Partnership-Ready Schools: Building Systems and Mindsets for the Achievement Schools to Receive and Utilize Community Organizations as Partners in Student Success

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Partnership-ready Schools: 
Building Systems and Mindsets for the Achievement Schools to Receive and Utilize 
Community Organizations as Partners in Student Success 

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) 
Capstone 

Submitted by 

Ansel Sanders 

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education 
in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for the degree of 
Doctor of Education Leadership 

May 2015
To my number one partner, Helen –

With unconditional, unwavering, and all-encompassing faith, hope, and love, you led our family and me through this amazing adventure. Thank you and I love you.
Acknowledgements

Applying this Capstone’s core concepts to my own experience, I have many to thank for readying me for and their partnership throughout this journey. First, thank you to my family – Helen, Field, Walker, and Stuart. Your boundless optimism, grit, and trust formed a foundation for me to maximize this opportunity and served as constant sources of inspiration. Thank you for learning and growing with me.

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Lastly, thank you Memphis and more specifically, thank you Frayser. Agape, Communities In Schools, Anaya, Seeding Success, Arthi Krishnaswami, Girls Inc., Charles Matlock, Charlie Caswell, Shep Wilbun, DeAndre Brown, and so many others – you all gave me the chance to partner with you for the betterment of Frayser’s children, families, schools, and community. As a result, you showed me what collective impact actually looks like; I will forever be an advocate for Frayser.
# Table of Contents

Abstract 5

Introduction 7

Review of Knowledge for Action 12
- Loose Coupling: Barriers, Challenges, and Risks to Partnership Readiness 13
- Tight Coupling and Trust: The Partnership-Ready School 20
- Systems Thinking and Change Management Theory 26
- Synthesis and Theory of Action 31

Description of Strategic Project 35
- Defining my Role, the Readiness Challenge, and Strategic Project 36
- Developing the Partnership-ready Toolkit 40
- Introducing the Toolkit and Targeting the Agape Partnership 45
- Readying Schools for the Agape Partnership 48

Results 49
- Short-Term Objective: Results to Date 50
- Mid-Term Objective: Anticipated Results 57

Analysis 58
- Value Proposition 60
- Legitimacy and Support 69
- Operational Capacity 77
- Theory of Action Revisited 84

Implications for Self 88

Implications for Site 94

Implications for Sector 100

Conclusion 105

Bibliography 111

Appendices 117
Abstract

Over the last decade, the call for schools to leverage partnerships with community organizations as a means to provide services that will mitigate the effects of poverty in the pursuit of achieving ambitious academic outcomes has gained momentum. The Achievement Schools, a network of five neighborhood schools serving students in Memphis’ Frayser community, has prioritized the development of partnerships as a lever to turn around the academic performance of its schools by ensuring students’ nonacademic challenges are identified and met. In this Capstone, I describe my role in building a “Partnership Readiness Toolkit,” a framework and set of resources to guide schools in developing the capacity needed to better utilize partnerships with community organizations that provide critical nonacademic services and resources. Drawing upon research that focuses on the challenges facing school-community organization partnerships, examples of effective partnerships, and change management theory, I argue that for schools to fully utilize partnerships, they must first be ready for partnership by more tightly coupling certain aspects of their relationships with community organizations. This Capstone then describes the approaches I took to design, build support for, and apply the Partnership Readiness Toolkit to an important community partner. The analysis of my actions and results generates two key findings: 1) creating a vision and proof point that multiple constituencies find valuable, undergirded by strong relationships with the constituencies, yields the support necessary to successfully introduce and begin applying the Partnership Readiness Toolkit, and 2) a school operator with multiple priorities and an ambitious mission must focus relentlessly on readying its schools for partnership in order for partnerships to be successful. This Capstone will
provide two instrumental contributions to the sector. First, this Capstone presents a case study of the successes and challenges of readying schools for partnership, which conveys a valuable set of insights for school operators, particularly those in “turnaround” situations serving low-income students. Second, the Capstone produces a Partnership Readiness Toolkit that will serve as a resource for current and aspiring school leaders seeking to utilize partners as a lever for school improvement and student success.
“I am here with you to underline the notion that partnerships are the ‘sine qua non’ for 21st century education reform...We need our health and human services, our criminal justice, our housing and economic development partners to come together with us in education. We just can’t do it within the silos anymore.”

-Paul Reville, Former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Keynote speech to the Institute for Educational Leadership, June 2013

**Introduction**

Over the past 25 years, state policymakers, school districts, and community agencies have become more interested in providing support services for low-income children and families within (or near) schools (Powell, 1991; Dryfoos, 1994; Sanders, 2001; Epstein, 2009). Schools appear to be ideal hubs for these services because they are centrally located in neighborhoods and already have connections to families (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988). The interest in integrating nonacademic support services into schools—health screenings; dental exams; eye exams; individual counseling; mental health services; housing, food, clothes assistance; mentoring; parent education—stems largely from the belief that children whose families struggle with poverty cannot focus on learning unless their nonacademic needs are addressed. This belief is supported by both qualitative and quantitative evidence, ranging from The Harlem Children Zone’s Geoffrey Canada’s oft-quoted line, “Good dental care doesn't make you a good student, but if your tooth hurts, it's hard to be a good student” (Strauss, 2006, p. 1), to the deep set of research reflecting the negative impacts of poverty.

Low-income families regularly experience economic and material hardship. Missed rent, utility shutoffs, inadequate access to health care, unstable childcare arrangements, and food insecurity are common experiences that inevitably affect K–12 students’ readiness, attendance, performance, and completion rates at school (Brocht,
Bernstein, Gundersen, & Boushey, 2001). The cumulative impact of living in a severely disadvantaged neighborhood, for example, reduces the later verbal ability of low-income children on average by approximately four points, a magnitude that rivals missing a year or more of schooling (Sampson, Sharkey, & Raudenbush, 2008). High school dropouts tend to come from low-income and minority homes (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011; Shapiro & Pham, 2010). In addition, poverty-related challenges steal instructional time, leading students who attend low-income schools to receive an average of half an hour less of instruction per day than their higher-income peers (Yettick, 2014).

The call for schools to leverage partnerships with community organizations1 as a means to provide and integrate services to mitigate the effects of poverty in the pursuit of achieving ambitious academic outcomes also continues to build momentum (Blank, Jacobsen, & Melaville, 2012). Paul Reville accentuated this point in a 2013 keynote address at the Institute for Educational Leadership and Chapin Hall that included representatives from policy and advocacy groups, government agencies, foundations, youth development organizations, health and human services agencies, think tanks, and universities, accentuates this point (Walker, Rollins, Blank, & Jacobsen, 2013, pp. 1–2):

We’ve disproved the notion that schools can do it alone…We are going to need robust partners to re-conceptualize what we do in the field of education and child development so that we actually develop a genuine 21st century learning system that enables us to deliver on the promise of education reform. In a sense, I am here with you to underline the notion that partnerships are the ‘sine qua non’ for 21st century education reform… We need our health and human services, our criminal justice, our housing and economic development partners to come together with us in education. We just can’t do it within the silos anymore.

1 For my Capstone project, I define “community organizations” as any organization in the community, public or private, that is interested in improving the academic and social outcomes of the community’s children, including community-based organizations (CBOs), local government agencies, nonprofit
Clearly, a primary lever that Reville and others cite to create this “new [K–12] engine with enough power and versatility to meet the challenge of educating all students to a high level” is a diverse and high-quality portfolio of partnerships between schools and community organizations (Reville, 2014, p. 1). Reville’s demand is justified by research that indicates how strong school partnerships—with community organizations that offer nonacademic student services—reduce the risk of impoverished students performing poorly in school (Lauer, 2006; Kane, 2003). A recent study by Child Trends found that integrated nonacademic student supports extended to low-income students through partnerships with community organizations decreased grade retention and dropout rates, increased student attendance rates, and improved math achievement (Moore et al., 2014). Additionally, prompted by his research on successful strategies Chicago elementary schools implemented in the 1990s to accelerate student learning and success, Anthony Bryk (2010) established a framework of four “essential supports” that influence learning and school success. One of these essential supports is partnership between school and community organizations:

The African aphorism, ‘It takes a village to raise a child,’ applies just as well to inner-city neighborhoods. Partnerships with community health, recreation, and social service agencies, as well as with the police department, are vital to ensuring students’ academic success. (p. 59)

Leveraging “mutually enriching” partnerships with community organizations is at the core of the Achievement Schools’ vision for “every child in Memphis’ Frayser community to attend an excellent neighborhood school” (School Operators, Achievement School District, 2014). Forty-nine percent of Frayser’s residents earn incomes below the
poverty line, and only 6% of the community’s adults hold college degrees. The community is also challenged by widespread blight and a continued absence of business and industrial investment, all factors that contribute to Frayser’s status as one of the most economically depressed and highest crime-rated areas of Memphis (Frayser Community LIFT Data Book, 2012). As a school operator in the Tennessee Achievement School District, the Achievement Schools are charged with turning around the academic performance of its schools from the bottom 5% of performing schools in Tennessee to the top 25% in five years. With operations beginning in 2012, the Achievement Schools in Frayser currently operates four elementary schools and one middle school, serving approximately 1,800 students. Poverty’s multifaceted and debilitating presence is pervasive in Frayser, a community of over 40,000 residents in north Memphis.

The contextual combination of 1) the Achievement School District’s ambitious academic achievement turnaround expectations and 2) the nonacademic, poverty-related challenges Frayser’s youth regularly encounter (challenges that negatively impact academic success) necessitates the Achievement Schools’ prioritization of the development of high quality partnerships with community organizations that specifically provide nonacademic support services. Just as Reville recognizes that “schools can do it alone” (Walker et al., 2013, p. 1), the Achievement Schools understand that in order to both serve its low-income student population and create the conditions for dramatic academic improvement, partnerships with community organizations are essential. The Achievement Schools’ interest in partnerships with community organizations prompted the creation of my role as Director of Partnerships and, subsequently, my strategic project to develop and integrate a “partnership readiness toolkit” for the Achievement Schools.
Organized into three main sections, this Capstone offers a context for identifying and fostering the necessary conditions for a school to be ready to receive and fully utilize community organizations as partners in student success. I begin with a review of knowledge that guided my actions in developing and integrating the Achievement Schools’ partnership readiness toolkit. In this Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), I first explore why a loosely coupled approach to and construct of school-community partnerships can potentially create barriers to a school’s readiness to fully receive and utilize valuable services community organizations offer. Second, I offer examples from across the education sector to describe a partnership-ready school: one that deliberately tightly couples its vision, goals, outcomes, leadership, and capacity with community organizations. In this portion of the RKA, I also argue that if developed strategically, tightly coupled school-community organization partnerships cultivate a powerful collective trust that becomes the foundation for sustained success. Lastly, I include a synthesis of systems thinking and change management theories that will inform my leadership efforts to integrate the systems and mindsets needed to bolster the Achievement Schools’ partnership readiness. My RKA culminates in a theory of action that outlines how my strategic project will be organized and executed in order to strengthen the Achievement Schools’ partnership readiness. Following this RKA, I provide an account of key events and activities during my residency, highlighting the “fits and starts” of both building a Partnership-ready Toolkit and working with schools to integrate the Toolkit’s systems and mindsets. Next, I provide the early results of this strategic project, highlighting two main areas: 1) my ability to design and develop a partnership-ready Toolkit and 2) early indications that and anticipated progress towards
establishing the conditions for partnership-readiness—the five strategy areas included in the Toolkit—are, to varying degrees, being integrated, established, and acted upon.

Following the results, I leverage several analytic frameworks to revisit my RKA’s theory of action and explain why I achieved the results I did, acknowledging the influence that both my actions and the behaviors of the organization had on the results. Lastly, built upon the analysis, I provide a set of implications for my own leadership development, some suggested steps for the Achievement Schools to consider, and questions and implications for the American education sector as it strives to transform itself into a new “engine with enough power and versatility to meet the challenge of educating all students to a high level” (Reville, 2014, p. 1).

**Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)**

The necessity of school-community organization partnerships, particularly for schools like the Achievement Schools serving impoverished students, is unquestionable and widely accepted by scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. In this RKA, I will reinforce that in order to equitably and adequately educate low-income children, schools benefit from partnering with community organizations with the shared goals to 1) integrate services into the school, 2) improve the well-being of their low-income students’ families, and 3) bolster students’ academic performance. However, both at the Achievement Schools and across the K-12 sector, schools often do not meet this objective because they are not ready to receive and fully utilize community organizations as partners for short- and long-term success. Great faith is placed in school-community organization partnerships as mechanisms for driving change and school improvement; however, if proper conditions—including clear systems and mindsets—are not in place at
the school, partnerships with community organizations often have little effect (Elmore, 2010). To further “unpack” this partnership-readiness argument, I use the RKA to explore three questions:

1. What barriers, challenges, and risks do schools tend to face in regard to their readiness to develop partnerships with community organizations?
2. How does a “partnership-ready” school look and feel for administrators?
3. What can I learn from systems thinking and change management theory to frame and guide my efforts in shifting mindsets and practices in schools?

A review of literature, theory, and practice associated with these three questions informs my residency project to develop a “partnership readiness toolkit” for the Achievement Schools and subsequently work with the Achievement Schools to integrate the toolkit’s systems and underlying mindsets. As a result, the Achievement Schools will be ready to effectively partner with community organizations and utilize the critical services these organizations provide in support of the low-income students and families the Achievement Schools serve.

**Loose Coupling: Barriers, Challenges, and Risks to Partnership Readiness**

Schools are often not ready to receive and utilize external organizations as partners because they are fundamentally arranged as loosely coupled organizations. Weick’s (1976) “loosely coupled” organizational theory frames schools as organizations containing elements that are connected yet maintain a “physical and logical separateness,” thus carrying a relationship connoting “impermanence, dissolvability, and tacitness” (p. 3). As an example, Weick cites a counselor’s office as being loosely coupled with the principal’s office (1976, p. 3):
The principal and the counselor are attached, but each retains some identity and separateness (in their scopes of work, expertise, and even physical location in the school building) such that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond.

The loose-coupling theory can also be applied to partnerships between schools and community organizations, which include community-based organizations (CBOs), local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, businesses, and higher education institutions. Similar to the principal-counselor example, the service or resource an organization provides—whether through tutors, dental services, after-school programming, or funding—impacts and thus is “attached” the school. Yet, the organization remains coupled with the school, forming a relationship that maintains a strong degree of separateness and manifests itself in numerous forms: separate offices (sometimes located outside of the school facility), mission, norms, infrastructure, measurement systems, identity, funding streams, and human resources.

The potential risks and impediments associated with and yielded by loosely-coupled partnerships between schools and community organizations are well researched (Capper, 1996; Crowson & Boyd, 1996; Kahne & Kelley, 1993; Langman & McLaughlin, 1993; Smrekar & Mawhinney, 1999; White & Wehlage, 1995; Yowell, 1996). For example, a partnership’s impact becomes jeopardized when participating parties (school and community organization) have uneven commitments to the partnership. A hospital that offers to establish a school-based health clinic in a school but the school fails to provide adequate facility space in or access to the school places the partnership, and its potential impact, in jeopardy. Similarly, a partnership’s impact
becomes jeopardized when there are significant differences in the power and legitimacy of involved parties. In the previous school-based health clinic example, by not providing the hospital adequate space or access, the school establishes hierarchical lines of legitimacy in which the services provided by the clinic are secondary to, as opposed to in tandem with, the work and mission of the school. This loosely-coupled relationship may put the partnership and its potential impact at risk.

Collaborations are also risky if the partnering parties fear losing their distinctive missions, or if the everyday structures and routines of the partnering parties are incompatible. Most seriously, if organizations try to inflexibly protect their own core identity and mission they may simply be unwilling to engage in new actions or strategies and risk addressing the wrong issue. Blank and colleagues’ (2012) study of school-community organization partnerships illustrates this danger:

Schools might enter into partnerships but if the partner from outside of the school believes and defines that item A is an issue and it really is not, then they have invested in developing a program or service for a problem that does not exist. (p. 16)

As a result, the services being coordinated will change little and financially, relationally, and impact-wise, transaction costs for coordination will yield few additional benefits.

Numerous examples from practice further reveal detrimental outcomes from a school’s under-preparedness to partner with a community organization as a result of adopting a too loosely coupled approach to partnerships. Weick (1976) provides a

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2 In a time of declining fiscal resources and greater demand for public services, schools and districts with fewer dollars to spread around have learned that forming partnerships with community organizations can also be fiscally prudent. A Coalition for Community Schools study finds that, on average, districts leverage three dollars from community partners for every dollar they allocate. Partners can contribute dollars or in-kind support in the form of access to family programs, health services, and more (Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, & Pearson, 2010).
common example: Given a potential loose coupling between the “intentions and actions of an organizational members, it should come as no surprise that administrators are baffled and angered when things don’t happen the way they were supposed to” (p. 4). Additionally, because of their “physical and logical separateness,” schools and community organizations operate in silos, a condition of loose coupling that entails many risks to an effective partnership (Weick, 1976, p. 3). In their examination of schools’ partnerships with child- and youth-related service providers, for example, Kirst, McLaughlin, and Massell (1990) identify the fragmentation of social service coordination as a barrier that leads to five additional problems: 1) youth needs are defined as discrete and viewed in isolation from one another; 2) there is a discontinuity in care from one organization’s jurisdiction (school) to another (service provider); 3) organizations may have competing goals that reduce the effectiveness of each; 4) a lack of communication across organizations prevents the provision of adequate resources for meeting social problems, and; 5) fragmentation of service leads to youths’ and families’ perceiving themselves to be disempowered pawns of complex and disorganized systems.

Loose coupling further generates potential barriers to a school’s partnership readiness because, as Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue, “peripheral” activities or services are perceived as “loosely coupled to the technical core of the school” (p. 340). Schools often define nonacademic services as “peripheral” activities and subsequently delegate these activities and responsibilities to community organizations that partner with a school. This allows the school to focus on its “technical core” of instruction and learning. Through his research, Bryk (2010) identifies this common school practice: “It is important to recognize that many of the nonacademic services that schools rely on are not
provided directly by the school itself, but rather arise through local arrangements with other public agencies and private institutions” (p. 59). The Achievement Schools, for instance, partners with Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital for its school nursing services, the Southern College of Optometry for comprehensive eye exams and services, and the Children’s Defense Fund’s Freedom Schools for summer programming.

Given the current high stakes K–12 accountability context in which standardized test scores are the primary measure of school success, public schools further prioritize their focus, separate nonacademic and academic-oriented services, and align capacity with the “technical core” of academic achievement and performance (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007). This is particularly salient to public schools like the Achievement Schools who are specifically charged with turning around low-income students’ academic performance in short order. As a result, schools push many student services to the periphery, authorizing community organizations to operate with autonomy in providing such services as health screening and services; dental services; eye services; individual counseling; mental health services; food assistance; mentoring; and parent education (Dryfoos, 2002). Consequently, the relationship between schools and community organizations becomes de-coupled; schools separate responsibilities and pay less attention to the work partners do or the impact they have (or do not have) on the school’s mission or goals. One Achievement School principal illustrates this approach (personal communication, July, 2014):

I think school should be more than just about reading and math scores, but for now, everything non-reading and non-math is secondary. It is hard for me to justify spending my time and limited resources on something other than teaching and learning. I’d rather another organization to provide those extra services, trust that they provide the services, and let me focus on being the instructional leader of my school.
This Achievement School principal’s propensity to recognize the necessity of partnerships while in practice developing loosely-coupled relationships with partners and prioritizing the “principal as instructional leader” role is not unique. It is an approach that reflects a contemporary mantra of how school leaders frame their scope of responsibility, communicate a sense of urgency, and prioritize their time and resources. According to results from a MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2005), principals report that even if they see the value of partnerships, many find it difficult to find the time and resources to either get started or to sustain the work, and they tend to believe work to develop partnerships with community organizations comes at the expense of instructional leadership. Consequently, due to a loosely coupled approach to partnerships, partnerships are not situated as a strategic or urgent priority and, so, schools do not, cannot, or will not ready themselves for effective partnerships and effective utilization of the services these partners offer.

Principals’ reported difficulty to find time and resources could also be a symptom of a deeper leadership preparation issue. The same MetLife survey (2005) also found that many principals are not well prepared for the kind of collaboration, sharing of leadership, and open and honest communication that partnerships demand. As a result, the sense of both not knowing what to do and the principal’s strong focus on instructional leadership often gets expressed as, “I don’t value partnerships” (Riehl, 2000, p. 46), and over time, commitment of the school and partner organizations ebbs, people lose interest, resources dwindle, or other problems emerge. In this way, the contemporary school leader’s prioritized function, core leadership competencies and preparation, and mindset—all undergirded by the principle of loose coupling—are fixed paradigms that become barriers
to a school’s readiness to receive and fully utilize community organizations as partners in student success.

When applied to school-community organization partnerships, the loosely-coupled structure and subsequent behavior of schools can become barriers in building what Paul Reville coins a “new K-12 engine” through a diverse set of partnerships. The current system defined by the high stakes accountability era, amplified in contexts of school turnaround efforts in low-income communities, creates the conditions for codified loosely coupled school-community organization partnerships. These are partnerships that could offer schools and students impactful nonacademic services and opportunities—health screening and services; dental services; eye services; individual counseling; mental health services; basic services (housing, food, clothes); mentoring; and parent education—to ultimately yield academic achievement (Porowski & Aikaterini, 2011). Although in theory loosely-coupled schools present many positives, school partnerships with community organizations often present loosely coupled relationships in the extreme. For example, Weick (1976) recognizes that loose coupling “lowers the probability that the organization will have to respond to each little change in the environment that occurs” (p. 6). Consequently, the potential barriers associated with loose coupling more readily emerge. Loosely-coupled schools tend to be ill-prepared to receive and utilize community organizations as partners because they do not have the willingness, focus, or ability to expend the capacity to develop the mindset or “consistent guidelines or systems to receive or manage them” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Without these systems and mindsets, including prioritizing the time needed to integrate such practices, schools are in jeopardy of remaining unready to develop strong partnerships and will therefore likely
persist in loosely coupled, underutilized relationships with community organizations that could otherwise provide critical student services and supports.

**Tight Coupling and Trust: The Partnership-Ready School**

Countering the potential barriers to effective partnership erected by the loosely coupled nature of schools, Riehl (2000) offers a call to action and blueprint for a partnership-ready school strategy (p. 68):

> It is already apparent that if schools consider partnership with service providers to be necessary and a best practice, they must focus on issues of implementation as well as outcomes, they must articulate coordinated services as an integral part of the mission of the school, and they must work to change school accountability systems to reflect these new relationships and obligations.

An underlying principle of Riehl’s readiness blueprint is a more tightly coupled relationship between school and community organizations. A too tightly coupled partnership between school and community organizations entails potential risks: the loss of individual organizational identity, more difficulty in adapting to changes in the school and/or the partner organization, and possible increased operational expenses due to the time and money it takes to coordinate people (Weick, 1976, pp. 4-8). However, critical elements of tight coupling such as common outcomes, integration into the school’s mission, and mutual accountability are often detrimentally absent from loosely coupled school-community organization partnerships. Similar to Riehl’s blueprint, Teachers21 and Community Matters (2013) conducted a review of partnership dynamics across the nation to help guide Boston Public Schools principals in developing their schools as partnership-ready. Summarized in Table 1 below, the guidelines that emerged from the review contain a common underlying principle of the need for more tightly coupled school-community organization partnerships (Teachers21 and Community Matters, 2013,
Table 1

*Partnership Development Support Tool*

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<th>Guideline</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>• Principal regularly articulates, with clarity and specificity, the</td>
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<td>shared vision for the school’s direction and development;</td>
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<td>• All educators and partners share ownership of the vision;</td>
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<td>• Everyone in the school can articulate the vision.</td>
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<td><strong>Alignment</strong></td>
<td>• Principal works with school leaders and partners to ensure that</td>
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<td>each partnership’s goals and programming aligns strategically to</td>
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<td>school goals and vision;</td>
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<td>• Principal and partners negotiate and resolve differences.</td>
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<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>• Principal works with school leaders and partners to continually</td>
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<td>assess the work of partnerships to ensure that school-wide and</td>
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<td>student-centered strategic priorities are achieved;</td>
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<td>• Principal regularly seeks adjustments in partnership strategies and</td>
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<td>programming, based on outcomes.</td>
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<td><strong>Shared Leadership</strong></td>
<td>• Principal works with school leaders and partners to share</td>
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<td>responsibility for the success of partnerships, engage in ongoing</td>
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<td>honest communication, and work together to solve problems as</td>
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<td>they arise.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity Building</strong></td>
<td>• Principal works with school leaders and partners to build the long-term</td>
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<td></td>
<td>capacity of the school, and prioritizes the use of funding,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>time, and personnel on partnerships that contribute most to</td>
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<td>achieving the vision.</td>
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The need to establish tightly coupled systems and behaviors as conditions for a school to be partner-ready, as reflected in Riehl’s blueprint and Boston Public Schools’ guidelines, is bolstered by collective impact research. Kania and Kramer (2011) frame “collective impact” as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a social problem” (p. 36). Through their research on collective impact initiatives, Kania and Kramer identify four conditions that “together produce alignment and lead to powerful social and educational results”: a common agenda, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a shared measurement system (pp. 39–40). Citing these principles in their research on effective
school-community organization partnerships, Blank and colleagues (2012) argue that any partnership into which a school enters should be tightly guided by the principles of collective impact. Translated into practice, a partnership-ready school would 1) ensure all partners share a common vision, 2) establish formal relationships and collaborative structure to engage partners, 3) encourage open dialogue about challenges and solutions, 4) engage partners in the use of data, and 5) create and empower school and district/operator capacity to sustain partnership work, and braid school-community organization resources and funding streams (Blank et al., 2012).

Similarly, Bryk’s (2010) research from effective practices in Chicago elementary schools cites a need for a “coherent partnership program for improving student learning, one that requires a school to manage a diverse array of academic and social support services while sustaining the relationships with the multiple institutions that provide them” (p. 59). Bryk (2010) also emphasizes the importance of the school leader’s involvement in developing and managing the school’s partnership program, underscoring that school leadership entails devoting considerable time and attention to tightly defining and tracking the details, practices, and behaviors of program implementation. Cited in The Role of Community Schools in Place-Based Initiatives, Carolyn McKnight, Principal of East Los Angeles Performing Arts Academy, exemplifies the principal’s active role in a partnership-ready school that Bryk, Boston Public Schools, and collective impact scholars espouse: “Our partnerships with community organizations are not ‘add-ons.’ They are part of the fabric of who we are as a school. We have included our partners from the very beginning. They helped play a role in designing our school plan and in our plans for teaching and learning” (Potapchuck, 2013, p. 20).
Principal McKnight’s school is one of a series of case studies highlighted in *The Role of Community Schools in Place-Based Initiatives*. This study, a compilation and synthesis of school-community organization partnership analysis from across the United States, paints a clear picture of an exemplar partnership-ready school, one that fully embraces, integrates, and operationalizes a tightly coupled partnership model to meet student need (Potapchuck, 2013). Part of the study’s synthesis is a detailed, comprehensive narrative of a hypothetical partnership-ready exemplar school in action, presented from the perspective of what a visitor touring the school might experience. The “visitor” describes 1) rooms in the school dedicated to community partners that offer mental health and dental services; 2) the regular and goal-oriented collaboration, protocols, and practices between the school principal, partner coordinator, community organization representative, and teachers; 3) the positive academic and student and parent engagement outcomes that result from closely developed and monitored partnerships; and 4) the “trust, energy, and camaraderie” that permeates the school as a result of the multiple stakeholders aligned to student success (p. 12).³

This exemplar school prioritized, built, and invested in coherent systems, practices, and resources to ensure it was, and will continue to be, ready to receive and fully utilize community organizations as partners in its students’ success. Underlying the tightly coupled structures described in the narrative is a strong sense of trust, an essential condition for any school seeking to position itself to receive and utilize community organizations as partners in the name of school improvement and student success (Bryk, 2003). For schools to be partner-ready, therefore, trust with partners must be firmly established. A review of the well-researched concepts of “school trust” and “collective

³ To read the full excerpt, please refer to Appendix A.
trust” offers a useful framework for understanding trust as a mechanism for effective partnership development and outcomes that lead to school improvement.

Contemporary school trust studies owe a debt to James Coleman’s sociological work *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990). Unlike prior theories, Coleman hypothesized that trust was not situated solely between two people, as a purely psychological state; rather, he depicted a sociological model of behavior that examined the ways that relational ties influence our behaviors. In this view, trust formation emerges from both individual interpersonal relationships and the larger social conditions specific to an organization (1990). Using this sociological frame, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) built on Coleman’s theory and defined school trust as arising from social conditions where it is possible to display vulnerability to another, as a result of belief in their expression of trust factors: being open, honest, reliable, competent, and honest. Bryk and Schneider’s *Trust in Schools* (2003), a seminal work in this literature, built upon this work, naming trust factors as: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity.

Furthermore, Bryk and Schneider (2003) advanced the conversation on school trust in several ways. They demonstrated the inappropriateness of common constructions of trust in relationship to schools. Specifically, the intensely tight relationships and unwavering faith required of organic trust does not align with the heterogeneity and loose coupling of schools. Additionally, as schools are not singular in purpose, the clearly established outcomes and transactional conditions required of contractual trust are not applicable to school environments. Bryk and Schneider proposed relational trust as the form most appropriate to schools. Resulting from the interactions between and within
groups, relational trust occurs in the complicated social exchanges in the daily operations of schools. Because “role groups” comprised of teachers, principals, students, parents, and community organizations that depend on each other for success, when individual interpersonal exchanges are aligned with the responsibilities and expectations assigned to an individual’s group, trust is likely to be strong. Bryk and Schneider asserted that the dynamic glue holding the essential elements of a successful school (one of which is community partnerships) together is relational trust, which “operates both as a lubricant to organizational change and a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of local school improvement” (2003, p. 27). Without this trust, organizing to build capacity, enhancing learning, or developing effective partnerships between schools and community organizations in the name of students’ success is impossible.

Forsyth, Adams, Hoy, and Wayne’s (2011) research advanced Bryk and Schneider’s (2003) relational trust through their conception of collective trust. Distinct and complementary to the interpersonal nature of relational trust, they defined collective trust as (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 22):

A stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time out of multiple social exchanges within the group. These socially constructed shared trust beliefs define the group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another group or individual.

The authors believed that collective trust arises from accumulated judgments of the verbal and behavioral exchanges between members of groups. Individuals determine the trustworthiness of a group by comparing expected and observed behavior and, over repeated interactions, form a tacit group consensus of another group’s trustworthiness. Therefore, collective trust serves as a form of group norming where “embrace by new
group members is a condition of their integration and full membership” (Forsyth et al. p. 27). Because schools comprise so many members, including partners or service providers representing non-school or non-district organizations, Forsyth and colleagues (2011) attest that it is critical to examine interdependent role groups and their typical behavioral patterns of the group in order to understand the trust conditions of a school. Because collective trust leads to commonly shared beliefs about the group as a whole, it directly influences the social atmosphere of the school.

Effective systems associated with ensuring schools are partner-ready—a clearly articulated partnership vision, aligned school-partner goals, ongoing assessment and progress monitoring, shared leadership, and capacity building (Teachers21 & Community Matters, 2013)—are built on a foundation of collective trust. Such trust, cultivated by developing and practicing partnership-ready systems and behaviors, is vital to achieving the collective impact that emerges when school and community organizations partner to share responsibility for the education and advancement of all children and youth (Blank et al., 2012).

**Systems thinking and Change management theory**

Literature on systems thinking and change management theory can assist in examining the critical elements of implementing and sustaining organizational change that is inevitable in any school improvement effort. When applied to my Capstone project, this understanding of systems thinking and change management will help me, as the Achievement Schools’ Director of Partnerships, frame, navigate, and reflect on the complexities of leading change at the school level. Specifically, this knowledge will enable me to integrate partnership-ready systems and mindsets that will bolster school
and student success. Similarly, as the Achievement Schools subsequently partners with community organizations in a different, more tightly coupled manner, relevant systems thinking and change management knowledge will help the Achievement Schools implement, improve, and sustain these organizational changes.

The “discipline of systems thinking provides a different way of looking at problems and goals—not as isolated events but as components of larger structures” (Senge, 2000, p. 78). Senge contends that schools and school systems tend to fix the problems right in front of them (as principals often tend to do when partnering with community organizations to address an issue or need), rather than examining the people, systems, culture, and organizational patterns that must be shifted or created to ensure both short- and long-term improvement and success. Wagner and Kegan (2006) explicate that there are strong reaction-oriented organizational idiosyncrasies, including compliance culture and the isolationist practice many educators and education systems employ, that make system change within education complex. Deep, sustainable change must overcome these practices through “keeping the ‘whole’ in mind, even while working on the various parts,” creating psychological safety, and consistently shifting and broadening viewpoints (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 64).

Nevertheless, change is rare and such change efforts are often met with skepticism. John Kotter reports that only 30% of companies agree that change initiatives within their organization are successful (Keller & Aiken, 2000, p. 1). This low success rate stems from limited abilities to tell stories from multiple perspectives about the need for change. Similarly, these stories tend to revolve around a challenge to overcome, rather than framed as both a challenge and an opportunity (Keller & Aiken, 2000). Additionally,
education change strategies must include organizational re-design, human capital development, aligning and allocating resources accordingly, and using performance data (Childress, Elmore, Grossman, & Moore Johnson, 2007). This type of coherence is essential for system change, rather than piecemeal or isolated change.

Multiple approaches are needed for sustainable change to occur and persist. McKinsey’s change model (2008) combines a dual approach of utilizing hard and soft elements. Hard elements include strategy, structure, and systems and soft elements include values (including trust), skills, style, and staff. McKinsey’s theoretical model asserts that organizations that perform well ensure that these elements are aligned and mutually reinforcing (McKinsey, 2008). This model is an important reminder about interdependency and the need to engage and interconnect both the “hard,” tactical and “soft,” cultural pieces.

Deep change certainly requires deep work. Ronald Heifetz (2002) distinguishes between two types of challenges: technical and adaptive. Technical challenges are problems that can be addressed with known solutions and tools; adaptive challenges “require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments” (Heifetz, 2002, p. 14). Heifetz describes that too often adaptive challenges, or those that require more than answers from authority, are treated as technical and solved with technical fixes. Essential to addressing adaptive work sustainably “depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself” (Heifetz, 2002, p. 13). He warns that it is important when faced with adaptive pressures, people too often want answers, not questions, and this tendency must be avoided. When individuals and organizations meet adaptive challenges they
themselves become something different. It is not merely some new skill or capacity that has been inputted into the organization (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 11).

Multiple change models exist, but across these models, there is resounding similarity. For the sake of simplicity, we will look at Kotter’s “8-Step Change Model” (1995). Kotter details eight linear steps for top-down change, and these are explained and detailed in Table 2 below (Kotter, 1995, p. 61):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One</th>
<th><strong>Create Urgency</strong>: Open dialogue about contextual challenges and opportunities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Step Two</td>
<td><strong>Form a Powerful Coalition</strong>: Bring together a coalition or team; build that team and seek emotional buy-in from the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step Three</td>
<td><strong>Create a Vision for Change</strong>: Craft a clear, memorable vision with embedded values; ensure the coalition can compellingly share the vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Four</td>
<td><strong>Communicate the Vision</strong>: Talk often about the vision; openly address and understand concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Five</td>
<td><strong>Empower Broad-based Action</strong>: Create structures for change; ensure job descriptions and organizational structures bolster the change; identifier resisters and work with them or remove them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Six</td>
<td><strong>Create Short-term wins</strong>: Orchestrate early victories; Recognize and reward these wins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Seven</td>
<td><strong>Build on the Change</strong>: Analyze successes and challenges; set goals; utilize continuous improvement practices; bring in change agents; use successes to bring in new changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step Eight</td>
<td><strong>Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture</strong>: Talk about progress constantly; include change ideals in staff training and hiring; publicly recognize change</td>
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The literature on organizational change and managing change provide useful insight into transformation within education settings. There are, though, specific theories about change management and system thinking within the education arena. Change necessitates a dual development of motivation and capacities. Within the education literature, theorists contend that system change must commence at the school level, not at
the system level. Richard Elmore explains that the “problems of the system are the problems of the smallest unit” (Elmore, 2004, p. 3). Tyack and Cuban (1996) similarly warn that unless “practitioners are also enlisted in defining problems and devising solutions adapted to their own varied circumstances and local knowledge, lasting improvements will probably not occur in classrooms” (p. 136). Elmore and Senge (2009) also noted that system change demands alignment across its units and across the organization, a nod to tightly coupled processes and behavior between units (between schools and partner organizations, for example). “The same processes of learning and development, the same strategic choices, the same knowledge and skill are evident at each level, and the form that they take is appropriate to that level” (Elmore, 2009, p.13). Successful change “requires multiple layers of leadership roles” at all levels, from classroom to school to community (Senge, 2003, p. 275).

Educators and systems benefit from three key change components: consensus, infrastructure, and implementation (Castillo, et al., 2010), all of which have relevance to a school’s developing its partner-readiness. First, key stakeholders must reach consensus about any new work. Consensus is also not a one-time, initial practice. Instead, it must be constantly sought and assessed. The second key component is infrastructure development. With any new initiative or practice, goals, structures, processes, and policies must be examined and re-orchestrated. Specific to partnership-readiness work, Boston Public Schools’ guidelines—vision, assessment, shared leadership, capacity building—must be considered. The third component is implementation. Sarason (1990) argues that most educational reform initiatives fail because implementation is not carefully considered nor assessed. An oft-overlooked element of implementation,
particularly with external partner organizations providing services or programs, is evaluating how implementation is going prior to measuring outcomes and indicators (Castillo et al., 2010). This requires the creation of intermediate, procedural indicators to look at implementation integrity.

The research on change management informs both my leadership role in developing and implementing a partnership-ready Toolkit, a means for schools to function as partner-ready entities that shift from a loosely-coupled to a more tightly-coupled partnership framework. First, Senge (2003), Kegan (2006), and Heifetz (1994) remind us that change requires deep, analytic and personal work. Second, shifting practice and mindsets is arguably the most difficult and most important work for sustained change. Third, changing practice and mindsets must stem from deep capacity building, and capacity building must take place within school contexts (Elmore, 2009). Fourth, Heifetz (1994) reminds us that we must be clear on what type of work in which we are engaging: Do we know what the problem is? Do we need to learn in order to craft a solution? Heifetz emphasizes the need to complete both technical and adaptive work. Fifth, Castillo (2010) and Kotter (1995) speak to the necessity of infrastructure and process needed to design and execute change initiatives. And sixth, Kotter (1995) provides a seemingly simple, eight-step model painting the critical elements of change campaigns. This combination of frameworks provides school and system level administrators useful guidance regarding the practical steps that must be taken while also skillfully navigating the adaptive and technical work.

Synthesis and Theory of Action
The partnering of schools with community organizations to provide services and supports that address the diverse nonacademic needs of low-income students is widely accepted and supported as an impactful lever for academic improvement. However, this lever assumes that schools have developed and codified the conditions to effectively receive, integrate, and utilize community organizations as partners in meeting academic improvement goals. In reality, these partnership-ready schools, and the conditions they have developed and under which they operate, are not the norm across the K–12 public education landscape. The Achievement Schools are no exception. Although the demand for partnerships to address nonacademic student need is great, the Achievement Schools have not developed the systems, capacity, or mindsets to fully receive community organizations as partners and leverage their available services. Developing and integrating a toolkit to guide the Achievement Schools to be partner-ready is my Capstone change project. My RKA focused on the following three key questions that will inform the toolkit’s development and integration:

1. What barriers, challenges, and risks do schools tend to face in regard to their readiness to develop partnerships with community organizations?

2. How does a “partnership-ready” school look and feel for administrators?

3. What can I learn from systems thinking and change management theory to frame and guide my efforts in shifting mindsets and practices in schools?

In response to the first question, schools are entities composed of loosely-coupled relationships, a condition that is amplified in many school-community organization
partnerships when principals do not acknowledge the importance of, feel accountable to, or prioritize their involvement in school-community partnerships. As a result, potential barriers associated with loosely coupled partnerships may emerge, including “physical and logical separateness” (Weick, 1976, p. 3), uneven commitments to the partnership, and fear of losing distinctive missions. Such potential barriers leave schools unready to receive and fully utilize the critical services that community organizations provide to meet the needs of low-income students. Relative to the second question, a partnership-ready school is undergirded by explicit efforts to cultivate collective and relational trust between the school and community organization. The potential barriers associated with loosely coupled partnerships can undermine trust. Instead, collective and relational trust can stem from a school’s spending the time, investing the resources, and building the systems to establish a more tightly coupled relationship between the school and community organization. Research suggests that a partnership-ready school is led by a committed principal, and ideally school-based designated partnership coordinator, who can clearly articulate a vision for school-community organization partnerships, aligns partners with school goals, regularly assesses and monitors partner progress, shares leadership, and builds capacity for sustained impact (Teachers21 & Community Matters, 2013). The third question led to an exploration of relevant systems thinking and change management theory to guide my work as the Achievement Schools’ Director of Partnerships in building and integrating a Partnership-ready toolkit into the Achievement Schools. Reframing schools’ approach to partnership is an adaptive challenge, one that entails shifting systems, mindsets, and “ultimately depends on having [the schools]
internalize the change itself (Heifetz, 2002, p. 13), and therefore necessitates my having a sound understanding of knowledge and skills to guide my efforts at changing practice.

This review of knowledge leads to a theory of action that spans the short-term (occurs during my residency), the mid-term (begins in my residency and continues after my residency), and the long-term (materializes in the future, after my residency). In the short-term, if I build and codify a Partnership-ready Toolkit for the Achievement Schools—one guided by a clearly defined, more tightly coupled partnership framework based on the five Boston Public Schools partnership strategies (Teachers21 & Community Matters, 2013)—then schools will have access to clear language, rationale, and practices to guide the development of partnerships with community organizations that provide services to address nonacademic challenges low-income students encounter. In the mid-term, informed by systems thinking and change management theory, if I coach school leadership to access, apply, and integrate the toolkit, then schools will shift practice and devote time, resources, and capacity to partner with community organizations. As a result, nonacademic student needs can then be efficiently and effectively identified, mitigated and monitored and schools will cultivate collective trust with partner organizations. In the long-term, if collective trust is cultivated, then schools will have established the optimal condition for sustained school-community organization partnership and impact. If the Achievement Schools and partner organizations interact and operate under this optimal condition of collective trust, then schools will be able to fully integrate partners as stakeholders in improving low-income students’ academic and social outcomes, thereby setting up the Achievement Schools to 1) advance to and sustain performance in the top 25% of Tennessee’s schools, 2) evolve into a network of
community schools accountable for both academic and social outcomes, and ultimately be the lever to break cycles of generational poverty.

**Description of the Strategic Project**

My strategic project entailed designing and integrating a Partnership-ready Toolkit for the Achievement Schools. The purpose underlying the project was to identify and begin cultivating the conditions for schools to fully utilize community organizations as partners—including organizations with which schools were currently partnered and future partners—in mitigating nonacademic challenges encountered by low-income students. This project and my role as the Achievement Schools’ Director of Partnerships, both of which emerged from a strategic plan that was revamped in the May 2014, represented a new and significant advance in the Achievement Schools’ plan to catapult five of Frayser’s chronically underperforming public schools to the top 25% of performing schools in Tennessee. The Achievement Schools framed “successful school turnaround” as more than a dramatic surge to the top 25% in reading and mathematics proficiency scores on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (Tennessee’s state standardized test); it sought to organize its neighborhood schools around recognizing and addressing the strengths and challenges of the whole child, both academic and nonacademic. The partnership-readiness project, therefore, entailed an important step towards actualizing this vision and, as Executive Director Ash Solar often described, “build neighborhood schools in Frayser that will not only be great now, but

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4 The technical definition of a “community school” is a place and a set of partnerships connecting a school, the families of students, and the surrounding community. A community school is distinguished by an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Community schools extend the school day and week, reaching students, their families, and community residents in unique ways (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012).
also great 100 years from now” (personal communication, July 14, 2014). Below, I provide an account of key events and activities during my residency, highlighting the “fits and starts” of both building the Partnership-ready Toolkit and working with schools to apply and integrate the Toolkit’s strategy areas.

**Defining my Role, the Readiness Challenge, and Strategic Project**

The partnership readiness Toolkit project emerged from a month-long process initiated at the outset of my residency in July 2014, to better define my role and priorities as Director of Partnerships. Over the first two weeks of July (See Appendix B for complete project timeline of events), I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with the five Achievement Schools principals to build an understanding of the current state of school-community organization partnerships. I planned each conversation around six critical partnership-related questions:

1) How do you identify the nonacademic needs of your students and families?

2) According to these needs, how are partners identified and what are the steps to building relationships with partners?

3) What processes and school-level resources are in place to support the utilization of partners and the services these partners offer?

4) How do you know the impact partners have and how do you confirm that the work they do leads (or does not lead) to your desired outcomes?

5) What partnerships already exist in your school?

6) How involved are you in meeting with or convening partners and what does this involvement look like?

These interviews reinforced a recognition by Achievement Schools principals that
1) nonacademic factors associated with poverty erect barriers to academic achievement,  
2) because of such barriers, schools alone cannot meet their goals, and 3) schools have a  
demand for partners to provide critical services as a lever to combat nonacademic barriers  
and position themselves to attain academic goals. The interviews also revealed a deep  
sense of urgency on behalf of the principals to ensure that their schools succeeded in  
reaching their academic goals. Given the Achievement School District’s expectations of  
its school operators (the Achievement Schools being one such operator) to turn around  
schools’ academic performance in five years, the Achievement Schools’ mixed results  
over its two-year operating history; and the schools’ daily encounters with nonacademic,  
poverty-related challenges, all principals agreed that school-community partnerships are  
critical and needed immediately. One principal asserted, “I need you to bring in  
wraparound service partners for my school right now because my students, and the  
community of Frayser, have been failed for too long; they deserve great neighborhood  
schools” (personal correspondence, July 9, 2014).  

Despite the clear demand for partnerships, the principals also struggled to provide  
detailed answers to some of my six questions. Principals were able to name the  
organizations working in their schools—mental health providers, nursing services, eye  
care services, mentoring programs—but were unable to describe their impact, the  
processes teachers or staff used to access such services, or how they identified or  
confirmed students’ nonacademic challenges. Principals also described how  
responsibility for partnership work within the school was distributed amongst a variety of  

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5 The Achievement Schools’ overall reading scores dropped in 2012-2013, its first operational year. During  
the 2013-2014 school year, however, some schools reversed that decline in test scores: Frayser  
Achievement Elementary School, one of the five Achievement Schools, saw growth in both reading and  
math.
staff depending on the partnering organization; counselors, directors of school operations, family outreach coordinators, and social workers were all named as having partial responsibility for partnership development and management. Principals offered a common explanation for their limited level of understanding of, participation in, urgency surrounding, and time committed to partnership work: the principal’s role as instructional leader, amplified in the demanding context of school turnaround and a feeling that wading into partnership work would simply take too much of their already limited time.

At the conclusion of one interview, for example, a principal explained, “I know how much we need to grow on TCAP and how little time I have, so I cannot devote time or a lot of capacity to partnerships. I’ll let these organizations do their work and make sure someone on my staff keeps an eye on them, but I need to spend my time observing teachers and strategizing to meet our academic goals” (personal correspondence, July 8, 2014).

The qualitative evidence I gathered from these early July principal interviews led me to hypothesize that the Achievement Schools did not have the systems and practices in place to fully utilize and leverage community organizations as partners in their efforts to address nonacademic factors that impede learning and achievement. This hypothesis challenged an assumption I had about the state of school-community organization partnerships at the Achievement Schools. Upon entering my residency, I assumed that systems and practices were already in place and my job would be to attract a collection of community organization partnership from which schools could select based on need. To further explore my hypothesis and my now-challenged assumption, I issued an “Achievement Schools Partnerships” survey (Appendix C) in mid-July 2014 to the
members of each school’s student support team—school-level teams that include such personnel as counselors, social workers, and family outreach coordinators. Built on the five interview questions I asked principals, the survey served multiple purposes: 1) an asset map of the organizations currently working as partners in the Achievement Schools, 2) an assessment of what the teams perceived to be the areas of greatest nonacademic need, and 3) a gauge of the schools’ capacity, systems, and approaches to partnering with community organizations.

Survey results reinforced my initial hypothesis: the Achievement Schools lacked the systems and practices in place to fully utilize and leverage community organizations as partners in their efforts to address nonacademic factors that impede learning and achievement. Further, the survey results reflected the schools’ recognition that, instead of expending and building capacity to ensure they were more effectively utilized community partners, they often haphazardly and hastily built partnerships. “Nearly all of our students come from low-income families,” reported one school counselor. “Their needs are so great, we end up spending our time and energy reacting to our students’ needs, seeking services to immediately plug this hole and that hole; put out this fire then that fire. This is not sustainable practice” (Achievement Schools Partnerships survey response, July 16, 2014).

The principal interviews and survey results helped define my role as Director of Partnerships and clarify my strategic project: 1) set up the Achievement Schools to become partner-ready by first developing a readiness framework and strategies—a “Toolkit”—and 2) subsequently begin bolstering the schools’ readiness by integrating the Toolkit’s systems and practices. However, I knew framing my project this way could be
potentially perceived as an unfitting use of time given the urgent daily nonacademic needs of students and the principals’ clear emphasis on instructional leadership. I recognized this approach, particularly when I began integrating the Toolkit, would call for a shift in principal behavior to become more involved in and cognizant of partnership work, a shift that ran counter to the loosely coupled nature of principals’ current engagement in and relationships to partnerships. Therefore, I knew that I not only had to design a Toolkit, but also simultaneously apply its components to demonstrate its (and my role’s) value.

**Developing the Partnership-ready Toolkit**

Wanting to act quickly on momentum built by the interviews and survey, as well as launch the work before students returned to school in August, I drafted an initial framework for the readiness Toolkit based on Boston Public Schools’ partnership work (Figure 1). I subsequently facilitated a session with Principals and their student support teams in late July (See Appendix D for session’s slide deck) to introduce and receive feedback on the draft framework and rationale for my focus on readying schools for partnerships.
Reviewing this session’s feedback, while it was clear that principals accepted the Toolkit’s initial framework and acknowledged the necessity of this readiness work, they cited their limited time for such work and expressed a need for “turnkey” solutions and resources that they could immediately use to better utilize both current and future partners. Furthermore, while the fully developed Toolkit would include these tactical tools, cultivating partnership readiness at the Achievement Schools also entailed shifts in practice, time commitments, and mindsets. I predicted, therefore, that some of the Toolkit’s strategies would prove more challenging and take more time for schools to embrace and incorporate than others. I expressed this prediction to my supervisor, Ash Solar, during one of our July check-ins, along with my concern for how I could build a
quality Toolkit that attended to principals’ immediate demands and students’ immediate needs. Ash acknowledged the necessary reality of “retrofitting and building the partnership plane as it’s flying,” and also returned to a philosophy I heard him often say: “Go slow to go fast. Start with some low-hanging fruit, but also work with the perspective of developing Frayser’s schools both for today and for kids 100 years from now” (personal correspondence, July 25, 2014).

The July session’s feedback and my subsequent reflection regarding potential challenges led me to consider the Toolkit’s development and integration from two viewpoints. First, which elements of the Toolkit could be categorized as low-hanging fruit? In other words, what opportunities could be seized early in the academic year (ideally August, as students return) to achieve practical, yet important programmatic goals? Second, I wondered how and when it would be productive to introduce potentially more difficult elements of the Toolkit. Keeping these considerations in mind, between August 2014 through October 2014, I transformed my draft framework into a fully-realized partnership-ready Toolkit composed of a comprehensive framework and corresponding tools that aligned with each of the framework’s five strategy areas (See Appendix E for full Toolkit). The empirical and theoretical content referenced in my RKA informed my initial development of the Toolkit, while practice-oriented conversations with organizations⁶ that were engaged in similar partnership readiness work informed my refinement of the Toolkit’s practices and resources. I used feedback from my July interviews with principals, responses from the student-support team survey, and feedback from the draft framework introductory session to inform how I sequenced

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⁶ Boston Public Schools’ Director of Institutional Advancement and Partnerships & Baltimore City Schools’ Director of Partnerships, Communications, and Community Engagement
the Toolkit’s formative development. I also leveraged the work of and thought-partnership with my Achievement School colleagues, particularly the Achievement Schools’ Operations Team, to help refine and codify the Toolkit’s five strategies. Lastly, during this three-month period, while developing the Toolkit, I began to simultaneously apply select pieces of the Toolkit to an existing Achievement School partnership with Agape Child and Family Services.

In August, I prioritized the development and introduction of the framework’s “Alignment,” strategy area because I had already begun the creation and implementation of practices and tools associated with this strategy within the Achievement Schools’ classrooms. I identified the “Alignment” strategy as low-hanging fruit because it served as 1) preliminary evidence of the Toolkit’s value and legitimacy, and 2) a foundation on which to build, introduce, and integrate the Toolkit’s other readiness strategies. Building on Boston Public Schools’ work on school partnerships, I developed an initial template for each strategy (Figure 2) that included “Big Questions,” “Guiding Questions for Principals,” “Look For’s,” “Suggested Practices,” and “Available Supports and Resources.” Using this template, I then populated the Alignment strategy (Appendix E).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Title - Headline</th>
<th>Big Questions</th>
<th>Brief Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guiding Questions for Principals</td>
<td>Look For’s</td>
<td>Suggested Practices</td>
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*Figure 2: Achievement Schools Partnership-ready Toolkit: Draft Strategy Template*
One “Suggested Practice” of the Alignment strategy, for example, is to conduct a school-wide needs assessment to identify unmet needs that could be met through existing or new partnerships. The founder of RyeCatcher, a web-based tool available to the Achievement Schools used to locate and track the impact of student services, and I collaborated to develop a needs assessment called the “Family Needs Mapper” (Appendix F). Families completed the Family Needs Mapper upon registering their student(s) at an Achievement School. These data assisted schools in better understanding areas of greatest nonacademic need, information that could subsequently drive the alignment of existing partners and decisions to seek additional partnerships. Similarly, another Alignment strategy practice is for schools to use a mapping tool to chart and categorize existing partnerships within the school. The Partnership Survey I built and administered to the schools’ student support teams in mid-July 2014 functioned as such an asset map.

In practice, the combination of the needs assessment and the asset map helped yield important data that informed how schools could effectively align their specific needs with those resources of existing partnerships. These data also helped Achievement Schools to pinpoint areas where additional partnerships were needed. For instance, data from both the Needs Mapper and the Partnership Survey revealed to us that children in the district were in need of eye care. These data helped to focus Achievement Schools on leveraging an existing partnership with the Southern College of Optometry (SCO) (see Results section for data related to the SCO partnership). Nevertheless, if schools did not have the systems in place or the principals’ involvement, as well as resources devoted to the partnership, the Achievement Schools would not have been ready to fully utilize the

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7 For completed templates, please see Appendix E.
SCO partnership. I recognized the Achievement Schools-SCO partnership as a strong proof point to support my project, a real-time case study I could use to ultimately develop the Toolkit’s remaining four strategies: Capacity Building, Assessment, Vision, and Shared Leadership.

The Achievement Schools’ Operations team spearheaded the Achievement Schools’ partnership with SCO. I met with the Operations Manager—weekly beginning in late August—to debrief, plan, troubleshoot problems of practice, and apply our reflections and learnings that resulted in a finalization of the Toolkit’s strategies by the end of October 2014. During this time, I acted as an observer of, thought-partner with, and participant in the Operations Manager’s collaboration with SCO and the Achievement Schools to learn how that organization created the conditions for the schools to be ready to receive and utilize SCO. The Operations Manager worked closely and regularly with Achievement Schools’ principals and SCO’s community engagement coordinator to 1) codify a partnership agreement, 2) allocate physical space in each school for the pop-up clinics, 3) train designated school staff to serve as school-level liaisons for SCO, and 4) establish regular progress monitoring practices. The Operations Manager also engaged Memphis’ collective impact organization, Seeding Success, and the nonprofit Literacy Mid South to guide the development of shared, literacy-based goals and data-sharing agreements between the schools and SCO. The time I spent observing and supporting the Senior Operation Manager’s work to ready our schools for a partnership with SCO also served to inform the development of the Toolkit’s remaining four strategy areas.

**Introducing the Toolkit and Targeting the Agape Partnership**
I organized meetings with principals and support team members in early November 2014 to 1) present the complete Toolkit, utilizing the SCO “case study” as proof points justifying the included strategies and 2) propose to apply the Toolkit to another existing partner, Agape Child and Family Services (Agape), an organization that places “Connectors” at partner schools to broker nonacademic services for students and families. The principals agreed that the Toolkit’s application to Agape was both appropriate and needed; these sentiments reflected my own experience and work with Agape through the first quarter of the school year. I embraced the partnership with Agape and the potential impact it could make, and the greater Memphis community further acknowledged this effort when the local media highlighted our efforts in an August 2014 news story (Appendix G). With my focus geared towards developing the Toolkit through the SCO partnership from August to October, I initially operated under the assumption that systems and capacities were already in place to support the Agape partnership, particularly because this partnership was created prior to my residency. As the first quarter unfolded, although I maintained a belief that the Connector model contained great potential to address the nonacademic needs of students, I realized my some of my assumptions were incorrect. On a September survey administered to all Achievement School staff, while more than 90% of respondents strongly agreed that Agape Connectors were valuable resources to their schools, only 60% of respondents reported that they knew Agape’s day-to-day roles, responsibilities, goals, and how to access their services. Furthermore, as I visited the schools throughout the first semester, principals and student

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8 Agape is an integrated student service Community-Based Organization (CBO) that works with partner schools to identify and assist individual students and their families needing support with nonacademic issues that interfere with achievement by leveraging resources from appropriate agencies, including health care, social services, and counseling.
support team members tended to share comments like:

I have referred students to our Agape Connectors, but I have not seen a tremendous change in these students’ behavior, attendance, or grades. I really like this model and we welcome the support, but what do they do and to whom do they report? (personal communication, October 16, 2014).

This valuable feedback informed me that, despite a widely shared belief that Agape Connectors are a value-add to the Achievement Schools, the conditions for optimizing their role, including trust and clearly defined parameters of the partnership, were not established adequately enough for schools to fully utilize the Agape partnership. Recognizing this, in October 2014, the Achievement Schools’ Senior Operations Manager and I developed the Toolkit using the SCO partnership as a case study. I concurrently began applying elements of the Toolkit to the Agape partnership for schools to better utilize this resource. For example, principals designated a member of their schools’ student support team as the school “point of contact” for the Agape Connector. Likewise, I worked with Agape and school leadership to 1) establish a partnership agreement (Appendix H), 2) develop a monthly progress monitoring report Agape would submit to Principals, 3) create a plan for how Agape Connectors would spend their time at their placement schools, 4) refine the process for schools to refer students to Agape Connectors, and 5) provide Agape Connectors access to SchoolRunner, the Achievement Schools’ student data system.

Despite these initial efforts I led to ready the Achievement Schools for Agape—and, similarly, my efforts to ready Agape for the Achievement Schools—the partnership remained underutilized in practice. The principals’ feedback from the November
meetings (presented in the Results section) reflected this underutilization and was amplified by the relatively small number of referrals schools were making to Connectors. This information justified my proposal to reboot and intensify our focus on the Agape partnership during the second semester by tightly coupling schools’ partnership with Agape around the Toolkit’s five strategy areas.

**Readying Schools for the Agape Partnership**

Based on the feedback from my Toolkit introductory sessions, my next step was to better assess and understand the current degree of the Achievement Schools’ readiness to partner with and utilize Agape. I did this through individual interviews with Achievement School principals between mid-November and the end of the first semester in mid-December 2014. In these interviews, I used the “readiness assessment checklist,” one of the Toolkit’s “Supports and Resources” included in the “Capacity Building” strategy. The checklist helps determine additional efforts that schools would need to undertake in each of the five strategy areas (Appendix I).

The assessment was designed to offer additional information that could guide my efforts to lead a targeted, more formalized integration of the Toolkit during the second semester by working more closely with Principals, student support team points of contact, and Agape leadership to ready our schools to more effectively leverage the Agape partnership. Looking forward to the second semester, I anticipated a number of potential Toolkit application challenges, including, 1) The sustainability of the Principals’ and designated points of contacts’ involvement and patience in applying the Toolkit strategies in an effort to ready their schools for better utilizing the Agape partnership, 2) Agape’s capacity in building their capacity and readiness to successfully partner with the
Achievement Schools, and 3) the partnership’s success varying school-by-school. Nevertheless, this partnership remained an organizational priority, as reflected by the Achievement Schools’ Executive Director: “We’ve got to knock this partnership out of the park. Having school-level personnel focused on coordinating nonacademic services for our students is a critical element to building great neighborhood schools in Frayser” (personal communication, December 4, 2014). Indeed, Agape was the Achievement Schools’ most critical community partner because of its purpose to coordinate wraparound services on behalf of low-income students and families. This partnership was intended to ensure that students’ nonacademic needs would be efficiently and effectively identified, mitigated and monitored throughout the school year.

**Results**

As I describe in my RKA’s Theory of Action, I have a long-term vision for the Achievement Schools to evolve into a robust network of community schools to serve as a network whose schools operate in the top 25% of Tennessee’s schools. The desired impact of this effort is to break cycles of generational poverty by introducing a robust portfolio of tightly coupled school-community organization partnerships to the district. Given the short timeline of strategic project and residency, however, I also developed short- and mid-term objectives as aspects of my Theory of Action.

My results are based on the short- and mid-term Theory of Action objectives. I anticipated completing the Theory of Action’s short-term objective—to build and introduce a Partnership ready Toolkit—within the timeframe of my residency, with the Toolkit’s functioning as a critical foundation for subsequent partnership work. The Toolkit would be a grounding framework on which I could begin cultivating the
conditions necessary for the Achievement Schools to more effectively utilize community organizations as partners in addressing students’ nonacademic challenges in the name of meeting academic goals. In this way, I anticipated making progress on my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective—to apply and integrate the Toolkit—but not fully completing the objective within the timeframe of my strategic project or my residency.

Short-Term Objective – Results to Date

The strategic project’s timeline (Appendix B) displays the sequence by which the Toolkit emerged and matured. I accomplished my Theory of Action’s short-term objective by November 2014, which is reflected by the successful development of the Partnership readiness Toolkit (Appendix E). I consider this objective accomplished, not solely because I created the Toolkit, but because of the iterative and collaborative process by which I created the product. While my RKA provided a basis of knowledge, and I particularly gravitated towards practices from Boston Public Schools and collective impact initiatives, the Toolkit evolved based on an ongoing improvement cycle of observation, development, feedback, and redevelopment that took place it during the late summer and first semester of the Achievement Schools’ 2014-2015 academic year. The results from the SCO partnership functioned as 1) a case study that drove the development and finalization of the Toolkit from August through October 2014 and 2) evidence that yielded broad principal endorsement of the Toolkit in November 2014.

Responses to the Needs Mapper’s item, “My family would like more information about…” revealed a need and demand for eye care from Achievement School families (Figure 3).
Figure 3: Results from Family Needs Mapper item reflecting family interest in eye care

These data focused schools on leveraging an existing partnership with the Southern College of Optometry (SCO), which resulted in SCO administering comprehensive eye exams to all consenting students through “pop-up” eye clinics at each of the five Achievement Schools. Of Frayser Elementary School’s total population of 323 students, 258 students (82%) consulted with a physician and 98 (38%) of those children were successfully prescribed (and received) glasses. In addition, 68 students were referred for additional vision therapies. The school’s leadership justified this partnership by aligning this health-oriented outcome with the school’s academic goals. As one principal stated:

SCO discovered a degenerative eye disease in one of my kindergarten students. If left untreated, this student would have gone blind in a few years. Now that it is being treated, her confidence is up, attendance is up, and she’s already showing academic improvement. (personal correspondence, October 15, 2014)
Furthermore, as evident by October news coverage the eye clinics garnered (Appendix J), the SCO partnership served as a clear example to the Achievement Schools and larger community of the necessity and potential impact of partnerships between schools and community organizations that offer nonacademic services to mitigate out-of-school challenges low-income students regularly encounter.

The results of this effort also justified the need and value of a codified Toolkit to ensure schools were ready to receive and utilize such partnerships. The SCO partnership yielded successful outcomes not because schools simply had access to data from the Needs Mapper and survey that identified the need for eye care. If schools did not have the systems in place or the Principals’ involvement to guide the partnership, as well as resources devoted to the partnership, the Achievement Schools would not have been ready to fully utilize SCO’s resources as they did. Figure 4 depicts the Achievement Schools’ progression in applying the Toolkit’s strategies and includes examples of each strategy in action, a progression that resulted in the schools’ readiness to effectively partner with and leverage SCO.

**Figure 4:** Depiction and examples of the Achievement Schools-SCO partnership’s sequential application of the Toolkit’s five readiness strategy areas

Just as the SCO partnership served as a case study to guide the Toolkit’s creation, it also became a proof point justifying the Toolkit’s value in partnership work.
Consequently, when I introduced the finalized Toolkit to principals and student support teams in November 2014 (See Appendix K for slide deck), the Toolkit and my proposal to fully apply the Toolkit to the Agape partnership, was well received. Positive survey feedback from this final introduction demonstrates the utility of introducing the Toolkit and its proposed second semester application to Agape.

The survey gauged schools’ degree of acceptance, willingness, and readiness to move forward with applying the Toolkit to the Agape partnership (See Appendix L for visual breakout of survey results). I collected feedback from 100% of participants (thirteen total, with four principals and nine student support team members completing surveys). Overall, the feedback on the Toolkit sessions was positive. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated that they found the session “very valuable” and 15% indicated that the session was “valuable.” Additionally, 92% of respondents indicated that they are “very excited” about moving forward in implementing the Toolkit. One Principal responded, “Our partnership work is so fragmented yet partnerships are critical to our goals. We needed a framework and set of resources to organize and launch this work” (personal communication, November 5, 2014). A member of a school’s student support team similarly responded, “This Toolkit readies us for partnership readiness!” (personal communication, November 5, 2014). Statements such as these reaffirm the utility of the Toolkit and its ability to generate positive change for Achievement Schools.

Furthermore, 100% of the survey respondents indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with fully applying the Toolkit to the Agape partnership. When asked for explanations to justify their sentiment, principals emphasized the need for coordinated, integrated nonacademic student supports, but described their current loosely
coupled, de-prioritized interaction with Agape Connectors:

I know we’ve put some pieces in place already from the Toolkit like the MOU and designated point of contact. But we’re still not where we need to be with Agape. I don’t want to manage them; I don’t have the time and I don’t want to do their job. But I know I need to be more involved to get the most out of this partnership. The Toolkit should help bring more structure to this partnership and to my involvement with Agape. (personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Similarly, one principal’s candid comments summed up the overall reaction and response to the Toolkit and my Agape proposal:

Thumbs up on the Toolkit, but it’s a lot. I am willing to be more involved in partnership work, but all of this is not going to happen overnight, so I like beginning with applying the toolkit to the Agape partnership. It’s needed. Having someone in our schools acting as a broker between students and nonacademic resources is a huge benefit; I know our students and families must have this support and it’s why I bought into the partnership in the first place back in the summer. But I see these Connectors in my building and I don’t know what they do, how they are making an impact, or how I can support them. I feel the partnership was established in haste—it looked good on paper—and while we like the idea and recognize the need, we were not prepared to partner. Let’s use the Toolkit to ensure we’re in a position to better guide and fully leverage this partnership. (personal communication, November 5, 2014)

The survey also asked school leaders to rank the Toolkit strategy areas in order of “ease of applicability” to the Agape partnership (Figure 5).
Figure 5: Survey Responses to “How easy will the strategy areas be to apply to the Agape partnership?”

Respondents indicated that the “Alignment” and “Assessment” strategies would be easiest to apply. Participants’ top explanation for this response was that many of these supports already occurred or were already in place; respondents cited the existence of the Family Needs Mapper, Agape’s access to SchoolRunner, and the signed partnership agreement (Appendix H). Respondents also justified their responses by explaining that undeveloped aspects of the two strategies would be relatively easy to define. For example, principals and support teams indicated that chronic absenteeism was a challenge with which they needed support. Schools envisioned focusing Agape on curbing chronic student absenteeism. This focus would more clearly align Agape and Achievement School goals, as well as allow a clear measurement of success. As one principal
explained,

Agape’s basic model is to provide wraparound services to students and families. By including chronically absent and truant students on their caseloads, Agape can identify and remove nonacademic barriers that are keeping these students from being in school and ready to learn every day. If Agape’s work brings about positive attendance outcomes—and this will be simple to measure; a student is either in school or not—I can more confidently say that the Agape partnership is beneficial and we’ll be in a much better position to improve our academic performance. (personal communication, November 5, 2014)

The Toolkit’s “Shared Leadership” strategy area received the lowest “ease of applicability” ranking and contained a common justification: principals and student support teams believed that the level of involvement required to integrate the “Shared Leadership” strategy with Agape would take too much of their already limited time. To illustrate, one principal wrote:

I think what Agape offers is valuable and needed, but the Shared Leadership strategy worries me because, based on the minimal impact I’ve seen Agape have thus far at my school, I’ll need to, and my support team will need to, devote a fair amount of time collaborating with, coaching, and even managing folks who are not even technically on my staff (personal communication, November 11, 2014).

The survey results affirmed that the Toolkit’s strategies and resources aligned with schools’ demand for clear guidance in partnership development. Further, while survey feedback reflected a willingness to move forward in applying the Toolkit to the Agape partnership, results also showed varying degrees of readiness to apply certain
Toolkit strategies. Consequently, I was able to better anticipate (and proactively begin planning for) progress towards my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective.

**Mid-Term Objective – Anticipated Results**

My work through November 2014 allowed me to assess and anticipate progress towards my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective, to apply the five Toolkit strategy areas, by the conclusion of my residency in April 2015. Illustrated by Table 3, this anticipated progress is based on a combination of two data sources: 1) responses to the November survey’s “Applicability” questions (See Figure 5 above) and 2) to date evidence of the five strategies in action. The to date evidence, which includes successes, deficits, and challenges experienced through November 2014, are based on the Toolkit’s “Look For’s” and “Suggested Practices” for each strategy area (Appendix E).

**Table 3**

*Anticipated Toolkit Strategy Progress by April 2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toolkit Strategy Area</th>
<th>Applicability, based on Nov. Survey Results (1-very hard; 5-very easy)</th>
<th>To Date Evidence of Strategies in Action (based on Toolkit “Look For’s” and “Suggested Practices”)</th>
<th>Anticipated Progress by April 2015</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>• Family Needs Mapper conducted to identify unmet needs (Appendix F)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Progress Symbol" /></td>
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<td>• Partnership asset mapping exercise conducted to chart and categorize existing partners with the school (Appendix C)</td>
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<td>• Need to gauge degree of alignment between existing partnerships and school strategic goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>• Agape Connectors have access to SchoolRunner</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Progress Symbol" /></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Monthly progress monitoring report developed</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Principals excited about assessing Agape effectiveness based on impact on chronic student absenteeism, but how to track/assess impact still unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Schools and Agape leadership share belief that non-academic factors Achievement School students encounter pose barriers to academic achievement and well-being, thereby necessitating this partnership, but unsure if this same belief is regularly communicated and</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Progress Symbol" /></td>
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By identifying evidence reflecting the degree to which the Achievement Schools have currently applied each Toolkit strategy area, I am better able to anticipate progress towards my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective. Bolstered by the November 2014 survey results, evidence suggests that, for example, the “Assessment” strategy will be more successfully applied compared to the “Shared Leadership” strategy, which I anticipate will see less progress by the end of my residency. At aggregate, results suggest that I have built a foundation for my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective but will not fully accomplish my mid-term objective by the conclusion of my residency.

**Analysis**

Moore’s strategic triangle⁹ provides an analytic lens to describe why I realized success on my short-term Theory of Action objective, but should be less confident about the anticipated progress on my mid-term Theory of Action objective. I strategically

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⁹ I do not include Mark Moore’s work in the “Systems Thinking and Change Management” section of my RKA. I initially intended to use Kotter’s “8-Step Change Model” and Heifetz’s “adaptive leadership” as lenses through which to organize my analysis. While Kotter and Heifetz do inform and are included in my analysis, after I wrote my RKA and as the strategic project unfolded, Moore’s strategic triangle became more relevant. To note, other research and literature not previously included in my RKA are also introduced and integrated into my Analysis section.
crafted and cultivated buy-in for the Toolkit during the first semester, but still have farther to go before successfully applying and integrating the Toolkit’s five strategy areas to ultimately call the Achievement Schools “partner ready.” The strategic triangle is intended to “focus the attention of government managers on three complex issues they had to have considered before (or while) committing themselves to particular course of action” (Moore & Khagram, 2004, p. 2). As Moore (1995) argues, it “helps public sector executives refocus their attention on the question of whether their political or task environments now either require or allow them to change their organizational purposes in the interest of creating additional public value,” and allows managers to understand if their efforts are substantively valuable (value proposition), legitimate and politically sustainable (legitimacy and support), and operationally feasible (operational capacity) (p. 72). If a manager hopes to be successful, he or she must be able to meet all three tests; if one of the tests fails, there exists high likelihood that the effort will not succeed.

The following analysis reveals that while I have gained success in creating a strong value proposition and legitimacy and support towards my project’s short-term objective, more work remains to establish broader, deeper, and sustained levels of legitimacy and support in the mid-term, as well as stronger operational capacity. The analysis below also provides an assessment of the impact of my own actions, as well as the contextual influences of the Achievement Schools as an organization on my ability to sufficiently address all three pillars of the strategic triangle.

Before applying the three lenses, it is worth describing the “authorizing environment” for school-community organization partnerships at the Achievement Schools. “The authorizing environment includes the large number and wide variety of
people in particular positions who authorize [managers] to take action, or appropriate resources for them to use” as well as those who influence them (Moore & Khagram, 2004, p. 6). In this instance, the authorizing environment consists of the principals, student support team members, Achievement School leadership and support team, Agape leadership, Agape Connectors, families, teachers, and students.

**Value Proposition**

Based on results to date, I have created a strong value proposition for the necessity and potential impact of a readiness Toolkit, the content included in the Toolkit, and the Toolkit’s application to the Agape partnership. As Moore (1995) describes, public value statements can originate from three sources: an expression of one’s own, individual conception of public value; what the contemporary political will demands; or what constitutes public value as described by “citizens, overseers, clients, and beneficiaries” (p. 100). Creating the value proposition lined up well with the first step in Kotter (1995, p. 61) the change management process I included in my RKA: assess context and create a sense of urgency. To create a strong value proposition, I had to understand the external environment, culture, potential resistance, and the speed of change necessary.

*My Conception of Public Value*

Beginning with my own conception of public value, I drew upon resources, knowledge, examples, and history of partnership work from the external environment to ensure the messaging of the value proposition created unified support and focused on developing conditions for the Achievement Schools to be partnership ready rather than building out a robust portfolio of partners. First, knowing there could be resistance
toward prioritizing developing partnership readiness given the accountability pressure on the Achievement Schools to dramatically turn around academic performance, in order to reduce resistance, I found it critical to consistently frame the partnership readiness work, the way I conceptualized the public value behind my project, as a means to attain academic goals. For example, I designed the July principal session during which I shared the draft readiness framework to include a set of “Overarching Ideas,” one of which rooted partnership work in the push to meet school goals (Figure 6, in bold)\textsuperscript{10}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching ideas framing the partnership readiness work</th>
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<td>△ Principals cannot do their job alone.</td>
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<td>△ Effective partnerships significantly raise the probability that progress can be made and school goals can be reached – despite the odds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>△ The work with partners shares a common set of strategies/needs/skills/approaches. One way to look at the “task of building-based leadership” is to see it as rooted in partnership development: partnerships with staff, parents, &amp; community organizations/service providers.</td>
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</table>
| △ Our focus is on readying our schools to engage and utilize community organizations as partners to help us reach our goals and fulfill our mission. | ❄️

\textit{Figure 6:} Slide from Draft Readiness Framework Introduction session

Drawing on my own experience as a former school leader as well as my understanding of the principals’ emphasis on academic performance during the early-July “State of Partnerships” interviews, I knew the potential of focusing on readying schools for partnerships could be construed as “yet another thing I have to do.” Conversations about capacity building, constructing systems, ownership, and behavior changes could run the risk of distancing the principals from this work and weaken its value proposition, making it feel top-down, burdensome, or compliance-oriented. By ensuring that the school leadership viewed partnership readiness as a means to student achievement, I was able to develop a stronger, unifying value proposition. This consistent messaging was

\textsuperscript{10} For complete slide deck, please see Appendix D.
delivered in multiple ways, and I highlighted it particularly when discussing the Agape partnership, including privately during sessions with principals and support team members and through email (Figure 7). Moreover, I stressed the value proposition publically, as evident by content from an August interview I conducted with a local media outlet (Appendix G): “We want to position our schools to build partnerships to better address our students’ nonacademic challenges, challenges that certainly have an impact on academic performance” (personal communication, August 5, 2014).

The readiness project’s consistently messaged, coherent value proposition not only is a reflection of my personal conception of public value, but also aligns with steps two, three, and four of Kotter’s change management process: form a powerful coalition around a vision for change, a vision which the change manager communicates openly and frequently (1995, p. 61). Following this sequence of steps built momentum that led to principals’ strong endorsement of applying the Toolkit to Agape, specifically around the idea of focusing Agape’s wraparound service model on curbing chronic student absenteeism. If Agape could bolster attendance, principals agreed, then stronger academic gains would follow. Further, my proposition to apply the Toolkit to the Agape partnership aligned with the expectations of principals. Moore (1997) argues that another source of defining a value proposition is to create one that aligns with “beneficiaries or clients” (p. 100). In this case, the principals are the primary clients. Given the value proposition’s dual alignment with my personal conception of public value – one rooted in the necessity of developing proper conditions at the school level to ensure effective partnerships – and that of the principals, I was better able to progress towards my Theory
of Action’s short- and mid-term objectives of developing, introducing, and applying the readiness Toolkit.

Team,

Good morning and I hope you all are well. During our November reflection sessions last week, student absenteeism and truancy surfaced as a common concern across the schools. Furthermore, a number of you had questions about how to best utilize the Agape Connectors who are working at your schools. Given that Agape focuses on both the student and his/her family for wraparound support, Agape Connectors are well-positioned to focus on chronically absent (including truant) students. The theory of action here is that if Connectors can identify and mitigate the causes of a student’s being absent, while creating incentives for attendance, then the student will be in school more and greater academic performance will result. Plus, absenteeism can be easily tracked and measured.

Ash and I met with Agape leadership yesterday and this was one of the topics we discussed. Agape was excited to focus on this particular topic and group of students as one specific way they can best support our schools.

This step to bring more focus to the Agape partnership, aligning their capacity to bolster student attendance, is an important step in applying the partner readiness Toolkit I’ve introduced to each of you. Moving forward, as an immediate next step, I’ll continue to work with you and your school-level points of contact (copied) to identify a group of students for the Connectors with the primary variable being chronic absenteeism/truancy.

As these student groups are finalized, Agape and I will be working to build out its model and plan for how Connectors can address chronic absenteeism/truancy.

Please let me know if you have any initial questions, but I am hoping this approach brings more clarity to “who” Connectors will be primarily working with and better focus how Agape can be better utilized as a wraparound partner at the Achievement Schools.

All my best,
Ansel

Figure 7: November email to principals and student support team members

Demands of the Political Will

According to Moore, a second source for a value proposition can come from what the “political will demands” (Moore, 1995, p. 100). Given the Achievement Schools is a school operator in Tennessee’s Achievement School District (ASD), and thus obligated by the state to move its schools’ academic performance from the bottom 5% of Tennessee’s schools to the top 25% in five years, I tied the importance of effectively and efficiently leveraging partnerships with community organizations to the ASD’s urgent academic accountability expectations. Following the first step of Kotter’s change management process (1995, p. 61), “create urgency,” I equated my partnership work with
academic performance consistently and early on in my residency, beginning in July when I introduced a draft of the Toolkit’s framework (See Figure 6 above) to principals. By framing readying schools for partnerships as a means to improved academic performance, I was able to leverage the “political will” of the ASD to create a sense of urgency around the partnership work and strengthen my project’s value proposition. This sense of urgency, undergirded by the ASD’s academic accountability expectations, incentivized schools to develop more tightly coupled relationships with partner organizations. Specifically, the Toolkit served as a framework and guide for schools to tightly couple their relationships with partner organizations around particular strategic areas. For example, the Toolkit’s “Alignment” and “Assessment” strategies ensure that partner goals align with school goals.

Another source of political demand that strengthened my project’s value proposition stemmed from the Achievement Schools’ strategic plan. The Achievement Schools’ strategic plan, revamped in the spring of 2014, included four strategic pillars, one of which was “Mutually Enriching Relationships” (see Figure 8, boxed area). One metric to measure this pillar centered on the question, “Are our institutional partnerships effective?” As the Director of Partnerships, I aligned my partnership readiness project to this question. But, relying on results from the July 2014 principal interview and student support survey, I also reframed the question to address a foundational issue I identified associated with our schools’ readiness to partner with “institutional partners.” As I often articulated in leadership team meetings, if I am able to build our schools’ capacity to effectively partner with institutions like Agape, then we will better leverage the services
our partners offer, thus better positioning our schools to evaluate if such institutional partners are effective.

Figure 8: The Achievement Schools Four Strategic Pillars

Beyond the Achievement School District and the Achievement Schools leadership team, by identifying and engaging a number of key constituents within the organization, including members of the Operations Team, school leaders, and school student support teams, I was able to ensure a diverse set of perspectives was included in the Toolkit’s development and introduction. By developing the Toolkit’s through this collaborative, iterative process during which I listened to and incorporated their feedback into the Toolkit, I made it more likely for these constituents to see partnership readiness as valuable because they saw their own perspectives included. As a result, principals,
student support team members, members of the Achievement Schools leadership team, and representatives from various departments (Operations, Academics, Technology/Data Analysis) have dedicated time to sit in on various readiness sessions between schools and Agape, as well as have committed time to be thought partners with me as we move into the Toolkit’s application.

**Stakeholder Conception of Public Value**

Moore (1995) argues that a third source of defining a value proposition is to create one that aligns with “beneficiaries or clients” (p. 100). For my strategic project, principals acted as the main “clients.” Additionally, Agape was also a “client” that had a stake in the readiness work. If I were able to strengthen my readiness value proposition by aligning it with Agape, I could create better synergy between Agape and the Achievement Schools, a condition of readiness that would set up the Toolkit’s subsequent integration during the second semester.

I argue in my RKA that a reason why school-community organization partnerships are often underutilized or fail is because of barriers that emerge from loosely-coupled relationships between schools and nonacademic service-providing community organizations. The Achievement Schools-Agape partnership began as loosely coupled. However, at the conclusion of the first semester, the participating principals and Agape staff defined a more tightly-coupled, aligned relationship that was united by the shared goal to address a common “pain point” within the organizations: chronic student absenteeism. Just as the principals identified this challenge, Agape believed that their integrated student services approach could be leveraged to address chronic student absenteeism. The alignment of the value proposition between these two primary clients,
in this case the Achievement School principals and Agape, contributed to the success of my November introduction and proposal to apply the Toolkit to the Agape partnership. In other words, the common goal of curbing chronic student absenteeism received a very positive response across the partnership.

As mentioned in my RKA, a vision must be communicated, particularly within the community (Kotter, 1995). While many key stakeholders have acknowledged the value proposition for partnership readiness and the Toolkit, I still need to collect input from a broader set of beneficiaries who view this work as substantively valuable. In particular, in order for this effort to be a success, I need buy-in from Achievement Schools’ teachers and families, as well as the Frayser community. Despite genuine efforts to collect input from families regarding the nonacademic challenges they and their children encounter, only 41% of Achievement School families responded to the Family Needs Mapper. This indicates that I need to put more consideration into building effective family engagement processes into the Toolkit. As a lesson learned, and future step, I intend to communicate with Achievement School teachers and the larger Frayser community via in-person interviews and focus groups, and anonymous surveys.

Because the alignment of partners to their identified need is a key aspect of the Toolkit, and a critical aspect to bolstering the Toolkit’s value proposition, in future refinement of my processes I will bolster my focus on the Family Needs Mapper respondent percentage and other outreach techniques designed to engage the teachers and Frayser community. In hindsight, I recognize that my focus on creating the Toolkit and achieving buy-in, and subsequently feeling stretched for capacity when attempting to apply some of the Toolkit while building it, affected my initial ability to conduct this type
of outreach. As a result, I missed a critical opportunity to engage families, teachers, and community members, who, albeit less directly than principals, have roles in the implementation of the readiness Toolkit. This missed opportunity leaves me unsure of whether or not I have support from key beneficiaries and constituents, particularly teachers and families, and this uncertainty contributes to my concern about how effectively I will achieve my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective of applying and integrating the Toolkit during the second semester.

To summarize, given the importance of these constituents in the success of the Toolkit’s application and integration, I remain concerned that this effort lacks the buy-in required to establish the appropriate levels of legitimacy and support, as well as operational capacity, necessary for this effort to be successful within the Achievement Schools. As such, this effort runs the risk of becoming merely a “central office” vision without any real action or impact at the classroom levels. Similarly, given that principals are my project’s primary “clients,” accomplishing my Theory of Action’s mid- and long-term objectives depends not only on initial principal support, but also principals’ becoming champions of readying their schools for partnership. This expansion of principal responsibility would serve as evidence of Kotter’s eighth and final change management step of “anchoring the changes in corporate culture” (p. 61). However, such a change would entail a shift in behavior and an evolution of principals’ operating as both instructional leaders and partnership champions.

As reflected by a MetLife survey of the American Teacher (2005), many principals are not well prepared for the kind of collaboration, sharing of leadership, and open and honest communication that partnerships demand. In this same survey,
principals also reported that even if they recognize the value of partnerships, many find it difficult to find the time and resources to either get started or to sustain the work, and they tend to believe work to develop partnerships with community organizations comes at the expense of instructional leadership. My concern, therefore, is that as the Toolkit continues to move from theory to action, principals will not provide the requisite support and operational capacity needed for my mid- and long-term objectives, a concern validated by the low anticipated progress towards the Toolkit’s “Capacity Building” and “Shared Leadership” strategy areas (See Table 3).

**Legitimacy and Support**

Through the “legitimacy and support” lens of his strategic triangle, Moore (1995) asks managers to consider “what sources of legitimacy and support would be relied upon to authorize the organization to take action and provide the resources necessary to sustain the effort to create that value” (p. 100). Moore and Khagram (2004) argue that “the group of people in positions that could confer legitimacy to the manager would have to agree with the conception of public value that was to be pursued” (p. 8), indicating the need to build a strong value proposition first. Moreover, “any social enterprise needs some kind of implicit or explicit authorization from society to stay alive and to continue operating” (p. 11), demonstrating that legitimacy and support must precede operational capacity in the long run. By building a value proposition based on early levels of conferred legitimacy and support by 1) the ASD’s accountability goals, 2) the Achievement Schools’ “Mutually Enriching Relationships” strategic pillar, and 3) my formal role on the Achievement Schools leadership team as Director of Partnerships, I garnered the additional legitimacy and support required to both successfully progress towards my
short-term objective of developing and introducing the Toolkit while looking forward to my mid-term objective of applying and integrating the Toolkit.

*Legitimacy Within the Achievement Schools*

Part of my legitimacy came from my formal leadership title and position in the organization chart. The organization’s leadership conferred legitimacy to me through my role as Director of Partnerships, which entailed a seat on the leadership team, a seat of positional title that sent a clear message that partnerships were one of the organization’s strategic priorities. However, the group of people in positions that could confer more useful legitimacy to my project and me was the Achievement Schools’ principals because they are the main levers in the Toolkit’s utilization. In order for the Toolkit to thrive as a useful tool, principals need to legitimize and support its potential utility. Nevertheless, legitimacy cannot be equated solely with title. Conferring legitimacy emerges from trust between members of an organization. As Bryk and Schneider assert, the dynamic glue holding the essential elements of a successful school together is relational trust, which “operates both as a lubricant to organizational change and a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of local school improvement” (2003, p. 27).

For this reason, at the onset of my residency in July 2014 I prioritized engaging the principals and their student support teams to align our value propositions and for the principals to develop trust in my abilities and me. This effort is evidenced by the time I initially spent in July 2014 interviewing and surveying the principals and student support team members. Moreover, I worked to identify opportunities for “quick wins” for the Toolkit such as the Needs Mapper data’s alignment with the SCO eye care service. The principals’ positive feedback after I introduced the Toolkit’s draft framework—one
principal subsequently expressed to the Achievement Schools’ Executive Director, “Ansel’s the real deal” (personal communication, July 24, 2014)—served to legitimize my role and project while confirming stronger alignment between value propositions.

The significance of the SCO partnership as a legitimizing proof point cannot be understated. The SCO partnership’s success became a clear proof point of the Toolkit’s value and clear evidence of the benefits of tightly coupling partnerships around the Toolkit’s strategy areas. The SCO partnership also strengthened both my professional legitimacy with the principals and the principals’ subsequent support for the Toolkit. Without the SCO partnership, as well as the strategic process through which the partnership was cultivated and utilized, the readiness Toolkit would lack clarity and remain an abstraction to the principals. The SCO proof point concretized the value of partnerships and the legitimacy of the Toolkit’s application because principals saw its process and impact in action in their schools and with their students. The SCO partnership success became a means to build broad consensus and support around the Toolkit once the Toolkit was fully introduced in November 2014. In other words, the SCO partnership proof point became a “source,” according to Moore (1995), “of legitimacy and support to be relied upon to authorize the organization to take action and provide the resources necessary to sustain the effort to create that value” (p. 100).

Additionally, by developing strong ties with my network-level (as opposed to school level) support team colleagues, I created stronger alignment and increased cross-departmental legitimacy for my partnership readiness work. Krackhardt (1992) argues that strong ties create trust, less resistance, and “comfort in the face of uncertainty” (p.

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11 According to Granovetter (1973), “the strength of a tie is a combination of time [length of relationship], emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), and reciprocal services that characterize the tie” (p. 1361).
Further, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) argued that trust arose from conditions where it is possible to display vulnerability to another, as a result of belief in their expression of trust factors: being open, honest, reliable, competent, and honest. Therefore, strong ties served and continue to serve me well, given the level of uncertainty related to the process of developing, introducing, and subsequently applying the partnership readiness Toolkit.

Moreover, Granovetter (1983) argues that individuals with whom collaborators have “strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available” (p. 209). This manifested itself throughout the first semester, as most meetings and sessions achieved nearly 100% attendance, a feat given the number of other principal and student support team obligations. Colleagues also responded to requests in a timely way. One of the clearest examples of the development of strong ties and trust was my relationship with the Achievement Schools’ Senior Operations Manager. We regularly debriefed the SCO partnership and used it as a case study to develop the Toolkit’s strategy areas. As these meetings and conversations continued, the Operations Manager and I better understood one another’s motivations and abilities, including why we were drawn to partnership work, the Achievement Schools as an organization, and working for communities like Frayser. With the resulting ties and trust built between the Senior Operations Manager and me, we were able to more comfortably critique, question, push one another’s thinking, and engage other departments in the Toolkit’s development. Consequently, not only did the Toolkit gain wider, cross-departmental organizational legitimacy, but also the Senior Operations Manager and I were more willing to reciprocate support for our other areas of work. Because of the legitimacy that resulted
from this relationship, I became increasingly confident in the Toolkit’s value proposition. This evidence further demonstrates that strong relationships between colleagues on network-level support team and me would lead to the levels of support needed for the successful development, introduction, and application of the Toolkit.

Legitimacy from Other Stakeholders

Even with this level of legitimacy and support at with the Achievement School leadership team, Achievement School principals, Achievement School student support teams, and network-level support team colleagues, I recognize my own limitations in developing similar levels of legitimacy and support with other key stakeholders, including Agape. By October 2014, I realized Agape would be the ideal opportunity for the Toolkit’s application and thus worked to develop legitimacy and support with Agape. I initially did not garner legitimacy and support from Agape, which logically made it difficult to collaborate with Agape and build their capacity needed to implement the Toolkit’s strategies.

My initial approach to building Agape’s support was unsuccessful, as I relied on my formally legitimized position and authority as the Achievement Schools Director of Partnerships. The following portion of an email I sent to Agape leadership in October (Figure 9) exemplifies my initial top-down approach to the partnership. In the email, I bluntly request, without providing context or rationale, that all correspondence about or on behalf of the Achievement Schools first go through me, a request that differed from how Connectors were working with school-level staff and principals.
Lastly, to **reiterate and be as clear as I can be**, I request that any outreach to churches, for example, to adopt an Achievement School (whether by a Connector, David, or other Agape staff) first comes through me. The volunteer and adoption efforts Agape is spearheading is amazing and will be incredibly helpful (and we thank you for doing this), but I ask you contact me first before doing so on the schools’ behalf. Additionally, as a general practice, schools would prefer local Frayser churches being solicited first. Some of our schools have solid relationships with local churches, so that might even make your job easier.

**Figure 9**: Email from Ansel to Agape leadership, October 2104

This was a mistake and hurt the Achievement Schools’ positive, but fledgling, nascent partnership with Agape, as evident by confused and frustrated responses from Agape leadership asking me if they had done something wrong and questioning the intent of my email. Unlike my initial approach to principals, I opted to swiftly and heavy-handedly utilize my formal authority as Director of Partnerships to dictate parameters of the Achievement Schools’ partnership with Agape, thereby minimizing Agape’s role in the partnership. This mistake was rooted in my failing to recognize the importance of Agape’s role in the “authorizing environment: “People in particular positions who authorize [managers] to take action, or appropriate resources for them to use” as well as those who influence them (Moore & Khagram, 2004, p. 6). Further, despite my belief in the necessity to more tightly couple partnerships between school and community organizations, I recognized that my initial approach to the Agape partnership messaged our relationship as too tightly coupled, one that threatened “a loss of individual organizational identity” (Weick, 1976, pp. 4). My approach also violated my own beliefs in cultivating trust and relationships as an initial condition to establishing legitimacy—a critical element underlying the entire readiness Toolkit—and it hampered efforts to align
Agape’s, Achievement Schools’ principals, and my own value propositions for the partnership readiness work. According to Moore (1995), if a manager fails to establish all three of the strategic triangle’s elements (in this case, legitimacy from Agape, a “conferring source” of legitimacy) there exists high likelihood that the effort will not succeed (p. 72).

My failure to initially establish legitimacy through relationship- and trust-building with Agape jeopardized the success of this partnership. In retrospect, I realize I was consumed by a sense of urgency to act and prove myself; a sense stemming from schools’ confusion about the Agape partnership and demand to build partnerships that can immediately meet the students’ numerous needs. I therefore acted swiftly, composing and sending an email (not the best means of communication if I had concerns with the partnership) without much forethought. Knowing that “collective trust arises from accumulated judgments of the verbal and behavioral exchanges between members of groups” (Forsyth et al., 2011, p. 22), I altered my approach to Agape, reconnecting personally by phone with each Agape representative and responding with the following email (Figure 10):

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12 As I mention in the “Operational Capacity” section below and more fully describe in the “Implications for Self” section, this urge to act quickly, prove myself, and validate my role and work are areas of leadership growth for me.
Team Agape,

I’ve been able to speak to almost each of you today (Latoya and Jim, I left you voicemails and will circle back) to follow-up on the email I sent last night, but wanted to send a group note to you as well.

I apologize for its tone and tenor, particularly the tone and tenor of the third point. As I reread it, although it comes across this way, in no way am I trying to throw a wrench in the great work we’ve done thus far, suggest that I need to be in control, or accuse you of doing something wrong. The volunteer recruitment piece is huge for us and our students! Also, personally, as someone who deeply values the cultivating of relationships to do good work and the trust that comes from building relationships, I’m pained to consider any harm I’ve done to our relationships and trust! My language was not clear and caused confusion and offense, for which I apologize (and should listen to Julie who tells me to go to bed earlier). There’s no underlying issue here and I assure you I’ll be much clearer if there are times when questions/concerns come up!

Thanks to you all and please let me know if you have any questions.

My best,
Ansel

Figure 10: Email response from Ansel to Agape leadership, October 2014

Despite the delegitimizing potential of my early correspondence with Agape, how I responded to Agape’s actually created a foundation for legitimacy because I recognized my fault, honestly apologized, made commitments moving forward, and then consistently behaved according to my commitments. Furthermore, through my follow-up correspondence, I was able to address the issue I initially expressed in my October email regarding appropriate communication norms. Like the legitimacy I formed with the Senior Operations Manager and the principals, my honesty, humility, and commitment yielded the development of strong relational trust and ties with Agape over the course of the first semester. As evidence, Agape’s Chief Operating Officer, sent me an email (Figure 11) soon after Agape and the Achievement Schools agreed to apply the Toolkit to better utilize the Agape partnership. In the email, she references my October email and acknowledges the trust we built over the following weeks through my consistent commitment, honesty, and hard work to bring entities together towards common goals.
Operational Capacity

When describing operational capacities, Moore and Khagram (2004) refer to “capabilities,” including new investments and innovations, on which the organization would need to rely, or develop, to deliver the desired results (p. 2). The Toolkit’s successful creation and introduction suggests that legitimacy and support is currently in place to advance the application and integration of the Toolkit. Likewise, the Toolkit is both a resource that bolsters schools’ operational capacity, as it is a new “innovation,” as well as a framework to identify, organize, and develop needed operational capacities and support to ensure schools’ ongoing partnership readiness. Garnering a greater level of legitimacy and support as a result of principal buy-in, as well as building a coalition of cross-departmental and organizational supports as evident by my work with the Senior Operations Manager and (eventually) Agape, I established some of the groundwork for creating a greater amount of operational capacity to guide the Toolkit’s application. The
creation of some of the Toolkit’s various elements serves as evidence of this groundwork: 1) the partnership agreement between Agape and the Achievement Schools (Appendix H), 2) monthly progress monitoring report Agape would submit to Principals, 3) plan for how Agape Connectors would spend their time at their placement schools, 4) process for schools to refer students to Agape Connectors, and 5) Agape Connectors’ access to SchoolRunner.

The Toolkit is also a foundation for the operational capacity required to sustain partnership efforts into the second semester and over the long run. It is a framework and set of resources schools can utilize to more tightly couple their relationships with community organizations around the Toolkit’s five strategy areas, thereby creating the conditions to yield more impactful outcomes from partnerships. While this is an accomplishment, I anticipate different degrees of progress towards application of the Toolkit’s strategy areas by the conclusion of and after my residency (see Table 3, pp. 53-54). The essence of my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective is to cultivate the Achievement Schools’ organizational capacity to successfully apply and integrate the Toolkit through the Agape partnership. I anticipate varying progress towards this objective due to a number of factors, including 1) the operational history and underlying driving forces of the Achievement Schools as an organization, 2) my own tendency to build relationships based on a trust and deliberately devoid of conflict, and 3) the schools’ propensity to frame partnership work as a technical task.

*Operational History of the Achievement Schools*

Since the Achievement Schools’ inception in 2012, principals operated with a high level of site-based autonomy (Figure 12, boxed area), a lever the ASD believed to be
critical to improving student achievement in short order. As such, each school operated much like an individual, distinct charter school. However, entering the 2014–2015 school year, the Achievement Schools leadership team envisioned shifting from a set of autonomously operating schools to a network of schools. The addition of a network-wide uniform curriculum, assessments, budgetary processes, data systems, and clearer network-level support team roles (including my residency position as Director of Partnerships) signaled this shift.

Some principals saw this shift as an infringement on their autonomy, warily viewing initiatives by the Achievement Schools leadership/support team as bureaucratic, top-down mandates. During one of my initial “State of Partnerships” interviews, a principal sarcastically asked, “So now that curriculum is out of our hands, what are you here to make me do?” (personal correspondence, July 8, 2014). Such resistance to (real or perceived) top-down education improvement efforts is not uncommon and often leads to the efforts’ derailment. As Beer and Nohria (2001) acknowledge, direction must be set
from the top, but individuals at the ground level also must be engaged for an effort to be successful. Edmunds (2005) also recognizes that, “Reforms fail when the school staff [are] not…active participants in crafting the reform” (p. 4). I therefore worked to counter this perception and actively built legitimacy and support from the principals over the first semester, leading to the successful development and introduction of the Toolkit.

However, my worry is that as the Toolkit shifts from development to full implementation across the Achievement Schools, principals will resist the operational capacities the Toolkit asks them to develop and lead, particularly in the “Shared Leadership” and “Capacity Building” strategy areas. Like the principal who asked what I was “here to make him do,” I anticipate potential pushback from principals who, despite initially approving the Toolkit, regress to framing the Toolkit as a top-down mandate from “the network” and an usurpation of their site-based decision-making autonomy. If this occurs, schools will maintain loosely coupled relationships with community partners, a condition that inhibits schools from fully utilizing partners’ services and resources, instead of tightly coupling their relationships around the Toolkit’s five strategy areas to better leverage partnerships.

My Role in Promoting and Inhibiting Building Operational Capacity

Wagner and Kegan (2006) argue that, “Although change leaders must pay attention to the larger systemic functions of the organization, it is also important for them to keep an eye inward, on how they are making sense of the improvement process and their own contributions to its pace and success” (p. 83). “One of the hardest aspects of charting the change course…is identifying the ways that we might also create obstacles

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13 I foresee the clearest instance of such pushback occurring in the spring of 2015, around the time of standardized testing. Given the importance of state standardized test scores at the Achievement Schools (and across the ASD), partnership readiness work could be tabled.
that get in the way of our own plans” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 55). I, too, see the effect of this as I move from Toolkit creation to Toolkit application; I foresee my own competing commitments and assumptions being enablers and barriers to the Toolkit’s success.

To analyze my own contribution to the project’s success and projected challenges, I also utilized an immunity to change map, a tool developed by Kegan and Lahey (2009) (Table 5). This tool assists in diagnosing the need for an “adaptive formulation of the problem” as well as an “adaptive solution” in a simple, visual way, providing “a picture of how we are systematically working against the very goal we genuinely want to achieve” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 47). By doing so, the map allows an individual to begin to understand the behaviors, actions, competing commitments, and big assumption that both enable and impede one’s ability to fulfill his or her commitment (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

### Table 4

*My Immunity to Change Map*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Doing/not doing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hidden commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Big assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I am committed to building and implementing/integrating a Partner-ready Toolkit for the Achievement Schools | • I am simultaneously building the Toolkit’s strategies while introducing portions of it to the Achievement Schools  
• I am taking the time to collaborate with others, and to ensure they’re on board, even when it means taking longer to get something done  
• I am not spending time with teachers, families, and students and therefore am not | • I am committed to making collaboration synonymous with “consensus” and will put whatever time it takes to ensure everyone’s opinion is taken into account for a final decision  
• I am committed to doing the things I know how to do well – build relationships and trust  
• I am committed to avoiding the things I don’t do well – lean | I assume that if I 1) don’t build and maintain consistently positive, conflict-free relationships with everyone with whom I interact and 2) am unable to visibly show positive results of my work, my work will be delegitimized and I will be exposed as unworthy of being a system-level leader |
learning enough about what’s working and what’s not in terms of partnership and service effectiveness

to conflict and explore how to utilize formal authority as a lever for change

- I am committed to not getting “called out” or questioned about the value or quality of my work
- I am committed to having clear proof and affirmation – in the form of positive feedback and public recognition – of my work’s impact and value

My assumptions of what might occur if I fail to 1) build and maintain consistent positive relationships with everyone (schools, co-workers, community organizations) and 2) prove my/my work’s worth helped me accomplish my short-term objective (build and introduce the Toolkit) but I predict will potentially become barriers to accomplishing my mid-term objective (implement and integrate the Toolkit through applying it to the Agape partnership). Indeed, my assumptions might impede the development of the needed operational capacity with key implementers to truly position the Achievement Schools as partner-ready. From July to December 2014, I behaved as a builder of collegial, positive relationships, believing this approach was the best demonstration of strong collaboration and consensus supporting my partnership-readiness work. However, by equating the positive relationships I built with consensus for the work, I avoided candid, potentially conflict-laden conversations needed to solidify school leader commitment to accept and embrace the changes that accompanies applying and integrating the Toolkit. As a result, rifts that might arise during my project’s Toolkit application phase might become
exacerbated because relationships are built on maintaining collegiality and not a comfort to lean into conflict.

*Readying Schools as Adaptive Work*

A third potential challenge to the development of the requisite operational capacity needed to successfully apply the Toolkit relates to how principals view the work of implementing the Toolkit’s strategies partnership readiness work. While principals acknowledged the necessity of partnerships to meet their goals, embraced the Toolkit, and committed to leading its integration, much of the Toolkit’s strategies require adaptive work. Ronald Heifetz (2002) distinguishes between two types of challenges: technical and adaptive. Technical challenges are problems that can be addressed with known solutions and tools; adaptive challenges “require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments” (Heifetz, 2002, p. 14). Heifetz describes that too often adaptive challenges, or those that require more than answers from authority, are treated as technical and solved with technical fixes. Essential to addressing adaptive work sustainably “depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself” (Heifetz, 2002, p. 13). He warns that it is important when faced with adaptive pressures, people too often want answers, not questions, and this tendency must be avoided.

Heifetz’s warning points to why the application and integration of the Toolkit in the second semester—my Theory of Action’s mid-term objective—could either succeed or fail. While the Toolkit does contain technical resources (needs assessment, partnership map, sample partnership agreement), fundamentally, the Toolkit frames partnership readiness as work entailing challenges and questions that require adaptive leadership. In this way, the Toolkit is an effort to set up principals as adaptive leaders to ready their
schools for high impact partnerships with community organizations. Similarly, Moore (2004) frames “operational capacities” as “capabilities,” including new investments and innovations, on which the organization would need to rely, or develop, to deliver the desired results (p. 2). Integrating Moore’s work with that of Heifetz, we see that developing operational capacity often requires adaptive solutions that do not exist. If I have successfully built enough principal legitimacy and support for the Toolkit—and if I have framed the Toolkit not as a comprehensive technical solution but a means for principals to lead adaptively—then the requisite operational capacity will follow. However, if I enter the application/integration phase of my project and discover that the legitimacy and support I created is based on the assumption that the Toolkit is a set of “made to order” solutions to partnership development and challenges, then such legitimacy will soon deteriorate and, thus, operational capacity will not develop.

**My Theory of Action Revisited**

Applying Moore’s strategic triangle as an analytical lens to my project leads me to believe the triangle has a particular cyclical cadence: a clear value proposition can help align constituencies and build legitimacy and support; this support is the foundation on which to build operational capacity to successfully move and manage change efforts. In turn, the developed operational capacity further justifies the initial value proposition, bolsters legitimacy, and ultimately creates conditions for sustained and additional improvements. Additionally, understanding competing priorities of both the organization and myself provide an additional level of understanding of the success achieved to date. In particular, multiple priorities, first set at the leadership level, but that trickle down to an individual, can undermine the capacity to build sufficient operational capacity focused
on reading schools for partnership. Consequently, I re-imagine Moore’s strategic triangle as one depicting a clear sequence and cycle of its three elements (Figure 14).

![Diagram of Moore's strategic triangle]

**Figure 14:** My re-creation of Moore’s strategic triangle as a cycle of ongoing, sustained improvement

This view of Moore’s strategic project also mirrors my Theory of Action, which guided the steps I took while leading my strategic project. In the short-term, I worked to clarify and communicate my value proposition of partnership readiness as a means to foster legitimacy and support from principals, colleagues, and Agape. My growing legitimacy, accented by a proof point in the form of the SCO partnership, allowed me to begin building and incorporating preliminary pieces of operational capacity. The second semester’s work entails the ongoing building of operational capacity.

However, I refined my Theory of Action (below, with additions underlined) based on two learnings from my analysis. First, I must test the strength of my assumptions underlying my legitimacy and support with the principals. Doing this will allow me to better understand if principals frame the Toolkit as a technical solution as opposed to a
framework for them to lead adaptive work. Consequently, I will be able to better plan for the project’s mid-term phase of building operational capacity to apply and integrate the Toolkit. Second, a broader base of support must be built for the value proposition of partnership readiness if I am to build more sufficient levels of legitimacy and support to enable enough capacity to implement the Toolkit, particularly with teachers, other members of the network-level of support team, and families.

In the short-term (during residency, specifically during the first semester of the 2014–2015 school year)...

- If I build a vision and rationale for Achievement School partnership readiness around student achievement and well-being that achieves deep buy-in and support from a broad set of stakeholders, including principals, school-level support team members, network-level colleagues, teachers, community organizations (Agape), and families;
- Develop a partnership-ready Toolkit for the Achievement Schools, one guided by a tightly coupled partnership framework, input from stakeholders, and based best practices from other districts and organizations; and
- Then schools will have access to clear, agreed-upon language, rationale, and practices to prioritize and guide the development of partnerships with community organizations like Agape that provide services to address nonacademic challenges low-income students encounter.
In the mid-term (begun during residency, specifically the second semester of the 2014–2015 school year, and continuing after the residency)…

- Informed by systems thinking and change management theory, which includes assessing the strength of the Toolkit’s legitimacy and support through identifying the competing commitments at the system and individual levels that could impede the work, if I coach school leadership to access, apply, and integrate the toolkit, then schools will shift practice and devote capacity to partner with community organizations, thereby ensuring nonacademic student need is efficiently and effectively identified, mitigated and monitored; and

- If schools shift practices and approaches to partnerships with community organizations, schools will then cultivate collective trust with partner organizations. If collective trust is cultivated, then schools will have established the optimal condition for sustained school-community organization partnership and impact.

In the long-term (beyond the residency), if the Achievement Schools and partner organizations like Agape interact and operate under this optimal condition of collective trust, then schools will be able to fully integrate partners as stakeholders in improving low-income students’ academic and social outcomes, thereby setting up the Achievement Schools to 1) advance to and sustain performance in the top 25% of Tennessee’s schools, 2) evolve into a network of community schools accountable for both academic and social outcomes, and 3) ultimately be the lever to break cycles of generational poverty.

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14 The technical definition of a “community school” is a place and a set of partnerships connecting a school, the families of students, and the surrounding community. A community school is distinguished by an
Implications for Self

Upon reflection of my analysis and experience to date with the Achievement Schools, four implications for myself have surfaced: 1) Draw upon previous experiences and research to inform and drive work; 2) root work in its impact on students; 3) balance inquiry with advocacy; and 4) continue to seek the appropriate balance between work and life.

Draw upon previous experiences and research to inform and drive work.

Entering the Achievement Schools, I had several pre-residency experiences that allowed me some initial success in crafting a value proposition that achieved buy-in in short order from several constituents. By conducting literature reviews and connecting with other organizations involved in partnership work, in combination with my own theory of learning surrounding supporting the development of the “whole child,” I evolved my own interest from how to build a diverse, broad portfolio of partners to developing the conditions for schools to be ready to effectively partner with community organizations. Constructing these beliefs in advance of my residency enabled me to more quickly and thoughtfully situate my project around the concept of developing partner-ready schools. For example, my prior exposure to Boston Public Schools’ and Baltimore City Schools’ approaches to school-community organization partnerships, bolstered by my own professional background as a school leader who relied heavily on and believed heavily in community partnerships, guided the Toolkit’s development. Moreover, by leveraging the national momentum for partnerships to address nonacademic challenges as integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Community schools extend the school day and week, reaching students, their families, and community residents in unique ways (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012).
a strategy for dramatic school improvement, I could more easily position partnership work as a priority in the Achievement Schools’ mission and turnaround strategy. As a result, this experience has affirmed the notion of continuing to stay aware of, and learn from, the environment that surrounds the Achievement Schools in order to effectively plan for and implement work within the organization.

**Root work in its impact on students.**

Leveraging a needs assessment—what I refer to as the Family Needs Mapper (Appendix F)—is a way to ensure partnerships are built around real, not perceived, family and student nonacademic challenges. Though I, as well as others, celebrated the alignment of partnership development with need through examples like the SCO partnership, it became clear that without hearing the voices of students and families throughout the process, we ran the risk of doing what we thought was best for students and families, rather than knowing what was best for students and families. Indeed, with the exception of the Family Needs Mapper, my efforts to engage students and families in the development of other Toolkit strategy areas and resources were minimal. I instead more heavily relied on constituents like Achievement School principals, student support teams, leadership team colleagues, and the Senior Operations Manager. This experience has affirmed the need to involve the “user,” or rather, the humans, for whom I ultimately work in order to effectively design solutions that will effectively and meaningfully impact their learning experiences, and their outcomes more holistically.

**Balance inquiry with advocacy.**

A key leadership goal of mine during residency was to balance inquiry with advocacy, identifying the appropriate moments to bring individuals along and when to
push forward even when I knew I would meet resistance. This goal came in part from my “360 feedback” survey completed prior to my first year of the Ed.L.D. Program as well as through feedback from Ed.L.D. project teams on which I served. The survey and feedback highlighted my tendency of getting work done for those I was serving or working with over pressing for changes or approaches I believed would yield better outcomes, advocacy that would potentially require additional expenditures of time and entail challenging those with whom I had worked to develop positive relationships. However, knowing how much I value relationships, I sought to balance the building of relationships with my desire to move quickly and “push” through a system. Therefore, given the collaborative nature of the Achievement Schools and partnership work, I wanted to focus on building relationships, rather than “steamrolling” over individuals, as I initially did with Agape, in service of doing what I thought was right by students. However, in doing so, I conflated “inquiry” with “sitting with ambiguity,” and often missed opportunities to ask questions of others and build strong relationships. Going forward, I will be mindful and cognizant of the fact that inquiry truly means inquiry, and not simply staying silent or accepting what is said.

Additionally, even when finding the appropriate moments to self-advocate, I missed chances to do so effectively, and was oftentimes overcome by the emotion I experienced when acting in a way that felt like I might violate the relationships or delegitimize the work that I valued (See Figure 17 for my immunity to change map). I found myself not expressing frustration or anger for fear I would be exposed as volatile, weak, or less confident- all perceptions that could potentially undermine the strength or effectiveness of my advocacy. During one of our check-ins, my supervisor recognized
this challenge and its implications: “Even when you are disappointed or frustrated with someone, you have a very warm ‘aw shucks’ or smiling ‘can you believe it’ demeanor when addressing it… expressing frustration more strongly and forcefully can provide some levity to relationships and also keep team members committed to meeting a high bar of expectations” (personal communication, January 29, 2015). For example, when I strongly advocated that Agape leadership filter all correspondence about or on behalf of the Achievement Schools through me (See Figure 10) and received immediate pushback, I retracted and apologized, fearful I had permanently harmed this important relationship and characterized myself as emotionally volatile. Although my reaction was positively received and I accomplished my objective to clarify communication norms, my attempt to advocate in this moment failed, which may be in part a function of my inability to advocate effectively.

This experience has taught me that I need to have the courage to share more of my own self through asserting genuine inquiry and advocacy. My supervisor believes I have cultivated the trust of the organization and its stakeholders to effectively take this next step: “You have done an extraordinary job of entering the organization, the Frayser community, and our network of partners and quickly establishing strong foundations for mission-critical relationships” (personal communication, January 29, 2015). The next step is to leverage this trust to safely “express a wider range of emotions in my leadership through inquiry and advocacy, even if it leads to conflict or difficult conversations” (personal communication, January 29, 2015).

After several conversations with my supervisor, I plan to practice advocacy prior to retracting or compromising, as well as seeking more feedback about my attempts to be
a strong advocate so I can adjust and modify my strategies for advocacy moving forward. Additionally, I also plan to explore whether or not effective advocacy will always yield the result I want; or, if sometimes effective advocacy can still yield the opposite of my desired outcome. This is an approach to improvement that I hope to continue to incorporate into my leadership. Wagner & Kegan (2006) frame this approach as a “leader-learner”:

When we get rid of our idea of a leader as the source of all answers and solutions…we don’t replace it with a picture of a lost, inept bumbler, serene in his cluelessness…instead we picture a highly capable “leader-learner,” someone with the courage and capability to learn, and help those around him learn, as they collectively create a path toward a previously unattained destination. (p. 213)

**Continue to seek the appropriate balance between work and life.**

Not only is it important to prioritize readying schools for effective partnership, I have acutely realized the importance of readying oneself for and prioritizing oneself in the work. With a tendency to put my needs behind others, particularly when I see the needs of the Achievement School students as more numerous and complex than my own, I have realized how greatly I strive to satisfy the wishes of multiple colleagues, school leaders, and community organizations. At the outset of my residency in particular—a time when I felt I had to prove my value and the value proposition of my partnership-ready project—I often found myself out of balance, deprioritizing my own health and failing to devote time to being a good father and husband in service of the Achievement Schools. However, choosing this path created a spiral effect; the more I dedicated time to “the work,” believing I would eventually get to a point of balance, the more frustrated I
became with my performance at work and, more importantly, in my personal life. Two instances forced me consider how to better balance work and life. The first instance made me reevaluate the implications of not having a work-life balance, leading me to personally commit more time to my family and personal health. The second instance forced me to practice these commitments.

After the superintendent of the Achievement School District suffered a heart attack in late September 2014, I reflected on the long term health tradeoffs I might be making by going full bore in this work all day, every day, at the expense of my own health and well being. Consequently, I committed to being more explicit and strategic about how I used my time. For instance, I said “no” more often, committed to being home by 5:30pm each day; took one of my daughters to school each morning; set a goal to go out to dinner with my wife at least once every two weekends; and not open my computer/check email for at least one day per weekend. The second instance put these commitments to the test. Our third daughter, born January 11, 2015, underwent heart surgery when she was four days old to correct multiple heart defects discovered hours after she was born. Work became greatly deprioritized and although such deprioritization initially made me strangely uncomfortable, I grew immeasurably in my understanding of and reliance on faith, hope, love, and family. When I returned to the Achievement Schools, I felt a greater sense of levity, confidence, and maturity—a sense I will recall and rely on in the future—in my approach to work, life, and the balance of the two.
Implications for Site

Upon reflection of my analysis and experience to date with the Achievement Schools, the following implications for the Achievement Schools have surfaced: 1) Follow an explicit change management sequence; 2) prioritize communication; and 3) remain ambitious about the scope of what the organization prioritizes, but decide on what to stop doing if new, better opportunities arise; and 4) ensure principals are the champions of readying their schools for partnership, but are not positioned as “heroes” attempting to manage an additional scope of work.

Follow an explicit change management sequence.

One of the core values of the Achievement Schools is to remain “nimble and responsive,” meaning that the organization and its personnel should be comfortable and ready to pivot priorities, commitments, and capacity as issues arise. The reactive, “all-in” sentiment of this core value aligns with the urgent, “should have been done yesterday” nature of the turnaround work in which the Achievement Schools, as well as the ASD at large, is engaged. As highlighted my analysis, this tension and the resulting multiple priorities the Achievement Schools adopt often results in more work to be done than there is capacity. In the instance of the Toolkit’s development and implementation, I attempted to simultaneously build the Toolkit, apply some of its strategies and practices, and meet the immediate demands of schools in need of critical nonacademic services for its students and families. My project’s success points to my effectively balancing the “macro” work of developing the Toolkit and its strategy areas with the “nimble and responsive” work of meeting immediate need. Further, the Senior Operation Manager’s work with the schools and SCO provided a proof point supporting the benefits of an
explicit, tightly managed partnership development and integration sequence. However, at times, the strategic work of developing and introducing the Toolkit seemed disconnected with the more immediate partnership demands stemming from the schools.

Research, past experience, and this strategic project highlight that the sequence to build a successful initiative matters. First, it begins with allowing change leaders to have sufficient time to understand the context within which they are operating, the problem they are trying to address, and the work that must be done to solve the problem. Next, one must be mindful to focus on building strong relationships and teams, establishing trust and respect. Then, when building an emergent strategy, one should consider opening authentic channels of communication to continually gather information and feedback from “users” and build a strong coalition of support. From there, strategy should drive the actions and supports provided at the school level. The Achievement Schools should consider this sequence of events, knowing that in some cases it may slow work down at the school level in the short term, but allow for alignment, coherence, and focus across the system (across the “central office,” across schools, and between schools and central office), and, in turn, sufficient and robust operational capacity, in the long run.

**Prioritize communication.**

Because of the many of priorities within the Achievement Schools and the speed at which its “nimble and responsive” employees take on new work, stakeholder engagement and communication sometimes becomes an afterthought. In creating Toolkit, various strategy creation opportunities left many individuals excluded from conversations. For example, the regular strategy sessions I held with the Senior Operations Manager, as well as the numerous sessions I conducted with principals and
support team members, excluded several potentially enthusiastic individuals, including certain teachers who expressed interest in partner work, partner organization representatives, members of the network-level support team, and parents. The demand to retroactively ready our schools for partnership while applying the Toolkit’s strategies to existing partnerships led to limited, rather than broad and robust, stakeholder engagement. My analysis highlights that without generating information or getting feedback from those who are either critical to implementation or “users” of the Toolkit, one cannot create a strong, sustained value proposition that a broad set of stakeholders will support with any level of certainty; as a result, the legitimacy and support, and the subsequent the operational capacity needed to do the work, will lack.

**Remain ambitious about the scope of what the organization prioritizes, but decide on what to stop doing if new, better opportunities arise.**

Ash Solar often said, “To build a network of great neighborhood schools—schools that support any child regardless of need—in a community like Frayser has never been done before” (personal communication, July 14, 2014). To successfully navigate these uncharted waters, it is understandable that the Achievement Schools’ strategic scope is ambitious and broad. Likewise, as an organization, the Achievement Schools has a culture that encourages exploration of new opportunities that can improve outcomes for students, while continuing to take advantage of practices that have and continue to demonstrate success for students. The creation of my role as the Director of Partnerships, a blended learning pilot, and the development of Saturday School demonstrate the Achievement Schools’ affinity to seek “transformation” in the service of building high quality, equitable neighborhood schools.
However, when adopting new initiatives, while benefits are clear, several negative side effects exist. Many organizational priorities, a fixed amount of time, limited funding, and a lean network support team (and thus limited capacity) will impact the level of participation necessary for initiatives to succeed. Achievement School support team members and school-level personnel also highlighted that the load of work is a factor in their considering returning to the organization or recommending it to others; many have experienced a lack of sustainability to do high quality work. The resulting attrition will require more time to focus on building foundations, such as trust and respect. If the Achievement Schools seeks to do more work in service of students, it should consider what to stop doing as it seeks other initiatives in order to create a healthy organization that can focus, support, and sustain the ambitious mission it espouses. Developing and codifying a clear theory of action, out of which cascades aligned priorities, a staffing model, and metrics for success, is an important initial step the Achievement Schools can take to advance its mission.

**Position and support principals as champions (but not heroes) of readying their schools for partnership.**

In my analysis, I surfaced a worry that although principals embraced the Toolkit when introduced in November 2014, principals would not maintain their support for and involvement with the Toolkit when it came to applying its strategies with fidelity. Reasons for this include the Achievement Schools’ multiple priorities (and principals’ understandable lack of capacity and time to do all of them well), history of school-level autonomy in decision-making, and pressure to achieve dramatic academic gains in a short time period. If partnership work is a commitment the Achievement Schools prioritizes,
school principals must be champions in leading the application of the Toolkit and readying their schools to leverage the partnerships they both demand and need. Education literature supports this implication, as theorists contend that system change must commence at the school level, not at the system level. Richard Elmore explains that, “The problems of the system are the problems of the smallest unit” (Elmore, 2004, p. 3). Tyack and Cuban (1996) similarly contend that, “Unless practitioners are also enlisted in defining problems and devising solutions adapted to their own varied circumstances and local knowledge, lasting improvements will probably not occur in classrooms” (p. 136).

Nevertheless, further engaging principals in partnership readiness work must not lead to the Achievement Schools’ framing the principal as a “hero,” one who does it all and adopts yet another scope of work on top of other responsibilities. “Principal as hero” is an unsustainable strategy, one that potentially leads to principal burnout, high turnover, and thus, difficulties in institutionalizing relationships, mindsets, and practices that ensure the Achievement Schools are and remain partnership-ready. Instead, the Achievement Schools should position principals as “chief customers” who champion readiness work by utilizing a resource like the Toolkit to better leverage their student support teams in partnership work, convene and ask the right questions of service-providing partners, and offer informed formative and summative feedback about partners’ impact (or lack of impact). Additionally, positioning the principal as chief customer can also extend beyond their role in partnership work. If the Achievement Schools adopts a school-level staffing model that clearly defines and differentiates positions around such areas as partnerships, academics, culture, and operations, then the principal can better operate as an informed, adaptive leader who is not trying to do it all
but serves as the school’s connective tissue who can make informed decisions for the advancement of the school’s mission.

Framing and positioning Achievement Schools’ principals in this way, however, is not solely about resources or staffing models. It will entail a shift in behavior and culture towards, to use language from the Toolkit’s strategy areas, shared leadership. As reflected in my Capstone’s results section, “Shared Leadership” was a Toolkit strategy area to which the principals warily responded. Such wariness can be attributed to the shift in culture needed to ready schools for partnership; shared leadership entails a requisite level of vulnerability, psychological safety, and commitment of already limited time to establish authentic, trust-based relationships on which effective partnerships are based.

Shifting to framing the principal as partnership champion and customer, as opposed to principal as hero who manages and “owns” multiple scopes of work, will assist with fostering a culture of shared leadership. Further, as an organization, the Achievement Schools can utilize both “sticks” and “carrots” to better position and support principals. Accountability can serve as a stick to promote this cultural shift. For example, the Achievement Schools leadership can hold its principals accountable for the Toolkit’s implementation through incorporating the fidelity by which they implement the Toolkit into their performance reviews. In this way, accountability is a lever to ensure school-community organization partners are tightly coupled around the Toolkit’s five strategy areas. Second, reciprocally, the Achievement Schools must provide the support and resources principals need to ready their schools for partnership. Such reciprocal supports could include deprioritizing (or altogether removing) other responsibilities or bolstering the school-level student support teams with additional human resources
devoted to partnership work. Even with this “sticks” and “carrots” approach, it must be recognized that both the Achievement Schools leadership and the principals will need to engage in intensive change management processes to infuse the Toolkit application’s prioritization throughout the organization and schools.

**Implications for Sector**

**When seeking to build and leverage partnerships with community organizations,**

**focus first on readying the school for partnership.**

The call for schools to leverage partnerships with community organizations as a means to provide and integrate services to mitigate the effects of poverty in the pursuit of achieving ambitious academic outcomes continues to build momentum (Blank, Jacobsen, & Melaville, 2012). Given this growing energy and momentum surrounding partnerships, my partnership-readiness project with the Achievement Schools, and specifically the Toolkit I developed over the course of the residency, has implications for the larger K-12 sector. As argued in my RKA, although schools recognize the need to partner with service-providing organizations that they otherwise could not offer students, if schools do not prioritize partnership work by developing proper systems, committing the requisite time, and behaving with urgency to steer the partnership, partnerships with these organizations will have minimal effect. Creating and cultivating these systems and mindsets, which the Toolkit attempts to define and articulate, entails a fundamental shift from loosely coupled school-community organization partnerships to more tightly coupled school-partner community organization partnerships, specifically around five critical areas: vision, alignment, assessment, shared leadership, and capacity building.

Therefore, moving forward, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners
spearheading and building the momentum behind the partnership conversation should not solely focus on outputs, meaning the positive outcomes that can result from partnerships between schools and community organizations. The conversation should include and begin with a focus on inputs, meaning the conditions a school must cultivate and codify to ensure they effectively utilize partners.

My Capstone and the Toolkit primarily focus on readying *schools* for partnership. However, equally important to ensuring partnerships that lead to positive outcomes is readying community organizations for partnership with schools. As I began to apply the Toolkit to the Achievement Schools’ partnership with Agape, for example, I realized that just as our schools were not ready to fully utilize Agape, Agape as an organization did not have the systems or mindsets developed to effectively partner with the schools. I often found myself playing the role of quasi-consultant to Agape, coaching them towards developing strategies contained in the Toolkit to ensure Agape was ready to effectively partner with the Achievement Schools. This experience contains an implication for the K–12 sector: whether led by schools, districts, or a third party (collective impact organizations such as Strive Together), community organizations seeking to partner with schools will need to cultivate and create their own readiness conditions to ensure an effective partnership with schools. Although the Toolkit integrates parts of this aspect of the readiness work, including the “School-Partner Readiness Checklist” (Appendix L), its unit of focus is the school. Therefore, additional investigation and exploration is needed in the area of readying community organizations for partnership with schools.

**Organizations engaged in school turnaround efforts should incorporate partnerships as a primary strategy for sustained improvement.**
Tennessee’s Achievement School District (ASD) is increasingly being viewed as a potentially replicable model to quickly and dramatically improve the academic performance of consistently low-performing public schools. Visits to the ASD by state government delegations from Michigan and Georgia during the 2014-2015 school year serve as evidence of this growing interest. These states are also monitoring the performance of the ASD’s various school operators, including the Achievement Schools, within this “school turnaround” context. As such, I believe the Achievement Schools’ prioritizing partnership work as a primary lever for turnaround has future implications for how school turnaround strategy is framed by the ASD’s school operators and by states and other organizations seeking to engage in similar “bottom 5% to top 25%” school turnaround work.

The urgency underlying turnaround efforts is a welcome injection into the K–12 sector. Yet the promise of turnaround efforts, which mainly target high poverty, minority schools and districts, falls short because of the propensity to myopically devote capacity to achieving academic success as measured by reading and math standardized test scores. This is not an argument against academic rigor or high academic expectations. However, turnaround strategies must reframe priorities to address the whole child, taking into account child development, the well-researched impact of poverty and associated risk factors that impede learning, and the opportunity to galvanize diverse resources through partnerships to ensure all students are ready for success. In practice, schools engaged in turnaround (and even schools not technically engaged in turnaround but serve high poverty student populations), should consider partnering with organizations like Agape in order to bolster the needed operational capacity to identify and engage service-providing
community organizations in an effort to meet student needs. Personnel like Agape Connectors who are placed in schools and essentially function as school staff members can be the connective partnership tissue between schools and community organizations.

In a speech at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2012, Education Secretary Arne Duncan offered a simple, but powerful description of this reframed approach: “Boosting student achievement is not an either-or solution. Educators and the broader community should be attacking both in-school and out-of-school causes of low achievement” (Duncan, 2012, p. 1). The Achievement Schools’ partnership readiness work adopts this “both-and” approach to turnaround to meet two ambitious, yet mutually-reinforcing goals: 1) transform Tennessee’s lowest-performing schools from the bottom 5% to the top, and 2) address the underlying conditions of poverty that are a significant barrier to students in the bottom 5% schools from being successful in school and in life. In practice, focusing on multiple priorities is challenging. Nevertheless, the Achievement Schools’ “both-and” turnaround strategy has broader implications for how other operators, states, and organizations in the K-12 sector consider approaches to school turnaround. This Capstone can also be expanded to consider partnership readiness’ implications for the broader system, focusing on such questions as, “What is a partnership-ready municipality or city? How does a partnership-ready municipality or city look and feel for its stakeholders?” Collective impact organizations such as Memphis’ Seeding Success, a member of the broader Strive Together network, are positioned well to lead this work in cities across the United States.

Consider reframing the function and preparation of the school principal to include partnership leadership competencies.
Achievement School principals’ propensity to recognize the necessity of partnerships while in practice adopting a loosely coupled approach to partnerships and prioritizing the “principal as instructional leader” role is not unique. It is an approach that reflects a contemporary mantra across the K–12 sector of how school leaders frame their scope of responsibility and prioritize their time and resources. According to results from a MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2005), principals report that even if they see the value of partnerships, many find it difficult to find the time and resources to either get started or to sustain the work, and they tend to believe work to develop partnerships with community organizations comes at the expense of instructional leadership. This difficulty to find the time and resources that principals commonly reported, however, could also be a symptom of a deeper leadership preparation issue. The same MetLife survey (2005) also found that many principals are not well prepared for the kind of collaboration, sharing of leadership, and open and honest communication that partnerships demand. As a result, this sense of both not knowing what to do and the principal’s strong focus on instructional leadership often get expressed as, “I don’t value partnerships” (p. 46), and over time, commitment of the school and partner organizations ebbs, people lose interest, resources dwindle, or other problems emerge (Riehl, 2000). In this way, the contemporary school leader’s prioritized function, core leadership competencies and preparation, and mindsets become potential barriers to a school’s readiness to receive and fully utilize community organizations as partners in student success.

In my analysis, I recognize a potential outcome of these barriers when the Toolkit work shifts from development to full implementation: principals will resist the leadership role the Toolkit asks them to play, particularly in the “Shared Leadership” and “Capacity
Building” strategy areas. I anticipate potential pushback from principals who, despite initially approving the Toolkit, tend to eventually recant and resist their critical role in effectively collaborating with partner organizations. This perhaps is due to principals’ prioritized function as instructional leader, a fixed paradigm that guides principal training, hiring, and accountability; the school leadership profession does not prioritize or prepare principals for partnership work and the requisite shift in culture needed to strengthen schools’ partnership readiness.

This challenge is also an opportunity for the sector to reframe the role and preparation for school principals as both leaders of instruction and leaders of school-community organization partnerships. While the principal does not need to be “in the weeds” of readying her school for partnership (designated student support team personnel can implement and manage the Toolkit’s specific elements), the principal must approach her role in school partnerships as she approaches instruction: observing partnership work, requesting and analyzing data, evaluating partnership impact, holding school-level personnel involved in partnerships accountable to goals, behaving with a level of vulnerability and psychological safety when engaging with partners, and elevating partnership work as a school priority. The Toolkit can serve to guide principals in defining their role and involvement in partnership work at the school level. Further, the Toolkit’s utility can extend beyond the Achievement Schools to become a part of the sector’s framework for school leadership preparation, development, and evaluation.

**Conclusion**

As I argue in this Capstone, partnerships between schools and community organizations that provide nonacademic services and resources to support low-income
students are recognized as critical by a broad group of stakeholders, including: education researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Nevertheless, schools and community organizations often enter into partnerships without being fully ready and willing to do so, yielding potential frustration, underutilization, and disappointing outcomes. As practitioners continue to emphasize partnerships as the “sine qua non” for sustained school and system improvement, they should understand the readiness prerequisites to successfully bring about such improvement through partnerships.

First, although partnerships are appealing to schools in part because schools can relinquish involvement in certain areas (student health, mentoring, parent education) to focus on others (academics), practitioners should avoid codifying a loosely coupled partnership with community organizations. Like many school operators and school districts, the Achievement Schools see the value of partnerships yet often adopts a loosely coupled approach in defining the partnership, their relationship to, interaction with the partner organization. Instead, practitioners should prioritize and approach partnerships in a more tightly coupled fashion. While too tightly coupling the partnership potentially risks the loss of individual organizational identity, makes adapting to changes in the school and/or the partner organization more difficult, and is more expensive to operate due to the time and money it takes to coordinate people (Weick, 1976, pp. 4-8), certain aspects of the partnership should be tightly coupled to ensure the partnership is effective, efficient, and sustainable. Initiated and overseen by the principal, and subsequently supported by designated staff, schools should specifically tightly couple partnerships with community organizations in five areas (Teachers21 & Community Matters, 2013, pp. 2–5):
### Table 5

**Partnership Development Support Tool**

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<th>Guideline</th>
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| Vision                  | • Principal regularly articulates, with clarity and specificity, the shared vision for the school’s direction and development;  
                         | • All educators and partners share ownership of the vision;  
                         | • Everyone in the school can articulate the vision.                                                                                         |
| Alignment               | • Principal works with designated school staff and partners to ensure that each partnership’s goals and programming aligns strategically to school goals and vision;  
                         | • Principal and partners negotiate and resolve differences.                                                                                  |
| Assessment              | • Principal works with designated school staff and partners to continually assess the work of partnerships to ensure that school-wide and student-centered strategic priorities are achieved;  
                         | • Principal regularly seeks adjustments in partnership strategies and programming, based on outcomes.                                         |
| Shared Leadership       | • Principal works with designated school staff and partners to share responsibility for the success of partnerships, engage in ongoing honest communication, and work together to solve problems as they arise. |
| Capacity Building       | • Principal works with designated school staff and partners to build the long-term capacity of the school, and prioritizes the use of funding, time, and personnel on partnerships that contribute most to achieving the vision. |

These tightly coupled tenants, on which the Toolkit is based, are the foundation for schools to be ready to fully leverage the services, resources, and opportunities community organizations can provide students, particularly low-income students who consistently experience the debilitating nonacademic and academic effects of poverty. Once schools recognize and prioritize the value of tightly coupling their partnerships with community organizations around these five areas, they can then begin building and practicing the structures, systems, and mindsets to better fulfill their missions. For the Achievement Schools, this approach to partnership will help ensure that “every child in Frayser can attend an excellent neighborhood school” (School Operators, Achievement School District, 2014).
Second, although many scholars, policymakers, and practitioners theoretically accept the necessity of school-community organization partnerships, partnership readiness work is largely underdeveloped across the education sector. Given this, schools interested in readying for partnership must acknowledge the learning stance necessary, and the additional time, effort and capacity required, to implement this developing strategy. As schools and school operators seek to cultivate their partnership readiness, they must also seek to model the behaviors of a learning organization, acting flexibly and adaptively as they collect, understand, and analyze information that can direct and redirect their work over the course of time. While it provides a clear, structured roadmap for readiness, the Achievement Schools’ Toolkit is not a “plug and play” tactical resource. The Toolkit frames how schools can behave as learning organizations, with its strategies helping to guide schools and community organizations to learn and evolve together, behaving as mutually accountable partners in the name of improvement and positive student outcomes.

However, adopting this learning stance may involve a challenging shift. Given the number of constituents—principals, school-level support teams, operator support teams, operator leadership, partner organizations’ leadership and personnel, even teachers—that must shift their resources and processes in service of a new priority and model, leaders must be patient. Leaders must be honest with themselves about the speed at which shifts in the systems can be made and trusting relationships between schools and community organizations can be built, particularly when cultures of these systems have solidified certain ways of thinking and working over the course of time and the demand for immediate and dramatic accountability-based academic improvement is strong.
Third, though readying schools for partnership brings a level of uncertainty, leaders should engage in specific change management activities with a level of definitiveness. A change leader must seek to understand the context in which he or she operates, which includes an understanding of the external environment, how individuals and groups behave within a system, and the desires of the multiple stakeholders involved in partnership work. Moreover, change leaders within an organization must seek to build a broad base of urgency, supports, and a strong set of relationships, across leadership levels, functions, community organizations, and schools, to ensure the initiative has the buy-in, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity necessary to implement personalized learning at scale, across the system. Additionally, though perhaps not obvious when focused relentlessly on “doing” the work, practitioners must create the time and space to identify their own competing commitments, as well as the system’s, that may impede the development of integrating partnership readiness strategies into practice. For the Achievement Schools, and likely for many school operators (charter and district alike) who seek positive outcomes for all students, it requires the discipline of focusing relentlessly on not only the prioritization, but also the implementation of readying schools for partnership. Engaging in these foundational change management activities will lead to greater success in building the capacity schools need to better identify and leverage the community organizations with which they need to partner to ensure every student is holistically supported.

Though this Capstone provides a practical case study for understanding the trials and tribulations of developing introducing, and, integrating a partnership-ready Toolkit across a network of schools, it additionally poses several questions to the sector:
• How might we ensure that the growing interest in building school-community organization partnerships includes a focus on the conditions that must be in place at the school, school operator, and partner organization levels?

• How might we incorporate school-community organization partnerships as a strategic lever in “school turnaround” efforts to dramatically and quickly improve the academic performance of consistently low-performing public schools?

• How can we evolve the role and preparation of school leaders to be that of both instructional and partnership leader?

• What measurement and accountability structures can be developed – structures containing an emphasis equal to that of academic accountability – to motivate the sector to prioritize meeting both academic and nonacademic student need?

Though the challenges of better readying schools (and the systems of which they are a apart) for partnership with community organizations may prove great, these challenges cannot serve as excuses. Leaders across the system must work to address these challenges so that every student served by K-12 education is prepared academically, socially, and emotionally for the world ahead. As leaders reorient their behaviors, actions, and mindsets towards those that support our schools and community organizations to more effectively partner in the name of children, the notion of creating a new K-12 system defined by multiple stakeholders working collectively to support and educate all students at a high level will become not only a possibility, but also a reality.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Full Description of a Partner-ready School, from *The Role of Community Schools in Place-Based Initiatives: Collaborating for Student Success*

If you were touring a fully-developed community school, here’s what you might see and learn:

You walk in and it’s immediately evident that the school is a welcoming place for all. The school is open evenings and weekends, as the sign with the school hours shows. Down the hall, there are some dedicated rooms and offices for an array of community partners. According to the signs on the doors, partners offer counseling and mental health, family strengthening, tutoring and mentoring services and literacy programs for the community.

As the meeting with the community school coordinator and the principal begins, the trust and camaraderie between them is clear. The coordinator talks about recruiting partners, coordinating opportunities and supports with the work of teachers, and the school’s goals. He talks with pride about aligning afterschool activities with the learning goals in the classroom, the new health clinic and the dental services shared by neighboring schools.

The principal describes her work to help struggling students and explains she now has more time to be the instructional leader since the community school coordinator helps manage expanded learning opportunities, health, and other supports. She discusses the ways in which teachers involve students in the community as part of the core curriculum, working with community partners on environmental and service learning projects and on STEM subjects.

She brags about the greater student engagement and the increases in attendance and academic achievement. The coordinator and the principal then start trading stories about the new roles and excitement among parents and how that new energy has had such a positive impact on the school.

You are invited to join a meeting with community partners. Today’s conversation focuses on afterschool opportunities and addressing increasing violence in the community. You learn about how more students are engaged in afterschool programming and that they are excited by the theater, arts, and music opportunities jointly staffed with community partners. The conversation then focuses on how to work with the police and faith-based institutions, to stop the violence.

As you continue the tour, you see the room where neighborhood early childhood programs come for professional development opportunities. Then you have a chance to speak with a couple of teachers who talk about how the presence of community partners helps them address problems that students bring to class every day that they once had to deal with on their own. They also talk about how much they love the connections their students are making with the real world.

And what’s particularly cool, you learn at the end of the tour, is that this community school is not one of a kind. In fact, it is similar to other community schools in the adjacent neighborhood and across town.
Appendix B
Timeline of Events

- **Principal "State of Partnership" Interviews**
  - Early July, 2014

- **Student Support Team Survey**
  - Mid July

- **Session with Principals and Student Support Teams to Share Draft Framework**
  - End of July

- **Developed Partnership Toolkit, using SCO partnership as guiding "case study"**
  - August-October

- **Developed Complete Toolkit to Principals and Student Support Teams; proposed full application of Toolkit to Agape partnership**
  - Early November

- **Introduced and Introduced "Alignment" strategy**
  - August

- **Applied portions of Toolkit to Agape partnership**
  - October

- **Assessed schools' readiness to partner with Agape**
  - Early November - Mid December, 2014
## Appendix C
Achievement Schools Partnerships Survey

### Who is completing the survey

1. **Name of your school**
   - Corning Achievement Elementary School
   - Frayser Achievement Elementary School
   - Georgian Hills Achievement Elementary School
   - Westside Achievement Elementary School
   - Whitney Achievement Elementary School

### Student Support Services Coordination and Oversight

The questions in this section are about how non-academic supports for students, community partnerships, and external programs are managed and organized in your school. Subsequent sections will ask about specific services.

2. **Is there a staff position at your school who is responsible for the overall coordination of partnerships with external organizations that provide services to students and families?**
   - Yes
   - No

   If you answered Yes, please describe the role:

3. **If you answered “Yes, there is a person responsible for partnerships,” which of the following best describes this position at your school?**
   - Full-time
   - Part-time
   - Part of another role responsibility among team members:

### School-level Student Support Teams, Processes, and Tools

4. **Do you have a "student support team" at your school?** "Student support team" refers to a group of professional staff at the school who meet on a regular basis to review students and match them to services, programs, and supports when needs are identified.
   - Yes
   - No

5. **Please list those who are on the student support team.**

### School-level Student Support Teams, Processes, and Tools

6. **Which of the following describes how "student support team" meetings are scheduled at your school?**

   - Meetings occur at regular times (i.e., scheduled in advance or on a “standing” meeting)
   - Meetings occur at a “moment of need” (i.e., collaborative teacher or staff meetings in response to the need)
   - Both: There are regularized student meetings and those that are called when needed if not scheduled otherwise

7. **How does the student support team identify students who need services?**

   - Individual cases brought to team’s attention by teachers or staff (instance above)
   - The team has access to data from assessments to identify students who need additional help
   - The team uses non-remediation interventions/strategies to identify students who need services
   - Every student in the school is reviewed at least once a year by the team
   - Other (please specify): [ ]
8. Do teachers or staff know what to do when they identify a potential need to refer a student to your school's student support team?

☐ Yes
☐ No

9. If "yes," please describe the referral process.


10. How are these processes communicated with teachers and school staff? Please describe.


11. What technology/software/platforms do you use to support your work? Please describe the technology and how you use it.


12. Which of the following types of Youth Development Programs are provided at your school? If a program is provided both by school staff and by an external partner, please put a check in both columns. And if the program is not offered at your school, please check the appropriate column.

- Social-emotional learning
- Career readiness
- Health
- Leadership
- College awareness and support
- Service-learning and civic engagement

13. Please list all external partners that provide youth development programs in your school.


14. How would you describe the level of need for mental health services among students at your school?

☐ Very high need
☐ High need
☐ Moderate need
☐ Low need
☐ Very low need

15. Do you refer students to any agencies outside of the school for mental health services?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, please indicate the agency to which you refer students. Please mark ... of possible.


16. Are any mental health services available onsite at your school? This includes services provided by Achievement First staff and external partners who work in your school.

☐ Yes
☐ No

17. Which of the following mental health related services are provided on site at your school? If services are provided by school staff AND an external partner, please check both columns.

- Individual counseling
- Family counseling
- Behavioral health
- School-based mental health
- School management services
- School-wide positive behaviors
- Assessment and referral services
- Family coordination
- Supportive services

Please list any other mental health services not included on your school.


18. Please list the agency name of any mental health providers that work directly in your school to provide services to your students. Please avoid using acronyms if possible.


19. How well do you think the current level of mental health services available at your school meets the needs of your students? Please select the response that best reflects your opinion.

- Overall, most students get the help they need
- It's kind of a mixed bag, some get the help they need while others don’t
- There are a lot of areas in mental health needs at our school

Please feel free to elaborate on your answers.
### After School Programs

**20. How would you describe the demand for after school services among the families at your school?**
- [ ] Decreased
- [ ] High
- [ ] Increased
- [ ] Unchanged

**21. Do you have an after school program?**
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

### If "yes, we have after school programming..."

**22. Who operates your after school program?**

- [ ] Is it run by the school
- [ ] Is it run by an external partner/agency

If external partner is involved, please specify in the space provided:

**23. Approximately how many students participate in the after school program?**

Write your best estimate in the space provided:

**24. Are families charged a fee for after school services?**

- [ ] No, it is a free program
- [ ] Yes, there is a set fee (e.g., enrollment, materials)
- [ ] Yes, there is a sliding scale fee based on income
- [ ] Yes, this is not for the students only

**25. Is the current level of after school programming available at your school meeting the demands of families?**

- [ ] Yes, the needs of most families are met
- [ ] Some needs are not, some are met
- [ ] No, there is a lot of unmet need

### Health, Wellness, and Prevention Programs

**26. Please indicate whether your school offers the following Health, Wellness, and Prevention programs and if so, who provides the program (school staff, external partners, or both). Check all that apply.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>School Staff</th>
<th>Other School Staff</th>
<th>External Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness, addiction, and recovery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury prevention and preparedness programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gun violence and health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance use prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition and healthy living</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicide prevention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health and well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance use and mental health</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**27. Please list the names of the external partners that provide any of the health, wellness, and prevention programs at your school. Please avoid using acronyms.**

### Trauma-Informed Programs

**28. Does your school offer "trauma-informed" professional development (i.e., how to recognize adverse childhood experiences, awareness of impacts of poverty on achievement, how to develop fortified environments for children who experience toxic stress)?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If yes, please specify which organization:

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121
31. Please list any partners you work with to provide these services to the families in your school. Please avoid using acronyms if possible.

32. Rank the overall categories of your school's wraparound needs in order of priority (1 = highest priority, 6 = lowest priority) by placing the number in the box to the left of each category.

33. How can the Achievement Schools network support team help you engage community and wraparound service partners in your school? Please write your ideas and suggestions in the space below:

34. Please list any other partnerships that you have at your school about which you were NOT asked on this survey.

35. If you have any additional comments you want to include about the partnerships in the school, please write them in the space below.
Appendix D
Partnership Rationale and Draft Framework Introduction (Slide Deck)
Goals

- ADD TO YOUR ABILITY TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION OF PARTNERSHIPS
- DEVELOP A COMMON LANGUAGE AND SHARED UNDERSTANDING AROUND PARTNERSHIP WORK
- INTRODUCE A "STRAW MAN" FRAMEWORK TO A "PARTNERSHIP READY" TOOLKIT

The state of partnership at the Achievement Schools (What I heard from you)

- Partnerships Are...
  - Essential
  - Helpful but distracting to my role
  - Painful but necessary
  - Some are better than others
  - Underutilized
  - Piecemeal
Overarching ideas framing the partnership readiness work

► Principals cannot do their job alone.
► Effective partnerships significantly raise the probability that progress can be made and school goals can be reached – despite the odds.
► The work with partners shares a common set of strategies/needs/skills/approaches. One way to look at the “task of building-based leadership” is to see it as rooted in partnership development: partnerships with staff, parents, & community organizations/service providers.

   Our focus is on readying our schools to engage and utilize community organizations as partners to help us reach our goals and fulfill our mission.

► Many principals are not well-prepared for the kind of collaboration, sharing of leadership, and open and honest communication that partnerships demand. This sense of not knowing what to do often gets expressed as I don’t value partnerships.*
► Even if principals see the value of partnerships, many find it difficult to find the time and resources, either to get started or to sustain the work.*

Two Key Assumptions

- Developing and utilizing effective partners is hard work, but it can be learned.
- Needing help is the norm (for all learners), and having Principals embrace this idea is key.

Two Questions

- What does any type of partnership (marriage?) necessitate?
- What do you believe a partnership-ready school looks and feels like?
5 Key Partnership Readiness Strategies – A Straw Man

- Vision
- Capacity Building
- Alignment
- Shared Leadership
- Assessment

The Partnership-ready School

Readying for Partnership – A Toolkit for Principals

- For each of the 5 Partnership Readiness Strategies:
  - Big Question
  - Guiding Questions for Principals
  - Look For’s
  - Suggested Practices
  - Supports & Resources
Appendix E
Achievement Schools Partnership Ready Toolkit (Slide Deck)

Partnership Ready Toolkit
Creating the Conditions for Effective Partnership with Community Organizations

5 Key Partnership Readiness Strategies

- Vision
  - Know where you’re going and tell your story

- Capacity Building
  - Manage for long-term sustainability

- Alignment
  - Move in the same direction

- Shared Leadership
  - Share responsibility through genuine collaboration

- Assessment
  - Take stock and adjust regularly
**Vision**

**Big Questions**

What does your school stand for, and what role can partnerships play in implementing your vision?

---

**Vision – Know Where You are Going and Tell Your Story**

The Principal regularly articulates, with clarity and specificity, the shared vision for the school’s direction and development; partners share ownership in the vision.

**Guiding Questions for Principals**

- What is your dream/vision for improving education for your students and moving your school forward?
- What data and needs shape this vision?
- To what degree do partners share in this vision? How do you know?
- How is your vision visible throughout your school and present in school-level conversations?

---

**Vision – Know Where You are Going and Tell Your Story**

The Principal regularly articulates, with clarity and specificity, the shared vision for the school’s direction and development; partners share ownership in the vision.

**Look For’s (What the strategy Looks and Feels Like in Action)**

- Principal engages the voice of partners through conversations, surveys, and meetings to formulate and articulate the vision.
- Principal models a sense of pride in the school that staff, students, parents, and partners share.
- Partnerships between the school and community organizations are embraced by teachers, staff, and partners, and are seen as helping deliver the vision.
- Partners can articulate, “own,” and feel accountable to vision’s goals.

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**Suggested Practices**

- Use Root Cause analysis (5 Whys) with your leadership team to understand what is at the foundation of school needs.
- Use SWOT with leadership team to develop an understanding of the needs and strengths.
- “Check for Understanding” - Solicit feedback from partner organizations as to what they believe the focus of the school is.

**Available Supports and Resources:**

- Root Cause Tool
- SWOT Quadrant
Alignment

Big Questions

On which two or three levers for change are you placing your bets? What outcomes can your partners achieve to support your strategic priorities?

Guiding Questions for Principals

- What are the key levers, strategies, and priority areas you have chosen to improve school performance?
- What are the school’s internal capacities to achieve its strategic goals? What data might you examine to make this choice?
- In what areas would the school benefit from partnering with an external organization(s) to achieve its goals?
- Which of the partnerships currently in place align with our vision and priority strategies? For partnerships not aligned to the priorities, is there clarity about the purpose and priorities these partnerships address?

Alignment – Row in the Same Direction

The Principal works with school personnel and partners to ensure that each partnership’s goals and programming align strategically to school goals and vision; principal and partners negotiate and resolve differences.

Look For’s (What the strategy Looks and Feels Like in Action)

Principal and support teams develop and guide partnership selection and formation to ensure that the goals and strategies of partnerships are well-aligned with those of the school.
Big Questions

Are we achieving the outcomes we desire through the programming and services being offered?

Guiding Questions for Principals

- How confident are you that your partners are contributing to the growth of your students? How do you know?
- How do you decide which partners to select, continue with, or seek out?
- How do you decide how much access your partners have to pertinent school data?
- How is your school going to look different at the end of the year as a result of this partnership? What would teachers, parents, students, and the partner say to this question?

Look For’s (What the strategy Looks and Feels Like in Action)

- Principal and school leaders work with stakeholders to create cycles of action research, where data is used to test hypotheses, discover new strategies, and reduce achievement gaps.
- Poor-performing partners are immediately held accountable through thoughtful, fair, transparent processes for support and performance management decision-making.
- High performing partners are recognized for their contributions.
- Principal acknowledges contributions by partners to achieving desired outcomes.

Suggested Practice

- Assemble student data that links to partnership work on a regular basis.
- Identify data and benchmarks to measure academic achievement and growth and student well-being.

Available Supports and Resources:

- Survey or observation rubric for teachers to provide feedback on partnership services
- Student and parent surveys to gather feedback on services provided by partners
- ACT (Achieving, Connecting, Thriving) framework
- Individual partner outcomes chart
Big Questions

How are we (Principal to partner/partner to Principal) doing? What do we need to do to be more effective?

Guiding Questions for Principals

- How do you address challenges and obstacles when they arise with your partners?
- How do partners provide you (and staff) with feedback about their experiences and observations working in your school?
- What is this partnership requiring of me/our school?
- What is it that my students and/or staff get out of this partnership?
- How healthy is our relationship? Can we talk openly and honestly?
- What is the relationship among and between the partnerships?

Look For’s (What the strategy Looks and Feels Like in Action)

- Principal and school leaders hold regular meetings with core partners, and maintain open communication channels between partners and school personnel.
- Relevant partners participate in leadership team, Student Support Team, and/or other forums to review student level data, discuss instructional/programmatic implications, and understand how to support partners in meeting student needs.
- Stakeholders feel safe having difficult conversations and openly provide feedback to one another and the Principal about the degree to which partnerships are working or not working.

Suggested Practices

- Develop ground rules to guide meetings and teamwork.
- Learn how to respond to criticism with curiosity.
- Practice acknowledging the feelings of others and being aware how one’s own feelings impacts communication.
- Gain coaching feedback from an outside observer who observes meeting with partners.
Capacity Building

Big Questions
How long will the partnership last? What will we do when funding goes away? What can we learn from our partners before the opportunity ends?

Principal works with school leaders and partners to build the long-term capacity of the school, and prioritizes the use of funding, time, and personnel on partnerships that contribute most to achieving the vision.

Guiding Questions for Principals
- Which partnerships are short-term and/or time limited?
- Which partnerships will require the school to develop the internal capacity to deliver the services once the partnership and the resources to support it have diminished and/or ceased?
- Which partnerships will require ongoing, annual financial support?
- Which partnerships are needed over the long-term, because they provide direct services to students or families, or because the school cannot offer such resources on its own?

Guiding Questions for Principals (Continued)
- What plans are in place to ensure sustainability during periods of transition of school and partner leaders and/or transitions among the faculty and partner’s staff?
- Which partnerships are of such core importance to your vision that you would prioritize them in times of leaner funding?
- How do I sunset a partnership that is no longer needed or is not working?

Look For’s (What the strategy Looks and Feels Like in Action)
Principal and school leaders hold regular meetings with core partners, and maintain open communication channels between partners and school personnel.
Up-to-date Partnership Agreements are in place for each partnership.
Principal meets with partner at the end of the school year to assess progress and future planning.
Staff and partners show initiative in recommending and leading new ways to improve outcomes.

Responsibility for partnership coordination is distributed beyond the principal. Partners and educators share leadership functions in the school.
Principal and partner(s) identify and plan for continued financial support as appropriate, including funding in school budget, continued funding from current public and private sources, and new joint fundraising.

Suggested Practices
Solicit feedback from staff, students, families and partners.
Identify funding needs and develop a collaborative plan for sustainability.
Develop plan with partners to craft a “train the trainer” model for faculty to embed the skills and programming provided by partners.

Available Supports and Resources:
- Sample partnership agreement
- Assessing School and Partner Readiness Checklist
- Partnership Coordinator Job Description
## Appendix F
Achievement Schools Family Needs Mapper

### Family Needs Mapper
*Circle one for each of the following questions.*

1. **[ ] write student name** has trouble getting up in the morning:
   - never
   - once or twice a semester
   - monthly
   - weekly
   - once or twice a week
   - daily

2. I am at home in the morning when ____________ leaves for school:
   - never
   - once or twice a semester
   - monthly
   - weekly
   - once or twice a week
   - daily

3. ____________ is late for school:
   - never
   - once or twice a semester
   - monthly
   - weekly
   - once or twice a week
   - daily

4. ____________ misses school:
   - never
   - once or twice a semester
   - monthly
   - weekly
   - once or twice a week
   - daily

4a. If more than monthly, because of:
   - health reasons
   - suspensions / disciplinary action
   - other ____________

5. Our first language is:
   - English
   - Spanish
   - other ____________

6. Yesterday, our family ate:
   - zero meals
   - one meal
   - two meals
   - three meals
   - more than three meals

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Check one or more for each question.

7. ________ needs extra support in:
   - ELA: Reading and Comprehension
   - Math
   - Science
   - Foreign Language
   - Written Expression
   - Enrichment Activities
   - College and Career Planning

8. ________ needs some help with:
   - Study Skills
   - Improving School Success
     (Time Mgmt, Study Skills, Organization, etc)
   - Memory
   - Visual and performing arts
   - Nutrition/Eating Disorder
   - Speech/Verbal Expression
   - Listening
   - Homework Assignments
   - Interpersonal Skills (Communication)
   - Peer interaction
   - Relationship Development
   - Paying Attention/Hyperactivity

9. ________ shows the following high risk behaviors:
   - doesn’t exhibit any high-risk behaviors
   - Anger Management
   - Homelessness
   - Stress/Anti-sense
   - Gang-related Activities
   - Traumatic events (death, divorce, etc)

11. My family would like information about:
   - Eyeglasses
   - Dental services
   - Tutoring programs & homework help
   - Enrichment opportunities (sports, arts, summer camps)
   - Healthcare needs
   - Asthma management
   - Healthy eating/weight management
   - GED
   - Legal assistance
   - Food/utility/rental/housing assistance
   - ESL adult classes
   - Professional mental health
   - Counseling
   - Employment fairs

12. ________ will be ________ will not be (circle one)
    the first person in my family to go to college.

13. I want to help ________:
   - remember to do his/her homework
   - improve his/her behavior in school, at home, or elsewhere
   - make a post-secondary plan: a job, GED, college, or community college

My family would like information about services:

Name: ____________________________

Phone: (____)___________________

email: ____________________________

Thank you for your time.
Shelby Connect Helps Students Solve Problems At Home

Posted: Aug 05, 2014 4:55 PM
By Darcy Thomas, Arts & Culture Reporter

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (FOX13) - Agape Child and Family Services partners with several Achievement School Districts to bridge the gap.

It's offering assistance to students dealing with issues outside of the classroom.

When this is the learning environment for students and this is the home environment, where there are problems of unemployment to gang activity; how can a student achieve academically? Agape and the Achievement School District say it starts with looking at the whole student.

Agape's Executive Director David Jordan said, "The kids that come to us were in the 9th grade academy, some 9th graders that were 2 to 4 sometimes more years behind academically, but then you go into the home and the family is doing the best they can."

It's a partnership where a database called "Shelby Connect" identifies a student and begins to address the barriers to their success.
Agape Site Coordinator Jim Harbin said, "Let’s say there’s a student that’s hungry, then we will have partners that we will find resources for food or clothes."

ASD Support Staff Ansel Sanders said, "We’re thinking about some of those non-cognitive, non-academic needs that certainly have an impact not just on academic performance, but on overall well-being of the child, household as a larger reflection of our community."

Agape works with teachers who identify students who are having trouble academically. Counselors intervene and then try to get down to the root of the problems.

Jordan continues, "The staff can go into the homes, work with the families, if staff has been going on in the home or the family is looking for support, needing help, so their youngster can do well in school. Our staff is there walking with them providing them the resources so their kids can do well in school."

He said this is the first year Agape has worked with the ASD, and the results are reflective in the test scores.

Jordan said, "Last year these 9th graders came in there were only 13 of about 115 kids that we’re 3.0 or better. The previous year at the end of this school year, we had 63 of those kids that were 3.0 or better."

A counselor’s case load may include 25 students, but because of the challenges in some neighborhoods, it’s taking counselors, teachers, and parents working arm in arm supporting often, every single child in the school.

Harbin continues, "A lot of times they just need another, caring adult to show them that this can be done, that they can succeed."

This year Agape will also be working in four more ASD schools, including Corning, Frayser, Georgian Hills and Whitney Elementary Schools.

It will serve and support approximately 1300 students.
Appendix H
Achievement Schools-Agape Partnership Agreement

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Agape Child & Family Services (Agape), through the Agape led Powerlines Community Network (PCN), seeks to help create a more nurturing environment for children and families by connecting residents living in an under-resourced community or neighborhood with valuable resources and services. The Achievement Schools (AS) seek to develop a portfolio of wraparound services the Achievement Schools can leverage for the well-being of their students and families. In the mutual interest of supporting the needs of the whole child, this Memorandum of Understanding outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of the undersigned parties.

In a spirit of cooperation for the well-being of all students, Agape agrees to do the following:

- Facilitate holistic wraparound services to the students of the four elementary Achievement Schools: Corning Achievement Elementary School, Frayser Achievement Elementary School, Georgian Hills Achievement Elementary School, and Whitney Achievement Elementary School.
- Provide "Connectors," each serving no more than 25 students and their families, aligning identified needs to partners and service providers.
- Work with school staff to ensure that all adults having direct contact with students at participating schools will have a cleared criminal background check.
- Measure and consistently provide, monthly at minimum, reports of outcomes, based on academic, behavioral, and parental involvement goals.
- Establish collective impact goals and expectations by which effectiveness can be measured and evaluated with school staff members and AS support team staff by the beginning of the school year.
- Share resources and expertise with school staff members and AS support team staff.
- Provide and maintain consent forms for all participating students.
- Maintain the security and confidentiality of all student information, pursuant to a separate data sharing agreement.
- Publicize Agape-planned community and school events at least thirty days beforehand (as time permits).
- Meet regularly with designated school-level student support team (composed of a school-level point of contact and identified staff) to assess and ensure effective student and family growth while sharing and receiving feedback from designated school-level point of contact.
- Collaborate with school-level student support team when communicating with selected students and their families.
- Identify, conduct background checks, and train volunteers to assist with student growth within the school and community setting.
- Utilize a client data-base system (e.g. Shelby/Connect and/or RyeCatcher) as a platform to facilitate connecting students and families to service providers and to track impact.
- Collaborate with school-level student support teams across the AS elementary schools to learn from and share best practices.
In a spirit of cooperation for the well-being of all students, The Achievement Schools agree to do the following:

- Designate a school-level point of contact to meet regularly with Agape Connectors and integrate them as members of the school-level student support team.
- Identify and refer students to Agape Connectors who would benefit from holistic wraparound services. Support Agape Connectors in ensuring their focus remains on holistic wraparound service to identified student and households.
- Work with school-level Directors of School Operations to provide Agape Connectors adequate working space, internet, landline, basic office furniture, printing/copying access, and guidelines for school site access.
- Publicize AS-planned events at least thirty days beforehand (as time permits) and participate in Agape-planned events.
- Provide daily access to “real time” data for students who have signed consent forms and releases of information. These data are specific to students’ academic, behavioral, and parental engagement.
- Led by the school-level point of contact, educate Agape Connectors and volunteers on students’ educational and behavioral goals for long-term outcomes.
- Invite and involve Agape Connectors in appropriate school-level professional development opportunities.
- Meet regularly with school-level student support team to assess and ensure effective student and family growth while sharing and receiving feedback from designated school level point of contact.

This memorandum of understanding shall be effective July 2014 and shall remain in effect until revised or cancelled. Either party may cancel this agreement with 30 days written notice. The terms of this memorandum may be amended at any time in writing agreed to by the parties.

Communications should be sent to:

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Achievement Schools  
Organization Name
Appendix I
School-Partner Readiness Checklist

A Check List to Assess School and Partner Readiness

The following is a quick checklist for school and partner organization leaders to assess the conditions and readiness of a school and partner organization to sustain a successful collaboration. The checklist below highlights many of the “look for’s” that are listed in the Partnership Readiness Toolkit and Principals are encouraged to use this checklist as a way to quickly determine the additional efforts that they might need to undertake in each of the five core strategy areas.

Common Purpose
☐ The partnership supports a shared set of goals established by both partners
☐ The goals are aligned with the strategic priorities of the school and/or district
☐ The goals are aligned with the mission and vision of the partner organization

Programming: Content and Expertise
☐ The partner organization has experience providing the targeted programming and is addressing an unmet need of the school
☐ The designated staff members have relevant skills and knowledge to provide the programming
☐ The program staff are culturally competent and use asset-based and child-centered approaches consistent with the school’s philosophy

Feasibility and Adapation
☐ The partner organization can focus or adapt its programming to the grades, academic level, and language level of the students it will be asked to serve
☐ The programming can be offered at a time during the day which is compatible with the school’s needs and the organization’s capacity
☐ The school orientates and provides ongoing information to the partner regarding: key school contacts, approaches to behavior management, emergency procedures, the school schedule and calendar, and strategies to outreach and communicate with families

Consistency
☐ The organization can provide consistent programming according to the agreed upon schedule
☐ The program provides consistent staffing and assigns substitute staff if the regular staff or volunteer(s) are unable to attend
☐ The school provides consistent access to space aligned with the program’s needs

Information, Data Sharing, and Evaluation
☐ The school shares appropriate information and data that supports the partner’s work with students and faculty
☐ The partner shares data with the school on enrollment, attendance and outcomes
☐ The school and partner organization agree to assess the status of the partnership and identified outcomes on an annual basis, or more often as needed

Communication
☐ The school and partner organization develop and execute a Partnership Agreement that details the roles and responsibilities, agreed upon outcomes, and logistical and financial arrangements (if appropriate) that support the partnership
☐ The school identifies a designated staff person to serve as the liaison to the partner organization and its program staff
☐ The partner organization identifies a lead contact person and/or staff supervisor to work with the school
☐ A representative of the partner organization participates in Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), Student Support Team and other faculty forums, as appropriate to review student level data, discuss instructional/programmatic implications, and understand how to support partners in meeting student needs.
☐ The principal and/or members of the school leadership team and the community partner meet and communicate regularly to monitor the partnership
MEMPHIS, TN (localmemphis.com) - Only 36% of students in Shelby County read at or above reading level in the third grade.

Now, Literacy Mid-South, Southern College of Optometry, and the Achievement School District have partnered to address literacy and vision.

Students in kindergarten through eighth grade are receiving free eye exams and free glasses if they need them.

"This is the important point in which we can intervene and make a real difference long term," said Christine Weinreich of the Southern College of Optometry.

For achievement schools in Frayser, literacy is of the utmost importance. A collaborative effort is aimed at helping students see that they can achieve their goals.

"Over 80% of children in Shelby County are not proficient at 3rd grade with reading, so that's a pretty big problem," said Weinreich.
So far, nearly 300 students have been examined and about 40% of them need glasses.

"We're going to put glasses on those kids faces and it's gonna change their world," Weinreich said.

This is the first time something of this magnitude has ever been done in Tennessee.

This partnership is just the beginning of a greater vision to help these little learners succeed in life.

"This is such an easy barrier to remove if we can just get in there early and bring the service to them so that they don't have to try to get to us. That's the key," Weinreich said.

There are nearly 1,800 students in the achievement schools in Frayser.

They will all receive free eye exams and, if they need them, free glasses.
A Toolkit to Ready the Achievement Schools for Partnership

Creating the Conditions for Effective Partnership with Community Organizations

Bringing you up to speed

- Introduce the Draft Framework (July)
- Build out the readiness toolkit and apply relevant elements (August-October)
- Present the final toolkit (today)
- Apply the toolkit (December through 2nd semester) - Agape
Bring your back to July - Two Key Assumptions

Developing and utilizing effective partners is hard work, but it can be learned.

Needing help is the norm (for all learners), and having Principals embrace this idea is key.

5 Key Partnership Readiness Strategies – The Draft Framework (from July)

The Partnership-ready School

Vision
• Know where you are going and tell your story

Alignment
• Row in the same direction

Shared Leadership
• Share responsibility through genuine collaboration

Assessment
• Take stock and look, regularly

Capacity Building
• Strategize for impact and sustainability

Achievement Schools
Two Questions

- The partnership with Southern College of Optometry was largely considered a success.
- What conditions were established that enabled this successful partnership?
- How do your observations intersect with the five key strategies of effective partnerships?

Readying for Partnership – A Toolkit for Principals

- For each of the 5 Partnership Readiness Strategies:
  - Big Question
  - Guiding Questions for Principals
  - Look For's
  - Suggested Practices
  - Supports & Resources
**Becoming more familiar with the Toolkit**

Jigsaw each of the five strategies and examine each strategy’s five components:
- Big Questions
- Guiding Questions For Principals
- Look For’s
- Suggested Practices
- Supports & Resources

**Small Group Activity**
- What is the essence of each strategy?
- What questions or comments does each strategy generate?

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**Investigating the Toolkit**

What’s in the Toolkit?
- Organized by strategy
- Examples of existing, modified, or new “Supports and Resources”
- Templates to be customized as appropriate

A Closer Look at a Few Supports and Resources
- Needs assessment (already done! RyeCatcher “Family Needs Mapper”)
- Assessing School and Partner Readiness Checklist
What’s next?

• A Proposal for Second Semester: Double down on the Agape partnership through the full application of the Toolkit.

• Why?
  ✓ We need, and we recognize we need, this community organization to “win.”
  ✓ We have some good pieces of the Toolkit already in place: MOU, Point of Contact, SchoolRunner access, monthly progress monitoring reports, referral process, school-by-school implementation plan
  ✓ But, this is an underutilized (and frustrating?) partnership.

• Immediate next step: Readiness checklist! I’ll be making my rounds before The break.
Appendix L
November 2014 Toolkit Introduction and Agape Proposal Survey Feedback and Data

Survey results represents leadership from across the Achievement Schools

Leadership responded that they found the session and Toolkit to be valuable

“Our partnership work is so fragmented yet partnerships are critical to our goals. We needed a framework and set of resources to organize and launch this work. This is it!” -Principal
Leadership in full support of applying the Toolkit to the Agape partnership

- The Toolkit should help bring more structure to this partnership and to my involvement with Agape" - Student Support Team member

"Having someone in our schools acting as a broker between students and nonacademic resources is a huge benefit; I know our students and families must have this support and it’s why I bought into the Agape partnership in the first place. But I don’t what the Connectors do, how they are making an impact, or how I can support them...Let’s use the Toolkit to ensure we’re in a position to better guide and fully leverage this partnership” -Principal

Leadership more confident in applying some strategies than others

- "I think we should focus Agape on curbing chronic student absenteeism. This aligns well with a school need, Agape’s wraparound work, and offers a clear measurement of success.” -Principal

- the Shared Leadership strategy worries me because, based on the minimal impact I’ve seen Agape have thus far at my school, I’ll need to, and my support team will need to, devote a fair amount of time collaborating with, coaching, and even managing folks who are not even technically on my staff” - Principal