYB services, programs and data. The CLC is a symbolic representation of the shared ownership SYB tries to cultivate across sectors; even though the group is largely advisory to the staff and the board of directors and does not participate in decision-making, these meetings create a sense of transparency about the work. According to one SYB leader, unless “the entire Operating Committee gets wiped out by a tornado,” it would be difficult to unravel the collective ownership built through these governance bodies (S3). They are opportunities to keep stakeholders engaged, solicit feedback and gain trust and legitimacy.

Aside from these formal governance structures, there are other ways in which SYB builds trust with cross-sector partners and in particular, the school district. SYB is a backbone

organization that has only recently involved itself more directly in providing wraparound support services to Buffalo Public School (BPS) students. Stakeholders described SYB as a facilitator responsible for bringing different partners together who already have expertise in certain areas, more so than executers of the ground-level work. This also contributes to a sense of shared responsibility with the other organizations and individuals contracted to carry out programmatic services (e.g., the Family Support Specialists). According to one district leader, the leaders of SYB have been able to build trust with the district through making it very clear that they have “no interest in governing the school district” (S13). The transparency of SYB work, through the inclusion of district staff on the Operating Committee and CLC, have been an opportunity to reinforce this message by SYB. Moreover, SYB leaders are careful about how they ask the district to engage with SYB. The backbone organization does not ask the district to make major changes to its operational structure, but provides tools (e.g., an SYB student data collection system) and resources (e.g., partnering with the county to leverage public dollars for the Family Support Specialists) to school-level staff to support the programmatic work associated with their graduation pipeline. One district stakeholder summarized this relationship succinctly:

[We've] got to be a completely open, transparent, very giving, and integrated partnership with Say Yes because they're the ones bringing assets to us. We're not bringing anything to them. They're self-funded, they're independent, they're fully operational apart from the district. We're the ones receiving all of the benefit; we have to be a suitable vessel for all that. So I took that as a really important part of my mission, and still do. So then on the scholarship side, I was involved in making sure that school counselors, that's one of my departments, did what they had to do and that type of collaboration took place. (S13)

This stakeholder believed that the relationship between SYB and the district was one that sought to improve the effectiveness of the district and its schools, but not one that aimed to take over and reform them. A teachers' union leader argued that many superintendents and board members would normally guard the district from this kind of outside interference, but the persistence and

charisma of the SYB director in working with new superintendents in a non-aggressive way has “managed to bridge that” (S16). The result, according to the union leader, is that “not too many people link Say Yes with anything political, one way or another” (S16). Thus, these governance structures and careful approaches to trust-building with the school district protected SYB from some of the suspicion and rejection of outside help. Simultaneously, they helped demonstrate a clear value proposition that was politically-neutral and distinct from the core work of the district. Had HSS been able to take a similar, collaborative governance approach to build broad-based, collective ownership while maintaining some independence from the school district, it may have been able to survive the aftermath of the scandal.

The Role of Funding Arrangements in Sustaining HSS and SYB

“Funders started pulling away like we had leprosy...especially after the indictments hit.”
- HSS leader

Funder scrutiny and revisited value propositions. The association of the former Harmon Public Schools superintendent with the scandal tainted more than just HSS. A local education fund, which had been set up in 2010 to fundraise on behalf of education improvement organizations such as HSS, was also closely tied to her name. This fund had promised to raise money for HSS, which made the board’s and director’s role of fundraising less critical. Shortly after the scandal indictments in 2013, the fund was shut down, leaving HSS to take on the role of fundraising—a role its leaders had been stepping away from. Not only did the scandal disrupt the expectation of HSS leaders that money would flow through this local fund; it appeared to diminish the taken-for-granted legitimacy of HSS, putting its financial health, programmatic goals, results and leadership under heightened scrutiny by funders. What was the true value proposition of HSS? Were they actually fulfilling their stated mission according to their results? Was HSS the type of organization that the city of Harmon needed?

According to all of the HSS funders interviewed, two consultants and the third HSS executive director, HSS had been struggling with fundraising in the years leading up to the scandal, but was well-known and respected in the philanthropic community. However, one funder shared that HSS “had gotten weaker over time” and struggled to have an impact in the community (H5). This foundation had partnered with another HSS-supporting foundation to commission a study on HSS in 2012—one year after the first scandal indictments—which found that “only about 14% of students who started in ninth grade ultimately get a college degree,” suggesting that HSS was not making a large enough impact on this issue in Harmon. A representative from a different foundation funding HSS explained that their dwindling operational grant support to HSS was related to the weakness of their strategic plan, evaluation systems, board leadership and management. Specifically, this funder shared that the Board “was not diverse,” the organization “was not doing fund evaluation” and “was just sloppy” about how it was tracking its students, the scholarship funds and long-term outcomes (H4).

Similarly, two representatives from another foundation that eventually stopped funding HSS stated that in their 2014 audit of HSS, the organization’s annual operating budget—aside from its scholarship reserve—was down to just over one million dollars, echoing other funders’ sentiments that this “made them appear weak” (H10; H11). A consultant who was hired to do a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis in 2013 identified a clearer articulation of how the organization would deliver on its value proposition to funders as an opportunity to win back its funders and create more consistency with their programming, which had gone through various contractions and expansions throughout the years.

When the third executive director was brought on board as an interim in 2013, she confirmed that many of these funders’ concerns were legitimate. She claimed that after

reviewing financial documents and attending board meetings, she found that the second director had been misrepresenting the organization's financial health to board members, funders and internal staff. In an interview, the third director claimed that there were three separate "books" being presented to each of these groups that she believed was an intentional way to obfuscate the poor financial health of the organization. She stated:

I was just looking over records, you know, reports. And so we called a conference call with the executive committee of the Board, the executive director who was leaving, and me, who hadn't started full-time yet, and we had a conversation with her. And because she'd been explaining these books the way she had for so long, she continued to explain it that way, and because the board knew her, they were trying to figure out what *I* was talking about, as if I didn't know what I was talking about. But then after she'd left, they all came to realize that there wasn't the amount of money that they thought....she wanted it to look like a very successfully run organization. (H2)

In an interview with the second executive director, she conversely asserted that HSS had in fact become a stable and sustainable organization by the time she left. When asked if there was dwindling support from donors during her leadership, she claimed that they "expanded [their] net afterward, not just by more donors but also by the dollar amount" (H6). Contradicting this statement, a former consultant for HSS described how she was hired to help with fundraising during the second executive director's term—a role which lasted through the third executive director's tenure. Her contract was to help HSS identify funding sources, establish a fundraising plan aimed at raising money for annual operating costs from its historical funders, and conduct the 2012 "feasibility study" to determine how much funding the organization could raise through an organized capital campaign. Corroborating the accounts of this consultant and the second executive director, a representative from a major foundation funder shared that "[HSS] was bleeding money" by the time the second executive director left (H4). According to a 2012 grant report from another funder, HSS had been withdrawing funds from its scholarship reserve to cover operational costs. These accounts suggest that the closure of the local education fund and

the association with the scandal were not the only explanations for the financial instability of HSS. Other organizational shortcomings, such as a lack of qualified fundraising staff and poor data tracking, had been depleting the organization's resources for years while putting them in an increasingly grant-dependent relationship with the funders who had historically supported them. Ultimately, what the scandal did was magnify the funders' focus on HSS, leading many of them to revisit its viability. As other scholars have theorized (Jepperson, 1991), the political scandal involving the superintendent was a large enough external shock to HSS to unravel its institutional status, revealing the ways in which it had not evolved to keep up with its mission.

In 2014, rather than focus on fundraising strategies, the main foundation donor supporting HSS informed the board that they would only provide enough funding to transition HSS into a new organizational entity with a similar mission. A leader from the foundation determined that they wanted to centralize their scholarship funding under one agency and start fresh with a "new brand" that had a clearer scope, theory of action and value proposition for the community (H5). A former board chair explained that after conversations with funders, they realized that they did not have the fiscal capacity to sustain the work and that closing HSS "was a less difficult [decision] than you would imagine" (H20). However, one HSS leader expressed a feeling of betrayal with what felt like an abrupt decision, stating, "I left with a very bad taste in my mouth because at the end of the day, honestly, I felt like I was carjacked. But these are the funders that run this city in terms of philanthropy" (H8). When HSS transitioned to its successor organization, the board configuration and funding arrangement also changed. The new organization is funded primarily by one foundation, is not expected to fundraise, only partners with organizations for direct service and programmatic work, does not expect the school district

to contribute financially to the new partnership, and has a significantly smaller Board (six members total) that excludes district representation.

Could the SYB funding and sustainability strategy survived such a scandal? SYB has the most unique and intentional long-term funding and sustainability strategy of the six cases included in this study—one that is largely dictated by the national network. Two Say Yes National leaders explained that the purpose of the Say Yes fundraising and sustainability strategy is to avoid the historical dependency on the three-year grant model, a lesson learned from prior experience with comprehensive school reform efforts. As explained by one Say Yes National leader, “for a long time you’ve had ‘stop and start’ grant programs, so, funded for three years, grant goes away, service goes away. We’re trying to stay out of a grant-funding cycle. So in fact, we don’t apply for grants. We want these sustained in budget lines in perpetuity” (S2). In lieu of short-term grants, the Say Yes National model relies on the long-term strategic investment of committed philanthropic dollars and the realignment of public dollars.

The “pre-launch” process begins with prospective Say Yes sites going through a rigorous fundraising and sustainability planning process facilitated by a leader from the national network. As described in their pre-launch guide for their newest site—Cleveland, Ohio—Say Yes National requires sites to commission a fundraising feasibility study to determine fundraising prospects over the next 25 years for their Say Yes student scholarship. Prospective donors then agree on a target goal and begin a “quiet” phase of fundraising that is followed by a public fundraising phase the ensuing year. The national network requires the local site to raise 60% of the scholarship funds before they can announce they are a Say Yes chapter. In order to receive seed capital investment from the national network, prospective sites must develop a financial model that includes both cost and revenue estimates. After determining the total number of

eligible students for the scholarship (based on local scholarship committee criteria), a tuition gap calculation, and future projections of college enrollment rates, a local scholarship committee makes recommendations about the total funds needed over a 25-year period. Each local Say Yes chapter is also expected to calculate an expected return on assets over the 25 years.

By the time of launch, Say Yes chapters have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and data sharing agreements negotiated with the school district, in addition to the aforementioned analytics, to reduce the margin for error. Uniquely, the memoranda of understanding are based on commitment to the *theory of action* rather than a commitment to reaching targeted outcomes within a certain timeframe. Once being deemed a Say Yes chapter, Say Yes national provides \$15 million in seed capital to its local chapters. Additionally, the national network provides facilitation, analytical expertise and staffing support. As part of their analytic expertise, Say Yes national requires the collaboration of local public entities—such as the city, county and school district—to understand public spending patterns, identify opportunities and better align dollars to Say Yes services in public schools. After five years of close collaboration and constant reevaluation with the national network, each Say Yes chapter is responsible for taking full ownership of the effort, including the collaborative governance structure, wraparound services and the sustainability of the scholarship endowment.

In Buffalo, the national network hired a firm to conduct a financial audit of the school district and county to figure out how to strategically leverage public dollars over the long-run. According to one community foundation leader, this was a very delicate task that was made easier by the transition of county leadership to an individual who did not feel ownership of their “predecessor’s books” (S9). Unlike HSS, by engaging in this collaborative process and providing the audit for the county and district, SYB was able to better understand how it could leverage

different federal, state and local government funding streams in support of Say Yes school services. However, two interviewees—one leader from SYB and one leader from Say Yes national—shared conflicting accounts about the value of these public sector audits. According to a leader from Say Yes national, the audit helped SYB discover that they could leverage county dollars for a Family Support Specialist (FSS) role that fit the criteria for those earmarked dollars. This leader claimed that the “money was basically just sitting there from the state” (S2). Conversely, in a 2019 follow-up interview with an SYB leader, he shared that the FSS funding through the county came to be through collaboration separate from the financial audit. He drew a distinction between the usefulness of the audit conducted by the network and the collaboration with public agencies to realign resources:

I think the district's perspective was the [audit] findings weren't fungible dollars that could be transferred to other areas. Same thing with the county, and that never went public. You can tap into underspending, but it might be dedicated and often is for a certain service. It doesn't mean you can just pull it and do child welfare work or family support specialist work with it. My contract might be four million but, let's say, those are the only two positions open because they're the only two people that left. I might be at \$3.8 million now. The \$200,000 isn't wasted county dollars. It's not dollars you can just go grab to do something else with. It's just a natural variance you have from operations. I would just say when you talk report sustainability, etcetera, I just think what's always missing from these things is the real factors of the financial component to running a nonprofit, which is complex, and just looking at a document to saying, ‘I'm going to go in and do an audit,’ isn't always necessarily the right approach to take. (S1)

From this leader’s perspective, the financial audit was not as effective in identifying fungible dollars that could be reallocated for Say Yes purposes. However, he did provide examples of how the collaboration with the school district and county was helpful in identifying funds that could support their work. A concrete example is the collaboration between SYB and the district to win a community school district grant from the state in 2016, which led to new funding streams for the district that further supported SYB work in its schools. This is yet another example of how SYB has embedded its programming into public budgets.

The goal of HSS was also to institutionalize its work through embedding it in the school district budget; however, it did this by completely offloading the responsibility to the district instead of collaborating with district leaders to align the right resources. As such, it never really acted as a conduit between HSS and the district; it relied on the championing of the superintendent to keep it alive and prioritized. Moreover, SYB is strategic about institutionalizing its work by embedding it into several public budgets, diversifying the public agencies through which it hopes to achieve this. As of 2019 (eight years into the work), SYB mental health clinics and home health coordination are supported by seed funding from a private health insurance company and longer-term Medicaid funding, the school FSSs are county- and city-funded, afterschool programming is supported by the district, and summer programming is a blended model of foundation, city, county and school district dollars. To date, the only major initiative still supported by SYB are the legal clinics.

This leveraging of public sector support has created less dependency on short-term philanthropic grants to operate the backbone, something that HSS was unable to accomplish by involving most of its funders in only the scholarship campaign. As will be discussed in *The Role of Data in Sustaining HSS and SYB* section, their dependency on philanthropic dollars meant that they eventually had to fulfill grant criteria that they were not internally equipped to meet due to poor data tracking and talent issues. SYB, on the other hand, has largely avoided this type of grant dependency by braiding funding streams to support the backbone work. Currently, only about seven percent of the backbone work is funded by short-term grants (\$775,000 out of \$7.5 million as of December 2019). Their embeddedness in public budgets, the upfront commitment of philanthropic dollars and strategic investment for the scholarship and the diversification of

funding streams have helped SYB avoid the pressure-cooker situation that HSS found itself in after years of struggling to come up with a sustainable funding arrangement.

SYB's funding and sustainability strategy may have increased HSS's chance of surviving the scandal by limiting the scrutiny and claims that funders could make to rationalize reducing their support. At HSS, the lack of local fundraising expertise and minimal financial support from the national network created challenges once it came time to funding the backbone operations. Further, the lack of a firewall between programming, operations and the scholarship reserve resulted in HSS leaders withdrawing scholarship funds to support its other two pillars. Since HSS only focused on institutionalizing the work within the school district, it only took one superintendent turnover after the scandal to eliminate HSS from the district and school budgets. Conversely, by its sixth year of operation (2019), SYB has managed to scale the backbone work and transition nearly all of its programmatic costs to sustainable public sources.

The Role of Data in Sustaining HSS and SYB

When data fail to support the narrative. HSS had been experiencing internal dysfunction that became business-as-usual prior to the 2009 scandal, compromising the internal stability of the organization. One of the most significant organizational dysfunctions came to light in an interview with the third executive director, who described inflated role titles that did not describe the work being performed by the individuals filling those positions. She explained that after she was brought on board, there were few, if any, internal accountability mechanisms to ensure that individuals were fulfilling their responsibilities. For example, she described a "Director of Partnerships" position when there were in fact no partners that HSS was collaborating with at the time, the school district aside. She described another individual with an "important sounding job title" who spent part of the work day completing a postsecondary

degree and several others who did not have the credentials or skills to match their positions (H2). This role inflation was indicative of a larger problem, which was the very loose coupling of roles, responsibilities and tasks that appeared to be divorced from a clear theory of action linked to operational and outcome data.

When asking HSS backbone stakeholders to speak more specifically about the use of data and how they would operationalize the organization's mission and goals, there appeared to be a gap in documenting and envisioning the steps for how this would occur. Similar to the aforementioned concerns raised by funders, HSS staff did not appear to be accustomed to tracking detailed information about operations and linking their activities with outcomes. Only one HSS middle manager could provide an example of internal operational data used to adjust the HSS strategy, referring to a "balanced scorecard" spreadsheet that was implemented near the end of 2012. The scorecard includes columns for the goals, goal measures, strategy alignment and the goal owner (e.g., the Board or particular individuals). In 2013, the scorecard only included 12 goals total across internal operations and programmatic outcomes. Internal goals included four related to finances and fundraising and one vague goal related to internal process controls, which was to be measured by "ensur[ing] proper internal business processes and controls are in place as evidenced by the achievement of an unqualified audit opinion from an external auditor each year." No process indicators or details about *how* these goals would be operationalized was documented in the scorecard. Programmatic goals, such as increasing high school graduation rates, GPA, completion of the HSS summer institute, the number of scholarship recipients, college enrollment, persistence and graduation were also listed.

The scorecard was expanded in 2014 after various consultants were brought in to include a broader array of 85 programmatic and organizational goals. More detailed operational goals

related to staff satisfaction, staff support and staff feedback are included in this version. Additionally, six “Data Collection and Management” goals were introduced into the 2014 version, but five of these goals were simply related to tracking student participation in HSS programs. Although the 2014 scorecard reflects a more extensive planning of goals with more detailed descriptions of how progress would be measured, the scorecard from this year coincides with an external assessment of HSS and plans from its primary funder to transition the organization to the Harmon Collective. Thus, the 2014 scorecard may have simply reflected an effort to guide the work of the transition more than accomplish goals for the following year.

In a 2015 “Current State Assessment and Recommendations” report produced by a consulting group helping transition HSS to the Harmon Collective, data management is listed as one of the organization’s weaknesses. On top of the disconnected theory of action, goals and process indicators in the balanced scorecards and the dearth of information that HSS staff could share about this topic in interviews, the report notes a “lack of cohesive data management and evaluation strategy or tactical plan that would better measure impact and inspire funding/community support.” This is particularly interesting given that one of the goal measures for organizational sustainability in the scorecard was the percentage of HSS staff and board members donating personal resources to the organization—an indication of the difficulty to fundraise from other organizations.

Further evidencing the lack of a theory of action connected to goals, the report notes that a college access pipeline framework was also missing from HSS. For the assessment, one taken from the Lumina Foundation was overlaid onto HSS activities to identify which best practices could be implemented at the new entity. Activities that fell into this category were described as “programs and/or events considered ‘best practice’ or ‘signature’ in nature, having formalized

structure, collateral and/or partnerships that provide the greatest benefit to the students” and “programs where existing program expectations and commitments made by and to parents and students must be continued.” In the area of college preparation, only six of the 15 HSS activities were recommended as best practices to continue, while just four of the 13 HSS college enrollment activities were recommended. None of the 14 activities in the category of persistence and completion were recommended to be transitioned. Of the recommended activities, the only data practice that the evaluator suggested the successor entity keep was tracking student and family commitment to the scholarship covenant, a practice that involved signing students onto the HSS scholarship contract in ninth and tenth grade.

The inability of HSS to tightly couple its mission with a theory of action and clearly defined goals and activities played a critical role in undermining the legitimacy of the organization after the scandal broke out in 2009. As explained by a leader from the Harmon Collective, “the feeling, especially after the scandal, was for a steady push to see more and to have a more tightly linked relationship between effort and results” (H21). Had these connections more tightly coupled, funders and board members would have a much weaker case to shut down the organization and transition to a new entity. In the aftermath of the scandal, the new superintendent who took over the district not only had the challenging task of repairing its reputation, but eliminating unnecessary programming and refocusing on activities that might produce better academic outcomes for students. Due to the questionable reliability of the student-level data after the cheating scandal, the interim superintendent did not trust that the data on the impact of HSS programming was accurate. All of the HSS funders I interviewed felt similarly—finding no clear evidence that the programming was in fact effective and aligned to the organization’s mission. Without well-defined interim indicators and a model to demonstrate how

their programming and activities would impact students in the long-run, HSS had one less weapon in its arsenal to fight off arguments for its closure. Put succinctly by one board member: “Data ended up being used to come to the decision that they needed to shut down PGA” (H17).

According to one leader at HSS, two board members consistently pushed back about the type of data they were collecting and sharing with funders and the community. The feedback from these board members was that the data did not align with what other college-going organizations were using to measure their goals. A different board member interviewed stated that he did not think most of the board was trained on how to use data to drive decision-making. This resulted in hiring a data staff person and external consultants in the final few years of HSS to better articulate how they were proving their effectiveness. One of these consultants shared her findings from examining the organization’s use of data:

They didn't have a lot of data from a college matriculation or an ongoing kind of support perspective to be able to really say that some of the things that they were...that some of their programming directly led to ultimate success. They were pulling people across the graduation stage at the high school level, but their mission didn't just stop there, so therefore their programming shouldn't have. So it was a little bit of a dissonance between kind of what they were saying, what they were trying to do and what they could actually prove that they were doing. (H7)

This discrepancy in goals, data collection, analysis and reporting, if caught earlier, could have been remedied prior to the scandal, reducing the degree of scrutiny from district leadership and funders. If HSS had been able to do this, they could have built a stronger foundation of evidence to support the highly visible narrative about their work in the community. Instead, these concerns were summarized in the 2015 Current State Assessment and Recommendations report as threats to HSS’s impact in the larger community that the Harmon Collective should avoid.

How did SYB navigate data constraints? Similar to the other cross-sector collaborations in this study, figuring out how to meaningfully collect and share data across

sectors while protecting students' rights proved difficult for SYB. A database meant to track academic and health indicators, for example, faced a number of development challenges and was never implemented in schools. This meant that SYB leaders had to continue requesting student-level data through the district's bureaucratic system. Despite the delay in getting the new database completed, SYB leaders have approached data collection and sharing in a two-pronged way: transparently sharing data on outcomes with the community and using data to inform continuous improvement efforts related to programmatic and operational goals.

Outcomes and other data indicators were determined collectively among the Operating Committee and Community Leadership Council (CLC) to ensure agreement on the most important measures connected to its goals of strengthening the school district, removing barriers to high school graduation and postsecondary completion, creating a college-going culture and revitalizing the city. Outcomes include English and Math proficiency, attendance, suspension, enrollment, graduation, college matriculation and graduation rates. An annual SYB performance report card reports progress on all of the aforementioned outcomes, using student-level data from Buffalo Public Schools, the City of Buffalo, Erie County, the New York State Department of Education (NYSDE), the National Student Clearinghouse and eScholarship,⁴⁶ a database used by Say Yes National to track some of the outcomes on college persistence for its chapters. Adding a layer of legitimacy to the report card is the fact that researchers from Johns Hopkins University and Syracuse University are charged with culling, tracking and analyzing the data for SYB.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The eScholarship database tracks when a student submits an application and creates a profile with information about where the student attends school, the student's financial aid package, Say Yes award, GPA, major, credits earned and degree conferred.

⁴⁷ See <https://sayyesbuffalo.org/press-release/say-yes-buffalo-announces-performance-report-card-measure-success/> for more information.

Progress on these data indicators is available in an online dashboard and presented three times a year in CLC and funder meetings as a means of holding SYB accountable for their goals.

These data points are overlaid onto a somewhat simple SYB logic model to ensure they fit with various goals across the preschool-16 pipeline. The logic model represents a way of operationalizing SYB's theory of action. As initial investment and cross-sector commitment to SYB was predicated on commitment to the Say Yes theory of action, rather than ambitious goals (e.g., a specific percentage point increase in outcomes each year), there is less pressure to demonstrate quick improvement in a short period of time and constantly reinforce its value proposition with funders. However, the tighter link between its data, logic model, theory of action and mission creates a more consistent narrative to share with donors and community members. Funders of SYB, according to one SYB leader, "want to see [we're] investing in this because they want to see macro indicators move" (S1). Similarly, another SYB leader believed that when "the numbers are going in the right direction, we'll continue to be able to raise money for our scholarship" (S3). In the case of HSS, it was funders who turned on the organization—not the community—because they wanted to see this connection.

Additionally, SYB works with academic institutions to evaluate their efforts and hold them publicly accountable to stakeholders and funders. For example, researchers from Syracuse University conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine SYB's impact on secondary and postsecondary outcomes, as well as housing prices.⁴⁸ Think tanks like The Brookings Institution have also published descriptive reports on Say Yes, including a Buffalo chapter, lending credibility to the organization.⁴⁹ As many of SYB's goals are ones that cannot be reached in the

⁴⁸ See <https://sayyestoeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Maxwell-Say-Yes-third-year-report-final.pdf> for full study.

⁴⁹ See https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ES_20180612_Gown-Towns-Reeves.pdf for full report on Say Yes and Say Yes Buffalo.

short-term, interim indicators, such as increases in FAFSA completion rates and programmatic data on the number of students served in mental health clinics and summer camps, are also brought to the Operating Committee, CLC and funders. As explained by two SYB leaders, participation data and surveys are used to make adjustments to the SYB strategy for continuous improvement. Presenting this data along with the outcomes included in the report cards helps SYB identify weaknesses or gaps in their programs that need to be addressed. For example, one SYB leader shared they did not have adequate data on postsecondary persistence and decided to collaborate with a major foundation to access funding and become part of a preschool-16 network to better connect integrate that data into their work.

As a result of all of the work done to collectively identify goals, process indicators and outcomes, SYB has managed leverage data in a strategic way that has built legitimacy in Buffalo. One district leader argued that the transparent use of the data and the outcomes to date contribute to the organization's long-term survival prospects:

I am convinced that the Say Yes partnership is so successfully integrated in Buffalo...a foundation has been built on such solid results, that there's no mayor, no change in superintendent, no factor that can affect the permanence of Say Yes. I expect them to be here for 100 years, I really do. The public is so knowledgeable about the Say Yes effect on students. The public will not tolerate harm coming to this partnership and that's much bigger than the mayor or superintendent or board of education. (H13)

This confidence in the outcomes of SYB and the high visibility of the organization to the public—including the annual report cards of its progress—minimizes the amount of uncertainty surrounding the purpose and value of SYB. Community members and funders do not have the same cause for suspicion as they did with HSS because SYB has presented data in a way that tells a cohesive story connecting its mission, theory of action, goals, tasks and technologies. This story-telling, in addition to the Say Yes National sustainability strategy, coalition building work and collaborative governance structures that created collective ownership of SYB, are

elements of the organization that could protect it from volatility in the broader environment. All of these different components would have to come undone in order for SYB to completely lose its legitimacy. If HSS had been born out of a more collective community process as opposed to championed by one superintendent; focused on building more collaboration and ownership across multiple sectors as opposed to expecting the district to absorb the work; hired skilled fundraising staff or trained internal staff instead of relying on an external fundraising entity; and been more intentional about using operational and outcome data to support the tight coupling of its mission, goals, tasks and technologies, HSS would have been in a stronger position to withstand a scandal that questioned its legitimacy as an organization.

Chapter Seven: Emergent Patterns from the Dead and Surviving

Collaborations

The cross-case comparison of the dead and surviving collaboration pairs yielded insights about how each of the dead collaborations could have navigated challenging circumstances differently. When comparing the three dead cases with one another, patterns also emerged from the interview data that warranted the creation of analytic questions to guide an additional round of coding and analysis of major themes (Neumann & Pallas, 2015). The evidence from the data that responds to these analytic questions has helped me form claims about why the dead collaborations failed to persist, resulting in four theoretical propositions about the conditions that contribute to the organizational death of cross-sector collaborations in education.

The four themes and theoretical propositions reflect challenges during different stages of initiation, implementation and institutionalization, as all of the collaborations died at different points in this trajectory. Lift Off struggled to transition from the initiation to implementation stage due to unsustainable funding and competing logics across sectors. Rise Up survived two years longer than Lift Off and was deep into the implementation stage of their work, as evidenced by the numerous projects they incubated in collaboration with the district, schools and other nonprofit partners. Unlike Lift off, its advancement through the implementation stage made it possible for certain pieces of the backbone's work to be well-developed enough to transition to other organizations at the time of its death. Uniquely, Harmon Students Succeed (HSS) was the only one of the dead collaborations to make it to the institutionalization stage, surviving 15 years as a taken-for-granted entity by the district, philanthropic sector and broader community before it was deinstitutionalized by an external shock from its local environment.

Despite the fact that these collaborations died at different stages in their organizational trajectories, there were major themes and patterns in the conditions undermining their survival. This suggests that such conditions do not apply neatly to any particular stage of a backbone's lifespan; rather, they are considerations that should be taken into account at every stage of a collaboration's development. Thus, while my analysis does not build a more definitive categorization of cross-sector collaboration life stages, it does highlight how various conditions, processes and dynamics undermining survival are fluid and present throughout different stages. Each of these major findings is presented below, beginning with the emergent analytic questions (AQs) guiding my cross-case comparison of the three dead collaborations, and ending with new theoretical propositions related to the general survival of these complex organizations.

7.1 Major Findings and Themes from the Dead Collaborations

Clashing Ideals and Expectations: The Institutional Contradictions in Funder-Backbone Relationships

AQ1: How does grant-dependency—particularly on foundations—undermine the sustainability of cross-sector collaboration?

AQ2: How did resource and capacity constraints alter the decisions made by collaborative backbone staff and funders?

Perhaps the most pervasive finding across all three of the dead cross-sector collaborations is the way that their funding arrangements—be that the funders on whom they were dependent, the types of funds that they sought to sustain their work, or their fundraising strategies and capacity—constrained the options they felt were available to them when thinking about how to approach and institutionalize their work. This pattern emerged very clearly across all three cases, with stakeholders in each of the collaborations raising examples of how funding drove key decisions about the direction of the organization. In particular, a common theme that emerged

from the interviews and document analysis was that dependency on short-term grants undermined the extent to which collaborations could focus on actionable, interim processes and steps that would cohesively get them to their desired, long-term outcomes. The clearest examples of this grant dependency come from Lift Off and Rise Up.

Lift Off was initiated with a small amount of seed funding from a bank grant that was ultimately not renewed. Although the plan was to involve multiple sectors in fundraising, the burden disproportionately fell on Collective Pathways, a large, charitable organization and traditional grantor to smaller nonprofits. Collective Pathways aimed to raise \$15 million to run the initiative over the course of five years. However, they lacked the right type of leadership and experience to identify long-term systems change grants—the type of grant that would better support the heavy lift of building a centralized data warehouse for the district and providers, establish school-partnership coordinators, and build strong cross-sector relationships. As a consequence, Lift Off defaulted to seeking incremental funding from foundation and corporate grants, albeit unsuccessfully because leaders could not package the backbone work in a way that appealed to these funders. Collective Pathways traditionally appealed to funders to operate programs, not systems change work, which was at the core of the cultural and systemic changes in service coordination they sought with the district.

In the meantime, the immediate concern of stretching the bank grant as long as possible trumped organizational decisions that could have improved the long-term sustainability of Lift Off. Insufficient funds were dedicated to communications and data—two elements that a former Collective Pathways executive leader ironically believed were critical to secure more funding. Report cards of Lift Off’s progress—an important way to build their brand and establish their importance—were also never sent to partners or made public because they were sidelined by the

more immediate need to secure funding. Further, the Lift Off coordinator position, which was in many ways the lynchpin of the cross-sector partnership between CBOs, nonprofits and schools, was filled by AmeriCorps VISTAs and other one-year public service members. Relationships between these cross-sector partners would have to be reestablished every year when a new individual filled this position. In interviews, nearly all Lift Off staff spoke to this impermanence as a problem that they were aware of at the time; however, the dwindling bank grant and the inability for Collective Pathways leaders to effectively fundraise for a systems change initiative restricted their ability to choose more permanent individuals to fill these positions. Moreover, these funding constraints influenced the decision of Collective Pathways to pass the work onto the district after the grant ran out, a plan that the other two leaders on the Steering Committee (the mayor and superintendent) never intended to happen.

The grant dependency experienced by Rise Up resulted in even more explicit goal displacement than it did in Lift Off. Unlike the two other dead collaborations, the Rise Up coalition morphed into the board of directors, many of whom were funders of the work. One foundation in particular—the one that started the coalition—had an outsized influence on the board because it was providing the largest amount of grant funding for Rise Up initiatives. Rise Up staff noted examples of how this foundation and a couple of other major funders on the board drove the agenda, a power they held because of their resource-dependent relationship on these players. As was the case with Lift Off, many foundations are accustomed to funding programs, not systems change. As such, representatives of these organizations tied short-term grant funding to the implementation of specific programmatic initiatives rather than backbone operations.

The pressure to meet annual grant requirements led to rushing through or skipping important, interim steps and processes. For example, the common enrollment initiative required

cross-sector engagement efforts, particularly with school stakeholders, which were neglected in lieu of piloting the initiative earlier to demonstrate tangible progress to funders. The lengthy processes of facilitating cross-sector engagement and collective sensemaking are perhaps the hardest aspects of the backbone work to pitch to foundations because the proof points are largely invisible. Negating this process, however, resulted in substantially reduced buy-in from school personnel and an extremely low number of common enrollment applicants—just ten percent of the total number of applicants they anticipated. In response to these tangible, low numbers, two foundations did not renew their grants for this project, eliminating an initiative in support of Rise Up’s mission. The short-term vision and funding of this initiative exemplifies how foundations can opt to support trends corresponding to grant cycles rather than long-term systems change. This tension also manifested in other areas of Rise Up’s work, with funders abruptly shifting gears and ceasing their funding for early learning initiatives despite their demonstrated success.

Rise Up’s funding arrangement affected institutionalization plans by giving funders on the board more pull in determining the direction of the organization. Although there were discrepant accounts for the reason behind Rise Up’s closure, a couple of board members (one of whom represented their largest funder) shared that Rise Up had become duplicative with some other coalitions and efforts being funded by the same set of organizations. The shift to state legislative advocacy in the final years of Rise Up appeared to be one way in which it was not replicating the work of these other organizations; however, once some of those policy goals were passed, funders no longer saw the value of sustaining Rise Up. Some of the competing coalitions absorbed aspects of Rise Up’s work, while new entities were formed to absorb other components. The same circle of funders were already involved or became involved in these

competing organizations, again reinforcing the notion that Rise Up's fate was dependent upon the changing winds of its primary funders' interests.

Harmon Students Succeed (HSS), while bringing on many of its own financial difficulties by failing to develop internal expertise in fundraising, was also dependent on short-term grants from a handful of foundations to support its operations. HSS is unique in that it was sheltered from funder scrutiny for years due to its well-respected and established reputation in the district and in the philanthropic community. Up until the cheating scandal, many funders had not required HSS to provide concrete evidence of their impact; their belief in the integrity of the mission and its champion was enough to secure short-term grants. However, in the years leading up to the scandal, HSS had stopped applying for operational grants to support its backbone work due to a lack of expertise in this area. When the scandal hit, the closure of a local education fund that promised to fundraise on its behalf further undermined its sustainability and HSS leaders started diverting money from the scholarship reserve to support the backbone.

After the scandal, HSS funders required them to provide evidence of their value and measurable impact, but the organization did not have the internal expertise nor capacity to do so. This was in large part a talent problem at HSS, but importantly, the scandal broke a spell under which HSS had remained largely unquestioned by the philanthropic community. They were being asked to provide evidence in a way they had not provided it before. Once its legitimacy unraveled, HSS had little to fall back on when its foundation donors turned to the more traditional, technical-rational norms and expectations associated with programmatic grants. Did the data they collect closely align with their mission and goals? Could they demonstrate the financial health of the organization? After years of not experiencing this type of scrutiny, HSS was suddenly thrust into a position to conform to technical-rational criteria that it did not have

sufficient experience or capacity to meet. Further, the dependency on one major foundation meant that once HSS failed to provide evidence that it could meet the expectations of the foundation in more tightly connecting its data, goals, mission and financial bookkeeping, its fate was tied to the decision of that foundation's leaders to dissolve the organization. Similar to Rise Up, institutionalization decisions were driven by its funders.

Navigating resource constraints while grappling with insufficient capacity plagued all three collaborations in different ways. Resource dependency on a small, concentrated number of funders gave disproportionate power to these organizations over the fate of the collaborations. The collaborations were beholden to grantors in a way that determined their organizational trajectories and survival prospects. Funders expected compelling evidence to justify their investments, while backbone staff were also responsible and focused on the core tasks of convening and facilitating, work that is often loosely coupled with outcomes. This discrepancy in thinking about the work applied pressure to backbone staff to conform to the “ceremony” of grant reporting, distracting them from the long-term, cultural and systems change focus of their work. The reliance on short-term grants created contradictory institutional pressures to which the collaborations had to respond: How could they work towards systems change when dependent on organizations accustomed to funding programmatic initiatives?

The macro- and meso-level implications of funder-backbone arrangements. The findings across these collaborations represent an interaction of institutional and organizational dynamics that converged to undermine backbone sustainability. In particular, the interplay of three macro- and meso-level theories shaped the fundraising, internal strategies and behavior of cross-sector collaboration actors faced with decisions about how to secure their immediate

survival: resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978); coercive isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983); and technical-rationality (Scott & Davis, 2005).

All three collaborations were heavily dependent on foundations or private, short-term grants to support their immediate existence. Simultaneously, all three organizations had to grapple with the fact that the value of the nebulous work of facilitating cross-sector collaboration was difficult to communicate to their funders, resulting in the non-renewal of grants when funder expectations were not met. Resource dependence on private sector organizations, particularly during uncertain periods, shaped backbone actors' decisions to focus on how to institutionally align with the expectations of funders. This altered the strategies that they pursued in the short-term, distancing them from their long-term mission and goals.

Resource dependency created fertile conditions for coercive isomorphism to occur: backbone actors felt pressure to increase their collaborations' compatibility with the institutional environments of their funders to gain legitimacy. In the case of Rise Up and HSS, this meant demonstrating their compatibility with the expectations of foundations, and in the case of Lift Off, a bank. According to key stakeholder accounts, including firsthand funder accounts in Rise Up and HSS, funders expected backbone actors to adhere to their own institutional norms. The result was conforming to the technical-rational grant criteria that foundations and banks have historically used to evaluate their return on investment in an initiative (Hwang & Powell, 2009). This criteria, often calling for specific data to demonstrate progress and clear linkages between tasks, activities and goals, created a new layer of responsibility for the collaborations, which were being held accountable for goal attainment while balancing the multiple, competing demands of cross-sector stakeholders involved in executing the work.

Theoretical Proposition 1: Funder-Backbone Relationships

Collaborations dependent on short-term, philanthropic grants will weaken their survival prospects through: (1) pressure to forego investment in activities that stimulate long-term progress towards mission fulfillment in favor of short-term successes that signal a return on investment for funders; and (2) compromising organizational identity to reconcile contradictions between their systems change goals and the technical-rational expectations of funders.

Buying vs. Building Support: Perverse Incentives for Cross-Sector Engagement

AQ3: How did stakeholders navigate coalition building to secure cross-sector engagement and what were the implications for their long-term survival prospects?

All three dead collaborations, to an extent, circumvented the coalition building process preceding cross-sector collaboration and the collaborative governance structures that guide implementation. Neglecting to spend an adequate amount of time convening partners and collectively setting an agenda, goals, strategies, norms and expectations about how the work should proceed resulted in missed opportunities to create a sense of shared ownership and accountability. This lack of collective ownership manifested in different ways throughout the implementation of the three collaborations: it heightened distrust across sectors, undermining collaboration amongst board members and partners; left space for ambiguity in making sense of the purpose of the work; and undermined long-term survival prospects by concentrating ownership into the hands of just one or a few stakeholders. In Lift Off and Rise Up, the concentration of ownership into the hands of one to two major players resulted in the perception of the work as being operated in an undemocratic and imposing way, increasing tensions across sectors. Further, several stakeholders from these two collaborations shared that the clearest incentives to collaborate were either to fund or protect their own organizational interests. Once

those incentives were compromised, there was nothing enduring enough left to convince partners that the backbone organization was worth sustaining. In HSS, ownership was concentrated in the hands of the former superintendent, with very few cross-sector partners substantively involved in the work. The loss of this leader resulted in a gap in ownership over HSS, with no cross-sector partners strongly advocating for its continuity. Across all three collaborations, negating an inclusive coalition building process and a truly collaborative governance structure contributed to discrepant understandings of the work's value.

Lift Off provides the clearest example of how skipping an inclusive and thoughtful coalition building process can heighten distrust among cross-sector partners and create perverse incentives to collaborate. The Mayor of Frankel identified Collective Pathways as the ideal organization to implement Lift Off under the flawed assumption that Collective Pathways, a large nonprofit and historical funder of other nonprofits in Frankel, would be an effective proxy for securing the buy-in and engagement of community organizations. In lieu of engaging other nonprofit and school stakeholders in a substantive coalition building process that would have allowed these stakeholders to feel valued and heard, Collective Pathways was given just under six months by the mayor to commit to being the backbone, create a strategic plan and begin the first year of implementation. Although quick efforts were made to inform other nonprofit and community organizations about the initiative through meetings and requests for information (RFIs), there was not enough time to create even a veneer of collective ownership with school and nonprofit partners. A model for the work was thus imposed, rather than built collectively.

Due to its historical role as a programmatic funder, Collective Pathways and Lift Off staff needed to spend time reframing Lift Off as a backbone initiative. However, Lift Off and school staff believed that skipping a coalition building process resulted in nonprofit leaders assuming

that the main benefit of the initiative was the promise of incremental funding. A baseline understanding was never established and nonprofit partners were left to their own schemas to make sense of what exactly Collective Pathways was trying to accomplish with Lift Off. The main incentive for nonprofit participation thus defaulted to the promise of grant funding to work with schools; their commitment and participation were in a sense bought rather than built. When the funding ran out after five years, nonprofits partners saw no reason to sustain their partnerships because their perception of Lift Off was always that of a temporary funder.

Again defaulting to their own schemas, district and school stakeholders shared suspicions of Collective Pathways and their role in Lift Off—distrust that might have been mitigated through a longer coalition building process and their involvement on the Steering Committee, which proved to be a more symbolic than substantive governance body. The district and schools, drawing from their prior experiences, thought of Lift Off as yet another initiative impinging on their autonomy—one that would disappear once a new reform was proposed. As researchers have suggested, the only way to systematically dispel these notions would have been through the constant renegotiation of meaning and roles (Weick, 1995; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Instead, feelings of distrust and unequal power in decision-making were prevalent, but shared mostly in retrospect during interviews. Once the grant funding ran out, a new superintendent came in and Lift Off staff attempted to pass the work off to the schools and the district, but there was little motivation to continue because collective ownership had not been built.

Rise Up differs from Lift Off and HSS in that it came into existence based on prior coalition efforts; however, *who* formed the coalition and what it transformed into shortly thereafter created distrust across sectors and a sense of unequal power over the strategic direction of Rise Up. The coalition was created by an influential foundation in Raboin and quickly evolved

into a nonprofit board of directors, chaired by a leader from the same foundation. Although the board chairs rotated, the evolution of the coalition into the board created an unequal power dynamic in which the lead foundation and a couple of other major funders of Rise Up had disproportionate power over decision-making. This created conflict when stakeholders from other sectors pushed to preserve political and organizational interests that were not aligned with the decisions made by more powerful board members. For example, tensions arose between more powerful board members wanting to move the work along faster and Rise Up staff and other cross-sector partners wanting to take more time to strategize and secure buy-in.

Just as there were perverse incentives for nonprofit partners to participate in Lift Off, some coalition members described perverse incentives for different organizations to join the Rise Up coalition. For foundations and CBOs, this meant ensuring that they would not miss out on other funding and project opportunities with major funders at the table. For one foundation leader, it was pushing for mayoral control over the school district. In the case of one charter network representative, it was ensuring that the backend algorithm creating a database of “quality schools” was not unfairly discriminating against charters. The lead foundation that created the coalition did not go through the process of setting a common agenda, framework and strategies that threaded through all of Rise Up’s initiatives to mitigate the navigation of these tense political relationships. Over time, cross-sector engagement waned due to some stakeholders’ perceptions that they were not being heard or involved in making real decisions.

HSS never even created a veneer of coalition building or collective ownership. It was championed by one individual—the superintendent—who unilaterally appealed to several corporate and philanthropic partners to ensure there was enough funding to support the scholarship and adopt the Students Succeed model. While Lift Off was largely associated with

Collective Pathways and Rise Up with its lead foundation, HSS was associated primarily with the former superintendent. Even though HSS touted itself as a collaborative effort across sectors, in reality, it operated in isolation with very few partners engaging with the organization and holding it accountable for its work. In the last few years of the organization's lifespan, titles like "Director of Partnerships" were symbolic, as HSS was not collaborating with other organizations and had dramatically reduced the schools with which it partnered. Moreover, the HSS board operated like a traditional nonprofit board, rather than a collaborative governance body, and did not have a clear theory of action guiding the work. There was no process to collectively set norms, expectations and joint strategic planning goals until it was on the brink of closure in 2014. At that point, the work to do so was mostly for the benefit of its successor organization. Dropping a model like Students Succeed onto a city under the championing of one local leader may have afforded it enough legitimacy initially, but in this case, the concentration of ownership into the hands of the superintendent undermined its long-term survival prospects when she was removed and no other partners were left to champion the effort.

Failing to build collective ownership: meso- and micro-level theoretical implications.

At the meso-level, backbone leaders made organizational decisions about governance and inclusion that had major implications for micro-level sensemaking. This ultimately undermined the collaborations' survival prospects by contributing to discrepant understandings of the value and purpose of the work, leaving different stakeholders to default to their own sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995) without structured or consistent guidance. The end result was weakened cross-sector partner commitments and a lack of shared ownership and accountability. As prior organizational scholars have theorized, the failure to invest in building "scripts" (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) to help conceptualize new organizational arrangements left a gap in knowledge

about how actors from different sectors thought and operated. This finding corroborates prior research on coordinated services collaborations that suggests partners struggle to re-conceptualize their new, collaborative roles outside of the roles they occupy in their primary organizations (Cohen; 1991; Johnson et al., 1980).

While “side payments” or perverse incentives are often described as common to political coalition building (e.g., Moldovanu & Winter, 1994), they proved to be damaging to the three dead collaborations because they were not accompanied by any sense of collective ownership. Relying on perverse incentives to collaborate, such as exposure to other funders and opportunities to meet stakeholders’ primary organizational interests, were not strong enough to sustain partnerships and legitimacy in Lift Off and Rise Up. Instead, these perverse incentives resulted in more powerful stakeholders (e.g., the lead foundation funding Rise Up) blocking collaboration on certain decisions and less powerful cross-sector partners only symbolically complying with the collaboration’s work (e.g., school leaders in Lift Off). This manifested in a variety of issues that became increasingly difficult to resolve in later stages of initiation and implementation. As the collaborations became more complex, advancing through different stages of their organizational trajectories, sensemaking was not given the attention it needed to guide stakeholders’ processing of increasingly diverse information about the direction, goals and overall purpose of the work.

Theoretical Proposition 2: Incentives for Cross-Sector Engagement

Collaborations that rush or circumvent an inclusive coalition building process and the creation of a new, collective, organizational “script” will weaken their survival prospects by: (1) increasing the perception or reality of unequal control and

representation; and (2) allowing discrepancies in sensemaking among different stakeholders regarding the goals and agenda of the backbone organization.

Organizational Form: Systems Change from Outside the District, Inside the District or Somewhere In-Between

AQ4: What organizational form do stakeholders think is best suited to perform backbone work?

AQ5: What rationales do stakeholders provide for the sector and organizational form best suited for institutionalizing the backbone's work?

The backbones of Lift Off, Rise Up and HSS were housed at 501(c)(3) nonprofits, two of which were created for the explicit purpose of implementing the backbone work (Rise Up and HSS) and one of which already existed (Collective Pathways). Stakeholders from all three collaborations shared similar philosophies about why their organizations needed to exist separately from the school district, citing the bureaucratic culture of school districts, insularity and lack of capacity as common arguments against the school district serving as a backbone. However, stakeholders from all three collaborations also believed that the work could only sustain itself if institutionalized—at least to some extent—within their respective school districts. The reliance on external, private funding sources could not sustain these efforts in perpetuity due to the changing interests of foundations and other funders. However, using a similar argument for the public sector, some stakeholders argued that changing political climates made the school district and public offices ill-equipped to sustain the work of cross-sector collaboration on their own. Despite these varying rationales, stakeholders across the organizational hierarchy generally expected institutionalization to occur through the absorption of initiatives and the adoption of practices by entities *other than* the backbone.

In the case of Lift Off, the strongest rationale for why a 501(c)(3) nonprofit was the best type of organization to carry out the work of a backbone was provided by the mayor, who argued that housing the backbone at an external entity—such as a community organization—had a better chance of creating shared accountability among the district, schools and nonprofits than housing it in a public office that would inevitably experience leadership turnover. From his perspective, if a community organization were to take on this role, it would incentivize other community organizations to collaborate with the district and participate in the initiative—a value that would be more difficult to add if coming from the district or another public agency. Similarly, he thought that housing the backbone at a nonprofit would secure more resources over a longer period of time than his office or the district could, again due to turnover. The former superintendent also argued that the district was not the right fit as backbone because of its prioritization of academics and the district’s associated accountability policies. He believed an external organization would have a better perspective on how to approach and prioritize the work than the district. Collective Pathways and Lift Off leaders were also skeptical of the public sector’s ability to pull off the backbone role because of their bureaucratic nature, with one Lift Off leader arguing that their nonprofit structure would afford them more flexibility when needed.

While both the former mayor and superintendent advocated for an external entity to operate as the backbone, they did not expect the district to fully take on the role of institutionalizing Lift Off. Their ideal was somewhere “in-between,” with Collective Pathways continuing to coordinate and fund Lift Off and schools and the district integrating certain practices into their own operations (e.g., centralized data collection and service coordination). Collective Pathways and Lift Off leaders, however, wanted the district to fully shoulder the burden of the work after five years when the bank grant had run its course. From their

perspective, institutionalization was intended to occur through scaffolding the work and training school personnel how to use data to integrate the service provision coordination into their normal routines. Conversely, district and school stakeholders did not think of Lift Off as a long-term initiative that required changes to their routines. Principal disinterest, limited school capacity and superintendent turnover at the district all supported the return to schools' business-as-usual practices after the grant ran out. The transition in thinking of the backbone work as change from the "outside" to the final plan to institutionalize the work from the "inside" was missing a key transitional piece: as described in the section above, there were insufficient coalition building and collaborative governance structures to bridge school leaders' perceptions of Lift Off as an imposing force aiming to penetrate district and school norms.

Rise Up served as a somewhat mixed model of both backbone and service provider, which was a result of conflict between the board and staff who could not agree on a specific organizational framework to follow. The main initiative that was started by Rise Up was the production and dissemination of the school quality scorecards to inform families of their choices. As such, Rise Up needed to be perceived as a "governance-neutral" organization, which several board members and Rise Up staff claimed could not have been done by a public institution (or they would have been accused of being pro-public school). While there were a handful of stakeholders who thought that other organizational configurations could have better managed the goals of Rise Up (i.e. through mayoral control over the school district or through a government office), most stakeholders shared the opinion that the instability of the school district and its series of emergency managers made it an impossible option as a backbone. The work of Rise Up would have been dependent on whoever was temporarily running the district.

In retrospect, several Rise Up leaders and board members lamented the fact that they never came to an agreement about what type of organizational configuration they should embody. No one truly contested the idea that Rise Up was best operated as a 501(c)(3), but what Rise Up leaders and board members did contest was whether Rise Up should operate as a “pure” backbone, a service provider, a collective impact organization, Harbormaster or traditional coalition. The board operated with different expectations among members—some expecting it to operate more as a fundraiser and others expecting it to act as a coalition where all stakeholders could influence the topics most pressing to them and how they would tackle them. This schism heightened conflict amongst board members and resulted in unclear guidance and messaging to Rise Up staff about their stance. Among the board and various Rise Up staff, there were also differing opinions about whether Rise Up was driving a reform agenda or a collective impact agenda, the latter of which would take more time to implement. This confusion bled into the activities undertaken by Rise Up staff, which ended up being facilitation, service provision and the incubation of initiatives that they did not have the capacity to fully implement.

Based on the original pledge, there was no concrete institutionalization plan laid out for Rise Up, but there was an expectation that the school district and charter networks would make changes to improve the quality of their schools as a result of the increased accountability made public by the school quality scorecards. Their evolution into a project incubator also implied that Rise Up would be able to smoothly pass these along to the entities most involved in continuing implementation, such as the school district. An obvious tension here is that they were shedding light on the often poor quality of schools and then asking them to adopt certain initiatives, like their common enrollment pilot, with fidelity. This muddling of different organizational frameworks made Rise Up less effective in accomplishing the myriad activities it took on.

Institutionalization plans were first geared towards inducing local school change from the “outside,” but then shortly thereafter evolved into plans to influence education policy at the state level. The justification, as explained by a Rise Up leader, was that the chaos, volatility and financial insolvency of Raboin Public Schools rendered the district unable to adopt any of the changes or initiatives that Rise Up sought to institutionalize. With the Rise Up board unable to fund all its initiatives in perpetuity, board members decided to splinter off Rise Up’s initiatives into other entities: preexisting nonprofits; competing coalitions; state agencies; the regional chamber; and the mayor’s office. Each of the organizations housing Rise Up initiatives offered a different organizational configuration that the board thought was better suited to each initiative’s purpose. For example, the scorecard was moved to the mayor’s office where it was thought to be perceived as more legitimate and the early learning work was absorbed into a state agency with greater fiscal capacity.

HSS differs from Lift Off and Rise Up in that it was the local implementation of a national network model, with a set of criteria that it had to follow to become a Students Succeed site. There was never disagreement about what type of organization it needed to be to perform the backbone convening and facilitation work—it was always going to be a 501(c)(3) organization that operated externally from the district. What complicated HSS from the start is that it was always more than this work; the model required the implementation of a package of reforms, including math, reading and classroom management interventions. Over time, a leader from the national network and a local funder shared that it became increasingly difficult to convince funders that reforms focused on classrooms and curriculum were worth investing in because they were perceived as the responsibility of the school district. As such, the first HSS executive director created an institutionalization plan dependent on the district—under the

leadership of the former superintendent—integrating HSS programs internally. This manifested in the creation of an HSS Department at the district office and HSS college access coaches at various schools. Unlike academic programming, the scholarship would always operate externally, funded by the private sector.

The problem with the plan of institutionalizing all HSS programming at the district is that school districts often grapple with prioritizing competing reforms. With the former superintendent strongly promoting HSS and the incentive of the scholarship funds present, there was motivation to retain elements of HSS and prioritize it as the district’s main reform. However, once the scandal broke out and an interim superintendent was hired, the HSS institutionalization plan of sustaining change from the “inside” completely unraveled. It only took new leadership and a desire to distance the district from the scandal to deinstitutionalize the work that had been absorbed by the district. Meanwhile, HSS had dwindling internal capacity to continue providing support for the scholarship and some of the postsecondary access programming it had continued. In retrospect, stakeholders involved in leading or funding the Harmon Collective explained that they intentionally wanted the new organization to remain distinct from the district, with the goal to exist in perpetuity. In so doing, very little would be asked of the school district aside from data sharing and cooperation with the organization and other service providers. Notably, the district would not need to fund any conduits from the Harmon Collective within any of its schools. The district, in return, would receive support and resources raised by external resources for the scholarship and work with service providers to offer wraparound supports, constituting more of an “in-between” strategy than that of HSS.

Backbone organizational form: macro- and meso-level theoretical implications. In order to understand why strategies to institutionalize the collaborative work from “outside” and

“inside” the schools district were not ideal, one needs to think about the combination of rational, natural and open system elements embodied by the three organizations. In the case of HSS, creating an HSS department within the school district and shifting the burden of HSS programming accordingly likely contributed to a looser coupling of organizational tasks from outcomes, a pattern that scholars have documented as a way in which schools and districts can buffer themselves from external examination (Meyer & Scott, 1992; Weick, 1976). Asking the district to take on this work may have resulted in a loss of some of the technical-rational criteria originally imposed by the Students Succeed network, as the former leader of this network noted it was difficult to monitor its local affiliates once the strategy was adopted by school districts. When HSS experienced an external shock from the districtwide scandal, this inability to demonstrate that its initiatives and programming were tightly linked to outcomes left it vulnerable to new scrutiny from funders supporting HSS.

Moreover, since HSS was championed by one individual and did not focus on building collective ownership, it was missing key natural system elements that may have bolstered its survival, such as nurturing interpersonal relationships among different stakeholders (Blau, 1956). Its institutional status, gained through the strong and loud advocacy of the former superintendent, also sheltered it from having to evolve into an organization that focused on these natural and rational system elements. In many respects, HSS also operated as an open system highly interdependent with its local environment (Scott & Davis, 2005), but with information flows focused on branding and visibility rather than sensemaking across stakeholders. As a result of this configuration, institutionalizing the work from “inside” the school district left it incredibly vulnerable to any disruptions affecting the reputation or operations of the school district.

Lift Off, as a Collective Pathways initiative, came with its own set of institutional norms and expectations that made it less effective as a backbone operating “outside” the school district. As a traditional nonprofit funder, Collective Pathways already operated with a rational systems framework, expecting a tight coupling of roles, responsibilities and tasks with outcomes. Similar to HSS, there was little focus on natural system elements, such as the non-rational or informal elements shaping partners’ perceptions of the collaboration, which could have strengthened relationships with school, nonprofit and district personnel. Although there was officially a Steering Committee and Lift-Off staff responsible for cultivating relationships between schools and nonprofits, the collaboration was so focused on its immediate survival that it deprioritized open system elements like sensemaking and information flows that may have also alleviated concerns and suspicion from district and school stakeholders. Its perception by district, school and nonprofit stakeholders as an externally imposed strategy created resistance to the adoption of new practices to support implementation and institutionalization.

Rise Up was also designed by its coalition members to operate “outside” the school district, primarily because the district and city were undergoing volatile changes related to financial solvency and political leadership turnover. By design, it was intended to bring a layer of technical-rationality to Raboin schools by holding them accountable with school quality ratings. Additionally, when Rise Up began incubating cradle-to-career initiatives, the most influential members of its board (key foundation leaders) imposed their own layer of technical-rationality upon Rise Up staff to demonstrate that their activities were clearly producing desired outcomes. This trumped open system efforts, such as setting aside the time needed to convene with school stakeholders and make sense of how they would implement their common enrollment initiative. Thus, despite the diversity of the coalition that became the Rise Up board,

the feeling that a handful of funders were directing the organization and its projects undermined the trust between stakeholders from different sectors.

The organizational configurations of all three collaborations did not lend themselves well to moving between the school district and various other stakeholders, creating the perception that they were not in fact neutral organizations. With HSS, housing much of the work within the school district left it vulnerable to volatility in its local environment and sheltered it from needing to adopt more technical-rational elements. Rise Up anticipated volatility when they set out to improve Raboin schools and attempted to change the district through the creation of an external entity; however, the outsized influence of coalition and board members seeking rationality trumped the collaboration's focus on rational and open system elements, diminishing its effectiveness at working with schools. Lift Off, again attempting to penetrate the culture and operational norms of the school district as an external entity, was similarly unable to focus on necessary relationship-building and sensemaking because of Collective Pathways' grant dependence and tradition of upholding a rational systems framework.

Theoretical Proposition 3: The Organizational Form of the Backbone

A backbone that operates as a conduit between the district, funders and stakeholders—as opposed to a backbone that operates internally or externally to the district—will have a greater chance at survival by distributing the responsibility to initiate, implement and institutionalize the work among stakeholders.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Of the six collaborations I studied, only one—Oakland's CSTS—constitutes a discrepant case when it comes to this theoretical proposition. CSTS leverages the district as an internal backbone. There is reason to believe, however, that the persistence of this collaboration may be unrelated to this configuration, as the district has gone through several superintendent turnovers, financial insolvency, and state receivership over the course of the past several years. Based on the interview data, it appears more likely that the reshuffling of one key individual both within the district and externally—at a critical funder organization—supported the continuity and survival of the CSTS strategy. This individual was the district's Community School Director, a leader at a key supporting foundation, and the district's Chief of Staff at various points in time over the past 10 years. In many ways, he has acted as the conduit between cross-sector partners (particularly funders) and district leadership in advocating for the strategy.

Communications and Branding: When Visibility Strengthens or Undermines Sustainability

AQ6: How do stakeholders think about the trade-off between the high and low visibility of their collaborations? How have their public relations and community and partner engagement strategies influenced their survival prospects?

The final pattern that emerged across the three dead collaborations is the role that their communications and branding strategies, or lack thereof, played in sustaining the backbone. Stakeholders from all three collaborations shared examples of how their inability to tightly control the narrative being told about their work at critical moments had negative implications for their fundraising and partnership efforts. Although the communications and branding strategies deployed by each respective collaboration were different, the narrative being told about the purpose of their work, their “agenda” and their value propositions among different stakeholders influenced perceptions of their legitimacy. The brands of these collaborations were also associated with a particular individual, organization or product that undermined institutionalization efforts once they were perceived as illegitimate. In Lift Off, the association with Collective Pathways resulted in the failure to create a sense of trust and interdependency among sectors that traditionally did not work together. In Rise Up, the production of the highly visible, school quality scorecards resulted in accusations of bias, such as public school advocates’ claims that they were unfairly promoting charter schools. Finally, in HSS, the highly visible brand became tainted by association with the superintendent, resulting in the wearing off of its taken-for-granted legitimacy and heightened scrutiny of its value proposition. These consequences could have been avoided if collaborations had invested sufficient time and resources into their communications strategies, dispelled rumors about their work, and created visible, tailored narratives about their value to different sets of stakeholders.

Several stakeholders from Lift Off compared its success in attracting funders to a Promise initiative being implemented in parallel. Of the stakeholders from Lift Off who spoke to its visibility within the community, nearly all thought that it was necessary for them to publicly promote the initiative and ensure it was just as well known as the Promise initiative. However, Lift Off never had a sufficient budget to invest in an actual communications or branding strategy. Being highly visible to the public could have been a double-edged sword for Lift Off: it could have made its institutionalization failure even more public had it strived to do this without securing more resources first, but it may have also attracted more interest from funders. Due to its budget constraints, most of Lift Off's communications efforts focused on disseminating information to nonprofit providers rather than creating an intentional or visible brand.

Data played an important role in the ability of Lift Off to brand itself as a separate initiative with its own unique value to add to the district, schools, nonprofit providers and broader community. The systems change work, which was difficult to quantify with data, did not produce any clear outcomes to evidence its value proposition to funders. This was further complicated by the inability of Lift Off to execute data sharing agreements and successfully create a centralized data warehouse. Data were limited to less compelling indicators, such as the number of nonprofit partners or student participation rates. To get around this issue, the first Collective Pathways executive charged with implementing Lift Off created school report cards with narratives about the success of Lift Off partnerships at schools; however, these were deprioritized in favor of other immediate issues and were never made public. As such, narratives about the purpose and "agenda" of Lift Off defaulted to those that school, nonprofit and district partners had experienced historically. To schools and the district, Lift Off was another reform being done to them that required the reshuffling of their own resources. To nonprofits, Lift Off

was just another grant opportunity. A Lift Off middle manager further argued that to parents and teachers, its low visibility made the new student offerings just additional activities.

HSS differed from Lift Off in that it was championed publicly by the superintendent through press conferences and other public events. The organization developed a number of public-facing events and activities to stir community awareness and support for the work, particularly during its first 10 years. Marching bands would parade through the city streets with HSS banners and teams of HSS staff would walk through neighborhoods signing parents and students onto the scholarship covenant. Much of the story being told was focused on the promise of the scholarship, more so than any other programmatic initiatives that may have been occurring at that time. Similar to sentiments shared by Lift Off and Rise Up interviewees, it was never seen as ideal to go about the work “quietly.” To the community, HSS was a household name.

The high visibility of HSS in the community should have provided it some insulation when the cheating scandal broke out; however, as previously noted, these community members were never involved in any collective decision-making or collaborative governance related to HSS. Thus, despite the fact that the community did not turn on the organization when the scandal hit, they could not provide a counterbalance to the increased scrutiny of HSS by the corporate and philanthropic community. The school district, which was also under national scrutiny at the time, further questioned the value of retaining HSS when it had become so tainted by the superintendent. Despite the fact that HSS had been struggling financially for years prior to the scandal and had not been living up to its stated mission and goals, its high visibility and branding as the “baby” of the superintendent sheltered it from criticism. However, after the scandal, HSS was left fragile because of its public association with one individual who had controlled its narrative—to the community and funders alike—for the majority of its lifespan. The

superintendent, described by the third HSS executive director as the “darling of the corporate community,” should not have been the only face of the work.

An enduring and compelling narrative about the work could have been produced for district leaders and funders using data, but data were never used in a systematic way to tell a cohesive story about how HSS was moving students along the postsecondary success pipeline. If HSS had more tightly linked its mission, goals, data collection, analysis and reporting, they could have built a stronger foundation of evidence to support the highly visible narrative about their work in the community. Without this buffer and without collective ownership, the scandal was enough to delegitimize the organization. The lead funder determined that the only way to recover was to create a new iteration of HSS under an entirely new entity, with a new brand, different staff, a different name and different organizational configuration.

Of the three collaborations, Rise Up provides the most complicated example of how communications and branding strategies can undermine cross-sector partnership commitments and ultimately, their ability to sustain the organization. Stakeholders described how their highly visible brand, which was associated with the school quality scorecard they produced, undercut other initiatives that required the consent and participation of stakeholders from schools, the district and charter networks. Rise Up had become highly visible to school stakeholders under a narrative of accountability that diminished their trustworthiness. For example, a couple of Rise Up staff shared that the school quality scorecards—the most public aspect of their work—created controversy over their true agenda. Public school advocates accused them of supporting the disproportionate closure of public schools, which ranked among the lowest of the city’s schools, and pushing a pro-charter agenda. Rise Up developed a communications strategy with these stakeholders, schools and others; however, it was focused on the dissemination of the school

quality scorecards rather than investment in storytelling about their mission, goals and purpose. In this case, it did not matter that the original pledge called for the creation of Rise Up as a “governance neutral” organization. Without a strong public relations or communications strategy accompanying the dissemination of these scorecards to all of the stakeholders affected by it, there was room for misinterpretation and the propagation of alternate narratives.

Rise Up staff recognized the controversy of the school quality work and at one point, tried to retake control of the narrative by hiring a public relations firm to produce positive press releases about their work. By the time this occurred, however, there was already too much fodder propping up the alternate narratives being told about the organization. The scorecards produced information that showed schools in a negative light and remained a more powerful story than anything the firm could produce. Consequently, it became harder to communicate the information to parents without the willingness of school stakeholders to release the scorecards themselves. When Rise Up dissolved and a new entity was created to produce the scorecard, it was housed at the mayor’s office and produced without any logos to emphasize neutrality. The scorecards now include a more elaborate qualitative component, which was incorporated late into Rise Up and expanded upon at the new entity. Overall, high visibility in reforming Raboin schools made Rise Up a target and a threat rather than a viable partner.

Communications, branding and visibility: macro-, meso- and micro-level theoretical implications. The issues that arose related to visibility, branding and communications efforts represent a complicated interplay between all three levels of my theoretical framework. Each of the collaborations sought legitimacy from their broader institutional environments, and in the case of HSS and Rise Up, this manifested in communications strategies focused on the high visibility of their core products and programs. With Lift Off, the intention of the mayor and Lift

Off leaders was to make the initiative as visible as other pillars of the mayor's reform, such as the Promise initiative, but meso-level organizational structures and tasks complicated how clearly their value could be communicated, particularly without compelling data points.

At the meso-level, the collaborations were grappling with competing pressures, demands and expectations from diverse stakeholders that created the need for additional layers of messaging about their work. The different roles of stakeholders in implementing or supporting the work meant that different value propositions needed to be reinforced to facilitate the cognitive economy (Rosch, 1999) of these partners in making sense of these roles and values on their own. While high visibility may have made it easier for HSS and Rise Up to conform to institutional myths and ceremonies about what their organizations should be doing (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), it did little to address the sensemaking processes of stakeholders from different sectors who came to their own conclusions about the benefits of the collaborations. The danger is that it allowed space for certain actors to produce alternate narratives of the collaborations' agendas, an issue that again could have been mitigated by collaborative governance structures tasked with collective sensemaking. The use of data, which was particularly weak in Lift Off and HSS, could have also been leveraged to support tailored narratives for distinct stakeholders in addition to a collective script, reducing the risk of misinterpretation and weakened commitment. While most stakeholders argued that the collaborations needed to be highly visible to attain legitimacy in the first place, high visibility alone increased the number and types of individuals and groups who could position Rise Up and HSS in the center of controversy.

Theoretical Proposition 4: Visibility and Narrative Production

Backbones that strategically communicate tailored narratives to different audiences about the value and purpose of the collaboration will improve their survival prospects

more than those that focus on high visibility alone. This process will allow the backbone to filter relevant information to different parties, thereby simplifying their sensemaking around the complicated work of cross-sector collaboration.

7.2 Promising Practices from the Surviving Collaborations

Just as patterns emerged across the three dead collaborations, a number of promising practices came to light in an analysis of the three surviving collaborations. While these collaborations are still undergoing implementation and persist at different stages of growth, they share similarities in how they have navigated challenges that could have otherwise been barriers to their success. The promising practices below are derived from interview data—some of which were in direct response to the question about the most important considerations for the survival prospects of cross-sector collaborations, and other insights that emerged organically.

Promising Practice 1: Diversify funding sources to avoid reliance on short-term grants.

Key stakeholders from each of the surviving collaborations made a conscious effort to avoid reliance on short-term grants through developing a diverse portfolio of funding sources. Each collaborative employed a different strategy in order to do so, providing examples of how the less traditional funder-recipient relationships they built and the types of funds they sought could provide more enduring support in the long-run. For Community Schools, Thriving Students (CSTS), key leaders at the school district strategically braided public and private funding sources in order to support the work. Short-term grants were leveraged to execute short-term tasks, such as communications efforts to determine where gaps in knowledge about the community school strategy existed among stakeholders. Multi-year, systems change grants were sought out from large foundations to continually support the expansion of school-based health

centers, also taking advantage of federal, state and county public funding streams that would supplement these centers. When it came to permanent, central positions needed to accomplish the work, such as the community school coordinators (CSMs), the district tapered the responsibility so that schools would eventually have to absorb the cost by reallocating their own funds or working with a CBO provider to staff the position. By partnering with CBOs to cover this position and an array of wraparound support services, schools could essentially outsource the responsibility of looking for grants to these organizations that were already well-versed in how to secure them.

All Hands Raised (AHR) leaders were also very aware of the limitations of short-term grant funding and intentionally structured the organization so that they would not directly fund the work of their cross-sector collaborative teams. Although they help these teams identify grant opportunities and leverage preexisting government funding, the backbone explicitly does not provide funding, allowing them to focus on their role of convening and facilitation rather than securing funds for project-based initiatives. This also protects them from instability when new initiatives or sites are added to fulfill their cradle-to-career mission, as they can maintain a lean backbone operation independent from the scaling of these projects. Further, rather than being beholden to a handful of major funders, AHR leverages an incredibly diverse, broad funding strategy in which individuals, as well as corporate, philanthropic and public sector agencies, can donate to the organization. In addition to this more democratic fundraising strategy, corporate grants are intentionally prioritized over foundation grants for their less rigid criteria. An AHR leader described the benefits of this funding arrangement as twofold: it builds collective ownership amongst community members and buffers AHR from punitive consequences in cases where they are unable to meet foundations' definitions of progress.

Say Yes Buffalo (SYB) has also managed to avoid dependence on short-term grants through braided funding streams and the upfront commitment of philanthropic dollars for the Say Yes scholarship. Seed funding for the backbone work from the national network provided a level of security while the collaborative began implementation, but the buy-in and legitimacy of the effort has come largely from the investment of philanthropic dollars for a scholarship that will be funded in perpetuity. This has signaled to other funders that SYB is a permanent organization and alleviates some of the pressure of constantly convincing funders of the organization's value. Currently, SYB leverages braided funding to support its staff salaries, operations and programming, with only a small proportion of their funding coming from short-term grants. Similar to comments made by leaders at AHR and CSTS, a Say Yes National leader explained that their fundraising and sustainability strategy is aimed at avoiding the pitfalls of dependence on the three-year grant model. Somewhat more uniquely, their long-term sustainability plan is to embed most of their initiatives in public budgets.

Through leveraging these different strategies, CSTS, AHR and SYB could focus on other critical components of implementation and expansion of the work, including continuous improvement, organizational reconfigurations, partnership building and collaborative governance. Unlike their formerly existing counterparts, the direction of the work was not driven by the frequent adherence to the technical-rational criteria of short-term grant requirements nor the resource dependence on one or two major donors providing such grants. Thus far, this appears to have mitigated some of the major implementation roadblocks experienced by Lift Off, Rise Up and HSS, all of which were derailed from their longer-term goals due to their preoccupation with immediate financial security.

Promising Practice 2: Recruit an effective leader who can communicate a clear value proposition to funders.

Another advantage that CSTS, AHR and SYB had over their unsustainable counterparts was an effective leader with the expertise and ability to fundraise on behalf of the organization. The importance of these leaders cannot be underestimated, as they were described by other stakeholders as instrumental in cultivating trust with funders (among other partners) and pitching the value proposition of their organizations in a compelling way. In CSTS, the former community schools director and current chief of staff has sought out and built strong relationships with philanthropic and corporate partners interested in funding systems change work, rather than projects or programs. This has resulted in the continued support of major funders who have provided tens of millions of dollars to date. He has pitched the community schools work as comprehensive and versatile, qualifying the district for several different types of grants meant to support long-term, cradle-to-career pipeline change. By focusing on these types of opportunities, the district is not pressed to prove dramatic improvement within a short timeframe. This leader remained involved in or with the school district through various superintendents and employers, creating continuity that has supported its sustainability.

AHR also had an effective leader who was able to deliver a clear value proposition to funders and establish a level of trust that has outlasted the decade he spent leading the organization. He claimed that he made a conscious effort to brand AHR as an organization focused on cultural change, rather than a policy advocacy or funder organization. This involved turning down opportunities for more funding when they did not align with this value proposition. Taking lessons learned from prior experience, he avoided funding opportunities that were too prescriptive and would reduce the flexibility of AHR to engage in continuous improvement,

which often meant changing course to take the work in a different direction. The diversity in the types and number of individual and organizational funders, as well as the participation of so many community organizations on its collaborative governance bodies, was enough evidence to funders that AHR was adding a unique value to the county.

SYB has similarly benefitted from the effective leadership of an executive director who has led the organization for the past nine years. Despite the fact that Buffalo does not have Fortune 500 companies or a large amount of local philanthropic wealth, he has been able to strategically work with the district's superintendent and public agency leaders to figure out how public dollars could be redirected to SYB in a mutually beneficial way. He has pitched the wraparound services work to public sector agencies and providers so that it can largely be sustained outside of SYB, while leveraging the “north star” of the scholarship promise and the returns of SYB to the city as part of a clear value proposition for the backbone work. Although the national network has continued to support the backbone for a number of years, the embedding of SYB programs in sustainable public budgets provides a clear indicator of financial health to prospective private sector funders. Similar to CSTS, he most recently applied to a long-term grant from the Gates Foundation focused on becoming a P-16 community. Unlike traditional foundation grant funding, this opportunity will provide more sustainable financial support for several years without the expectation of a short-term return on investment.

Promising Practice 3: Invest in iterative partner engagement and collaborative governance structures from coalition building through implementation.

CSTS, AHR and SYB all invested significant amounts of time convening cross-sector stakeholders prior to officially launching their collaborations. Further, they continued the process of cross-sector engagement through explicit community engagement efforts and formal

collaborative governance structures throughout implementation. The intentionality of this process created space to collectively make sense of the identity and purpose of their organizations and stakeholders' roles in helping it succeed. In taking the time to do this, leaders were able to build stronger and more enduring incentives for partners to collaborate than simply funding or political opportunities. These efforts helped build a sense of collective ownership and democratic participation where partners could be motivated by a long-term vision. Without this process, the three collaborations would likely have had a more difficult time convincing partners that they were doing something new and different for their communities. While it is too soon to say that the surviving collaborations have been fully institutionalized in their local ecologies, interviewees from all three organizations suggested it would be highly unpopular for new district, city or county leadership to dismantle them.

OUSD invested in a strategic planning process that involved 14 different community school task forces comprised of CBO, district, public and private sector leaders, each of which was focused on a different component of the strategy. In total, the process took over a year and resulted in the creation of a strategic plan to guide the district's vision for full-service community schools over the ensuing five years. Even though the district, operating as the backbone, had ultimate say in determining the strategy, this advisory process cultivated shared trust among partners and a strong sense of what different partners thought the district's children needed. Community engagement efforts with families and students accompanied this process as a means to inform them of the district's strategy and goals. These initial efforts planted the seeds for broad-based buy-in and long-term engagement, which was maintained through continued engagement efforts and the creation of collaborative governance bodies at the school site level (i.e., the COST teams). CSTS was the only one of the three collaborations that engaged

grassroots community members from the outset, but this strategy seemed appropriate because students and families ended up serving on local control governance bodies.

In AHR, coalition building started with a preexisting mayor's cabinet that coalesced other higher education and community partners to rethink how to improve the county's educational outcomes. Even after the Portland Public Schools Foundation was identified as the backbone, its leadership conducted outreach to a variety of sectors—meeting with representatives from the county's school districts, higher education institutions, CBOs, the business community, culturally specific organizations, and city and county governments. This provided a space for AHR to draw clear boundaries between their vision and the backbone role they would take on. From the onset, stakeholders knew to expect that AHR would not provide financial incentives for participating in the partnership. To ensure coalition building and partner buy-in were constantly negotiated and valued, AHR established a Partnership Council consisting of over 42 executive and systems leaders that provides AHR leaders strategic guidance on how to continually engage different sectors, analyze and report data, and make local policy recommendations. Like SYB's Community Leadership Council (CLC), this collaborative oversight body only meets three times a year and is largely advisory, leaving the board of directors to make more operational decisions about AHR. The autonomy AHR provides to its ground level collaborative teams—the School Community Site Teams—is another means through which it uses a structured governance team to reinforce their identity as a facilitator while engaging relevant stakeholders in democratic decision-making to build collective ownership.

Political and civic willpower were among the criteria that Say Yes National identified as essential before even considering the adoption of Buffalo as one of their sites. A full 18 months prior to its announcement as a chapter, Say Yes National leaders and two key foundations were

convening meetings with grasstops leaders to gauge the level of support for SYB in the community. Like AHR, this engagement was initially focused on executive and systems leaders rather than families and grassroots community members to avoid demoralizing community members if SYB was unable to become a chapter. This small group of grasstops, cross-sector stakeholders formed the Operating Committee, which functions as a board of directors making operational and strategic decisions about the direction of the organization. Eventually, grassroots leaders were brought onto the Operating Committee and many were also invited to sit on the Community Leadership Council (CLC), which currently includes over 60 members. Even though the CLC is largely symbolic and advisory, it is an opportunity to disseminate information on the progress and outcomes of the work to date, reinforce the value of the work and provide a forum for community members to provide feedback and engage with SYB leaders.

Building in these collaborative oversight bodies was an effective way to create a structured space for cross-sector leaders to reconcile differences in opinion and come to a joint understanding about the work. Even when the trajectory of the collaborations were constantly changing and being renegotiated, these spaces and efforts were places to return to where the identity and brand of the organizations could be reestablished. This allowed leaders to set their organization apart from prior initiatives by creating a unified understanding of their uniqueness in mission, vision and approach. Subsequently, this made it easier for stakeholders to return to their own organizations and networks and articulate the identity, purpose and progress of the work to date. This constant negotiation cannot be taken for granted in cross-sector collaboration because it creates legitimacy that ultimately supports institutionalization.

Promising Practice 4: Create one common narrative about the organization’s identity and mission, but tailored narratives about how different stakeholders fit into the work.

The level of visibility, communications and branding strategies across the three surviving collaborations varied greatly; however, there were some common elements at the core of how each organization went about this process. Interviewees from all three collaborations used similar phrases and diction (“the whole child,” “a ray of hope,” “changing the culture of collaboration”) when speaking about the mission and vision of their work. The shared use of these phrases indicates that the collaborations had established a brand rooted in a common narrative about the organization’s mission and purpose. However, different channels of communication were employed to deliver tailored messages to stakeholders about their roles in fulfilling this vision. Both grassroots and grassstops leaders were involved in the strategic planning process for CSTS, but students, parents and teachers were not. Separate community engagement efforts were held simultaneously with these community members to focus on how the community schools vision would benefit them. After winning a communications grant and hiring a firm to do case studies about community schools awareness, CSTS leaders learned that there was a misunderstanding among teachers that CSTS would be a “donut” that failed to address schools’ core academic needs. Subsequently, the district tailored communications efforts for teachers in a way that explained how the school wraparound services would supplement, rather than supplant, investment in academics.

AHR also created a common narrative about its work, but focused on communicating its value proposition to funders, systems and executive leaders over grassroots community stakeholders. The structure of AHR left it a couple of degrees removed from parents, teachers and students, meaning their buy-in and knowledge of AHR’s presence was not essential for AHR to continue its work. When communicating with their School Community Site Teams, board and Partnership Council, AHR centers meetings on data and continuous improvement to drive

decision-making and reassert the value of AHR to superintendents, principals and other school stakeholders. Events advertised to systems and corporate leaders, like “Principal for Almost a Day,” promote continued partner engagement through exposing them to the ways in which AHR’s work translates to schools, while the production of “chapters” is used to present the journey of AHR in a way that communicates the difficult and long-term nature of improving outcomes to funders.

Although the common narrative about SYB is rooted in the hope that the last-dollar scholarship brings to Buffalo, SYB has also tailored its narratives and communications strategies based on the type of stakeholder they are engaging. Leaders leveraged the engagement of their faith-based and grassroots leaders, for example, to disseminate information about the scholarship to families. These leaders thus served as the mouthpiece of SYB instead of relying on direct communication and engagement with this community members. When appealing to different funders, SYB has tailored its narrative strategically to secure more funding. A recent example of this is a long-term grant from a major foundation, which they won by framing their narrative as a preschool-16 pipeline. Moreover, across the three surviving collaborations, diverse communications efforts have been focused on maintaining and increasing cross-sector engagement rather than claiming credit for the work. Overall, these collaborations were able to get ahead of damaging narratives in a way that their dead counterparts could not.

Promising Practice 5: Buffer the backbone from environmental instability and scrutiny by creating separation between facilitation and programmatic service provision.

An analysis of the organizational arrangements of the surviving collaborations revealed some positive benefits that interviewees had not necessarily thought about or considered when determining the role of the backbone. Separating the backbone convening and facilitation work

from service provision, for example, seemed to afford the surviving collaborations more flexibility as they moved through different stages of implementation—including contractions and expansions of their initiatives. CSTS leveraged the preexisting services and expertise of public agencies and CBOs in delivering wraparound services at school sites, while the district provided strategic oversight for the CSTS strategy and established school governance structures, such as the COST teams. Schools then had a large degree of autonomy in determining their CSM and cross-sector partners. In the case that a CBO partner is ineffective, the loose coupling of the school’s activities from the district could shield the district from criticism that it was in fact the community school strategy that was ineffective, rather than a specific partner or school.

AHR, which has been the most explicit of the three surviving collaborations in distinguishing their backbone role from programmatic service provision, similarly created a loosely coupled configuration in which the backbone could not necessarily be held responsible for the ineffectiveness or failures of the ground-level School Community Site Teams. The level of autonomy afforded to the teams creates space to exercise continuous improvement and change course more freely. Even SYB, which has recently moved into more direct programmatic work, created a clear distinction between its backbone role and the collaborative work of its partners in providing various wraparound services at the school district at its inception. The implementation of a new, comprehensive database to support the work of the Family Support Specialists (FSSs) never fully materialized, but this contraction has not affected the continued scaling of SYB because of how much their partners are implicated in implementing wraparound initiatives—building in not just credit, but accountability.

None of the leaders from the three collaborations claimed that insulation from environmental instability or scrutiny factored into their logic when determining this role

separation, but the ability to dilute or disperse responsibility during implementation across several different organizations appears to be a positive externality of this configuration. Lift Off, Rise Up and HSS, in either failing to distinguish between their backbone roles and programmatic service provision or engaging in service provision before the collaborative had matured to a sustainable scale, were scrutinized by cross-sector partners and the public for their perceived shortcomings. The bundling of all these roles into one left little room for the collaborations to take the work in a different direction or repair their reputations, reducing how much they could experiment with trial and error during implementation. Moreover, it encouraged mission creep by requiring backbone staff to learn how to specialize in tasks or services that could have been outsourced to organizations already well-versed in these areas.

The explanation that stakeholders from the surviving collaborations did provide for the distinction of their backbone role from programmatic initiatives was the desire to avoid duplicating efforts that were already in existence throughout their locales. Leaders from CSTS argued that implementing the community school vision was concerned with the more effective coordination of preexisting resources and expertise in the community than it was about creating new initiatives that had never been attempted before. This sentiment was shared by leaders from AHR, who were more focused on data-based communication and information flows between cross-sector stakeholders than duplicating the efforts of CBOs and others who had worked on improving certain outcomes for decades. Instead, AHR made sure that these stakeholders were sitting on specific School Community Site Teams and informing the work. SYB leaders were also attuned to the issue of duplication. In the vast majority of its initiatives, SYB works in partnership with coalitions and organizations that have been involved in the work long before SYB came into existence.

Promising Practice 6: Leverage network membership to learn from other collaborations and avoid replicating the same mistakes.

Finally, a preliminary finding from the three surviving collaborations is the benefit of leveraging formal and informal network attachment to guide the initial stages of their work. OUSD leaders attended conferences at the Coalition for Community Schools and held meetings with the network's leader to inform their district-wide strategy. In actively participating in these events, they determined which collaborative structures would be best suited for the district based on others' experiences, resulting in the community school manager (CSM) position and coordination of services teams (COST) at schools. Lift Off, which did not have enough time to consult this network or others involved in community schools work, made critical mistakes that could have been avoided if they had learned from these networks. For example, hiring entry-level, short-term contract staff to fill their coordinator positions (a parallel role to the CSM) undermined the sustainability of both the structure at schools and the partnerships built between the schools and nonprofits. If this role had been filled by a mid-level employee, institutionalization may have stood a better chance once the work was passed on to the district.

AHR and SYB were more formally attached to a network than CSTS, originally initiated under the guidance of the StriveTogether network and Say Yes to Education National, respectively. Leaders from AHR and SYB described some shortcomings of being attached to the network, such as certain criteria for membership being too prescriptive or not as helpful as the network believed it to be. Overwhelmingly, however, stakeholders appreciated the collaborative governance structures, data-driven models and learnings from other backbones that the networks brought to their collaborations. The collective impact identity of AHR and its rapid cycle continuous improvement practices, for example, were learnings from the StriveTogether network

that provided a cohesiveness to the work when AHR experimented with different approaches. In contrast, Rise Up's lack of a cohesive framework and organizational identity contributed to mission creep and an inability to approach its different initiatives consistently and effectively.

SYB, attached to the most prescriptive network of the three collaborations, benefitted from the guaranteed, substantial financial support from its network and a built-in governance and sustainability model. Although the collaboration has been given increased autonomy to operate without the network as it moves into the later stages of implementation, its affiliation has provided a consistent framework for cross-sector collaboration and learnings from other collaborations doing similar work. Just as leaders from AHR and OUSD attended meetings and conferences held by StriveTogether and the Coalition for Community Schools, SYB benefitted from the experiences of other Say Yes sites and postsecondary pipeline collaborations. HSS, on the other hand, operated largely in isolation from the learnings of other postsecondary pipeline initiatives, particularly as the financial sustainability and capacity of the Students Succeed network weakened over time. In the final transition report for its successor organization, consultants reported that the lack of a postsecondary pipeline framework used by several other initiatives doing similar work was one of the main weaknesses of HSS.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Implications for Future Research

The findings from my study build on previous research identifying hindrances to cross-sector collaboration for education (see discussion in Karp & Lundy-Wagner, 2016; Lee et al., 2013), but provides a more in-depth analysis of how these hindrances influence organizational survival. Specifically, my study adds more nuance and richness to prior research indicating that divergent partner priorities, staff and leadership turnover, and funding constraints are variables that undermine effective collaboration. More importantly, my study adds new value to the field of cross-sector collaboration by focusing on what Hanleybrown et al. (2012) refer to as the third key phase of collective impact: sustaining action and impact. The bulk of the literature on collective impact to date focuses on the first two phases—initiating action and organizing for impact—but provides mostly prescriptive guidance on sustainability. By focusing on stakeholders’ retrospective accounts of why their collaborations closed, I have sought to provide evidence for the value of “autopsies” in cross-sector collaboration research. There is value not only in understanding what these complex organizations are doing in real time, but in understanding how and why they were unable to persist long enough to fulfill their missions.

Researchers interested in unpacking the complicated interpersonal, organizational and environmental dynamics involved in cross-sector collaboration should pursue future research informed by the four new theoretical propositions that emerged from this study. Using these theoretical propositions to guide the construction of a conceptual framework and research instruments (e.g., interview protocols or observation rubrics) would shed light on how, if at all, the patterned conditions and practices of the three dead collaborations in this study are applicable to other collaborations in different environments. This would contribute to a more robust body of

academic knowledge on cross-sector collaboration in education that would strengthen practitioners' and policymakers' ability to implement the work effectively. Future researchers could explore more deeply the following questions: Are there in fact moments in a cross-sector collaboration's developmental trajectory when these conditions and practices are especially consequential? Is it possible to identify "symptoms" or early warning indicators related to their organizational death? Both the theoretical propositions and promising practices outlined here should be tested in other case studies to confirm (or reject) their centrality to the sustainability and institutionalization of these complex organizations.

Further, in comparing the key conditions, events and strategies that led to the closure of these collaborations with those of their surviving pairs, I was able to examine how currently operating collaborations addressed or are addressing these issues differently. Preliminary promising practices emerged in juxtaposition to the formerly existing pairs that may support the efforts of current collaborations in various stages of their own implementation. The value in this comparative analysis is that it highlighted areas of focus in the surviving collaborations that also warrant more investigation in the future: Are the surviving collaborations, which are not yet permanent fixtures in their environments, still vulnerable to the same conditions that undermined the dead collaborations? How do variations in the composition of cross-sector partners influence the cohesiveness and stability of the collaborations? Do the benefits of network membership vary during different stages of their organizational trajectories? Other interesting topics that were raised by a handful of interviewees, such as the role of logic models and student outcomes in signaling progress, also warrant more explicit investigation in the future.

Finally, a larger question remains that the data from my study cannot answer: Are there any generalizable environmental conditions that support the survival of cross-sector

collaboration, or will survival always be contingent on the unique interplay of interpersonal, organizational and environmental conditions in each locale? Future scholars should pay particular attention to different manipulations of the macro-, meso- and micro-level conditions described in this study to build a more robust understanding of how distinct combinations might yield different outcomes. While there may never be a singular form of cross-sector collaboration that works universally well across diverse contexts, the findings from this study bring us closer to understanding the most important considerations for their survival. Organizational persistence is a necessary condition for these collaborations to fulfill their missions and “move the needle” on the systems change they so often seek.

Implications for Practitioners

I wanted this study to speak to more than just academics. Practitioners are often put in a position where they do not have sufficient time or capacity to engage with academic research to inform their own choices. The danger in the inaccessibility of academic research to these leaders is that they are not always aware when they are recreating an initiative that struggled with implementation and sustainability elsewhere. Lift Off is a perfect example of such an effort—the initiative was pitched by Collective Pathways to a nonprofit in another city without the leaders of that organization ever learning the details of how it functioned in Frankel. It is likely that these cross-sector collaborations are being replicated in other locations without leaders understanding the critical events and junctures that made them impossible to sustain in the first place.

The major findings of the cross-case analyses, including the theoretical propositions and best practices, are meant to be practical and actionable for on-the-ground stakeholders with limited information to predict the challenges they will face when it comes time to implement. Most implementation studies are focused on one case, but my dissertation looks across six to

explicitly analyze how the persisting collaborations diverged from their dead counterparts when it came to strategizing and making difficult decisions. Additionally, instead of generic considerations from networks and other cross-sector collaboration forums, I have provided substantive details about the characteristics of each of the cases, with real world examples of how their work has played out under different conditions. The promising practices and theoretical propositions here can be flagged for practitioners to signal healthy signs of sustainability or indications that they will need to reconsider their organizational arrangements.

Implications for Policymakers

The importance of building a more robust understanding of cross-sector collaboration for education is evidenced by the federal policies and resources supporting the strategy, the increasing awareness and popularity of intermediary, “weaver” organizations, the growing number of collaborations across the country and the increase in cross-sector network memberships (Henig et al., 2016). At the highest level, the federal reauthorization of the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) in 2015 shifted much of the responsibility of improving academic outcomes to local actors, empowering states and local education agencies to come up with their own solutions to educational improvement. Since 2017, the Institute for Educational Sciences Regional Education Laboratory Programs (RELs) have also been culling information on cross-sector collaboration as a strategy for educational change (see REL West, 2018), further suggesting that the strategy is becoming a popular option for local educational actors and policymakers. The literature and research synthesized by RELs, however, focuses on collaboration successes and positive academic and nonacademic outcomes, sustaining partnerships, and leveraging multiple funding streams to sustain the work beyond a grant cycle.

There still exists a large gap in the knowledge produced about the conditions that undermine effective implementation and the strategy's long-term viability.

This gap makes my research relevant and informative for local policymakers as well as other educational actors. Under what conditions is it worth investing in cross-sector collaboration as a strategy for educational improvement? As more intermediaries start to identify as “collective impact” organizations and network membership increases (Henig et al., 2016), diversifying the information available on this strategy becomes more salient. The largest cross-sector collaboration network, StriveTogether, has grown from providing guidance to a handful of member organizations in 2006 to over 70 cross-sector partnerships and 10,800 organizations in 2020 (StriveTogether, 2020). Influential think tanks and social impact organizations, such as the Aspen Institute and FSG, have also increased their membership and presence throughout the years. Aspen Institute initiatives, such as the Collective Impact Forum and Weave: The Social Fabric Project, have been promoting the use of cross-sector collaboration by providing publicly accessible tools and resources to interested actors. In particular, the Aspen Institute is responsible for recently introducing and promoting the concept of “weaver” organizations in 2018—intermediary organizations like All Hands Raised whose explicit purpose is to eliminate social isolation by weaving together diverse community actors for social change.⁵¹

In light of these social and policy trends, it is critical to add more empirical evidence to the body of information being produced by predominantly advocacy organizations about cross-sector collaboration in education. My study and others that build on it can help policy leaders make better informed decisions about if and how they should invest in supporting the strategy. If state and local policymakers do decide to pursue the strategy as one means of improving

⁵¹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/18/opinion/culture-compassion.html> for more information about the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project.

educational outcomes, the lessons learned, theoretical propositions and promising practices from my study can help them determine who should participate in coalition meetings, what technical and financial support they could provide, and how to think about cross-sector collaboration as a process. Some states have already passed policies that support the incubation of regional cross-sector collaboration efforts to incentivize the strategy.⁵² The production of more empirical research on this subject can influence how other state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) across the country decide to reallocate resources in support of the intermediary, backbone organizations pursuing this work.

Implications for Foundations and Other Philanthropic Donors

In an age of growing philanthropic investment in education, my research has perhaps the most important implications for the role of funders in cross-sector collaboration. Scholars have long documented the increasing role of business, venture philanthropy and wealthy, charitable organizations in shaping the education policy agenda (Cuban, 2005; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Reckhow & Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Scott, 2009). Large, influential philanthropies like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation, Chan-Zuckerburg Initiative and the Aspen Institute have become increasingly aggressive with their involvement in recent years (Herold, 2016; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). While we appear to be in an era where these elite, charitable institutions are investing more than ever in education reform, it will take more than their financial commitments to change social systems.

Prior research has already found that foundations force heterogeneous nonprofits to become more similar by imposing their own logics and practices through grant criteria (Hwang & Powell, 2009). Many of these large, charitable organizations have historically relied on

⁵² Examples include Oregon's regional achievement collaborative initiative (RACs) and Florida's early learning coalitions (ELCs).

capitalist logic to guide their investments—focusing on prescriptive innovation toolkits, scalability and demonstrated returns on investment. Leaders from the cross-sector collaborations in my study—dead and surviving—spoke to the difficulty of producing data and outputs commensurate with this return on investment. As evidenced by the resource dependent relationships of backbone organizations upon philanthropies and the discrepancies in what philanthropic and backbone leaders expect of cross-sector collaborations, these donors will need to reimagine their roles in order for collaborations to persist long enough to demonstrate substantive change. Philanthropies must shift into a cultural and normative mindset where they are no longer funding a program or product from which they can get a return on investment; they are funding a reimagining of social structures that cannot be commensurately measured.

With recent policies such as the 2017 Investing in Opportunity Act creating incentives for the private sector to invest in community-based social change, it is of utmost importance that charitable organizations build an awareness of how their traditional giving patterns, grant requirements and internal organizational cultures influence the implementation of systems change work. Think tanks, foundations and networks alike have moved into a space where they are developing frameworks and guidance on how to design and execute cross-sector collaboration. While these efforts are well intentioned, there are some dangers to cross-sector collaboration that come with this space. When collaborations do not meet the technical-rational expectations of their funders nor the prescriptive criteria of networks, they risk being dropped from their support altogether. Philanthropic organizations must build an awareness that in continuing to fund systems change work the way that they have been, they are circumventing a more democratic process of social change (Giridharadas, 2018; Scott, 2009). Cross-sector

collaborations and their investors could both benefit from moving into a space that prioritizes and rewards local innovation over adherence to prescribed rules.

Thus, the value of my study for foundations and other grantors is shedding light on the pressing need for these organizations to develop a new, more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a “convener,” “intermediary,” or “backbone organization.” This missing understanding was present across all three dead collaborations and a concern noted by a handful of leaders across the survivors as well. The consequences of their resource dependent relationships on philanthropic donors, particularly when concentrated into the hands of a few, was at the center of the dead collaborations’ inability to sustain their work over time. While there is extant research on how to guide grantors to invest in these efforts and how collaborations can leverage different funding streams (Asera, et al., 2017), there is a dearth of research that speaks to the critical importance of changing the inter-organizational arrangements between collaborations and their funders. My study and research that further investigates this topic has the potential to influence how donors think by highlighting the voices and sensemaking of stakeholders on-the-ground. There are early signs that this could make a tangible difference to business-as-usual for philanthropic organizations. The Gates Foundation, for example, recently changed their grantor focus to funding “intermediaries for scale” that “support diverse institutions through the process of comprehensive change” as of January 2020.⁵³ A move such as this from a major foundation, alongside research that demonstrates the importance of reimagining traditional funder-recipient relationships in cross-sector collaboration, has the potential to positively shape the field.

⁵³ See <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/01/09/gates-foundations-new-grants-intermediaries> for more information.

References

- Annie E. Casey Foundation. (1999). *The Eye of the Storm: Ten Years on the Front Lines of New Futures*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, *18*(4), 543-571.
- Asera, R., Gabriner, R., & Hemphill, D. (2017). What makes a partnership work? Report commissioned by College Futures Foundation.
- Barringer, B. R., & Harrison, J. S. (2000). Walking a tightrope: Creating value through interorganizational relationships. *Journal of Management*, *26*(3), 367-403.
- Bartlett, L., & Vavrus, F. (2017). *Rethinking case study research: A comparative approach*. Routledge.
- Bazzoli, G. J., Casey, E., Alexander, J. A., Conrad, D. A., Shortell, S. M., Sofaer, S., & Zukoski, A. P. (2003). Collaborative initiatives: Where the rubber meets the road in community partnerships. *Medical Care Research and Review*, *60*(4), 63S-94S.
- Beierle, T. C., & Konisky, D. M. (2001). What are we gaining from stakeholder involvement? Observations from environmental planning in the Great Lakes. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, *19*(4), 515-527.
- Bennet, J. V., & Thompson, H. C. (2011). Changing district priorities for school-business collaboration: Superintendent agency and capacity for institutionalization. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *47*(5), 826-868.
- Berry, C. R., Burden, B. C., & Howell, W. G. (2010). After enactment: The lives and deaths of federal programs. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*(1), 1-17.
- Binder, A. (2007). For love and money: Organizations' creative responses to multiple environmental logics. *Theory and Society*, *36*(6), 547-571.
- Blau, P. M., & Schoenherr, R. A. (1971). *The structure of organizations*. Basic Books (AZ).
- Bracht, N., Finnegan Jr, J. R., Rissel, C., Weisbrod, R., Gleason, J., Corbett, J., & Veblen-Mortenson, S. (1994). Community ownership and program continuation following a health demonstration project. *Health Education Research*, *9*(2), 243-255.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: Propositions from the literature. *Public Administration Review*, *66*(s1), 44-55.

- Bush-Mecenas, S., & Marsh, J. A. (2018). The DIVE Approach: Using Case-Ordered Meta-Matrices and Theory-Based Data Displays to Analyze Multiple Case Study Data. *Complementary Research Methods for Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, 33-56.
- Butterfoss, F. D., & Kegler, M. C. (2002). Toward a comprehensive understanding of community coalitions. *Emerging Theories in Health Promotion Practice and Research*, 157-193.
- Butterfoss, F. D. (2006). Process evaluation for community participation. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 27, 323-340.
- Butterfoss, F. D., & Kegler, M. C. (2009). The community coalition action theory. *Emerging Theories in Health Promotion Practice and Research*, 2, 237-276.
- Carroll, G. R., & Delacroix, J. (1982). Organizational mortality in the newspaper industries of Argentina and Ireland: An ecological approach. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 169-198.
- Cohen, D. L. (1991). Reality tempers "New Futures" optimism'. *Education Week*, 9(4), 12-15.
- Crosby, B. C., & Bryson, J. M. (2005). A leadership framework for cross-sector collaboration. *Public Management Review*, 7(2), 177-201.
- Crowson, R. L., & Boyd, W. L. (1993). Coordinated services for children: Designing arks for storms and seas unknown. *American Journal of Education*, 101(2), 140-179.
- Crowson, R. L., & Boyd, W. L. (1996). Structures and strategies: Toward an understanding of alternative models for coordinated children's services. *Coordination among Schools, Families, and Communities: Prospects for Educational Reform*, 137-170.
- Cuban, L. (2005). *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can't be businesses*. Harvard University Press.
- Davis, G. F., McAdam, D., Scott, W. R., & Zald, M. N. (Eds.). (2005). *Social movements and organization theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Collective rationality and institutional isomorphism in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147-160.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (Eds.). (1991). *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis (Vol. 17)*. University of Chicago Press.
- Education Northwest. (2013). Road map for educational results: Year-end formative evaluation report.

- Fehrer, K., & Leos-Urbel, J. (2015). Oakland Unified School District Community Schools: Understanding Implementation Efforts to Support Students, Teachers, and Families. John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities.
- Friedland, Roger, and Robert R. Alford. (1991). Bringing society back in: Symbols, practices, and institutional contradictions. In Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis: 232-263*. University of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, A. R., & Wicklund, K. (2006). Allies against asthma: a midstream comment on sustainability. *Health Promotion Practice, 7*(2), 140S-148S.
- Geoghegan, T., & Renard, Y. (2002). Beyond community involvement: lessons from the insular Caribbean. *Parks, 12*(2), 16-27.
- Giridharadas, A. (2019). *Winners take all: The elite charade of changing the world*. Vintage.
- Given, L. M. (2008). Purposive sampling. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods [Internet]. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Gray, B., & Hay, T. M. (1986). Political limits to interorganizational consensus and change. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 22*(2), 95-112.
- Gray, B. (1989). *Collaborating: Finding common ground for multiparty problems*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hallett, T. (2010). The myth incarnate: Recoupling processes, turmoil, and inhabited institutions in an urban elementary school. *American Sociological Review, 75*(1), 52-74.
- Haas, E., Johnson, N. J., & Hall, R. H. (1963). The size of the supportive component in organizations: A multi-organizational analysis. *Social Forces, 42*(1), 9-17.
- Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). Channeling change: Making collective impact work. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work and <http://www.fsg.org/publications/channeling-change>.
- Herold, B. (2016). Technology in education: An overview. *Education Week, 20*, 129-141.
- Henig, J. R., Riehl, C. J., Rebell, M. A., & Wolff, J. R. (2015). Putting collective impact in context: A review of the literature on local cross-sector collaboration to improve education. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Henig, J. R., Riehl, C. J., Houston, D. M., Rebell, M. A., & Wolff, J. R. (2016). Collective impact and the new generation of cross-sector collaborations for education: A nationwide scan. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Hess, F. M. (1999). *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*. Brookings Institution.

- Hodge, G. A., & Greve, C. (2007). Public-private partnerships: an international performance review. *Public Administration Review*, 67(3), 545-558.
- Hudson, B., Hardy, B., Henwood, M., & Wistow, G. (1999). In pursuit of inter-agency collaboration in the public sector: What is the contribution of theory and research?. *Public Management an International Journal of Research and Theory*, 1(2), 235-260.
- Human, S. E., & Provan, K. G. (2000). Legitimacy building in the evolution of small-firm multilateral networks: A comparative study of success and demise. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45(2), 327-365.
- Hwang, H., & Powell, W. W. (2009). The rationalization of charity: The influences of professionalism in the nonprofit sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54(2), 268-298.
- Jepperson, R. (1991). Institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalism. In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 143-163.
- Johnson, D., E. Ransom, T. Packwood, K. Bowden, and M. Kogan. (1980). Secondary Schools and the Welfare Network.
- Jones, C., Hesterly, W. S., & Borgatti, S. P. (1997). A general theory of network governance: Exchange conditions and social mechanisms. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 911-945.
- Karp, M. J. M., & Lundy-Wagner, V. (2016). Collective impact: Theory versus reality. Columbia Academic Commons.
- Koppenjan, J. F. M., & Enserink, B. (2009). Public-private partnerships in urban infrastructures: Reconciling private sector participation and sustainability. *Public Administration Review*, 69(2), 284-296.
- LaRocco, D. J., Taylor, B. A., & D'Annolfo, S. C. (2014). Urban community schools: Educator perceptions of the effects of children's health and wellness on learning. *Current Issues in Education*, 17(1).
- Lasker, R. D., & Weiss, E. S. (2003). Broadening participation in community problem solving: a multidisciplinary model to support collaborative practice and research. *Journal of Urban Health*, 80(1), 14-47.
- Lee, J., McAlister, S., Mishook, J., & Santner, G. (2013). Partnerships for college readiness. College readiness indicator systems. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.
- Lindblom, C. E. (1959). The science of "muddling through". *Public Administration Review*, 79-88.

- Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 226-251.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage publications.
- McGuire, M. (2006). Collaborative public management: Assessing what we know and how we know it. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 33-43.
- Mechanic, D. (1962). Sources of power of lower participants in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 349-364.
- Mehta, J. D., & Teles, S. (2012). Jurisdictional politics: A new federal role in education. In *Carrots, Sticks and the Bully Pulpit: Lessons From a Half-Century of Federal Efforts to Improve America's Schools*. Harvard Education Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Merrill-Sands, D., & Sheridan, B. (1996). Developing and managing collaborative alliances: Lessons from a review of the literature. *Organizational Change Briefing Note*, 3(8).
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340-363.
- Meyer, J. W., & Scott, W. R. (1992). *Organizational environments: Ritual and rationality*. Sage Publications.
- Meyer, H. D., & Rowan, B. (2006). Institutional analysis and the study of education. In *The New Institutionalism in Education*, 1-13. SUNY Press.
- Milam, J. M., & Heath, R. G. (2014). Participative democracy and voice: Rethinking community collaboration beyond neutral structures. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(4), 366-386.
- Milofsky, C. (1981). The Structure of Funding Arenas for Community Self-help Organizations. Institution for Social and Policy Studies, Yale University.
- Milofsky, C. (1988). *Community organizations: Studies in resource mobilization and exchange*. Oxford University Press.
- Moldovanu, B., & Winter, E. (1994). Consistent demands for coalition formation. In *Essays in Game Theory* (pp. 129-140). Springer.
- Murphy, J., & Meyers, C. V. (2009). Rebuilding organizational capacity in turnaround schools: Insights from the corporate, government, and non-profit sectors. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 37(1), 9-27.

- Neumann, A., & Pallas, A. M. (2015). Critical policy analysis, the craft of qualitative research, and analysis of data on the Texas Top 10% law. *Critical Approaches to the Study of Higher Education*, 153-173.
- Núñez, A. M., & Oliva, M. (2009). Organizational collaboration to promote college access: A P-20 framework. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(4), 322-339.
- Ostrower, F. (2005). The reality underneath the buzz of partnerships. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (2003). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. Stanford University Press.
- Pluye, P., Potvin, L., & Denis, J. L. (2004). Making public health programs last: conceptualizing sustainability. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 27(2), 121-133.
- Powell, W. (1991). Expanding the scope of institutional analysis. In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. University of Chicago Press.
- Pugh, D. S., Hickson, D. J., & Hinings, C. R. (1969). An empirical taxonomy of structures of work organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 115-126.
- Reckhow, S., & Snyder, J. W. (2014). The expanding role of philanthropy in education politics. *Educational Researcher*, 43(4), 186-195.
- Reckhow, S., & Tompkins-Stange, M. (2018). Financing the education policy discourse: philanthropic funders as entrepreneurs in policy networks. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 7(3), 258-288.
- REL West. (2018). A Compilation of Research on Cross-Sector Education and Career Partnerships. Regional Educational Laboratory West at WestEd.
- Rein, M., & Schön, D. (1996). Frame-critical policy analysis and frame-reflective policy practice. *Knowledge and Policy*, 9(1), 85-104.
- Reilly, T. (2001). Collaboration in action: An uncertain process. *Administration in Social Work*, 25(1), 53-74.
- Rosch, E. (1999). Principles of categorization. *Concepts: core readings*, 189.
- Roussos, S. T., & Fawcett, S. B. (2000). A review of collaborative partnerships as a strategy for improving community health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 21(1), 369-402.
- Scott, W. R. (1995). *Organizations and institutions. Foundations for Organizational Science*. Sage Publications.
- Scott, W. R. (2004). Institutional theory. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 11, 408-14.

- Scott, J. (2009). The politics of venture philanthropy in charter school policy and advocacy. *Educational Policy, 23*(1), 106-136.
- Sedlak, M. W. (1981). Youth policy and young women, 1950-1972: the impact of private-sector programs for pregnant and wayward girls on public policy. National Institute for Education Youth Policy Research Conference, Washington, DC.
- Shediach-Rizkallah, M. C., & Bone, L. R. (1998). Planning for the sustainability of community-based health programs: conceptual frameworks and future directions for research, practice and policy. *Health Education Research, 13*(1), 87-108.
- Singh, J. V. (1986). Performance, slack, and risk taking in organizational decision making. *Academy of Management Journal, 29*(3), 562-585.
- Singh, J. V., Tucker, D. J., & House, R. J. (1986). Organizational legitimacy and the liability of newness. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 31*, 171-193.
- Stone, M. M., Hager, M. A., & Griffin, J. J. (2001). Organizational characteristics and funding environments: A study of a population of United Way-affiliated nonprofits. *Public Administration Review, 61*(3), 276-289.
- StriveTogether. (2020, January 28). About Us. StriveTogether.
<https://www.strivetgether.org/about/>
- Tolbert, P., & Hall, R. (2009). *Organizations: Structures, Processes, and Outcomes*. Routledge.
- Van der Heijden, K., Bradfield, R., Burt, G., Cairns, G., & Wright, G. (2002). *The sixth sense: Accelerating organizational learning with scenarios*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Vaughan, D. (1997). *The Challenger launch decision: Risky technology, culture, and deviance at NASA*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wohlstetter, P., Malloy, C. L., Smith, J., & Hentschke, G. (2003). Cross-sectoral alliances in education: A new approach to enhancing school capacity. In annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago IL.
- Wolff, T. (2016, May 4). Ten Places Where Collective Impact Gets It Wrong [Blog post].
<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/blogs/100061/ten-places-where-collective-impact-gets-it-wrong>
- Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 38*, 628-652.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sage Publishers.
- Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2015). *Managing the unexpected: Sustained performance in a complex world*. John Wiley & Sons.

Weiss, J. A. (1984). *Managing Cooperation and Complexity in Education: The Case of Educational Service Agencies*. Final Report.

Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford Publications.

Appendix A

Table A1. Variation in Characteristics across Collaboration Pairs

Key varied conditions	Lift Off	Community Schools, Thriving Students	Rise Up	All Hands Raised	Harmon Students Succeed	Say Yes to Education Buffalo
Backbone structure	501(c)(3) charitable organization; partnership facilitation	Public school district; partnership facilitation	501(c)(3) charitable organization; facilitation and direct service programming	501(c)(3) charitable organization; no direct service programming	501(c)(3) charitable organization; facilitation and direct service programming	501(c)(3) charitable organization; facilitation and direct service programming
Network membership	No	Coalition for Community Schools	No	StriveTogether Network	Yes, but network dissolved	Say Yes to Education National
Coalition strategy	Reliance on preexisting funder-nonprofit relationship	Multi-year strategic planning process	Foundation-driven coalition that became Rise Up board	Continual coalition building as core part of backbone role	Superintendent brought to businesses and philanthropies	Foundation-driven coalition
Funding arrangement	Bank grant that was not renewed	Long-term “systems change” grants; shared funding responsibility of district, school sites and partnering community organizations	Short-term foundation grants	Over 200 organization and individual donors each year; largest amount of funding from corporate sector	Scholarship reserve and short-term foundation grants	Seed capital from national network; investment of philanthropic donations for perpetual scholarship fund; realignment of local, state and federal public dollars; local philanthropic support
Communication and branding	Small budget; no clear strategy	Charismatic leadership; district-led community engagement	Highly visible to parents, schools, policymakers and philanthropic sector	Invisible to students and parents; visible to partnering district leaders, principals, community partners, corporate and systems leaders	Name-brand to parents, students, teachers and philanthropic community	Name-brand to parents, students, teachers and philanthropic community
Geographic region	Northeast	West	Midwest	West	South	Northeast
Jurisdiction	City	School District	City	County	School District	City
Racial demographics	31% white; 33% black; 29% Hispanic	27% white; 25% black; 27% Hispanic	10% white; 80% black; 7% Hispanic	70% white; 6% black; 12% Hispanic	37% white; 52% black; 5% Hispanic	56% white; 29% black; 8% Hispanic

Appendix B

Key Stakeholder Interview Protocol: Dead Collaborations

The purpose of this study is to understand how key stakeholders in former cross-sector collaborations for education worked with others to build coalitions, create organizational structures and processes, invest in sustaining the collaboration's work, and adapt to the local political, social and economic context. This interview is an opportunity to share the story of [dead collaboration] and provide any insights you might have about the environmental and organizational dynamics that supported or undermined its success. This research is being conducted for my doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University.

This interview will last roughly one hour. The goal of the interview is to simply hear your account of how the collaboration started, how you experienced it throughout its duration (including any critical events and turning points) and how it ended. I will be asking you a series of general questions about your personal experience with the collaboration in this interview. With your permission, I would like to follow-up with you for a second round interview at a later date which will focus on more specific questions about your involvement with the collaboration. I'm speaking with you today because your perspective is invaluable in helping me understand the complexities of [dead collaboration]. Your input will also help me and others who are invested in improving the sustainability of cross-sector collaborations.

Confidentiality

This interview is completely confidential. I will not use your name, specific title, or any direct quotes that would link you to your statements in an identifiable way; however, I will use the information you share with me in my dissertation and any publications or presentations that result from this research. As this interview is voluntary, you can choose to end the conversation at any time. Do you have any questions about the study or the way that your interview will be used?

Consent and Audiotaping

Please take a moment to review the consent form and let me know if you have any questions before signing. Would you mind if I audio record this conversation? Recording will help me keep a complete record of our conversation. You may request at any time to discontinue or temporarily stop the recording. Is audio recording acceptable? (If yes, begin recording).

[NOTE: Some sections of this protocol are intended to guide a more in-depth line of questioning about the collaboration's internal and external dynamics, but will only be asked if relevant to the specific interviewee.]

The Beginning

I would love to get your take on the overarching story of [dead collaboration] and your time working there.

1. Can you describe how *you* first got involved in [dead collaboration]?
 - a. Who reached out to you about the work?
 - b. How did he/she convince you of the importance of the work?
 - c. Did you already know other members of the collaboration? If so, who were they and how did you know them?
2. From your perspective, why do you think [dead collaboration] was created?
 - a. Were there any particular social, economic or political conditions that created a need for this type of organization?
3. Do you recall what strategies were used to recruit the support and membership of other individuals and organizations?
 - a. Do you feel that the leaders of [dead collaboration] able to build trust among partners? [If yes] How were they able to do that?
4. Were there other organizations doing similar work in [city/county] when the collaboration started?
5. When you first joined the collaboration, how did you interpret the organization's mission and goals?
 - a. Did this understanding change over time?
6. How would you describe your role in the initiative?
 - a. What specific responsibilities did you take on?

Organizational Structure and Management

I would now like to dig into some questions about the mechanics of the organization itself for more context.

5. How would you describe the structure of the collaboration?
 - a. How were tasks and work divided among partnering organizations?
 - b. Were there sub-teams or working groups? If so, how were those determined?
 - c. How often did partners meet in sub-teams and convene as a whole?
 - d. Did the collaboration model its structure off another organization?
6. How would you describe the management of the organization?
 - a. How were decisions made?
 - b. How much influence did you feel that you had in decision-making?
7. Were members held accountable for following through with tasks or goals? If so, how?
8. What was your experience collaborating with other partners?
 - a. What strategies for collaboration seemed to work well? What strategies did not?

- b. How would you describe the distribution of power among partners? Did any organizations have more power in influencing the work?
 - c. What incentives were there for partners to continue their involvement in the collaboration?
 - d. Did any partnering organizations ever withdraw from the collaboration? [If yes] Do you remember why?
9. Did you ever get to a point where you felt like the structure and operations of the collaboration became more routine and stable? If so, when?
- a. What contributed to that sense of stability? [Probe: better leadership; more cohesive partnerships; stable resources; morale]

The Role of Data

One of the issues I'm particularly interested in is the role of data. Being "data-driven" seems to be a popular catchphrase in this type of work and I'm curious about how important it is for the collaboration to meet the expectations of a "data-driven" environment.

12. Did you ever share information with the public about what the collaboration was doing?
- a. Did you share data on specific goals and progress towards those goals? [Probe: data tracking internal processes like membership and meetings; data on interim or short-term goals; data on the outcomes of stated goals]
 - b. What was the goal of communicating this specific information?
13. From your perspective, did [dead collaboration] have the capacity to meet its stated goals? How so?
14. What role do you think data played in securing funding and support for the collaboration?
- a. Did the data you shared with funders differ from the data you collected to measure progress toward long-term goals?

Culture and Experience of the Organization

I also want to understand the general culture of the collaboration, how things evolved throughout different stages of the work and what that meant to you individually.

15. How would you describe the culture of [dead collaboration]?
- a. Was the culture consistent throughout your time there or did it change?
16. Are there any important moments or events that stand out in your mind?
- b. Why do you think these events/interactions are memorable to you? [Probe: Did they represent a shift in the course of the collaboration?]
 - c. Can you recall how you felt at the time?
 - d. Did your behavior change after this event/interaction? Did you notice the behavior of other stakeholders change?

17. Did leaders of the collaboration ever change course or approach the work in a new way (e.g., new processes, structures or strategies)?
 - e. [If yes] How did they communicate those changes to you?
 - f. How did you make sense of the new direction?
18. Did leaders of the collaboration ever make any mistakes?
 - g. [If yes] How did they talk about those mistakes? How did you process them?
19. How did partners in the collaboration deal with conflict or confusion?
20. How visible was the collaboration to the general public throughout your time there?
 - h. Did teachers, students and parents know about the collaboration? [If yes] Were they involved in any capacity?
 - i. Did you feel that there was any benefit to the collaboration being more or less visible?
 - j. Did it become more or less visible over time?

Network membership (if applicable)

Networks espouse a number of member benefits on their websites, including support with implementation, additional resources and opportunities to learn from others within the network. I would love to hear your take on the appeal of membership and how well their claims hold up based on your experience.

21. Why did [dead collaboration] choose to become a member of [network]?
22. How would you describe the guidance or support the collaboration received from the network? [Probe: capacity building; implementation; trust-building; scale-up]
 - a. How did you receive information from the network?
23. What were some of the major benefits of being part of the network? [Probe: new relationships; implementation support; other resources]
24. Were there any drawbacks to being part of the network? If so, what were they? [Probe: rigidity in criteria for membership; restrictions; network demands]
25. How critical do you think the network's support was to the sustainability of [dead collaboration]?
 - a. Would you have been able to receive the same amount of support without network membership?

Funding, Resources and Sustainability

Finally, I would like to hear about how, if at all, the strategies to secure funding played a role in the sustainability of the collaboration. I'm also interested in any other factors that might have influenced the sustainability of partnership and stakeholder commitment.

26. How dependent was the organization on outside sources of funding?
 - a. Can you share which sources these were?

- b. How much of this funding came from the public versus the private sector?
 - c. How much of this funding came from grants? Do you recall the grant criteria?
 - d. Do you think this dependence influenced the organization's mission, goals or structure?
27. Did funders expect you to share stories of your progress or success?
- a. [If yes] How did you explain this to funders?
 - b. Can you share an example of one of those successes?
28. Do you know if the collaboration had to compete for funding with other local organizations?
- a. If yes, how did [dead collaboration] convince funders it could do the work better than other organizations?
29. How much effort do you feel was spent on securing immediate financial resources versus planning for the long-run?
30. Throughout your time at [dead collaboration], do you ever recall discussions about sustaining the organization's work?
- a. If so, what strategies were discussed to institutionalize the work?
 - b. Were there plans to transfer any of the work to the public sector?
31. From your perspective, what conditions do you think supported or undermined its sustainability?

Closure of the Collaboration

Finally, I wanted to get your thoughts about the ultimate closure of the collaboration.

32. When did you first learn that [dead collaboration] was going to close?
- a. In retrospect, were there any red flags about its sustainability leading up to that moment?
33. From your perspective, why did the collaboration need to close its doors?
- a. Did the decision surprise you?
34. Were you still partnering with [dead collaboration] when it closed?
- a. [If yes] What were the main reasons you continued to participate in [dead collaboration] until the end?
 - b. [If no] Why did you decide to leave?
35. What, if anything, do you think would have changed the survival prospects of [dead collaboration]?
36. If you could help other collaborations improve their chances of survival, what strategies would you suggest that they pursue? What pitfalls should they avoid?

Key Stakeholder Interview Protocol: Surviving Collaborations

The purpose of this study is to understand how key stakeholders in cross-sector collaborations for education worked with others to build coalitions, create organizational structures and processes, invest in sustaining the collaboration's work, and adapt to the local political, social and economic context. This interview is an opportunity to share the story of [collaboration] and provide any insights you might have about the environmental and organizational dynamics that have supported or undermined its success. This research is being conducted for my doctoral dissertation at Teachers College, Columbia University.

This interview will last roughly one hour. The goal of the interview is to simply hear your account of how the collaboration started and how you have experienced it to date (including any critical events and turning points). I will be asking you a series of general questions about your personal experience with the collaboration in this interview. With your permission, I would like to follow-up with you for a second round interview at a later date which will focus on more specific questions about your involvement with the collaboration. I'm speaking with you today because your perspective is invaluable in helping me understand the complexities of [collaboration]. Your input will also help me and others who are invested in improving the sustainability of cross-sector collaborations.

Confidentiality

This interview is completely confidential. I will not use your name or any direct quotes that would link you to your statements in an identifiable way; however, I will use the information you share with me in my dissertation and any publications or presentations that result from this research. As this interview is voluntary, you can choose to end the conversation at any time. Do you have any questions about the study or the way that your interview will be used?

Consent and Audiotaping

Please take a moment to review the consent form and let me know if you have any questions before signing. Would you mind if I audio record this conversation? Recording will help me keep a complete record of our conversation. You may request at any time to discontinue or temporarily stop the recording. Is audio recording acceptable? (If yes, begin recording).

[NOTE: Some sections of this protocol are intended to guide a more in-depth line of questioning about the collaboration's internal and external dynamics, but will only be asked if relevant to the specific interviewee. For the surviving cases, I only conducted a handful of follow-up interviews with key stakeholders in 2019, with the bulk of interview data coming from interviews conducted in 2015-2017. The follow-up interviews were intended to: 1) fill in gaps in information about the characteristics of a case that pertain to

that stakeholder's position; and 2) dig into specific dynamics based on the emergent themes from the dead collaborations. As such, each interview had a tailored set of questions that deviates from the model below. Questions related to emergent themes are in bold.]

The Beginning

I would love to get your take on the overarching story of [collaboration] and your time working there.

37. Have the collaboration's mission and goals changed since we last spoke in [year]?

a. [If yes] Do you know why?

38. How would you currently describe your role in the initiative?

a. What specific responsibilities do you take on?

b. How has this role changed since you first started working at [collaboration]?

Partner Engagement

I would now like to ask a couple questions related to how you have moved from coalition building and partner recruitment to maintaining partner commitment.

10. What strategies have you been using to secure the buy-in and participation of partner individuals and organizations?

a. Do you feel that the leaders of [collaboration] have able to maintain trust among partners throughout the years?

i. [If yes] How were they able to do that?

11. Can you remind me which actors at the federal, city or school levels were brought together in the formation of the collaboration?

a. Have these actors remained partners throughout the collaboration?

12. What has it been like collaborating with other partners involved in [collaboration]?

a. What strategies for collaboration seem to work well? What strategies do not?

b. How would you describe the distribution of power among partners? Do any organizations have more power in influencing the work?

c. What incentives are there for partners to continue their involvement in the collaboration?

d. Have any partnering organizations withdrawn from the collaboration to date? [If yes] Do you know why?

Experience to Date

I also want to understand the general culture of the collaboration, how things evolved throughout different stages of the work and what that has meant to you individually.

1. How would you describe the current culture of [collaboration]?

- a. Has the culture been consistent throughout your time there or has it changed?
2. Are you at a point where you feel like the structure and operations of the collaboration are more routine and stable?
 - a. [If yes] What contributed to that sense of stability?
3. To date, have leaders of the collaboration ever changed course or approached the work in a new way (e.g., new processes, structures or strategies)?
 - b. [If yes] How did they communicate those changes to you?
 - c. How did you make sense of the new direction?
4. Have leaders of the collaboration ever make any mistakes?
 - d. [If yes] How did they talk about those mistakes? How did you process them?
5. **How visible is the collaboration currently to the general public?**
 - e. **Has it become more or less visible over time?**
 - f. **Do you feel that there has been any benefit or disadvantage to the collaboration's visibility?**
 - g. **How does the visibility of the organization affect partner buy-in and engagement, if at all?**

Organizational Structure and Management

Now I would like to dig into some questions about the mechanics of the organization itself for more context.

6. **Has the structure of the collaboration changed at all since we last spoke in [year]?**
 - a. How are tasks and work divided among partnering organizations?
 - b. Are there sub-teams or working groups? If so, how were those determined?
 - c. How often do partners meet in sub-teams and convene as a whole?
 - d. Does the collaboration model its structure off another organization?
7. **Has the management of the collaboration changed at all since we last spoke in [year]? If yes, how so?**
8. Are members currently being held accountable for following through with tasks or interim goals? If so, how?

The Role of Data

One of the issues I'm particularly interested in is the role of data. Being "data-driven" seems to be a popular catchphrase in this type of work and I'm curious about how important it is for the collaboration to meet the expectations of a "data-driven" environment.

9. **Does [collaboration] share information with the public about what it is doing?**
 - a. Do you share data on specific goals and progress towards those goals? [Probe: data tracking internal processes like membership and meetings; data on interim or short-term goals; data on the outcomes of stated goals]

- b. What is the goal of communicating this specific information?
- 10. What role do you think data has played in securing funding and support for the collaboration?**

- a. Does the data you share with funders differ from the data you collect to measure progress toward goals?

Network membership (if applicable)

Networks espouse a number of member benefits on their websites, including support with implementation, additional resources and opportunities to learn from others within the network. I would love to hear your take on the appeal of membership and how well their claims hold up based on your experience.

- 11. Why did [collaboration] choose to become a member of [network]?
- 12. How would you describe the guidance or support the collaboration received from the network? [Probe: capacity building; implementation; trust-building; scale-up]
 - a. How did you receive information from the network?
- 13. What have been some of the major benefits of being part of the network? [Probe: new relationships; implementation support; other resources]
- 14. Are there any drawbacks to being part of the network? If so, what are they? [Probe: rigidity in criteria for membership; restrictions; network demands]
- 15. How critical do you think the network's support was to the sustainability of [dead collaboration]?
 - a. Would you have been able to receive the same amount of support without network membership?

Funding, Resources and Sustainability

Finally, I would like to hear about how, if at all, the strategies to secure funding have played a role in the financial sustainability of the collaboration. I'm also interested in any other factors that might influence the sustainability of partnership and stakeholder commitment.

- 16. How dependent is the organization on outside sources of funding?
 - a. Can you share which sources these are?
 - b. How much of this funding comes from the public versus the private sector?
 - c. How much of this funding comes from grants? What are the grant criteria?
- 17. Do funders expect you to share stories of your progress or success?
 - a. [If yes] How do you explain this to funders?
 - b. Can you share an example of one of those successes?
- 18. Has dependence on grants or funders ever changed the goals or mission of the organization? [e.g., a shift from chronic absence to social emotional focus]**
- 19. Do you know if the collaboration competes for funding with other local organizations?

- a. If yes, how does [collaboration] convince funders it can do the work better than other organizations?
- 20. How much effort do you feel is spent on securing immediate financial resources versus planning for the long-run?**
- 21. Have you had discussions about sustaining the organization's work? If so, what strategies have been discussed?**
- a. **Are there plans to transfer any of the work to the public sector?**
22. From your perspective, what conditions do you think have supported or undermined the sustainability of the collaboration thus far?

Final Thoughts

Finally, one of the major goals of this study is to understand how cross-sector collaborations can improve their long-term sustainability.

23. Based on your experience to date, what strategies would you suggest that other collaborations pursue to improve their sustainability? What major lessons have you learned that can help others avoid pitfalls?

Appendix C

List of Primary Documents Collected from Dead Collaborations

Note: Documents do not include specific titles in cases where it would compromise the anonymity of the organization.

Lift Off:

1. 2011 Service Corps Job Description
2. 2012 Citywide Education Reform One-Pager
3. 2015 School-Community Partnership Agreement
4. 2015 School-Community Partnership Proposal Form
5. Lift Off Partnership Discussion Guide
6. Lift Off Gap Analysis Worksheet
7. Replicating Organization “[Lift Off]” Toolkit
8. Lift Off digital archive, including:
 - a. Model of school-district partnership process
 - b. Draft measures to track impact of Lift Off interventions document
 - c. Cincinnati Learning Partner Dashboard
 - d. Lift Off Conversation with Nonprofit Leaders Annotated Agenda
 - e. Data sharing consent forms
 - f. Lift Off overview documents for individual schools
 - g. Completed partnership agreements
 - h. Memoranda emails between Collective Pathways and the Mayor’s Office
 - i. 2011-2012 Lift Off Work Plan
 - j. 2011 Lift Off Fundraising Plan
 - k. 2010-2015 Lift Off Draft Budget
 - l. Memoranda of Understanding for partnership between Collective Pathways, the city and school district
9. 2015 Lift Off archived website materials

Rise Up:

1. 2010 Coalition Pledge
2. 2011 Parent School Shopper Fairs Guide
3. 2011 School Quality Scorecard
4. 2013 School Quality Scorecard
5. Internal server documents from 2011-2017, including:
 - a. Monthly board agenda and meeting minutes
 - b. Rise Up staff presentations to the board
 - c. Audited financial statements

- d. Summary budget documents
 - e. Rise Up “Investment Policy” document
 - f. School quality assessment indicators document
 - g. Theory of Action PPT
 - h. Notes on tensions between scorecard and “collective impact”
 - i. Common enrollment initiative PPT
 - j. “A Discussion of Future Options for [Rise Up]” PPT
6. 2015 Rise Up archived website materials

Harmon Students Succeed (HSS):

- 1. 2012 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis
- 2. 2013 HSS Balanced Scorecard (internal goal tracking)
- 3. 2014 HSS Balanced Scorecard (internal goal tracking)
- 4. 2014 HSS Staff Retreat Agenda and Notes
- 5. 2014 Work Plan
- 6. 2015 Current State Assessment and Recommendations Report
- 7. 2015 Signed Plan of Dissolution
- 8. 2015 HSS to Successor Organization Kickoff Documents
- 9. 2015 HSS archived website materials