Leading on the Line: Reimagining the High School Experience at the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academies

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Leading on the Line: Reimagining the High School Experience at the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academies

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

Submitted by
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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements for the Doctor of Education Leadership.

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Dedication

All things work together for the good of
those who love the Lord, who are called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28

I dedicate this Capstone to my parents Darlene Fisher and Daniel Kwawu.
God took a man from the village of Anfoega and a woman from Washington D.C.,
brought them together to birth me. I am who I am because of your beautiful model of
God-fearing love, compassion, and grace. You always reassured me that with God, “all
things are possible.” At an early age, watching the both of you embody a “generosity of
spirit” towards everyone that you encountered set a fire down in my soul to create
opportunities where everyone has the opportunity to actualize their full potential. God
truly has worked all things together for the good, from Englewood to Harvard. Words
cannot express how deep my love runs for each of you.

I entered Harvard this commitment and leave Harvard
more steadfastly committed to “lifting my community as I climb”:
We have to improve life, not just for those who have the most skills
and those who know how to manipulate the system.
But also for and with those who often have
so much to give but never get the opportunity.
Dorothy Height
Acknowledgements

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To my brothers (Anthony & Selasie), nieces, and nephews, I pray that each of you continue to pursue your dreams, all things are possible. I want to thank my maternal and paternal families for their constant prayer, love, and support. For every friend (too many to name), that called, texted, and prayed for me, I appreciate you more than you will ever know. Valerie Holmes, you have been my ride-or-die mentor, big sister, and model of “Blackgirl magic” since I was 19 years old—thank you for always challenging me to bring my best self forward.

To Lumarie and LaRita, you are my sisterfriends for life, thank you for being there “through it all.”

My Fairy Godmother
Dr. Deborah Jewell-Sherman: God orchestrated our meeting when you interviewed me for EdLD. From your welcome call to EdLD until now, you have been a steadfast rock of love, Godliness, compassion, and grace. I love you dearly! I count it a privilege to leave EdLD with not only a mentor but a godmother.

My Defense Committee
Dr. Deborah Jewell-Sherman, Dr. Ronald Heifetz, Chief Executive Officer Anne Williams-Isom. God could not have orchestrated a more powerful committee of wisdom, compassion, and strength. Taking adaptive leadership with Professor Heifetz changed my life and gave me inner and outer tools to approach residency and life as an open vessel. Heifetz, thank you for using your gift to empower the thousands of people taking your class to make the world a better place. Dr. Jewell-Sherman, thank you for simultaneously pushing me both academically and personally to embody equity and excellence. CEO Anne Williams-Isom, thank you for guiding me and trusting me to exercise leadership at HCZ where the stakes and accountability are high and the world is always watching. Most CEOs won’t carve out time to meet with their own staff; yet you invested one-on-one time with me and taught me numerous leadership and life lessons.

My Harvard/EdLD. Family
I did not know that one place could harbor so many kind and loving souls. Dr. Adria Goodson, thank you for inspiring me to unleash, own, honor, love, and nurture “my best self.” To my confidante, the newly minted Dr. Ali Imad Fadlallah, your friendship was a pleasant blessing to the Harvard experience, thank you for modeling what it means to be led by God and to step out on faith. To the Ladies Power Pod, thank you for your love and support and for pushing me to continually grow. Team Breakthrough: each of you humbly taught me what it means to utilize the strengths of a team to maximize our power for transforming self and the sector. C5, I love each and every one of you—our genuine love and care for one another is simply beautiful. With C5 out in the world, I know that educational equity is possible. Thank you Gislaine Ngonou and Raychael Jensen and many others from the EdLD Women of Color Network who provided support and love throughout this journey. My TF, Pei Pei Liu thanks for reviewing my drafts and pushing my thinking. To the HGSE student affairs staff, but especially Tracie Jones, thank you for being a listening ear and support system for navigating Harvard and life.

To the HGSE faculty (too many to name), thank you for pushing me to excel academically, socially, and emotionally.

HCZ Staff
Dr. Marquitta Speller, you are a brilliant ray of sunshine, deeply committed to educational justice. Your unwavering support and daily reminders that I am the “soon to be Dr. Fisher” carried me and I thank you for trusting me to lead One Promise. To the Promise H.S. teams, HCZ senior leadership, and countless HCZ angels, thank you for welcoming me into your “prized jewel,” challenging me to handle it with care, and pushing me to think about the nuances of exercising leadership at a national model. I am deeply humbled by your steadfast commitment to Central Harlem young people and their families.
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Abstract

Before the national trend arose of ensuring college and career readiness for all students, the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) adopted the bold mission of supporting children and their families with a birth through college model. The HCZ launched Promise Academy I & II charter schools in 2004 and 2005 in Central Harlem due to the lack of high-quality educational options. Its mission guarantees that all Promise Academy graduates will be accepted to and succeed in college. The HCZ undertook this lofty mission in spite of the odds stacked against the area’s children and youth. The Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academies has had three high school graduating classes, Promise alumni currently enrolled in college, and college graduates. As a result, the Harlem Children’s Zone has experienced the full PK-16 continuum and can now assess their effectiveness in accomplishing their audacious mission.

My Ed.L.D. residency focused on leading Phase I of One Promise, the “re-imaginaion of the high school experience.” My work included examining student preparation for high school and college success, determining the assets and challenges of the existing high school structure from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, and using data to design a strategy for systemic improvement. The capstone highlights the adaptive leadership challenges inherent in the transformational process of leading a national model through a comprehensive internal diagnostic process aimed at realizing HCZ’s goal of ensuring Demography is Not Destiny for its students. HCZ’s unique place in the education sector necessitated a different approach from that of many school improvement models. My strategy intricately involved HCZ stakeholders in the process of “reimagining” and redesigning the HCZ’s first comprehensive improvement plan for its high schools. With an emerging college and career focused 9-12 curriculum and student competencies, the Promise Academy high schools are better poised for greater success.
Introduction

The Harlem Children’s Zone Overview

In 1970, Richard Murphy founded the Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families, the organizational predecessor of the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ, the Zone). Geoffrey Canada joined Rheedlen as the education director in 1983 and assumed the role of CEO in 1992. Early on in his tenure as CEO, Canada realized that Central Harlem had an even greater need for comprehensive at-scale family, educational, and community programs than Rheedlen could meet. In 1997, he started transforming the Rheedlen Center into the HCZ. Originally covering the residents of a 24-block area, the HCZ now spans 97 blocks and serves some 13,000 children and 13,000 adults. Its mission includes “breaking the cycle of poverty in Central Harlem by working at scale to build community, strengthen families, and ensure our children succeed from birth through college graduation.” The Zone takes a PK–16 approach (see Appendix A for pipeline overview) that includes family, social services, health care, and community-building programs. Accomplishing this mission requires a “whatever it takes” mind-set, a significant budget, and a large workforce. With an annual budget of $126.5 million, HCZ employs more than 2,100 staff members. Its comprehensive education and support model and its removal of barriers that impede students’ ability to persist and succeed through college has attracted a great deal of attention in the education sector and beyond.

The Evolution to a Birth-through-College Model

The “whatever it takes” model evolved over forty years. In the 1970s and 1980s, Rheedlen Centers’ programming focused primarily on truancy prevention and service to families through its parent support centers. In 1991, the Rheedlen Centers partnered with New York City Mayor Dinkins to develop Beacon Programs, which offered holistic youth development programs that focused on education and recreation. In response to the growing concerns about young people’s educational outcomes, Geoffrey Canada developed a program called Harlem

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1 Information on the Harlem Children’s Zone came from the HCZ history timeline.
Peacemakers Success in Schools. The Peacemakers program repositioned Rheedlen as a direct partner with local schools by offering in-classroom academic support, engaging parents, and delivering socio-emotional programming for young people. With the establishment of the Beacon and Peacemakers programs, Rheedlen/HCZ moved from a focus on truancy to establishing stronger academic partnerships with schools to address the achievement gap plaguing young people in Central Harlem. From 1994-2007, HCZ continued to expand its portfolio of programs to include comprehensive PK–12 supplemental services, including after-school programs, community centers for youth and adult programming, Baby College (an infant development program), Harlem GEMS Head Start, and health initiatives such as the Obesity Program. Given this evolution, it made sense that HCZ would eventually open its own schools. In 2004, the HCZ opened Promise Academy I Charter School (PA I). Promise Academy II Charter School (PA II) launched in 2005. With the addition of the College Success Office in 2007, HCZ provided comprehensive services from birth through college (see Appendix B for a Zone map). HCZ was then positioned to drastically change the life outcomes of Central Harlem’s young people and their families.

In 2014, after decades of service and achievement, Geoffrey Canada made the momentous decision to pass the torch to the new CEO, Anne Williams-Isom, whose focus became consistent delivery of excellent services to the community.

**Promise Academy High Schools**

In the early 2000s, Geoffrey Canada realized that simply having external partnerships with K–12 schools would not ensure high educational achievement for Harlem’s young people. The persistently failing local schools and the length of time it would take to turn around a “traditional” district school led HCZ to expand the original scope of its mission to charter schools. Both PA I and PA II started with the primary grades\(^2\). They extended into the high school grades in 2008 for PA I and 2013 for PA II. Currently the two schools serve roughly two

\(^2\) Information came from Promise Academy I and II high school profiles
thousand students, of which 480 are in high school. Although chartered separately, both schools have the same mission: to “provide high quality, standards-based academic programs for students, grades K–12, from underserved communities and underperforming school districts, and to provide students with the skills they need to be accepted by and succeed in college.” Both schools have an extended school day, with classes from 8 am to 4 pm and a 4–7 pm in-building after-school option. PA I and PA II offer the standard New York State–required curriculum, Advanced Placement courses, and opportunities for dual enrollment at the City University of New York (CUNY) campuses. In 2012, Promise Academies began to offer a Bard Early College Program for PA I and II students. The Promise Academies also provide services such as free medical and dental care, a social work team, and family engagement opportunities. Roughly 80% of the students attending Promise Academies qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Although both schools have the same mission, they operate autonomously, with separate principals, leadership structures, curricula, and school cultures (see Appendix C for school profiles).

The two new high schools have already drawn national recognition. PA I was in the top 10% of U.S. high schools and earned the National Silver Medal from *US News and World Report*. Each year Promise Academy high school students earn scores of 90% and higher on the state Regents exams, with PA II often outperforming PA I. Additionally, 100% of the senior class graduates on time, and 100% are accepted to college. On average the schools rank in the top ten of their charter school peers and exceed the graduation rates of their New York City Department of Education peer high schools. PA I graduated its first high school class in 2012 and the second in 2013, not resuming graduations until 2016. The gap occurred because Geoffrey Canada and the HCZ board made two critical decisions that affected the matriculation of students into middle and high school. In 2007, Canada and the board elected to close the middle school and eliminate eighth-grade matriculation into high school because of the students’ low academic achievement (Tough, 2008). In *Whatever It Takes*, Canada explained the rationale behind their difficult decision: when the schools opened, HCZ leaders guaranteed students a high-quality education;
the Promise Academies’ inability to increase student performance on state exams made them unable to fulfill that guarantee and necessitated a pause in the middle of high school expansion until a solution was developed (Tough, 2008). The board and Canada applied a more cautious approach to expansion for PA II; its first high school class will graduate in spring 2017. It is important to note that much of the data on Promise Academy high school and college performance comes from PA I. Now that several PA I classes have graduated and the first cohort of students has completed the entire HCZ PK–12 experience, attention will focus on HCZ’s ability to get students into college and to succeed there.

**Promise Alumni College Success**

In May 2016, the first class of PA I graduates completed college. With a college graduate cohort, 135 Promise alumni currently in college, and another cohort poised to finish in 2017, HCZ now has a more complete picture of whether Promise Academy high schools have met their goal of preparing students for college. Data from February 2017 show that for the 2012 and 2013 Promise Academy alumni, 91 of the original 127 graduates are currently in college, 26 students are not, and 15 have graduated from college. Among the class of 2016, 54 students have graduated high school, 44 have enrolled in college, and 8 students are not in enrolled in college.

Despite the complex transitional challenges faced by first-generation and low-income students, the majority of Promise Academy alumni persist through college because of their ability to use resources, be resilient, and adjust their behavior to meet the new expectations of college. In an extension of the wraparound support in the PK–12 schools, HCZ gives each Promise Academy alumnus a college advisor to support their transition to and through college. The hands-on approach taken by the high school and College Success Office staff acknowledges that the students experience adverse life conditions, many on a daily basis. The staff’s support is intended to create a series of safety nets to keep students from failing. Staff members believe that without intensive support, many of their students might not be able to break out of the cycle of generational poverty or persist through to college graduation.
There is compelling evidence that HCZ’s emphasis on high-quality educational opportunities coupled with intensive wraparound support has changed the life trajectories of many alumni. For this reason, the Obama administration created the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative in 2009. This initiative gives cities federal funding to develop models that, like HCZ’s, are aimed at addressing the complex educational and social needs of poor communities. HCZ’s impact has become international, with more than 170 foreign delegations attending HCZ’s Practitioners Institute to learn how to start similar initiatives.

Several empirical studies (Fryer & Dobbie 2014, 2013, 2011) have measured the positive educational impact of the K–8 Promise Academy schools, but only one study to date has explored Promise Academy high school alumni’s transition to and persistence in college. Speller’s (2015) study, *Life after the Zone*, presented a qualitative analysis of HCZ students’ perceptions of their high school preparation and success in college. Study results showed that alumni deeply appreciated the comprehensive and intensive support from Promise Academy staff and that many view the safety net as a critical variable in their success. Conversely, Speller (2015) also found that Promise Academy alumni attributed some of their college readiness issues to the lack of academic challenge in high school. Focus groups and survey results revealed that students struggled with learning strategies such as note-taking and prioritizing class materials to study for tests. Speller (2015) ascribed some of the students’ inability to discern important information for tests to the rote memorization techniques used to prepare Promise Academy high school students for the Regents exams. In the study, Promise Academy alumni said that staff behavior such as making wake-up calls and allowing extra time to turn in assignments without consequences created a false sense of academic expectations and crippled them in college (Speller, 2015). The alumni referred to the “well-meaning” behaviors as “babying” them.

The data from Speller’s study, on-the-ground formative data from HCZ staff, and college matriculation and persistence numbers indicate some gaps in college readiness. Although the HCZ is proud of the high Regents test scores, graduation rates, and college acceptance numbers,
senior leaders acknowledge that improvements are needed to increase Promise Academy students’ high school and college success. As a result of the study, HCZ is now grappling with the larger question of how to preserve the strategies that work well and that have allowed the Promise Academy model to achieve prominence, while addressing the concerns expressed by its college students. Geoffrey Canada believed that HCZ needed a “whatever it takes” mentality if it were to change the culture of poverty, poor education, and minimal social mobility for Harlem’s young people and their families, and this approach led to the organization’s huge success. The model’s prominence and successes work against any attempts at substantive change and contribute to some stakeholders’ opposition to any tinkering with the model.

**A Reexamination of the Model and the Advent of One Promise**

In the spring of 2016, the Executive Director of Secondary and Collegiate Programs Dr. Marquitta Speller announced *One Promise*, a plan for comprehensive school improvement aimed at addressing the gap in college readiness (see Appendix D for Secondary and Collegiate Programs overview). She and the CEO acknowledged that the current structure of PA I and II high schools directly effects students’ academic, social, and emotional ability to persist to and through college. She used her knowledge as the former principal of PA I to devise a solution that would address the college persistence challenges of Promise Academy graduates. Prior to my arrival in June 2016, the primary strategy under consideration for addressing the college readiness challenge was to consolidate PA I and II high schools into one school with a single curriculum and a single building. She identified consolidation as the lever for change, thinking it would offer opportunities to capitalize on best practices and resources from both schools. It would provide pathways to use teachers’ skills differently, add student-interest learning communities, offer more Advanced Placement and Early College classes, emphasize college and career readiness, and build soft skills and independence. When Speller presented *One Promise* to school leaders and HCZ senior leaders, however, the college-readiness solutions aspect got lost amid the logistics for housing the two schools in one building. Some school leaders, parents, and HCZ senior leaders
resisted the consolidation idea. There are three types of people in an organization that can enable or block change, “endorsers, who are positive about the change; resisters, who take a purely negative view; and fence-sitters, who see both potential benefits and potential drawbacks” (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013, p. 7). HCZ stakeholders also fell into those three categories (see Appendix E for a One Promise stakeholders). School leaders across PA I and PA II comprised a mixture fence-sitters, resistors, and some endorsers. Members of the K-8 pipeline were resistors and fence-sitters. Other HCZ senior leaders fit into all three categories. Some parents were fence-sitters and resisters. Students and teachers spread amongst the three categories. The organizational backlash against consolidation led Speller to position One Promise as a multiphase project. In June 2016, I started my residency as the Strategic Advisor for High School and College Success and reported to Dr. Speller. My strategic project was to design and lead Phase I of One Promise.

Problem of Practice

HCZ has a theory of change predicated on continuous learning and evaluation and a culture of success, and its leaders are committed to the integration of best practices. Therefore, it is logical that the Executive Director for Secondary and Collegiate Programs would ask the seminal questions of my work at HCZ: “Are we adequately preparing our kids to thrive in college? What would it mean to reimagine the Promise Academy high school experience?” These questions led to the development of One Promise, and they guided my work at HCZ. I wondered how to lead a fundamentally introspective process in an organization with such a high national and international profile. But after leading the initial diagnostic process, I encountered an even greater challenge: how to co-create with stakeholders at all levels a comprehensive improvement plan that addressed the need to better prepare Promise Academy high school students for the rigors of collegiate scholarship and life. I had to revisit best practices from my previous work and comb the literature to determine how best to do this. I researched school system transformation and the adaptive challenges inherent in leading such work in my review of knowledge for action.
Review of Knowledge for Action

Every adult associated with Promise Academy high school needs to have a thorough understanding of what it means to prepare young people for postsecondary pathways. Leading school improvement researchers argue that, before embarking on a major change process, organizations must have a thorough understanding of why their system produces its current results (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMaheiu, 2015; Childress & Marietta, 2008; Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, & Grossman, 2015). Only with that understanding could I lead HCZ to design the most effective strategies for addressing the root causes of underpreparing students for college. Based on the research citing the importance of problem diagnosis to the change process, I then asked three pivotal questions: (1) What are the assets and problems of the current system? (2) What might the solutions look like? (3) As an outsider, how will I lead others through the change process? These questions form the structure of the Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA). I start with an overview of the research on problem diagnosis and a survey of the literature on college and career readiness frameworks. Then I present literature on the approaches to and types of school improvement and explore frameworks used for managing the politics of organizational change. The section concludes with the rationale for the selected frameworks I planned to use to guide my strategic leadership for Phase I of One Promise.

What Are the Problems?

Problem Diagnosis

In 2015, leading scholars from the Carnegie Foundation published Learning to Improve in response to the repeated failure of reform efforts (Bryk et al., 2015). According to this book, improvement research requires a focus on the specific problem to be solved and examination of the problem from the user’s point of view (p. 13). The authors also argue that “a premium be placed not just on what needs to be fixed but also knowing why systems currently work as they do and learning how they might be reformed toward the goal of greater efficacy at scale” (Bryk et
The first three steps of their improvement science framework are to (1) make the work problem-specific and user-centered, (2) focus on the variation of performance, and (3) see the system that produces the current outcomes. Earlier, developers of the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) published *A Problem-Solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a Strategy to Improve Performance*, which substantiates the importance of problem diagnosis as the first step in school system improvement. According to Childress and Marietta (2008), the “first and most critical step of solving a performance problem is to accurately identify and rigorously analyze it. . . . at a glance it may seem to be the easiest of the steps in the process; however it is much more challenging to figure out what is actually going on” (p. 2). Bryk et al. (2015) and Fullan and Quinn (2016) contend that understanding what, why, and how things happen lessens the chance of *solutionitis* and *initiativitis*. Bryk et al. (2015) define *solutionitis* as “the propensity to jump quickly to a solution before fully understanding the exact problem to be solved” (p. 24). Fullan and Quinn (2016) say that acknowledging and getting clarity on the issue is the first step to preventing *initiativitis*, the process of turning every issue into an initiative.

Once a problem is diagnosed, Bryk et al. and Marietta and Childress (2008) suggest, a root cause analysis will help educational leaders address the “roots” of their problems versus the symptoms. In *Learning to Improve*, Bryk et al. suggest utilizing a causal system analysis tool for investigating the sources of unsatisfactory outcomes the educational system produces. The second step in the Childress and Marietta (2008) framework involves conducting a root cause analysis using the “5 Whys” protocol. Problem diagnosis and root-cause inquiries challenge school systems to look internally at their practices and variance in results as a way to dig deeper into the complexities of what it would actually take to improve performance. Considering multi-stakeholder perspectives during problem diagnosis increase the chances of addressing the root versus a symptom because it provides more opportunities to triangulate system problems.

In the case of HCZ it is important to understand what aspects of HCZ’s current model contribute to the successful preparation of current Promise Academy students and alumni.
Equally important is to find out what factors contribute to the under-preparation of current Promise Academy high school students and alumni. Adequate diagnosis of the problem and root causes would avoid the mistake of addressing symptoms rather than the root causes.

Deborah Jewell-Sherman (n.d.) offered the framework *Demography Is not Destiny* (DID) as an analytical tool for educational leaders to diagnose the gaps in a school system from a system level (see Figure 1). According to this framework, each gap corresponds to a set of diagnostic questions that system leaders can use to identify cracks in the system. The belief gap explores assumptions about students’ and adults’ ability to learn. The instructional gap is the chasm between the instructional core and how the school system operationalizes teaching and learning. The opportunity and capacity gap covers the areas of alignment/misalignment between espoused values and enacted policies as well as the structures that manifest and sustain the current problem of practice. The innovation and support gap refers to the current level of performance to address the organizational, capacity, and managerial challenges. The final gap—outcome and accountability—is the level of shared ownership needed to address the problem of practice and the effectiveness of internal and external stakeholders’ ability to mobilize and focus on the problem of practice. To extract the maximum value guaranteed to students and their families when the schools were founded, one must conduct ongoing diagnostic processes to ensure that resources (people, time, and money) are used effectively to offer excellent education for Promise Academy students. Like the work of Bryk et al. (2015), Childress and Marietta (2008), and Fullan and Quinn (2016), Jewell-Sherman’s DID framework confirms the importance of pinpointing the specific problems at the right location in the system.

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<th>Belief Gap</th>
<th>Instructional Gap</th>
<th>Opportunity and Capacity Gap</th>
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<tr>
<td>What hindering assumptions do we hold about students’ and adults’ abilities to learn, improve, and achieve?</td>
<td>To what degree is teaching and learning the organizational focus and what competes with it?</td>
<td>What are the areas of (mis)alignment between espoused and enacted policies and strategies?</td>
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<th>Innovation and Support Gap</th>
<th>Outcome and Accountability Gap</th>
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<td>What are the levers of reform and what is the current level of performance capacity to address the problem of practice?</td>
<td>To what degree is there an organizational culture of shared ownership for the problem of practice?</td>
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*Figure 1. Demography is Not Destiny Framework*
My professional knowledge and experience with facilitating and leading urban superintendents and school leaders through PELP, Workplace Lab, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education Programs in Professional Education Institutes (Urban School Leaders, Scaling for Impact, School Turnaround) align with the tools and habits of mind needed for HCZ’s school improvement efforts. I found an important connection with the PELP Coherence Framework (see Appendix F for the full framework), which asserts that when the environment, theory of change, strategy, systems, structures, stakeholders, resources, and culture operate in coherence, the teachers and students succeed in the instructional core, and the district can achieve its mission (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 13). A signature goal of all these programs is to challenge school and system leaders to focus on understanding the problem before determining the solution. I myself saw that this process often challenged leaders’ natural urge to let their preconceived solution drive the improvement process. Moreover, it forced an internal look at the practices and variance in results as a way to dig deeper into the complexities of what was required to improve performance. While the research and my professional experiences aligned in the areas of problem diagnosis and root cause analysis, I felt a gap remained with how to conduct an internal diagnosis in an acclaimed organization. Later in the RKA, I explore the influence of politics and organizational change as a way to close my experience gap.

**College and Career Readiness Frameworks**

One of the HCZ’s strengths is the cultivation of a college-going culture throughout the pipeline. Students go on college tours, high school students attend summer college programs, and even K–8 classrooms are named for colleges, so it is clear that any HCZ student is expected to attend college. Creating a college-going culture is a crucial step to increase the odds that students will go to college (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). Improving the chances that students will persist through college requires additional measures, such as academic preparation for college, taking entrance exams, applying, and enrolling in college (Horn & Carroll, 1997). The mission of the HCZ and Promise Academy schools identifies college readiness as the central
goal; thus, we need a deeper look at the relevant research in order to understand Promise Academy strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Although many definitions of college readiness exist, scholars define it as the academic, noncognitive, and social preparation needed for a successful student transition to and through a postsecondary program (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Leading college and career readiness scholars challenge secondary schools to consider proficiency and developmental approaches for moving students to and through the high school-to-college pipeline. Conley (2013) writes that students exhibit college and career readiness proficiency when they “first and foremost engage with and comprehend challenging course content, apply knowledge in novel and non-routine ways, use a variety of learning skills and techniques, and successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary learning” (p. 59). Conley’s model can be summed up as think (key cognitive strategies), know (key content knowledge), act (key learning skills and techniques), and go (key transition knowledge and skills). The developmental approach to college access and success advocated by Savitz Romer and Bouffard (2012) entails engaging high school students in key processes for developing a college-going identity, which includes identity development, self-concept and aspirations, motivation and goal-setting, self-regulatory skills, and relationship development. Like Conley’s, this model offers specific actions students and school staff can take to improve college readiness.

Researchers found the lack of college readiness skills in high school often led to decreased student success and remediation in college (Conley, 2013; Hearn, Jones, & Kurban, 2013). Seeing the negative impacts of that phenomenon led Conley to add to his college and career readiness model this definition of success: “the ability to complete entry-level courses at a performance that is sufficient to enable students to continue to the next course in their chosen field of study” (p. 15).

A related widely discussed topic is the integration of noncognitive or “soft” skills into the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Some scholars use the term character education to
describe these attributes. Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012) classified identity development, goal-setting, self-regulation, and related skills as noncognitive. A study by the Chicago Consortium on School Research (Farrington et al., 2012) analyzed the influence of noncognitive factors (academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mind-sets, learning strategies, and social skills) on high school performance. Of the five noncognitive factors, only two—improving academic mind-sets and learning strategies—directly led to increases in academic performance. The Chicago Consortium on School Research challenges the current overemphasis on “character education” and says research to support its direct impact on student achievement is lacking.

With regard to the Promise Academy mission, it is important to understand the research on factors that contribute to college success. Theorists who focus on higher education retention found that psychosocial factors such as a sense of belonging affected students’ decisions to go to college and their intentions to re-enroll after the first semester (Adelman, 2006; Schreiner, Lewis, & Nelson, 2012; Seidman, 2005; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). This line of thinking correlates to renowned retention expert, Vincent Tinto (1993), who found that academic and social integration in college influenced students’ decisions to depart. These results offer insight to the high school staff who coach students during the college-match process. In his research on high-achieving Black college students, Griffin (2006) noted that extrinsic career goals and desire to do well increased student persistence. Those students saw academic challenges as controllable and achievable, which increased their resiliency as they navigated the challenges of college (Griffin, 2006). Since earlier data tell us that some Promise Academy alumni struggle to get into and stay in college, HCZ can use this information for the reimagination process. For instance, Conley’s think, know, act, and go model could be used to boost high school student motivation for college and career goals and their ability to deal with academic challenges.

All the scholars align with HCZ’s provision of both curricular and noncognitive skill development. Knowing the best practices for college readiness and persistence allows me to take the data from causal system analysis and benchmark it to these college readiness frameworks and
practices to identify gaps in the current structure.

My professional experience with designing college student retention strategies for universities has added to staff reflections on increasing Promise Academy graduates persistence college. Likewise, my experience designing college and career readiness approaches for charter schools gives me unique insights into designing strategies throughout the pipeline. Even with that background, developing a strategy for change within a high-stakes, highly accountable, nationally acclaimed model requires other strategies for merging the concepts of college and career readiness with the foundational underpinnings of college student retention.

**What Might the Solution(s) Look Like?**

All agree that HCZ needs to address Promise Academy students’ under-preparation. Stakeholders disagree about how that reform should occur. Before considering comprehensive school reform, education leaders need to understand the purpose of schooling from the perspective of community-based stakeholders, and they should determine which educational results matter (Goldberg & Morrison, 2010). This question of strategic purpose asks leaders to consider what really matters, especially to the schools’ communities. The original promise that Geoffrey Canada and others made to parents was a high-quality education and preparation to be accepted into and succeed in college. HCZ also promised itself as an alternative that would commit to students and their families for the long term; failure was not an option.

**Strategic Visioning**

Before embarking on the school improvement process, I wanted to find the philosophical underpinnings of developing a strategic vision for school design. A literature review yielded two themes worth considering in the reimagination process: structural design and tailoring to community and student needs. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), “most initiatives have focused on trying to make the education system inherited from the early 1900s perform more efficiently, rather than fundamentally rethinking how schools are designed, how systems operate, how teaching and learning are pursued, and what goals for schooling are sought” (p. 238). Almost
all educators agree that today’s schools mirror their school experiences. Hess and Meeks (2012) call on educators to restructure and rethink schooling by unbundling schools and schooling, and deconstructing andreassembling them in newer and smarter ways that “customize to better suit student needs” (p. 100). Comparing education to business, Darling-Hammond (2010) says, “every organization is structured to get the results that it gets,” and changing the results requires organizational redesign (p. 237). In other words, if HCZ wants different results, it must reconsider the current design of its high school model.

Henig, Malone, and Reville (2012) advocate consideration of the unique needs of communities in poverty when launching school reform. They caution against “innovation for the sake of innovation, instead encouraging innovation that is intentional, informed, and of sufficient magnitude to register outcomes against a background in which other social, economic, and political forces are at play” (p. 128). Any innovative reforms must take into account the challenges of working with students and families in Central Harlem, many of whom are affected by poverty, trauma, and structural racism. Managing the effects of poverty is an area of excellence for HCZ, but I recommend taking a deeper look at the long-term effects of HCZ’s current model and whether it achieves the goal of developing students into lifelong self-sustaining adults.

School Design

Over the past few years, high school redesign led the school reform conversation. Whether it was the White House Summit on Next Generation High Schools or the XQ Super School challenge, educational experts and practitioners agreed we needed to rethink grades 9 to 12. Several researchers (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2006; Kuo, 2010; Thurman, 2012) specify areas of successful comprehensive school reform for high schools. HCZ’s desire to reimagine the high school experience aligns with the national conversation, which makes this a prime opportunity for HCZ to benefit from other innovative school models.

In their article on high school redesign, Darling-Hammond et al. (2006) offer several
design features that might improve high school student achievement: opportunities for personalizing student-teacher relationships; school mission expansion across all grades that unifies curriculum, academic success, and school behavior; challenging academic core curriculum; instruction that is responsive to student learning; application of knowledge to discipline-based problems; a professional learning community for teachers; and collaborative practices for teaching and problem-solving (p. 193).

Kuo (2010) identifies design elements for improving teaching and learning in high schools, including career academies and early college experiences, which in his study provided smaller and more personalized learning experiences, integrated college and career readiness, and fostered integrated learning across disciplines. (During the April and May 2016 One Promise brainstorm meetings, Promise Academy staff members identified early college, career majors, and other personalized learning opportunities as options for the redesign. Alignment of the staff brainstorm, Kuo, and the Darling-Hammond group’s research suggests the team was in synergy with national best practices.) Kuo (2010) found that at-risk students enrolled in career academies and early college programs had higher attendance and earned more credit than peers not enrolled in these types of programs. Additionally, early college students also reported higher levels of engagement and academic self-concept and better proficiency on standardized tests (Kuo, 2010).

The Bard Early College Program at Promise Academy has become the pride and joy of HCZ, especially since the Bard participants’ rigor and student engagement surpass their standard-class counterparts, and both parties want to expand the program. Considering the PA graduates’ desire for more academic rigor, reforms like these may address their concerns. Moreover, addressing these issues can ease PA’s first-generation college students’ transition to college and mitigate the concerns raised by current alumni.

Kuo, Darling-Hammond, and researchers on college and career readiness and higher education underscore the importance of having a comprehensive high school reform conversation. To consistently achieve its mission of college readiness and success, the HCZ school
improvement process must consider structural design, the educational needs articulated by PA alumni, and the results produced by the current model.

**School Consolidation**

One of the areas of reform under consideration is school consolidation: merging the two schools together into one building or operating both under one curriculum. If moving schools into one location becomes part of the long-term strategy, the following researchers’ results must be factored into that process. Timar and Tyack (1999) view school consolidation as a process rooted in business management strategies to reduce costs and create uniformity. In terms of education, it usually refers to “(a) combining districts and (b) closing schools and sending students from the closed schools to other schools (or building a new and larger school)” (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011, p. 1). At HCZ, Dr. Speller sought to put PA I and II in one building. Because of their separate charters and the legal aspects of HCZ’s initial authorization by the NYC Department of Education, full consolidation requires a community hearing and change in charter, so that process is not currently under consideration for Phase I. From my understanding, consolidation in this case is less about saving money and more about maximizing resources and expanding best practices to both schools. Still, HCZ must consider several factors if consolidation is a future design consideration.

Comprehensive reforms such as school consolidation offer pros and cons. Researchers found that the way schools handled the impact on stakeholders determined the success of an integration. In their review of school consolidation literature, Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2008) found the pros included a more comprehensive curriculum offering, increased diversity in the student social experience, and better teacher preparation. The cons were longer commutes, disappointment about losing a community school, higher teacher stress, and less of a “small school” feeling (Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2008). Strong consolidation proposals must account for challenges that may arise with efficiency, student performance, educational climate, costs, and community relations (Howley et al., 2011).
The research suggests that another important consideration is the impact of consolidation on school stakeholders, especially when one school is moved into the other school’s location. Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2008) explored the impact of consolidation on students, teachers, principals, and families who moved to a new school and those at the receiving schools. Nitta et al. (2008) found that students and teachers who moved had stronger feelings than did those who remained in their home school. Overall, adults responded less favorably than students, with parents and teachers objecting to consolidation because of the negative impact on students; students warmed to the idea before the adults did. More parents than students were unhappy and unwilling to accept the new situation (Nitta et al., 2008). Thurman (2012) found that, despite teachers’ initial concerns about consolidation, it improved teaching and learning quality by improving teacher preparation and training, providing more opportunities to focus on one’s discipline, increasing teacher collaboration, and adding more student supports.

The literature review on school design, school consolidation, and strategic visioning changed my perspective on how to approach Phase I of One Promise. Although I have launched and designed new educational programs, departments, and university strategies for student success, I came to realize that comprehensive high school design requires a different knowledge base. With a more complete picture of the influences of structural design, best practices in high school design, and an understanding of the political implications for school reform, I shifted my focus toward strategies for leading others through the change process in a high-stakes, high-accountability, and deeply politicized environment.

**How Will I Lead Others through the Change Process?**

One consistent thread runs through the leadership literature: change is hard, no matter the size of it, because people are comfortable with their systems and routines. In an organization that is revered as a national model, change is even harder. It’s difficult to ask a successful organization to adjust its model without any guarantee of success. Kotter (2002) contends that the
most important factor in leading large-scale organizational change involves the heart: “people change what they do less because they are given some analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings” (p. 1). A tug at the heart is what led Geoffrey Canada and HCZ to redirect its mission in the 1990s into place-based services in Central Harlem; they sought to achieve a mammoth vision to end generational poverty and fundamentally change the way schools, communities, and social services interact to serve young people and their families. Kotter (2002) writes that emotions create urgency, which excites the desire to change. My research confirmed the importance of making problem analysis both problem-specific and user-centered. Increasing urgency can only come if HCZ has identified the right problems, their roots, and their significance for Promise Academy stakeholders. People have to see and feel before they are willing to change.

Adaptive Challenges and Adaptive Leadership Framework

In his signature work, Leadership without Easy Answers (1994), Heifetz introduces the concepts of adaptive and technical challenges. Heifetz (1994) defined adaptive challenges as “the gap between aspirations and reality that require development of a new capacity to close and adaptive leadership is the process of “focusing attention on the specific issues created by the gap” and leading people through the process of narrowing and closing them (p. 99). In their decades of research, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) found the “most common cause of failure in leadership is caused by treating adaptive challenges as if they were technical challenges” (p. 19). Adaptive challenges present problems for which the answers are not yet known while technical ones can be solved by an expert (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Most of the difficulties organizations face are a combination of both technical and adaptive challenges, but it is important to characterize them accurately to avoid treating the symptoms rather than their adaptive roots. Heifetz (1994) encourages those who are charged with solving the problem to ask themselves a “key differentiating question: does making progress on this problem require changes in people’s values, attitudes, or habits of behavior?” If the answer is yes, then the problem is adaptive and
requires a different approach. Heifetz distinguishes between technical and adaptive changes in Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of challenge</th>
<th>Problem definition</th>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Locus of work</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and adaptive</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Requires learning</td>
<td>Authority and stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>Requires learning</td>
<td>Requires learning</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Distinguishing Technical problems and adaptive challenges (Heifetz et. al, 2009, p. 20)

Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky (2009) found “the language of complaint is used increasingly to describe the current situation when organizations struggle with the adaptive challenge of addressing the persistent gap between aspirations and reality” (p. 74). Complaints of college success outcomes also surfaced during my listening and learning onboarding tour. Asking people to change how they see their roles and do things challenges the very core of a person’s identity (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Reimagining the high school experience is in itself an adaptive challenge because it requires changes in the way teachers, school leadership, students, families, and HCZ senior leaders view themselves and their work. When being the best is your core identity, it can be hard to change. As Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) pointed out, the American auto industry in 2008 “crashed headlong into the adaptive pressures about which it had been warned about for decades” (p. 19). They offered this example as a pointed reality check for organizations because the world watched the American auto industry suffer a slow death due to its unwillingness to change.

Heifetz’s Leadership without Easy Answers (1994), Leadership on the Line (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and The Practice of Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009)
provide several tools and a diagnostic framework to determine the type of adaptive challenge and strategies for taking action. The adaptive leadership framework involves several key actions, but I chose five key steps that relate to leading with informal authority: (1) get on the balcony, (2) distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges, (3) create a holding environment, (4) give the work back to the people, and (5) hold steady.

The founders of HCZ took an adaptive leadership approach to address the poverty, education, and limited access to high-quality services plaguing Harlem by asking all stakeholders to reconsider their identity, values, beliefs, and approaches to ending generational poverty. Twelve years after starting Promise Academy schools, and with several cohorts now in college, HCZ must determine if their adaptive model meets the present-day needs of getting young people into and through college. Heifetz referred to this internal reflection as the process of getting on the balcony and going to the dance floor. Get on the balcony refers to stopping the action and taking a aerial of view of situation in order to determine next steps; its counterpart get on the dance floor explains the process for returning to the action (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

The reimagining high school process involves both technical and adaptive challenges. The technical problems involve roles and responsibilities, creating an inclusive planning process, and using the best practices available for college and career. The adaptive challenges require convening stakeholders to revisit the mind-set and behaviors exhibited in the entire educational system, which will likely result in changes to the very behaviors that have made Promise Academies successful. Adaptive change beckons all stakeholders to be open to altering their behaviors, values, and identities to a new way of doing things. In her vision for reimagining the high school experience, Marquitta Speller called for allowing safe opportunities to fail which means allowing Promise students to experience productive struggle; struggle that teachers independence without thwarting their academic careers. She also suggested merging two school cultures, increasing student independence, and changing the curriculum. These actions would inevitably entail resetting expectations since a change in operations will likely change how
services are delivered. Simply asking what it means to reimagine the high school experience could unintentionally cause friction and excite fear of the unknown among the staff, especially those directly involved in schooling the first graduating classes, who may worry that they failed kids.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) warn about poorly communicating adaptive change. They contend that adaptive change requires thoughtful framing of the intervention in a way that enables members to understand the goal, the relevance of the intervention, and their role in delivering change. The key would be to communicate what One Promise is and is not. Heifetz et al. argue that creating a holding environment is one of the foundational elements of leading people through adaptive change. Holding environments “bind people together and enable them to maintain their collective focus on what they are trying to do” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 155). Because of the pride associated with being a national model, the holding environment must include affirmations of what works well within the current structure in order to validate stakeholders’ previous accomplishments while pushing them to consider change. The literature suggests that fundamentally rethinking and reforming education will undoubtedly cause cognitive dissonance and increase political conflict among stakeholders. A holding environment could help ease these tensions.

Before taking on the residency, I had spent five months studying with Professor Heifetz at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. As I began the residency project, I realized that his framework offered a strategic toolkit for leading Phase I of One Promise and that adaptive leadership would be essential. In my professional positions I had led teams and organizations through the launch of new initiatives and operational changes, and unknowingly employed some of the methods identified by Heifetz, such as giving the work back to the people and creating a holding environment for change. However, I lacked technical knowledge about his other methods. In asking all stakeholders to change their behavior, adaptive leadership skills would be invaluable for leading the delicate dance of politics and school culture.
### Micropolitics and Macropolitics

Blasé and Björk (2010) define *micropolitics* as “the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations including cooperative and conflictive actions and processes” (p. 240). *Macropolitics* “represents the school’s external environment and its relationship to the local, state, and federal level and interactions between the private and public areas” (Blasé & Björk, 2010, p. 238). In addition to the typical stakeholders (teachers, families, students, board members, community), HCZ staff members such as the K–8 superintendent and his leadership team also have a vested interest in the outcome of *One Promise*. A prime example of the micropolitical problems in *One Promise* is the issue of space. Because of HCZ’s space challenges, merging the two high schools would also require a shift in space for the middle schools, which represents loss for the K–8 team and possible changes to their schooling model. Moreover, if the two high schools merge curricula, will the board require K–8 to do the same?

As a reform strategy initiated outside the classroom and school level, *One Promise* is a top-down directive, and as such it creates both micro- and macropolitical waves. According to Blasé and Björk (2010), externally imposed initiatives to change and reform schools must contend with existing internal political cultures that promote and protect the school’s status quo (p. 240). This finding underscores the importance of engaging stakeholders in the process. Blasé and Bjork (2010) reviewed the ways school stakeholders facilitate “positive micropolitics (empowering, collaborative, problem centered) or negatively impede it (controlling and self-serving).” One way to limit the political backlash from current Promise Academy teachers is to involve them in the reimagining process, which is an example of Heifetz’s concept of giving the work back to the people. Principals and teachers must have an active voice in the One Promise school improvement process. In Blasé and Bjork’s study, reforms succeeded when principals facilitated leadership that empowered teachers, managed internal conflict, developed teachers’ capacity for critique, and challenged teachers to transform school; when principals took a more
control-oriented approach, unwilling to let go of power and enact democratic and facilitative leadership, reform was impeded. Superintendents facilitated successful reform when they were highly involved in instructional matters, worked effectively to manage political dynamics with the community and school board, built organizational political support, and communicated the purpose and status of change to the public. The researchers found that superintendents also impeded reform when they failed to clarify roles and had a need for power and control. HCZ and Promise Academy, which rely heavily on stakeholders, require inclusion at the core of the strategy to mitigate both internal and external micropolitics. Research suggests that communication, clarity of roles, team empowerment, and democratic leadership are critical for managing the politics of change.

Organizational Culture

My classroom and school observations at PA I and PA II confirmed that they have distinctly different cultures. Schein (2010) defines culture as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 18). Asking two schools with drastically different cultures and deeply embedded practices to become One Promise poses a huge adaptive challenge (in addition to several technical problems). As Heifetz and Linsky note, this type of adaptive change “forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity; it also challenges their sense of competence which conjures feelings of loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetence . . . which is a lot to ask” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.30). Therefore, a deep understanding of both cultures is needed to achieve One Promise. Schein suggests the way to diagnose culture “is to bring representative groups of 10–15 people together and ask them to discuss artifacts, values, and the assumptions behind them” (2010, p. 191). Based on his years of studying culture, Schein forewarns us that to “capture the whole culture is probably impossible so the researcher must have a specific goal in mind before a set of
questions for the group can be designed” (2010, p. 191). For HCZ, the goal of exploring these cultures might focus on the prototypical students and the teaching and learning cultures at PA I and PA II.

Examining these elements can help senior leaders make decisions on how to merge the cultures while minimizing culture clash. Marks and Mirvis (2011) find four stages of culture clash and suggest ways to limit the risks of a clash. The stages they identify are perceived differences (people focus on the differences based on style of leaders, reputation, decision-making, and type of staff), magnifying differences, stereotypes (characterizing others as an embodiment of their company culture), and putdowns (“we are the superior culture and they are inferior”) (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 862). Listening and observing at both schools, I heard elements of all stages. To minimize culture clashes, leaders should (1) define the desired cultural end state, (2) deepen cross-cultural learning, (3) drive the combination (the merger of two organizations) toward the desired end, and (4) reinforce the emerging culture through substance and symbolism (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 862).

I found that the key for my work would be identifying the desired culture and working that into the phased planning process. Following best practices under the organizational culture area of One Promise should include performing the culture clash protocol and developing the desired cultural end state. These diagnostic and problem-solving processes should proactively set up the new One Promise culture for success. They also call on the planners to acknowledge and address the distinct cultures of both schools rather than treating them as a monolith.

Research Conclusions

After reviewing the literature, I realized that two theoretical frameworks were most important for guiding my work with One Promise: Jewell-Sherman’s Demography is Not Destiny (DID) and Heifetz’s adaptive leadership. While all the knowledge gained through the RKA influenced my thinking and strategy, these theories provided both analytical and diagnostic approaches for leading Phase I. Because One Promise requires a comprehensive improvement
approach, I utilized the systemic model of *Demography is not Destiny* that advocates addressing: 1) the beliefs of the participants, 2) the opportunities they need to be able to do the work, 3) the instructional program and the required shifts in the current curriculum, 4) the embedding of innovations, and 4) the accountability measures that I want to put into place so that the participants can continue to the next phase. In essence, DID captures the importance of problem diagnosis from an educational systems perspective. While, I’ve led school change work before, I have not done so where there was a significant leadership shift, where the entity is nationally and internationally renowned, where there was a heightened accountability because a whole cohort was about to complete the HCZ PK-12 experience, and the reticent to change something that is revered in the community. Leading this type of change, I knew it would require the adaptive leadership framework, which provides strategies for leading people through change that requires a shift in mindsets, behaviors, and beliefs. With these concepts in mind, I designed my first theory of action.

**Initial Theory of Action**

People exercise leadership from places of formal or informal authority (Heifetz, 1994). Distinguishing between those positions determines how to employ some aspects of the adaptive leadership framework. For example, leading with informal authority keeps one closer to the action, whereas formal authority requires a leader to maintain order and control (Heifetz, 1994). Knowing that I would lead this work from a place of informal authority offered certain benefits because it placed me “closer to the detailed experiences of some of the stakeholders in the situation . . . learning people’s hopes, pains, values, habits, and history” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 188). Realizing my status as an outsider with informal authority, I wanted to enter the work with humility and empathy. In some ways, I viewed my ten-month role like that of an internal consultant.

To supplement my informal authority perspective, I reviewed Schein’s most recent work, *Humble Consulting: How to Provide Real Help Faster*. Schein (2016) suggests that basing the
work in humility and personalization (genuine interest in getting to know the people you are helping) while honoring and caring for clients in their complex situations can open the door to collaboratively determining the real problems and solutions. Recognizing the truth of Schein’s claim required me to approach this work knowledgeably yet humbly. Humble respectfulness in collaborating and exercising adaptive leadership guided me as I sought to engage and collaborate with key stakeholders during this change process.

My initial theory of action was this:

If I

• systematically and intentionally listen to voices from PA I, PA II, and HCZ partners,

• use that information to guide the reimagining of the high school experience,

• provide a holding environment for stakeholders to engage in open and honest conversations about the gaps in effectiveness within the current high school structure,

And if I

• equip Promise staff and collaborators with tools for school improvement (diagnosis, analysis, and improvement planning),

Then

• we will collectively design a school reform process that honors and validates stakeholder perspectives and moves HCZ toward developing the best solutions to achieve the goals that guarantee that students are equipped to graduate from college.
What and How: One Promise Phase I

One Promise Phase I: My Approach to the Project

Based on the knowledge gained from the RKA, I developed two overarching objectives to guide Phase I: (1) determine the assets and challenges of the current high school structure from the perspectives of each group of stakeholders and (2) collaboratively develop the strategies for system improvement that fit the organizational context of HCZ. The problem analysis research drove my approach to understanding the scope of the problems at the Promise Academies, so my first step focused on distinguishing the factors that contributed to and detracted from preparing students to succeed in high school and college. I believed this information should guide the systems improvement process. Since HCZ employs a multiple-stakeholder approach to supporting students from birth through college, I designed the first action of this process to hear from those closest to the work of ensuring that all students succeed in their postsecondary pathways. The research on stakeholder responses to school reform also underscored the importance of including their voices in the problem diagnosis. I interviewed 24 school-based and external stakeholders and coded the top assets and problems in the transcripts; this gave me important information to guide the root cause analysis of the Promise Academies’ challenges with consistently graduating college-ready students. Research on school improvement and DID, and my experience with PELP, confirmed the importance of exploring the entire system before taking action. Using data from the causal analysis, Promise Academies’ leadership determined that developing an intentional 9–12 curriculum inclusive of college and career readiness would provide the greatest lever for change. With the focus identified, I used the Heifetz adaptive leadership approach since I knew the school improvement process involved a number of adaptive challenges. I “gave the work back to those closest to the problem” and recommended dividing it between two working groups: school leaders and teachers. I believed that if I listened to voices from all the partners, used that information to guide the reimagining of the high school experience, supplied a holding environment in which stakeholders could discuss the gaps in
effectiveness in the high school structure, and gave everyone the tools for school improvement (diagnosis, analysis, and improvement planning), the result would be school reform process that helped HCZ guarantee that students are equipped to graduate from college. Now I describe how I approached the work utilizing my theory of action to guide the accomplishment of the two project objectives from August 2016 to March 2017.

The Initial Charge from the Executive Director to Lead Phase I (August 2016)

Dr. Speller’s vision to create a high school through college, or 9–16, focus within the high school redesign directly aligned with both my prior work in higher education and my recent strategy development for charter schools that sought to add a high school-through-college persistence structure. I saw it as a privilege to be fully authorized to design Phase I. Leading Phase I of One Promise entailed guiding PA high school staff, students, families, HCZ staff, and community stakeholders through HCZ’s first significant high school reform. This journey required stakeholders to undergo a deep inquiry into what it takes to create a unified comprehensive high school experience that consistently delivers on the “guarantee that students are equipped to graduate from college.” One Promise might appear to be a typical case in education reform, but it is far more than that. The One Promise process has charted a new course for educational reform addressing the sensitive nature of the process of analyzing its system from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The most pressing challenge was how to ensure that current students were ready for college. Upon assuming leadership, I quickly saw that I needed to understand the history of One Promise, divide the work into phases, and focus on reasonable outcomes for the residency period. I used the RKA to build my theory of action and the two overarching project objectives: (1) determine the assets and challenges of the current high school structure from the perspectives of each group of stakeholders and (2) collaboratively develop the strategies for system improvement that fit the organizational context of HCZ. Achieving those objectives would involve asset and problem diagnosis, unpacking root causes and strategic visioning, planning school improvement, and sequencing change.
Implementing Phase I: Asset and Problem Diagnosis

Parent Survey (September 2016)

While not originally a part of my project plan, the Executive Director asked me to create a parent survey for the High School Welcome Back meeting. I jumped at this opportunity to gather feedback from parents on their perspectives of the current effectiveness and areas of growth for Promise Academy high schools. Forty-one parents across Promise Academy I and II high schools completed the survey. Survey items covered course offerings, college exposures, SAT/ACT prep, extra-curricular opportunities, school culture, college planning, parent engagement, student preparation for college and career, and sports (see Appendix G for the parent survey report). I also included a few open-ended areas for parents to share their thoughts on the types of classes and extra-curricular opportunities that they would like offered. Overall, parents were satisfied with their students’ experiences at Promise Academy. Parents identified Promise Academy does the following activities well: Engaging parents, after-school, preparing students for college and career, Bard Early College Program, and college planning. They identified opportunities to travel internationally, after-school, summer exposures, student clubs and organizations, and school culture as areas of growth. Overall three themes emerged: parents want more diverse course offerings and extra-curricular activities, parents want to expand their knowledge about the college process and college process supports provided by Promise Academies, and overall parents felt Promise Academies did well with helping their students prepare for college in some areas such as course offerings, college planning, summer exposures, etc. This information proved helpful because it allowed me to glean where parents felt we needed to improve.

Stakeholder Interviews (October–November 2016)

Stakeholder engagement drives the HCZ “whatever it takes” philosophy. Therefore, hearing from stakeholders rose to the top of my priority list. Additionally, the dissonance caused by the original announcement made it prudent to engage stakeholders who had not been involved
My research also confirmed the importance of stakeholder engagement. Ms. Speller worked with me to ensure the interview list incorporated the most important stakeholders engaged with supporting Promise Academies’ students in high school and through college. Two overarching research questions guided the inquiry to determine what factors contributed to and detracted from the successful preparation for high school and college success. I designed four interview questions (see Appendix H for the interview questions and agenda) based on elements of the PELP Coherence Framework (see Appendix F), which asserts that when these organizational components work together, the organization will consistently achieve its mission. Over six weeks, I interviewed 24 school-based and non–school-based stakeholders: school leaders (principal, assistant principals, dean), teachers (Bard Early College and regular), non–school-based partners (College Success Office leaders, Career Services team members, Development team members, CEO, chief operating officer, senior advisors, and after-school staff), and school system leaders (K–8 superintendent and Dr. Speller). I initially intended to interview parents; however, I ran out of time. Thus, I used the results from the September 2016 parent survey to represent their perspective on the high school reimagination. For school-based interviews, I “honed in” by asking questions based on the PELP Coherence Framework organizational components that are most critical to system improvement: systems and processes, culture, teaching and learning, resources, and stakeholders. I selected these areas because they get to the heart of how schools and the system operate. I wanted to easily isolate the asset/challenge area to a specific location in the system. In HCZ partner interviews, I asked more general questions regarding what Promise Academy does well and needs to get better at doing. I opted to ask broad questions because many of them lacked understanding of the inner workings of the schools. The stakeholder interviews provided a comprehensive overview of factors that contribute to successful student preparation and those that contribute to under-preparation.

Coding the Interviews: What I Learned

Data from the interviews revealed how the design of Promise Academy high school
produces the current results. I coded the interview responses, which enabled me to learn the
strengths (assets) and challenges (problems) of the current high school system. The assets
represent the factors that contribute to successful preparation and challenges represent the factors
that contribute to under-preparation. From there, I mapped the factors drawn from the PELP
Coherence organizational components (teaching and learning, culture, resources, stakeholders,
and systems and processes) to see where the coherence challenges were throughout the school
system (Appendix I which provides the analysis of the factors that contribute to successful
preparation and under-preparation).

Three categories contributed to successful student preparation: the “whatever it takes”
philosophy, teacher commitment to student success, and college-going culture. Five factors
contributed to student under-preparation: teacher and staff development, curriculum, partnerships,
developing student agency and accountability, and intentional structures and systems for
consistently carrying out the work.

I focused the diagnostic process at the systems level and resisted the temptation to blame
problems on groups (e.g., teachers, principals). The analysis situated the assets and problems in
the PELP Coherence Framework, which clarified how the PELP components (teaching and
learning, stakeholder engagement, school culture, systems and processes, and resource
allocations) work together to support and detract from successful student preparation (Tables 1
and 2). This diagnostic process also aligns with the larger HCZ core values of data-driven
practice and continuous improvement. Overall, these interviews gave me a holistic snapshot of
HCZ’s factors that contribute to and detract from effective preparation for high school and
college success. The multi-stakeholder perspectives provided triangulation of data across diverse
constituency groups, which signaled symmetry at the 30,000-foot level on the areas that most
needed change (30,000-foot level indicates at the highest level all stakeholders agree on the need
to develop solutions to address the college and career readiness gap). These data also helped
situate my analysis: using the DID framework; I could show which coherence components most
frequently appeared in both successful preparation and under-preparation. Culture, teaching and learning, and systems repeatedly surfaced as the greatest challenges to coherence in the under-preparation category. Conversely, teaching and learning and resources appeared as the areas of most coherent with successful preparation. The process also established me as a listener truly interested in hearing from the people and creating opportunities for their voices to drive change.

More analysis on this data and how it informed my strategy is included in the analysis section.

Table 1. Categories and codes for Promise Academy assets identified in stakeholder interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that Contribute to Successful Preparation (Asset Categories)</th>
<th>Interview Codes</th>
<th>PELP Coherence Framework Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whatever It Takes</strong></td>
<td>• Above and beyond to help students succeed&lt;br&gt;• Caring and strong student-staff relationships&lt;br&gt;• Collaboration with stakeholders to help students and schools succeed&lt;br&gt;• Allocation of resources for innovation and improvement</td>
<td>Culture Resources Stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Commitment to Student Success</strong></td>
<td>• Teacher creativity&lt;br&gt;• Differentiation to meet students needs&lt;br&gt;• Data-driven instruction and teacher practice</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Going Culture</strong></td>
<td>• Bard Early College Program&lt;br&gt;• Access to summer exposures (college and career)</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that Contribute to Under-Preparation (Challenge Categories)</th>
<th>Interview Codes</th>
<th>PELP Coherence Framework Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers/Staff Development</strong></td>
<td>• Building staff capacity to do their job effectively&lt;br&gt;• Standardized approaches to onboarding, training, and ongoing professional development&lt;br&gt;• High staff turnover (including the loss of talented staff)</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Culture Systems Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><em>Academic:</em>&lt;br&gt;• Lack of Intentional 9-12</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase Partnerships with parents</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exposure outside of Promise</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Participate in other HCZ programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◦ Community Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing student agency and accountability</th>
<th>Culture Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student Accountability</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Handholding and Coddling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of safe opportunities to fail, grow, and problem solve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of opportunity for student voice, autonomy, and independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regimented school schedule</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentional structures and systems for consistently carrying out the work</th>
<th>Culture Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic/Curricular:</strong></td>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• College and Career readiness (process and approach)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of student data for improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of pipeline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Culture:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overuse of discipline and impact on instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adult-student respectful communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Categories and codes for Promise Academy challenges identified in stakeholder interviews

On November 21, 2016, Dr. Speller and I convened the first strategy session with the PA I and II principals (see Appendix J for the full agenda). Having an outsider come in to lead a comprehensive change effort created tensions between the principals and my role. Recognizing the inherent inside-outside tension that existed with leading One Promise, I designed the first meeting with two major objectives: to clarify and receive feedback on the project scope, timeline,
and activities and to build a holding environment to allow the group to engage in open and honest conversations. The concept of a holding environment is borrowed from the Heifetz Adaptive Leadership Framework referenced in the Review of Knowledge for Action. To launch the holding environment, I opened with a positive ritual focused on envisioning a successful school year. The ritual activities are used as team builders to create positive energy by having participants reflect on positive outcomes to their situations. From there, we discussed the conditions for sharing our excitement and anxieties about One Promise, the project scope and timeline, and a preview of the stakeholder interview responses. Despite the tensions in the air, we got through most of the meeting agenda. At the meeting commenced, I realized that I would need to continue to work on building a holding environment in order to improve the atmosphere of the meeting.

On December 12, 2016, I convened the second strategy session with the same attendees and focused on three main objectives: strengthen the holding environment, gather feedback on an ideal Phase I, and share all the data from the stakeholder interviews (see Appendix K for the full agenda). I continued my efforts to strengthen the holding environment by including positive opening and closing rituals and having each participant make a personal commitment to help create a successful Phase I. I also added personal and professional-level sharing activities, which recounted the positive and challenging aspects of life that each member brings with them into the meeting space, hopefully creating a more empathetic environment. I asked the everyone, “What don’t I know that I should know to effectively lead them through Phase I?” These questions displayed vulnerability that helped to build trust, and answering it validated their knowledge and expertise on organizational change. They identified the following weak spots: staff turnover and lack of time to accomplish daily tasks due to the number of crises occurring in a day, both of which have hampered their ability to implement change with fidelity. I also modeled transparency by sharing my theory of action and my hopes for working together. I used the meeting to try to break down the outsider threat posed by my presence. I shared my belief that the answers are in the room and my goal of keeping a system view for improvement (focus on the people, structures,
systems and how those elements come together to produce the current results). I also shared my desire to be of service to HCZ, my wish to support the principals in their first year, and my commitment to ground the work in the context of HCZ. Then I gave a rationale for using stakeholder interviews as a diagnostic tool and presented the three assets for successful preparation and the five areas contributing to under-preparation. The team confirmed that the data appeared consistent with their own observations of Promise Academies’ assets and growth areas. We engaged in more discussion, I answered questions, and then I asked the team to select the greatest lever for change to address the issues of under-preparation; they all chose curriculum. The team believed addressing curriculum also tackles some of the other challenge areas. Their decision to focus on teaching and learning also aligns with PELP Coherence Theory, which states that putting the instructional core first when addressing system performance problems “reminds everyone what really matters happens in the classroom with the interaction of teachers, students, and rich content” (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 12). Reflecting at the end of the meeting, while still tense, the meeting went slightly better than the first one. The dialogue flowed a lot easier. I believe this occurred because I asked them more questions about their experience and asked them to guide me through understanding HCZ’s culture. Around this time, I noticed an uptick in strategy meetings rescheduling and cancellations, signaling a shift in the project’s priority.

**Implementing Phase I: Unpacking Root Causes and Strategic Visioning**

*One Promise Strategy Session III*

On January 18, 2017, the principals, Dr. Speller, and I met to address the root causes of Promise Academy curricular challenges (see Appendix L for the full agenda). After the positive opening ritual, I used the fishbone approach to lead the group through a root cause analysis aimed at determining which curricular factors contribute to the under-preparation of Promise Academy high school students and graduates. The exercise unearthed a few key roots: (1) overemphasis on Regents exam in ninth and tenth grade which negatively impacts eleventh and twelfth grades; (2) lack of student-centered instruction and independent student practice in the classroom; (3) staff
turnover; (4) lack of intentionality in curriculum development; and (5) students entering ninth grade underprepared (see Appendix M for fishbone diagram). We discussed which root causes had the greatest impact, and the team chose *lack of intentionality in curriculum development*. The team decided to develop an intentional 9–12 curriculum connected to college and career readiness as the focus of Phase I school improvement planning. I pitched the idea of moving the school improvement planning into two working groups (curriculum and competencies) made up of school leadership and teachers (i.e., those who are closest to the problem). They agreed, and we developed the working group membership. In order to put more time and planning into the working groups, the group agreed to reconvene as needed and I committed to keeping them in the loop on the working groups. Reflecting back, this meeting embodied a spirit of camaraderie. We engaged in a manner that felt less forced than the previous meetings. I understood that the principals took issue with me leading *One Promise* so the change in atmosphere at this meeting gave me hope. I believe our collective preparation to demonstrate to our competence to lead the college process to the Promise board sparked a sense of teamwork amongst us.

*Strategic Visioning*

As referenced in the RKA, I decided that the reimagination process should articulate the *purpose, design, and community needs* requisite for creating a strategic vision for One Promise. Since the Promise Academy mission statement addressed each of those areas, it served as the vision for designing the system improvement plan (Figure 2). If the adaptive challenge arose from a gap in consistently achieving the mission, we should turn to it as the foundation for change. In Figure 3, I added the words in parentheses to identify HCZ’s purpose, its design, and the community needs it sought to address by establishing Promise Academy charter schools.
Figure 3. Promise Academy mission statement.

At the *One Promise* leadership retreat held on February 15-16, 2017, members of the original *One Promise* group (Promise Academy school leaders, after-school and athletics staff, and HCZ senior leaders) participated in a visioning session facilitated by Authentic Leadership consultants. The consultants provided leadership development focused on collaboration and personal growth. The session afforded an opportunity to brainstorm the what, why, and how behind *One Promise*. For the “what” people described *One Promise* as: enhancing best practices across both schools while appreciating their uniqueness, adding more classes to broaden access, discipline departments, and broaden student access to teaching. They described the “why” as: create a shared culture of unity and collaboration to support kids, work more aligned to address cracks in the pipeline, comprehensive, thriving for children, and broaden their education. The session increased buy-in by participants and provided the opportunity to expand membership in the current working groups, it also magnified the lack of clarity that contributed to the communication and branding challenges. Since *One Promise* efforts occurred in silos (namely, my strategic project, shared classes between the high schools, and unified Promise after-school and athletics activities), we missed the opportunity to show public support for this vision among the diverse Promise stakeholders. Dr. Speller and the retreat attendees as well as I decided that
ongoing communication with this group would be essential to developing alignment and supporting future planning for One Promise. The session delivered the momentum to make One Promise more public and position it for a true cross-collaboration with the school improvement planning process. The brainstorm that took place at the retreat ended with three major action items: add after-school and athletics to the competencies working group, develop collective language for One Promise, and form a One Promise steering committee. Making this group the steering committee brought with it the blessing of an established holding environment because we had participated in leadership development sessions focused on collaboration and personal mastery. The holding environment allowed for open, honest conversations as we sought the best solutions for bringing to life a unified One Promise experience. This turning point gave me hope for the project and its durability to persist through the highly politicized HCZ organizational culture.

**Implementing Phase I: School Improvement Planning and Sequencing Change**

*Scaffolding the College and Career Readiness Approach*

In order to create a common understanding of college and career readiness and highlight the best practices, I designed a college and career readiness overview handout (see Appendix N for the full document). I reviewed this guide at the first meeting of the competencies group, distributed it at the One Promise curriculum retreat, and used it as a guide for the curriculum working group. It includes Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness, definitions of terminology, a summary of best practices for middle and high school that increase college access and success, on-track indicators for readiness, guiding questions for integrating college and career readiness, and a youth development approach to college access and success. Because I wanted the school improvement planning to be a for-us, by-us model, I assumed responsibility for scaffolding and building staff capacity to engage in the work in a well-informed and meaningful manner. With everyone on the same page, the groups could select which best practices to tailor to Promise Academy. Providing everyone with the knowledge of college and
career readiness empowers all team members to join the planning conversation with the same knowledge and depend less on the external expert to for answers, thereby creating the conditions for approaching the work as an adaptive change-planning process.

One Promise Curriculum Retreat (February 2017)

On February 17, 2017, we held the One Promise Curriculum Retreat. I co-led the retreat with the assistant principal for instruction with these learning objectives: develop a baseline understanding of college and career readiness, identify places to integrate college and career readiness techniques into the curriculum, provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their instructional practices, and foster cross-school collaboration in curriculum breakout sessions (see Appendix O for the agenda). Instructional and noninstructional staff partnered in groups to define college and career readiness (see Appendix O for poster examples). That activity led to the formal introduction of college and career readiness as a focus at the schools. We also provided breakout sessions for each curriculum department to develop a college and career readiness vision for their content areas (see Appendix P for the departmental vision statements). In those groups, they connected Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness to New York State Common Core Standards. The teachers were vocal about how Promise Academy adequately and inadequately prepares students for college and career. There was in immense about of energy around the teachers having their voices heard and validated. This retreat hosted the first large-scale curricular conversations and school-based dialogue on preparing Promise Academy high school students for postsecondary pathways. The departmental vision statements will serve as the overarching vision for content areas as the curriculum working group designs the foundational 9–12 curriculum over the next few months. As we closed the retreat by asking staff to explain their summary of the retreat in a #, the spirit in the room embodied unity, a deeper commitment to students, a willingness to embrace college and career readiness, and a desire to work across schools to ensure best practices reach each Promise Academy student.
Curriculum Working Group (March 2017)

The charge of the curriculum working group is to develop an intentional 9–12 academic and co-curriculum connected to the college and career readiness competencies and New York state standards. The group will also make recommendations for how to phase in the curricular changes over the next three years. As with the competencies group, the planning process will include metrics for success, standardized curriculum approaches, and the school resources requisite for fidelity of implementation.

The curriculum working group held its first meeting on March 2, 2017 (see Appendix Q for group members). At the time of this writing, the scope of the group work includes a variety of activities; I will continue to lead the group and hope to complete the scope by the end of May 2017. I served as the facilitator of this meeting and led the group from the perspective of giving the work back to the people. I focused on bringing the teachers and school leaders up to speed on the One Promise asset and problem diagnosis. To create a holding environment for the work, I used tactics similar to those used in the strategy sessions, starting with group expectations, processing the realities of leading change and planning to support people through the process of loss, ongoing positive rituals, and group commitments. Since the initial meeting, the group has established a purpose and timeline, conducted a two-way internal self-assessment of Conley’s four keys to college and career readiness (rating how teacher and school practices promote the four keys as well as using evidence to support the ratings), brainstormed ways to bolster the practices, and engaged more teachers in the self-assessment. Overall, the teachers’ energy for this group was amazing. They stayed after-school for the meetings and brought 100% of themselves to the planning sessions. I felt most confident about the work of this group extending beyond my tenure. I believe this is also attributed to the technical nature of the group, teachers are operating from their comfort zone of improving teaching and learning.

The remaining work to be done for April and May: (1) taking the departmental college and career vision statements and developing foundational 9–12 curriculum based on New York
State Standards and Conley’s four keys, (2) developing a multiyear implementation plan, and (3) creating a suggested professional development plan for teachers.

*College and Career Readiness Competencies Working Group (February–March 2017)*

The competencies working group held its first meeting on February 3, 2017 (see Appendix R for group members). The meeting set the foundation for the work by (1) providing background on the One Promise asset and problem diagnosis that led to the development of the competencies group, (2) reviewing the college and career readiness overview handout, and (3) identifying group needs. The group’s charge is to develop three to five core competencies to ensure Promise Academy students are college and career ready upon graduation. The American Institute for Research’s (AIR) College and Career Readiness Guiding Questions Framework streamlines the planning process to include developing the competency, outcomes and measures, pathways and supports, and resources and structures. This planning tool builds in the establishment of key performance indicators, specific activities for developing the competencies, and the school resources needed for fidelity of implementation. At the time of writing this, the scope of the work has included a variety of activities similar to the curriculum group’s. Like the curriculum group, I will continue to lead the group and hope to complete the scope by the end of May 2017. I led the group in the same way, focused on bringing the staff up to speed on the One Promise asset and problem diagnosis, and built the holding environment. The staff have created their own definitions of college and career readiness and compared current practices to their definitions. We elevated their ideas and walked through the AIR guiding framework, which helped the team experience the full cycle of creating a competency. The group inventoried the current college and career readiness and student development practices through grades 9 to 12, which supported competency development and validated the current work in the schools. The group also completed the same Conley’s four keys self-assessment based on practices promoted at Promise Academy. I then used the language from the staff-defined college and career readiness competencies and asked the group to winnow them down to six competencies that would be the
greatest levers for change and map those onto Conley’s framework to ensure connection to best practice. Reflecting back on this group, I noticed meeting attendance varied after the first few meetings. Staff engagement levels varied by years of experience at Promise. I noticed those least engaged worked at Promise longer than the regular attendees. As I played back their reactions to the change, I noticed throughout the year they embodied some “fence-sitter” behaviors. I think this meeting attendance is a symptom of the potential lack of buy-in as well as the reality of making adaptive change. The curriculum work situates itself in the technical expertise category. Whereas, the competency working group requires learning in addition to execution, thus requiring more seasoned participants to reflect on their role in the college and career readiness challenges of Promise alumni.

The remaining work for April and May is to (1) finalize the three to five competencies, (2) map them onto Conley’s four keys and to and through college success indicators, (3) develop metrics for measuring outcomes, (4) create pathways to facilitate competency development, (5) identify resources/structures needed to ensure fidelity of implementation, and (6) develop a multiyear implementation plan to phase in the competencies in grades 9 to 12.
Why: Phase I of One Promise Analysis and Evidence

Guideposts for Leading on the Line: The Demography Is not Destiny and Adaptive Leadership Frameworks

Exercising leadership without authority while guiding people through adaptive change at a national educational model epitomized the dangers of what it means to “leading on the line.” As Heifetz and Linsky’s text, described in Leadership on the Line, this type of adaptive leadership required flexibility and deep empathy for the staff as I helped them untangle which aspects of their practices to preserve and which required change in order to ensure that HCZ consistently graduates students ready for college and careers. Pursuing the two objectives of Phase I of One Promise presented its share of ups, downs, sleepless nights, incredible highs, political juggernauts, and strategic conundrums. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), “leadership is an improvisational art and although you may have an overarching vision, clear, orienting values, and even a strategic plan, what you actually do from moment to moment cannot be scripted” (p. 73). I found this adage to hold true as I transitioned on and off the balcony, thought politically, managed two holding environments, gave the work back to the people, held steady during tested moments, and anchored myself to maintain a sound mind, body, and spirit.

Leading a large-scale change project for a prominent organization demands respect for the past and current state, while leveraging pathways for future innovative practices. In this section, I describe why the project unfolded as it did over the past 10 months using two analytical frameworks: Jewell-Sherman’s DID and Heifetz’s adaptive leadership. DID focuses on system-level educational change and adaptive leadership is based on adaptive change. I provide a quick overview of both theories and their applicability to this analysis, describe the organizational context in which I began the project, and summarize the successes and failures relative to the two frameworks and my theory of action. I conclude by revisiting my original theory of action and adding final thoughts on how well these frameworks worked for addressing systemic adaptive issues in this internal diagnostic process. See Figure 4 for my original theory of action.
Deborah Jewell-Sherman (n.d.) offers the DID framework as a tool with which educational leaders can identify and address system-level gaps. The five gaps—belief, opportunity and capacity, instructional, innovation and support, and outcome and accountability—suggest a set of diagnostic questions for use in exploring persistent challenges in educational systems. The belief gap relates to beliefs about adult and student learning. The opportunity and capacity gap involves the alignment of espoused values and enacted policies that manifest the current problem of practice. The instructional gap is about the gap between the instructional core and system operations. The innovation and support gap relates to the organizational capacity to address challenges. The outcome and accountability gap concerns shared ownership and the responsibility to achieve results. I employed DID to dissect the stakeholder interviews in efforts to understand the current state of the system reform from a multi-stakeholder perspective and to identify gaps in Promise Academy high schools. My theory of action focused on engaging stakeholders to understand system challenges, which included the first objective of asset and problem diagnosis. The DID framework was critical for analyzing that data.
I believe Geoffrey Canada founded HCZ with a DID frame of mind. He redirected the mission of the Rheedlen Centers for Children and Family Services to a new organization that did not limit young people to Harlem and their current circumstances. He envisioned children and families in Harlem with the same access to high-quality education and life outcomes as those who live on the NYC’s Upper West Side. He first addressed the belief gap and ended with the outcome and accountability gap, which entailed provision of services by HCZ to make up the deficits left by each gap. Through HCZ’s ongoing cycles of innovation and provision of systemic in-depth supports for students, parents, and the community, the gaps have slowly started to close.

Adaptive Leadership: Recap and Why Is It Applicable?

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) define adaptive leadership as the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive (p. 14). In this section, I categorize One Promise’s adaptive challenges and explain how I integrated the adaptive leadership framework into my project. The adaptive leadership framework directly connects to the three areas of my theory of action and the second project objective: providing a holding environment, equipping staff to lead change, and collectively designing school reforms.

When identifying the specific type of adaptive challenge One Promise represented, I found it most aligned with Archetype I: the gap between espoused values and behaviors. It has been a persistent challenge to ensure that all Promise students are college and career ready. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) write that "closing an Archetype I gap is a difficult adaptive challenge because people in the organization have been successful through their patterns of behaviors and will want to continue to do what earned them success, especially when they still are recognized and rewarded for doing so" (p. 73). Many people (including senior leaders and the board) hesitate to modify the HCZ model without a guarantee of success. After all, students at Promise Academy high school have a 100% graduation and college acceptance rate, and Regents exam scores in both schools rank above the New York City Department of Education averages.

Promise college students are graduating at rates higher than the national average on a six-
year college graduation model for African American and low income students, but a high level of hands-on support is required to achieve both high school and college graduation. PA high school graduates are not so well equipped when they arrive at college, and much handholding continues in college. One stakeholder interviewee noted, “we need to help students understand college expectations.” Moreover, their summer melt and persistence rates indicate that something is happening at the root of their educational preparation. Several stakeholder interviewees identified the lack of an intentional 9-12 curriculum and lack of rigor in the curriculum as contributing to the college and career readiness gap. The stopping-out patterns raise concerns about college readiness. During the summer, speaking casually with former Promise college students, I found that many of them, although grateful for their HCZ education, recount challenges similar to their predecessors interviewed in Speller’s *Life after the Zone* (2015). Heifetz would argue that these persistent challenges signal a deeper adaptive challenge that is not easily solved with an expert fix.

Following the adaptive leadership framework, I frequently tried to get on the balcony to distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges as well as seek data to inform my interventions. I tried to use that data to situate the work at the right orienting level (the level to get the most traction for stakeholders to take action). Finally, I gave the work back to the people and established holding environments to maximize the working groups’ productivity. In the midst of exercising adaptive leadership, I also held steady and adjusted to the changing levels of authorizations as daily organizational dynamics and crisis shifted the pace and urgency of the work.

**On the Balcony: Organizational Context at the Start of the Strategic Project (September 2016)**

Before I took any action, I stepped onto the balcony to expand my understanding of the organizational context surrounding the development and implementation of *One Promise*. Here is what I learned. When Dr. Speller announced the consolidation of PA I and II under *One Promise*,
the plan was to unify the curricula as well as the location. Parents, students, school leaders, teachers, and HCZ staff supported the plan at varying levels: as endorsers, fence-sitters, and outright resistors. Their reactions matched the warnings in the Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel (2008) “Phenomenological Study of School Consolidation,” which advocated the securing of stakeholder buy-in before embarking on large-scale change efforts that affected their lives. The resistance halted the physical consolidation. I arrived at the end of June, during the halt.

When selecting a subject for my strategic project, I asked Dr. Speller for the most pressing priority, and she named the process of implementing One Promise. Having read the findings from her dissertation, I understood the driving factor behind One Promise to address the growing number of underprepared Promise graduates entering college and struggling to persist. After meeting with several stakeholders, I realized I needed clarity about the most pressing problems. To conduct a thorough diagnosis of the system before implementing the level of change required for a consolidation, I had to understand the current assets and challenges. Also, data gathered from my listening and learning tour indicated sizable adaptive issues associated with college readiness and Promise Academy’s approach to schooling. During this time, I became privy to more conversations about summer melt and the stopping-out patterns of the classes of 2012, 2013, and 2016. It became clear that consolidation as a sole solution needed further vetting. All stakeholders believed HCZ needed to rethink its tactics for preparing PA students for college, but they disagreed about what sort of intervention would solve the problem. These disagreements caused the halt of One Promise (consolidation) and disrupted relationships among HCZ stakeholders. In order to move the project forward, I speculated, I would have to reframe the project outside of the consolidation image stuck in stakeholders’ minds.

Rather than viewing One Promise as an effort to increase college and career readiness, stakeholders fixated on the technical problems of putting the two schools into one building. When I grasped this issue, I reframed the message as “reimagining the high school experience,” or the adaptation needed to address the under-preparation of Promise high school students. I separated
the building consolidation from the college and career readiness challenges. My framing message to staff focused on students’ high school and college preparedness and success. From the balcony, I also saw that in order for this project to succeed, we needed to engage everyone—the resistors, fence-sitters, and endorsers. As previously mentioned, hearing from stakeholders quickly became one of the most important aspects of my theory of action. These realizations formed my two objectives for One Promise: determining the assets and challenges of the current high school structure from multiple stakeholder perspectives and collaboratively developing strategies for system improvement that fits the HCZ organizational context.

### Overall Successes and Failures of the Project (September 2016–March 2017)

I fully accomplished the asset and challenges diagnosis (project objective 1) and partially completed the strategies for system improvement (project objective 2). As notated earlier, the working groups are continuing to develop the strategies for improvement. I attributed the partial achievement of the objectives to the political dynamics of leading adaptive change, which stymied the project at various points. Individually listening to stakeholders through interviews and using that information to inform the change came easier than establishing the holding environment for the strategic planning process which left me more susceptible to the larger HCZ political culture. Before analyzing the overall picture, I discuss the strong insider-outsider dynamic in the HCZ culture.

#### Impact of Insider-Outsider Dynamic

From my observations, I saw that staff members view insiders as people with 7+ years tenure at HCZ and refer to new staff as outsiders. Insiders expect outsiders to prove themselves by demonstrating their loyalty to doing what is right for kids. This attitude may appear harsh, but I caution against judgment. Given the population served by HCZ, the high stakes, high-accountability environment, and the lengths required to become a national model; it makes sense that over time insiders took on the gatekeeper role. As a non-New Yorker and a Harvard-educated Black woman, I was cast as an outsider. As evidenced by the difficulty with establishing
relationships with the principals and being told countless times that my professional experience “threatens the identity of staff.” My status as almost the embodiment of One Promise, a change that some people desperately wanted to prevent, only underscored that label. Heifetz (1994) used the term *lightning rod*, to describe the vulnerability of a leader without authority who directs attention to an adaptive issue. Several times during residency, I experienced lightning rod moments. At various points, being an outsider has both helped and hindered my leading One Promise. When I conducted stakeholder interviews, it helped, but it hindered me as I facilitated difficult discussions on system challenges and pushing forward some aspects of the work. I quickly realized establishing a holding environment without formal authority is more challenging than I originally thought.

**Overall Successes**

Even though leading One Promise sometimes made me a lightning rod, it also gave me the space to get closer to the front line and understand the hopes, pains, values, habits, and history of Promise Academy high school’s diverse stakeholders (Heifetz, 1994). I interviewed 24 school-based and non-school-based stakeholders and coded the interviews to uncover factors that contribute to and detract from preparing students for high school and college success. That process allowed me to locate where in the system the challenges surfaced and gave me a platform on which to engage in an open and honest root cause analysis. It laid the foundation for selecting the greatest lever for change—curriculum. Competencies emerged as another powerful lever for change. The decision to use the stakeholder interview data for leveraging change proved to be an important part of my theory of action (systematically and intentionally listen to stakeholders and use that information to inform the reimagination). It provided the political cover when questioned about the rationale for “competencies” and “curriculum” driving the change for Phase I.

Going up on the balcony in January 2017 forced me to intervene by giving the work back to the people closest to the problem as I set competencies and curriculum working groups. Then, an unfortunate set of circumstances led to a crisis that catapulted the work back to the center of
attention and supplied the momentum to prioritize the working groups. The crisis occurred immediately before the One Promise retreat, which opened the door for me to introduce the concept of college and career readiness to teachers and administrators across both schools as well as provide space for them to reimagine their roles in improving student preparation for postsecondary success. The retreat represented a powerful example of what happens when the people closest to the work receive authorization to reimagine their practice for the best interest of students. After the retreat, I maximized the energy and created steady opportunities for the working groups to meet and work toward their goals. Reframing One Promise as a reimagination also provided the psychological safety for K–8 stakeholders to brainstorm partnership efforts because it presented less of a physical threat to how they administer schooling.

**Overall Failures**

One of the greatest lessons I learned from studying with Professor Heifetz for 5 months across 2015-2016 was how to become desensitized to failure. I learned that leading adaptive challenges includes a mix of small successes and failures and it is important to examine leadership from the outside-in (organizational/system to the personal level) and inside-out (personal to the organizational/system level). Adaptive work involves leading others and myself through processes that involve risks and unknown outcomes, which makes the work simultaneously predictable and unpredictable. The technical aspects of the work came easy, including conducting the interviews, coding them, researching best practices and school improvement frameworks, co-facilitating the One Promise curriculum retreat, and developing tools to scaffold working group learning. However, the adaptive aspects (such as acknowledging mindsets that thwart student independence) proved more challenging and slowed the momentum of the work.

For example, I allowed my work to remain in the shadows, which allowed people to continue to think of One Promise as a consolidation versus the diagnosis and stakeholder engagement project that I was leading. While I never used the word consolidation, I neglected to
forcefully sway the Executive Director from using the terms combination and consolidation until the final months of residency. Without communicating to HCZ staff about all of the diagnostic work and vehicles to include stakeholders’ perspectives, it made my strategic project appear less transparent than it actually needed to be. My informal authority left me vulnerable and I allowed the politics of the environment to keep me from publicizing my work and the process. Therefore, we missed an early opportunity to publicly communicate the objectives of Phase I to the same group of stakeholders who heard the original announcement, the group with the power to advance or thwart this initiative. Outside of my personal updates to people I bumped into, One Promise remained a mystery to senior leaders and thus I missed opportunities to galvanize strategic alliances with fence-sitters and resisters. Although leading without authority did not grant me the power to orchestrate conflict to create a greater sense of urgency for change, I did possess the ability to publicly spark the debate with stakeholders about what new strategies were needed to address the college and career readiness challenges. I could have used that dialogue to engage senior leaders in a conversation about what it would take to improve this process, thereby shifting their minds from the logistical challenges of building consolidation toward solutions for achieving the greater HCZ and Promise Academy mission.

Getting on the balcony and digging deeper into the rationale for keeping One Promise from the public eye, I realized the silence became an unintended by-product of HCZ’s politicized environment. Taking heed to Heifetz’ advice for leading with informal authority, I read the authority figures for cues on the current state of the political environment. I noticed the silencing represented an attempt to “lower the heat” (relieve the political pressures) being placed on the school leadership and Executive Director for Secondary and Collegiate Programs to account for the college and career readiness issues plaguing current Promise high school students and graduates. Out of great respect for those in my working environment, I opted not to push One Promise to the forefront since the external pressures appeared to engulf my colleagues. Even after I got the space needed to think strategically and politically about how to re-position the work of
Phase I as an alleviation of the pressure rather than an elevation of it; I still ran out of time to fully complete objective 2. I plan to stay on three weeks post residency to complete the project.

Examining the Successes and Failures: DID Gap & Theory of Action Analyses

The DID gaps illuminated the context behind the reasons for both the successes and the failures of Phase I of One Promise. In the following discussion, I refer to my interviews with 24 stakeholders, data from the parent’s survey, data from the working groups, and observations from being on the ground. I end by revisiting whether my theory of action helped me understand the organizational gaps connected to the college and career readiness challenge as well as expanding stakeholder’s knowledge of the depth of our challenges.

Belief Gap

The belief gap relates to adults’ assumptions about students’ ability to learn, improve, and achieve, see Figure 4. The “whatever it takes” philosophy operates as an asset when it ensures that all kids get to and through the PK-16 pipeline, but it can impair student independence. Even in a culture of high accountability, belief gaps persist. The lack of opportunities for student independence signals underlying assumptions about student learning and ability to thrive independently. Stakeholders identified developing student agency and accountability as a top factor contributing to under-preparation. As I coded the interviews, I isolated a subset of codes in that category: lack of student accountability; handholding and coddling; lack of safe opportunities to fail, grow, and solve problems; and lack of opportunity for student voice, autonomy, and independence. Each code identified something the adults doubted about students’ ability to learn, make decisions, think independently and critically, exhibit
agency, and demonstrate resiliency. One interviewee said, “Students lack the ability to tackle challenging tasks.” Another said, “The pressure for Promise kids to succeed creates both a dependency on staff and privileged behaviors from students.” Dr. Speller’s *Life after the Zone* study (2015) illuminated similar staff behaviors, and Promise Academy graduates believe that some of those behaviors stifled their growth in the long run. When teachers, school leaders, and staff rated the Promise Academy practices that promote Conley’s College and Career Readiness Proficiency in student ownership of learning, they ranked them at 3 or below (1 = does not promote the practice). Uncovering student agency as a category led me to set up the competencies working group to address the belief gaps.

Our planning process in the competencies working group involve candid discussions about what it will take to shift the mind-sets of students, families, and school leadership to address the “handholding” deeply ingrained in the HCZ culture. We hope the establishment of competencies will place independence and ownership of learning back onto the students.

Figure 5. Evidence of the Belief Gap

*Opportunity and Capacity Gap*

Promise Academy has a college-ready mission, but it struggles to fulfill that mission; this is evidence of an opportunity and capacity gap. For Dr. Speller, this misalignment served as the
main impetus for the One Promise consolidation. If the mission is college and career readiness, then an intentional approach to attaining the necessary skills must exist throughout the curriculum and the high school experience. Interviewees acknowledged teacher commitment to student success as a major asset; however, the lack of teacher and staff development emerged as a contributing factor to under-preparation. Interviewees commented on the lack of standardized approaches to onboarding, training, and professional development. One said that students do not understand the reason for summer exposures and other opportunities to build their college capacity. Another said, “Students do not know why they should go to college; they go because we tell them to go.” These observations point to misalignment in the school system.

Over the past few years, Promise Academy shifted several policies in an attempt to attract and retain highly skilled teachers to address the problem of high turnover and loss of talented staff. Several interviewees recounted stories of losing good teachers because of the high-stakes/low-support environment. Closing the opportunity and capacity gap requires dismantling the structures that keep these gaps intact, such as the lack of an intentional 9–12 curriculum and a teacher development plan. Since staff identified having processes for systematically carrying out the work as a major contributor to under-preparation, having a plan to address this would help that ensure the school’s espoused values and enacted policies become aligned. Having a college and career readiness mission without a clear map to get there creates a chasm between values and policy. As one staffer said, “We need to define what it means to graduate from college or succeed in college and what we are shooting for in high school.” See Figure 5 for evidence of the gap.
The fact that Promise graduates arrive at college unable to persist because of a lack of academic rigor in high school demonstrates an instructional gap. The absence of an intentional 9–12 curriculum at Promise Academy explains why this instructional gap exists. My interview data revealed that the overemphasis on Regents exams in the grades 9 and 10 impaired student performance in grades 11 and 12. One interviewee said, “Students know the Regents are most important and tend to work less in the upper grades—some students tell teachers they do not have to work hard anymore because they passed the test.” Another said the lack of pedagogical approaches in K–8 and 9–12 contributes to under-preparation. The differences among student grades, SAT scores, Regents scores, and AP scores at Promise evidences a larger teaching and learning issue: how can students with high GPA and Regents scores perform poorly on the SAT and fail to pass AP exams? The interviews uncovered several curriculum barriers to teaching and learning: lack of an intentional 9–12 curriculum focused on college and career readiness; lack of diversity across the curriculum and co-curriculum; students’ poor reading and writing skills; lack of resources (library, technology, space); and overemphasis on the Regents exams. Teaching and learning is at the heart of addressing the instructional gap. The curriculum working group conducted an internal self-assessment to identify school practices that promote college and career readiness. The assessment revealed that individual teachers sometimes instinctively promote good practices, but HCZ lacked a coherent system-wide approach to promoting college and career readiness. See Figure 6 for a summary of the evidence of the instructional gap.
Figure 7. Evidence of the Instructional Gap

Outcome and Accountability Gap

To consistently deliver on the audacious mission that all students will be accepted into and succeed in college demands that all Promise stakeholders share ownership of the mission. In other words, everyone must be responsible for addressing the issue of college and career readiness at Promise Academy. This gap probably surfaced because of the lack of standard practices across Promise. The under-preparation category of “intentional structures and systems for consistently carrying out the work” explains the gap’s presence. It is hard to consistently achieve Promise Academy’s mission without standard practices of excellence. For example, despite having had three graduating classes, the college coordinators began the 2016–2017 school year without manuals or standards of practice and expectations to guide the college process. The interview data for this category identified missing standards of practice for a consistent college and career readiness approach; not using student data for improvement; and failing to leverage the K–12 pipeline. Several people noted the importance of hiring more skilled staff and building the staff’s capacity to do their jobs. Many of the 24 stakeholders believed intentional structures and
systems for carrying out the work would alleviate the challenges of the outcome and accountability gap. If implemented in Phase II, the systems proposed by the working groups can address this gap.

Other interviewees spoke of using stakeholders more effectively to support college and career development. The competencies working group’s proposal to include key performance indicators raises the stakes by creating internal metrics to hold HCZ staff accountable for meeting benchmarks. See Figure 7 for a summary of the evidence of the outcome and accountability gap.

Figure 8. Evidence of the Outcome and Accountability Gap

Innovation and Support Gap

The presence of college and career readiness challenges indicates a need for innovation in the Promise Academy model, see Figure 8. One interviewee noted the lack of diversity in school curriculum and opportunities. When we surveyed parents to learn what they perceived as strengths and weaknesses at Promise Academy, the parents recommended adding more extracurricular activities and offering a more diverse curriculum. Resources for innovation exist at HCZ, so addressing the innovation gap is not a financial matter. But is there support at all levels to take the risks of trying something new?
Everyone agrees that change is needed, but they disagree about which lever should be used to address college and career readiness issues. HCZ’s tendency to hire a consultant rather than cultivate the talent and skills of internal staff demonstrates an unspoken value that relies on outside experts to lead the change. As one person commented, “Promise needs to use its staff better versus hiring outside consultants.” This behavior contributes to the inside-outside culture. I sought to address this gap by establishing working groups and giving the work of developing innovations back to the people. (As far as I know, this is the first use of this approach at Promise Academy.) I consistently sent the message that the answers are in the room. The working groups exist to take the “on-the-ground” knowledge, staff professional experience, and best practices and merge them into a strategy that meets HCZ’s unique organizational needs. The groups represent teachers, staff, and school leadership leading innovative change to address the college and career readiness challenges of Promise Academies. Staff and teacher practices that have been shared in the working group meetings indicate that pockets of excellence already exist at HCZ and that what was missing was a vehicle to magnify those practices.

Figure 9. Evidence of the Innovation and Support Gap

Using the research on school improvement, I sought a clear understanding of both the assets and the problems contributing to Promise Academy’s college and career readiness
challenges before designing the solutions. Employing DID aligned with the first two areas of my theory of action (listen systematically to stakeholders and use that information guide reimagination process). During the change process, we wanted to build on the strengths of Promise Academy while experimenting to fix the weaknesses. As Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) note, “the challenge for adaptive leadership involves helping people distinguish what is essential to preserve from their organization heritage from what is expendable” (p. 15). They say that the work must be put in the right place, “where it can be addressed by the relevant parties” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 128). The gaps illustrated how Promise Academy’s organizational challenges conspire to generate the college and career readiness problems.

While listening and using that information to guide the change process proved successful. I now realized I could have exploited the stakeholder interviews and gap analysis to construct a larger holding environment. For the working groups, I can draw a line from the interviews to using that information to guide the reimagination process as well as the collective designing of strategies for improvement. So this process worked for gaining buy-in for change on the working groups. However, it did not spread into the larger HCZ culture. Meaning stakeholders across the Zone remained uninformed and less tethered to moving One Promise forward. I now realize, I should have created an interview report to share out with the 24 interviewees as well as provide periodic updates on the status of the work. This would have established bonds within the larger HCZ environment for the addressing the college and career readiness challenges. Instead of taking my cues from the interviewees (those not on the working group) who often shared in passing, their interest in my work with One Promise, I focused my attention on the working groups. I now realize the greater role I could have played with keeping stakeholder interviewees engaged in the planning process, thus creating pathways for more endorsers and voices to help us think creatively addressing our challenges.

As I think about the ways I could have supported Dr. Speller with gathering more endorsers and moving resisters to fence-sitters, this is one way I could have facilitated that
process. If I pushed to publicize an interview report and provided a rationale, I believe she would have entertained the idea, even with the political pressures.

Examining the Successes and Failures: Adaptive Leadership & Theory of Action Analyses

The adaptive leadership analysis examines a few key moments within the strategic project that explain how this framework informed my thinking and exercise of leadership. Each section provides more in-depth insights into the successes and failures previously mentioned. I included figures to visualize my thinking, the organizational context, and the relevant adaptive/technical components that were present during that moment in time. I end by revisiting whether my theory of action allowed me to become more effective with leading adaptive change and moreover did it help me accomplish my objectives.

*I got on the balcony and held steady when the atmosphere of the holding environment shifted* (December 2016-January 2017)

As a part of my weekly reflective practice, I got on the balcony to reflect on the progress made, the organizational context, and my personal leadership effectiveness with advancing Phase I of One Promise. This process became even more important when the pressures of Phase I got to be too much, it allowed me to hold steady, which helped clear the blind spots from my informal authority role. Several things that occurred during Phase I prompted me to reposition the work.

In December and early January, I noticed a change in priority regarding One Promise. I began to notice meeting cancellations and a shift in language about the priority of One Promise. These behaviors are patterns of work avoidance, the “conscious or unconscious patterns in a social system that distract people’s attention or displace responsibility in order to restore social
equilibrium at the cost of progress to meet the adaptive challenge” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 308). As Heifetz (1994) noted, “the leader without authority may become less aware of the other crucial problems confronting the society and the ripeness of his issue in relation to other pressing issues that may need to take priority” (p. 207). Work avoidance often occurs when the heat goes beyond the productive zone of disequilibrium (i.e., conflict in the environment exceeds the productive level of being able to get work done). Picking up on context clues, I guessed that external pressures on the Secondary and Collegiate Programs area were growing at this time. Several staff members repeated variations of “there is so much going on that you do not know about.” I “listened to the song beneath the words” and “read the authorities to gauge the pace and manner to push forward” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.74). As a result, the project slowed in December and January.

Getting off the dance floor and onto the balcony, I reflected on the dissonance I felt at the December strategy session and in my one-on-one interactions. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggested, “I held steady to give myself time to let the issue ripen and figure out where the people are at, so I could refocus attention on the key issues” (p. 159). Taking time to rest over the midwinter break and zoom out allowed me to return in January with a fresh perspective. I came back with greater empathy for the school leadership and Dr. Speller: as they sat in strategy sessions led by an outsider (me), who was asking them to analyze the mistakes they made with the classes of 2012, 2013, and 2016, the Promise Academy board was pressuring them not to fail the class of 2017. That alone would be enough to spur work avoidance and push them to the edge of disequilibrium. A January meeting with a board member confirmed my speculation that the team was being pressured, especially about college readiness and persistence.

At that moment, I realized some stakeholders held a belief gap in the Secondary and Collegiate Programs team’s ability to consistently prepare students for college. The gaps identified from the stakeholder interviews mirrored the larger HCZ political dynamics. The data from the 2012, 2013, and 2016 graduating classes gave external stakeholders (namely, the
Promise Academy Board) the leverage to challenge the team’s capacity. My own insights and interview data solidified my belief that Promise Academy high school needed an intentional curriculum, college and career readiness competencies, and accompanying processes to successfully prepare Promise students for high school and college. Piecing together the action from the dance floor bolstered my commitment to bringing Phase I to fruition. From the balcony, I saw that with a high school plan in place, external stakeholders like the board and senior leadership might relax their judgments of the Secondary and Collegiate Programs’ capacity.

At Harvard’s January RCV, I spent time with faculty and peer colleagues thinking about my difficulties with moving ahead on Phase I and how to reposition the work for long-term success. During my time away, I remembered an earlier strategy session in which Dr. Speller and the principals recalled examples of board members and senior HCZ leaders stifling innovative ideas for fear of making the model charter school experiment look bad. I realized that some of the innovation and support gap problems stemmed from external stakeholders who have the power to influence daily school operation. Around this time, Dr. Speller gave me new authority by identifying me as a person with the expertise to address the college and career readiness gaps. These consecutive events motivated me to move my One Promise work from the shadows to the open. Two things happened at the RCV that gave me the boost I needed for the strategic project: rediscovery of the concept of organizing to learn as opposed to organizing to execute, and Johnson’s polarity map (see Appendix S for my thinking on the divergent impact of staying within one polarity versus balancing between the two). Dr. Lisa Lahey introduced the cohort to Johnson’s polarity map, which makes sense of the “polarities that exist between two interdependent pairs that need each other over time to achieve a greater purpose that both pole values share” (Lahey, 2017). During the activity, I placed Edmondson’s (2008) organizing to learn v. organizing to execute on the polarities map. This action illuminated my blind spots with the project and the organization. The first part of my project focused too much on organizing to learn. Whereas HCZ’s larger culture organizes to execute. In this high-stakes, highly accountable
environment, my being in the learning space went against the grain. Therefore, I needed to jump on the momentum from the external pressure points and empower the school teams to become engaged partners in school improvement planning. While using our execution strength, I planned to embed learning in that process. At RCV, I got the idea to move the One Promise planning from the principals and EDs to the teachers, school leadership, and HCZ stakeholders. This aligned with my original theory of action—to distribute the work among stakeholders and build the capacity of HCZ to lead the change they wished to see at the Promise Academies. I also knew that if the work stayed with the leaders, the daily pulls on their time would further delay the planning process. This repositioning ultimately brought to light the previous six months of work that had been happening in the shadows of the organization. One key thing to figure out was how develop a strong enough pitch to gain approval to move the planning process back to the people closest to the work to ensure that Phases II and III lived beyond my tenure with HCZ.

Continually Distinguishing the Technical Problems from the Adaptive Challenges

(June 2016-March 2017)

In essence, the entire Phase I of One Promise represented comprehensive system improvement aimed at improving the college and career readiness of Promise Academy students.

Figure 10. Adaptive Leadership Balcony Analysis

One Promise offered HCZ the opportunity to address both the technical problems and adaptive challenges associated with ensuring its students are prepared to meet the demands of postsecondary life. Through the multipronged approach, Phase I addressed both technical and adaptive challenges and constructed pathways to engage multiple stakeholders and working groups in the change process. I underestimated the influence of external stakeholders and the
amount of resistance to exploring change. The adaptive nature of this challenge concerned the struggle to consistently achieve the mission of guaranteeing that all students are prepared to succeed in college. The technical problems concerned the tactical aspects of leading adaptive changes such as administrative tasks, knowledge of best practices, protocols for facilitating working groups. Figure 10 provides a more in-depth look at the nature of the adaptive challenge (archetype I) and the technical and adaptive aspects. Each of these aspects are referenced throughout the capstone.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Aspects</th>
<th>Archetype I Challenge</th>
<th>Technical Aspects</th>
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<td>• Highly politicized environment</td>
<td>• Gap between espoused values and behaviors</td>
<td>• Benchmarking with national standards</td>
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<td>• Outsider Status</td>
<td>• Gap in consistently achieving the mission of Promise Academy</td>
<td>• Scaffolding College and Career Readiness learning</td>
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<td>• Adversion to tinkering with the model</td>
<td>• Espoused Value: guarantees students are equipped to graduate from college</td>
<td>• Establish working groups</td>
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<td>• Leading with informal authority</td>
<td>• Reality: Promise Academy students have a gap in college and career readiness</td>
<td>• Communication of what One Promise is/not</td>
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<td>• Lack of K-8 buy-in</td>
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<td>• Setting up stakeholder interviews</td>
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<td>• Consolidation</td>
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<td>• Determining avenues to share best practices across schools</td>
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<td>• National/International Model identity</td>
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<td>• College and career readiness self-assessment</td>
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<td>• Creating a holding environment for working groups</td>
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<td>• Developing the 9-12 foundational curriculum</td>
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<td>• Developing the competencies</td>
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<td>• Use of working group to develop solutions</td>
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<td>• Mixed support for change within school leadership</td>
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**Figure 10. Summary of Adaptive and Technical Aspects**

*Giving the Work Back to the People and Creating a Holding Environment for Change*

After the RCV, I came back to HCZ ready to make my proposal to the principals and Dr. Speller. Given the ripeness of the college readiness issues, I presumed the principals and ED would accept the proposal. They did. The best solutions to adaptive challenge are achieved when “the people with the problem” go through a process together to become “the people with the solution”; this journey allows the relevant parties to internalize, own, and ultimately resolve the issues (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 127). The curriculum working group focused on the developing the intentional 9–12 curriculum and the competencies working group concentrated on
developing the profile of a model college- and career-ready Promise student. I intentionally positioned the competencies group to address the belief gap and opportunity and capacity gaps. I set up the curriculum group to tackle the belief, outcomes and accountability, and instructional gaps.

*Curriculum Working Group.* The greatest adaptive challenge for the curriculum working group was to build an intentional curriculum under the constraints of the high-stakes testing environment and of those identified from the curriculum root cause analysis and. This group built on the momentum from the *One Promise* curriculum retreat, and vision statements each content area had developed at the retreat served as a foundation for the group’s work. Making a point of validating all voices and perspectives during the creative planning process was key to focusing the weekly group meetings on innovative thinking. In the first few meetings, we established a holding environment of trust and camaraderie through positive opening rituals, setting expectations, and open discussion on the managing the reality of change. Establishing the conditions to tackle this work was fairly easy since the teachers genuinely wanted to partner with and support their peers. I suspect that the largely technical nature of this group aided the ease of planning. In addition to building the holding environment, the first few meetings consisted of analyzing the Promise Academy’s current practices with Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness. As the facilitator, I offered professional learning opportunities on college and career readiness to increase the group’s effectiveness. I distributed handouts, relevant best practices, and led them through strategic planning and reflective exercises. I embedded their perspectives into each step of the planning process, always merging it with national best practices. The strong holding environment maximized productivity, and the teachers were eager agents of change in their efforts to address the instructional gaps.

My partnership with the assistant principal (AP) for instruction contributed to the group’s success because I found a way to advance her goals with the current curricular needs as we engaged in *One Promise* future planning. Our partnership created a bridge to the future, ensuring
that the work would extend beyond my tenure AND provided additional exposure for the AP’s instructional vision for both high schools. In a culture of top-down hierarchy, my for-us and by-us approach went against the grain and pushed everyone outside of their comfort zone. This push empowered teachers—some of Promise Academy’s greatest assets—to design the planning process for change. The working group built on the feedback from the curriculum retreat, where teachers had requested more teacher-led trainings and opportunities to co-plan with their peers. The group summary provides a snapshot of the group’s work and the remaining challenges (see Appendix T). I included the first meeting agenda, Conley’s Proficiency Approach to College and Career Readiness Self-Assessment, Bolstering College and Career Readiness Activity, and a Progress Summary (progress, remaining work, and considerations for implementation).

**Figure 12. Brief Summary of Curriculum Working Group Progress**

*College and Career Readiness Competencies Working Group.* The task of this group, to create competencies for college and career readiness, was adaptive by nature. No matter who you ask, almost everyone at HCZ will identify the same belief gap and opportunity and capacity gap: student accountability and agency. Handholding and lack of consequences for handing in late work signals some implicit bias about what students are capable of achieving. Members of this group represent the staff most responsible for creating the culture that ensures young people are college and career ready. Completing this task required honest conversations about the capacity it
will take to move Promise Academy forward. Given the diversity of membership, I focused the first few meetings on creating a holding environment to support open and honest engagement. Because some members had attended the authentic leadership session at the February One Promise retreat, the psychological safety underpinnings they had learned there carried into the group meetings. As with the other group, I provided scaffolds on Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness, on-track indicators, and designing competencies from idea to implementation.

The competencies group pushed the envelope as it conceptualized what college and career readiness means for Promise students and how Promise Academy can achieve that aspect of the mission. Even with some hidden perspectives, concerns, and fears about changing the original model, group members challenged themselves to think creatively about solving the adaptive challenge of consistently ensuring that Promise students graduate with non-cognitive as well as academic skills for college success. As I shared in the project description, the most active participants represented new staff members along with one seasoned staff member. One fear identified by the group members concerned fidelity of implementation: would their careful planning be carried out as they hoped? This concern is a real fear given the group members who planned the majority of this process. When people stop coming to meetings, it is usually a diagnostic cue for resistance or disagreement with change. While some of the absences concern time constraints, it will become important to check in on those absent to ensure their voices are included in the final planning stages. The competencies group raised the stakes for Promise Academy to improve its practice; I hope their fears do not come to fruition in Phases II and III.

The group summary provides a snapshot of the group’s work and the remaining challenges (see Appendix U). I included the first meeting agenda, Master list of the College and Career Readiness Competencies Brainstorm, Competency Implementation Activity: Elevate and Ideate, Current Practices College and Career Readiness Inventory, Conley’s Proficiency Approach to College and Career Readiness Self-Assessment, Narrowing the Competencies Activity, and a Progress
Summary (progress, remaining work, and considerations for implementation).

- Integrated Conley’s College and Career (C&C) Proficiencies
- Identified HCZ cultural challenges
- Developed master list of competencies
- Conducted Proficiencies Self-Assessment
- Started to finalize competencies

**Overall Progress**

**Remaining work**
- Finalize 3-5 competencies
- Determine pathways for development
- Build arc of competency development across 9-12 grades
- Create student and staff development plan

**Considerations for implementation**
- What are the safeguards to ensure the work is implemented with fidelity?
- Which HCZ stakeholders do we need to engage?
- How does this approach live within the “Whatever it Takes” culture?

**Figure 12. Brief Summary of College and Career Readiness Competencies Working Group**

*Holding Steady and Allowing a Crisis to Expand My Informal Authority*

Within a month of my return, an unexpected staffing change opened the door a little further for me. Dr. Speller asked me to step into the gap created by the staff member’s departure and assist with the curriculum supports in both schools. The crisis represented an opportunity to “galvanize attention on the unresolved issues” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 61). I believed this to be a blessing from God. Although it was tragic, the crisis in staffing gave me the chance to give the work back to the people with an added level of authorization and urgency. I seized the moment. The crisis opened the door for collaboration between the schools to think innovatively about their approach to schooling. When I sent the meeting requests, appointed members from both working groups accepted and arrived at meetings eager to move the work forward. Creating a balanced learning and execution environment in the working groups gave the people closest to the work greater autonomy and empowerment to design solutions. The changes also aligned with both the adaptive leadership framework and the Carnegie Foundation’s network improvement principles, which encouraged them to make the work problem-specific and user-centered. This level of authorization pushed my ability to influence the outcomes of the group in a more public way, placing the goals of Phase I back on the radar of staff, thereby increasing the odds of
adoption.

As I think about my theory of action as it relates to adaptive leadership, I now see that I neglected to include my utilization of the adaptive framework to guide my actions in the actual theory of action. I took for granted my use of adaptive leadership to guide my actions. I included aspects of the framework but from the standpoint of me leading others and not utilizing it to inform my thinking. I also realized the need to develop two holding environments: one of the working groups and one for the larger HCZ environment. These oversights created missed opportunities to help Dr. Speller form a larger holding environment within HCZ. The organizational context identified in Figure 10 evidences the lack of a holding environment to engage in open and honest conversations about the current high school structure and its effect on college and career readiness. What does this mean? While getting on the balcony and holding steady proved helpful in the long-run, I wonder the outcome if I got on the dance floor and attempted to strategize a plan for using the One Promise work to alleviate some of the external pressures. Had I better articulated my position, the Executive Director, and intentional use of adaptive leadership in my theory of action, it may have led to a different set of actions. Again, I deeply underestimated the politics and HCZ’s aversion to change. To truly address the root causes of college and career readiness issues, requires looking at the entire model, “whatever it takes” philosophy, K-8 approach to schooling, and the senior leadership. That is truly a huge undertaking. Until the conditions exist for that to occur, focusing on implementing the current solutions with fidelity provides a safe way for HCZ to test this change, keep what works, and then chip away at the other areas mentioned above.

Concluding Thoughts on the DID and Adaptive Leadership Analysis

Both the DID and adaptive leadership frameworks provided powerful analytical tool for determining whether my RKA and theory of action prepared me adequately to lead a model organization through an internal diagnostic process under the pressure of graduating its first full-pipeline class. Operating with informal authority in a highly politicized environment required
analytical tools that would let me quickly reach the heart of the issues while managing the nuances of leading adaptive change.

The DID framework helped me to fit a huge amount of interview data in the context of the school system. Moreover, DID also enabled me to identify the technical and adaptive challenges that corresponded with the various gaps. With the PELP coherence framework, DID allowed me to zero in on the major areas of concern about college readiness. The premise of DID involves ending educational inequity and thus it fits perfectly with the mission of HCZ to end generational poverty. The framework’s gaps offer a language that system-level leaders can use as a diagnostic tool when addressing challenges. Simply looking at the challenges of college and career readiness could lead one to think that only an instructional gap exists, but deeper exploration of the interview data uncovered connections between the five gaps. The belief gap launched the organization, while the fears associated with losing its prominence fed into the opportunity and capacity gap. This led to the innovation and support gap and produced stagnation, which created the instructional gap; now the administration has to address the outcome and accountability gap.

The adaptive leadership framework proved helpful as both an analytical lens and personal development tool. Knowledge of this framework allowed me to survive while leading at HCZ and avoid "being pushed to the sidelines” for being the physical manifestation of the controversial One Promise initiative. My frequent moves into the center of the work and away from it—from the balcony to the dance floor—clarified my strategies for navigating the politics of change inherent in leading HCZ through Phase I of One Promise. Quickly distinguishing the technical from the adaptive challenges saved me from the mistake of using technical fixes for adaptive changes. The practice of holding steady both helped and hindered the work; on the one hand, it helped by allowing me to fly under the radar and gather lots of interview data and observational data. It hindered me because holding steady also prolonged the start of the working groups because I delayed making the proposal to re-position the work until after January RCV. wanted to
make more progress and leave the group in a stronger place so as to avoid the HCZ tendency to react to its challenges rather than designing a long-term proactive strategy. Giving the work back to the people was one of the best decisions I made because it challenged HCZ to revisit its belief gap in the current staff to solve the problem. It also made the work more challenging because it left me vulnerable to people’s schedules and dispositions. The adaptive leadership framework was the source of the activities I used at every meeting to create a safe space so the group could address its challenges effectively.

During the interview process, I experienced a blind spot with respect to parent and community engagement. Although I did survey the parents, interviews would have permitted them to give more open-ended responses and offer their perspectives on schooling and reimagining. In many ways, I mirrored the HCZ tendency to “unintentionally” use parents as fully empowered partners in the education process rather than inviting them to meetings after decisions have been made. When I cut the parent interviews due to a lack of time, I missed a unique opportunity to meet them face-to-face and hear their unfiltered feedback. While, I still had their survey feedback to integrate into the planning process, I unintentionally silenced their voices. Additionally, I should have pushed Dr. Speller to reframe her language and to keep asking why her solution was consolidation; I feel like I am missing a hidden perspective on why that served as the original solution. All in all, these theories served me well in this work. One change I would make is to introduce the theoretical frameworks and languages to the team. I think transparency in that area would have bolstered the staff toolkit for how to conduct their own internal diagnostics when outside experts are not present. That would have crystallized giving the work and power back to the people. I hope the competencies and curriculum working groups’ recommendations and implementation plans are carried out. I believe wholeheartedly that the strategies designed by the teams can begin to address college and career readiness challenges. Another change I would make is to include Tuckman’s theory on exploring versus exploiting. HCZ staffers regard their national model status as sacred to their identity and can easily shift back
into that comfort zone when presented with the system’s failures. This is a natural tendency, given the function of the Practitioner Institute to scale the model and the foundations that use HCZ as the ideal way to meet the challenges of urban poverty. Tuckman’s (2004) explanation of how great companies failed over time because of their inability to perform the explore and exploit action could have sparked HCZ senior leaders to think differently about their approach. They too face the growing competition of other charter schools in Harlem and other organizations that seek to solve the seemingly intractable problem of ending generational poverty.

**Revised Theory of Action**

Starting with what works, I developed an asset and problem diagnosis strategy based on the PELP coherence model and Carnegie Foundation causal system analysis. I interviewed 24 school-based and non–school-based stakeholders, including people in development, the College Success Office, the Career Services Team, and the high school after-school program, as well as HCZ senior leaders. I used interview data to identify top assets and growth areas related to preparation and under-preparation. From there, I identified three major assets and five areas of growth and examples of what it looks like in practice. I analyzed parent survey results to gauge what parents perceived as Promise strengths and areas of growth and used aspects of the Career Services Office student survey to analyze Promise Academy student perspectives on their college preparation. I employed a root cause analysis to determine the curricular challenges that contribute to the under-preparation of Promise students. I ensured that collaborators were well informed on the diagnostic and planning processes and encouraged transparency by using a shared Google drive. Additionally, I documented all of our meetings via shared Google docs. I scaffolded staff comprehension of best practices for addressing college and career readiness. I launched the curriculum and competencies working groups to conduct school improvement planning and ensured diverse representation in the working groups across both Promise Academies and positional levels. The working group members drove the internal college and career readiness diagnostic and creative solutions process.
Hindsight is 20/20. If given the opportunity to redo this project, I would add more specificity to my theory of action. For example, I would identify the stakeholders responsible for authorizing the One Promise initiative. Knowing this would have led to more meetings and the development of bonds with people to convert them to endorsers. Seeking more input from the school leadership and senior leaders on the desired end state would have created more buy-in. The project lacked a clear communication plan; all the literature indicates this is key! I mirrored my environment by failing to make this a major priority. Establishing the working group earlier on would have allowed me to employ a PELP-like framework, in which I would train the teams on how to conduct their own diagnostic process while walking them through their school improvement process over the course of 10 months. That model would have allowed the group to establish short- and long-term outcomes for addressing the college and career readiness challenge and create more ownership to keep the work going in my absence.

Here are my additional takeaways from this project.

- Get clarity from key decision makers on the major problems driving the change.
- Ask a lot of questions to ascertain the organizational readiness for change as well as the urgency or ripeness of the problem.
- Repeatedly clarify the project scope with influential decision-makers.
- Establish a communication plan for continuously sharing the progress.
- Meet with key decision-makers early on in the process.
- Establish a clear and consistent message on the project scope and goals.
- Communicate insights about the initiative along the way.
- Establish psychological safety for fence-sitters and resistors to communicate their challenges with the change effort.
- Push stakeholders beyond identifying the problem as the absence of the solution.

The revised theory of action takes into account my overall analysis of the strategic project and key learning over the course of 10 months. Moreover, the changes represent what I learned
about how to position and lead change in the context of HCZ. I include my revised theory of action in the chart below.

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Then

We will collectively design a school reform process that honors and validates stakeholder perspectives and moves HCZ toward developing the best solutions to achieve the goal that “guarantees students are equipped to graduate from college.”

We will create a holding environment for a streamlined school improvement process that addresses systemic root causes, enables diverse stakeholders to develop the solutions for change, and ultimately move HCZ closer to consistently achieving its mission of ensuring Promise students are accepted by and succeed in college.
Implications for Self

I started residency with two overarching leadership goals: (1) learn how to effectively lead diverse stakeholders with competing interests through an intentional adaptive change process and (2) develop the mind-sets and behaviors for leading authentically with informal authority in a hierarchal organization. Informed by the adaptive leadership (AL) framework, I based my leadership skill development on increasing my effectiveness with implementing adaptive leadership, described as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 14). I believed the role of a resident aligns with AL because we operate from a place of informal authority. Organizations provide residents with fancy titles, but without formal positional authority on the permanent organization chart, residents occupy the space of informal authority. Although I had unknowingly led others through adaptive processes before, my HCZ residency represented the first intentional use of the AL lens to guide my leadership strategy. In this section, I provide an overview of my goals and conclude with key things I learned as a result of leading One Promise.

Residency Leadership Goals: Learn how to effectively lead diverse stakeholders with competing interests through an intentional adaptive change process, and develop the mind-sets and behaviors for leading authentically with informal authority in a hierarchal organization.

I created these goals because leading the reimagining high school experience consisted of a series of technical problems and adaptive challenges. Implementing these goals required developing a balance of knowledge (know), thoughts (be), and actions (do). Simply possessing the knowledge of the framework served as my foundation; however, integrating it into my mind-set and behavior proved to be the bulk of the challenge. I pondered whether or not I could experience the same level of success leading from a place of informal authority that I experienced with formal authority, especially in an organization where hierarchy matters and being a highly acclaimed model is at the core of its identity. Since hierarchy matters at HCZ, meeting with
stakeholders became a priority. Hearing from stakeholders allowed me to quickly discern where senior leaders stood on One Promise. These conversations revealed that stakeholders carried different theories about how to address the college readiness challenge of Promise students. I drew a stakeholder perspectives map to visualize the politics of change surrounding One Promise. This tool helped me see factions and loyalties as well as what each person stood to gain or lose from change. The technical aspects of identifying best practices, benchmarking Promise practices, and assembling staff for tasks were relatively easy; more difficult was blending different perspectives, discussing behavioral changes, and focusing on the work amid daily crises.

My frequent trips to the balcony for perspective brought together the politics surrounding the college and career readiness challenge. Withdrawing from the action also showed me I need to “give the work back to the people.” I wanted to break the habit of leaning on the “expert” to drive the change, especially since I know that resentment toward the outsider expert lurks behind that reliance. Given HCZ’s history of outsiders leading change, I empathized with staff sentiments. I wanted this to be a “for-us, by-us” One Promise planning experience, meaning that those closest to the work create the vision behind the change. I tried my best to break the paradigm of waiting for the expert or the authority to tell them how to solve the problem. Putting effort into using the working group meetings as sacred holding environments for open and honest communication became key to getting the ideas out, debating them, and selecting the best options. I learned trying to shift the organization to focus on collaboration is a lot harder than it appears, as evidenced by how long it took to give the work back to the people in the form of working groups.

I still contend adaptive leadership was the best model for my personal leadership development and strategy for leading change. Looking back, I wished that I had introduced the adaptive change language and DID gaps to the principals, working groups, and Dr. Speller earlier in the project. I opted to hold back for fear of appearing to be “Harvadesque.” This mind-set developed because I struggled with negotiating how to wear Harvard in a place sensitive to
outside threats. Now that I have some distance, I see that using that language earlier and sharing how it applied to the very concept of HCZ would have given the staff a common language to describe the challenges of achieving HCZ’s audacious mission in Central Harlem. It would have also pushed my learning on how to wear Harvard and share Harvard simultaneously. Adaptive leadership language could have empowered the team by giving them language to share their experiences and better understand why consistently achieving HCZ’s mission is hard.

**Lesson Learned:** *Getting on the balcony and holding steady is key to leading a national model through adaptive change.*

Leading a national model through an adaptive change is not an easy feat. It requires an immense amount of humility, patience, deference, and flexibility. I am still amazed that HCZ trusted an outsider with its crown jewel, Promise Academy. I approached this work with humility and deference because I realized the difficulty of leading adaptive work. I remain grateful to my studies with Professor Heifetz, which prepared me for the dangers of leading on the line. I started residency knowing that it was good to get on the balcony to take a wide-angle view of my context before acting, and this proved helpful for clarifying next steps. As I reflect on my personal leadership, however, I now see the need to balance my dance floor and balcony actions better.

Balancing time on the dance floor with time on the balcony is an ongoing area of growth for me and, I believe, for anyone who practices adaptive leadership. It is easy to get caught up in the action, but I missed a few chances to speak up and steer the project in a different direction, such as pushing Dr. Speller to “rebrand” *One Promise* and communicate the urgency for change. I think reframing would have built more momentum earlier in the project. Being on the balcony during this experience helped me depersonalize and focus on the ecosystem around me that created the conditions for equilibrium (harmony) and disequilibrium (productive conflict). Once I found my role and my place on the team and managed through the constantly shifting stages of authorization, I found myself on the dance floor more, making interventions in situations where earlier in the residency I might have remained silent. At times, I learned that “holding steady
under a barrage of criticism is not just a matter of courage; it also involves skill” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 160).

Lastly, leading on the line is dangerous and requires deep empathy work. This empathy allowed me to hold steady and understand the complexity of leading a national model during a difficult adaptive change. I continue to have a deep respect for the HCZ staff and our young people who overcome immense odds every day. Even with the organizational challenges, I cannot imagine Harlem without the HCZ. I felt the pressures of *getting it right* every day I walked through the St. Nicholas Community Houses to get to work. Even with frustrations, I always understood the congruent and competing interests that shape the ecosystem surrounding our children, HCZ, and the Harlem community. With compassion, I led on the line with empathy even while challenging those around me to step out of their comfort zone to prioritize what is best for the students and their families. Challenging them to deliver the solutions to their own problems. While leading on the line, I channeled three pieces of advice from members of my doctoral committee that kept things in perspective: (1) diagnose the ecosystem around the child; (2) people come to you as they are not as you want them to be; and (3) be willing to maneuver and adjust so that you can have a seat at the table. I did all of these. As a result of working at the HCZ, I have a humble and newfound appreciation for Prof. Heifetz’s book *Leadership on the Line*.

**Lessons Learned: Beneath the instructional gap are other adaptive challenges and gaps**

The HCZ seeks to consistently uphold the promise made to hundreds of Central Harlem families: their young people will receive a high-quality education that prepares them to be accepted by and succeed in college. *One Promise* offers the opportunity to strengthen the HCZ’s Zone P–16 educational pipeline by taking a deep dive at the current strengths and areas of growth of Promise Academy Charter high school. As the number of Promise full-pipeline (students enrolled since pre-K) cohorts continues to grow, the pressure will increase to produce college-ready young people who thrive in high school and college. At first glance this project may seem
to present only technical challenges: if there is a problem with college and career readiness, then implementing a college and career readiness curriculum would solve the issue. Viewing it that way might lead to a simple solution: fill the instructional gap and everything will fall into place. Even with my knowledge of adaptive leadership, I had to keep pushing myself to dig deeper to understand what is behind the college and career readiness challenge. The issue has plagued the past three graduating classes, which means it goes deeper than a simple curriculum fix. The stakeholder interviews uncovered DID gaps in the systems that facilitate under-preparation and showed how they worked together to produce the current results. Those contributing factors involved changes to mind-set as well as technical fixes such as improving teaching development. I also uncovered the other DID gaps in HCZ’s current model (see analysis). I learned to listen to the song beneath the words (understand the meaning behind what people said to me) and discovered that leading on the line is deep empathy work. Helping people manage the loss associated with adaptive change is often overlooked, and I only scratched the surface. I must admit this is still an area of growth for me. I understood the loss associated with change that Promise Academy staff experienced, but when I finally asked about the losses that students, staff, families, and teachers would experience if One Promise moved forward, I finally heard the song beneath the words—I heard what we were asking people to abandon in the face of the unknown. As a result of leading this work, I now understand the importance of problem analysis and diagnostic inquiries from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Those processes led to understanding the nuances of achieving a college and career readiness model at HCZ.
Implications for the Site

Develop a Clear and Consistent Message: Approach the Work from a College and Career Readiness Lens

Setting up One Promise for future success in Phases II and III will require a streamlined message that communicates the challenge it seeks to solve, the context, and specific solutions. That challenge is to address the college readiness of Promise high school graduates. One of the challenges with getting buy-in the first time stemmed from stakeholders becoming stuck on the building consolidation rather than fixing the college readiness issues. The leading message for this project should be driven by closing the college and career readiness gap. The need for (1) an intentional curriculum and rigorous college-level instruction throughout the school, (2) clarity around what it means to ensure Promise students are college and career ready, (3) an intentional college process starting in elementary school pipeline, (4) internal school self-assessment based on Conley’s four keys to college and career readiness proficiency approach, (5) sharing best practices and teacher talents between the two schools, and (6) offering a diverse and robust curriculum so students can have more college and major options after graduating from Promise. Some of these needs can be solved with a technical fix (curriculum, class scheduling), while others require adaptive solutions such as student competency development and addressing systemic roadblocks that prevent Promise staff from developing intentional systems to carry out their work. Heifetz believes that most difficult challenges require both technical and adaptive solutions. By addressing the technical fixes in combination with the adaptive ones, gatekeepers may soften their grip on their control of practices that prevent the team from employing more innovative practices on a daily basis.

Once there is clear leadership on the message, it should be shared across the organization. The One Promise steering committee started to draft an initial message at the February retreat, and I worked with another steering committee to draft a One Promise overview to be shared and
voted upon in April. It is important that everyone shares the same message and vision about *One Promise*. Right now, if I asked five people to explain *One Promise*, I would receive five different explanations. If this change is going to survive, it must map onto the current college and career readiness problems/challenges as a solution that meets those needs. Almost everyone agrees that HCZ needs to address the college and career readiness challenge, so that agreement should leveraged by using the college readiness language versus “combination or consolidation.”

The mission of Promise Academy directly calls for a college and career readiness approach to schooling. Because of the mission, HCZ should have an intentional college and career readiness approach that extends through the entire K–12 pipeline, so that a student moves seamlessly across each key transition point, supported by staff at both ends of the pipeline. Given the current organizational dynamics, I recommend starting with a 9–12 intentional approach, implementing the work from competencies and curriculum groups with fidelity, and starting in eighth grade and slowly work toward the lower grades. I also believe sharing the proficiency approach in a digestible way with families and HCZ stakeholders can help people see how Promise Academy high schools approach college and career readiness. From what I observed, the academies need pathways to intentional implementation of mind-sets and behaviors associated with college and career success, equipping students and staff members with the knowledge and tools to develop those mind-sets and integrate them into their daily behaviors. It is what Dr. Speller called for in *Life after the Zone* (2015): a move from rote memorization toward independence and critical thinking skills. It is the *know, think, act, and go* proficiency approach, which Conley suggests provides students with the skills, strategies, knowledge, and techniques to thrive in any postsecondary setting. With this intentional approach, HCZ will begin to confidently state that every young person who graduates from Promise Academies will be college and career ready.

**Address the Belief Gap and Opportunity and Capacity Gap**

The stakeholder interviews as well as Speller’s work (2015) revealed the opportunity and
capacity gaps within the HCZ (this is a gap in alignment between a system’s enacted policies and its espoused values and policies). As I continued to hear some people’s “song beneath the words,” I found their comments fixated on team dynamics, ignoring the persistent challenges of achieving outcomes. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) suggest that language fixated on dynamics instead of outcomes “indicates a problem with being accountable for the outcomes” (p. 76), or blaming the people and not the system. If there is not a system to carry out the work consistently, HCZ should not expect to consistently achieve its mission. To address opportunity and capacity gaps, one must ask if the current curriculum offers multiple opportunities to develop know, think, act, and go skills, strategies, and techniques. If yes, then how? If no, then why? Another task is to explore which Promise policies facilitate college and career readiness mind-sets based on the mission and on Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness. Important next steps are to use the working groups diagnoses of the aforementioned questions and move into action to close the gaps. Both working groups’ gap analysis identified HCZ’s college and career readiness pockets of excellence and areas of growth.

I also think embedded within opportunity and capacity gaps are belief gaps about students and adults. The underlying belief gaps often drive the opportunity and capacity gaps. HCZ senior leaders must inquire if a combined belief/opportunity and capacity gap about adult and student learning exists at HCZ. From my observations, the gaps exist much less around whether Promise students can get accepted by a college or if they should go to college. It is clear both of those beliefs (all kids can get accepted by and succeed in college) are deeply embedded in the mission, vision, and pre-K–high school experiences. The gap manifests in whether the students will thrive if we relax our model and allow for safe opportunities to develop independence and engage in productive struggle. I formed the competencies working group in an attempt to address the belief and opportunity and capacity gaps by starting group discussion about adult and student learning capacity. Looking at these gaps can help HCZ understand where the misalignment occurs that leads to inconsistently achieving the college-ready mission. Given the
previous discussion of the receptivity of the competencies across old and new staff necessitates special attention to ensure implementation occurs with fidelity and the work of this important group does not get placed on a shelf.

Get on the Balcony: See the System, Learn from the System, and Execute from That Learning)

In a high-stakes, high-accountability environment, most people are caught up in the day-to-day crises, which leave few people to zoom out and see the system. This leads to HCZ operating from a reactive stance rather than proactive. Frontline and functional teams live on the dance floor and often get on the balcony only when the quality team or evaluation team hauls them off the dance floor. While there are benefits to this approach and its direct feed into the “whatever it takes” philosophy, it limits those closest to the work from seeing their role as creative problem-solver versus doing what they are told from those in leadership positions. Edmondson calls this type of work execution as efficiency versus execution as learning. It took me until January 2016 to realize that Promise Academy operates in the mode of execution as efficiency most of the time; that realization only came after I saw the need to shift the project work from learning to a healthy balance of execution and learning. In my theory of action, I sought to learn before acting. This instinct went against the grain where people around me wanted execution. With my original approach to One Promise, I realized I was asking HCZ to function in a way that was antithetical to its normal way of being. While execution is important, taking time to learn from practice is equally important. The current practice of using data days to explore student mastery of the Regents materials could be used to explore effectiveness in other areas of the school. Building on that practice and integrating it across the school in all content areas is a practice worth pursuing. Simple things such as building reflection time into meetings provide self-checks to measure the effectiveness of the current approaches on a daily basis. Strong execution can only take an organization so far; it is not enough if HCZ plans to stay current with the needs of its ever-changing population.
Using General Motors as an example, Edmondson (2008) writes that “great execution is hard to sustain—not because people get tired of working too hard, but because the managerial mind set that enables efficient execution inhibits employees’ ability to learn and innovate—the focus on getting things done, and done right, crowds out the experimentation and reflection vital to sustainable success” (p. 6).

In order to make the shift, Edmondson notes, psychological safety must be cultivated in the work environment. Psychologically safe work cultures ensure staff are not penalized for asking for help or admitting mistakes (Edmondson, 2008). Very few high-stakes, high-accountability workplaces truly boast an environment of psychological safety. I argue that given the critical nature of HCZ, psychological safety must be fostered. Starting small with creating psychological safety can begin to address some of the root causes of teacher, staff, and student retention issues. Moving toward execution as learning requires helping staff to learn faster so the teams know what works and focus on that. By pausing to get on the balcony, teams can see the system, learn from the system, and execute from a learning stance. Edmondson offers four steps for creating culture that focuses on execution as learning (I provide examples for adoption in parenthesis):

1. Provide process guidelines (establishing standard work practices, such as integrating Conley’s four keys, would address the “intentional structures and systems for consistently carrying out the work” identified during the asset and problem diagnosis).

2. Provide tools that enable employees to collaborate in real time—both online and in-person collaboration (continue joint college process meetings and curriculum and competencies working groups).

3. Collect process data (focus on data that show how the process unfolds and identify what went right/wrong and why. Similar to the way the joint college team use the Success for the class of 2017 goals to benchmark).

4. Institutionalize disciplined reflection (spend time reviewing process data across the
system, such as internal diagnostic processes like the stakeholder interviews).

Some of this work has begun with the joint college processes and can easily be continued by expanding the lens to include the entire high school system. However, sacred time must be carved out for this to occur. I underscore the importance of moving toward execution as learning will be key to the success of *One Promise*.

**Give the Work Back to the People: Utilize the Pipeline and the Power of HCZ Stakeholders**

As HCZ continues to move forward with *One Promise*, it is even more important that leadership use school-based and non-school-based stakeholders. Stakeholders (HCZ, parents, board partners) are deeply invested in the success of Promise students; therefore, it’s smart to think about specific ways to involve them to leverage their expertise for student learning. When the high school leaders become clear on their approach to schooling, they will be poised to figure out how others can support the school’s success in specific and tangible ways. Giving the work back to the people to design a 9–12 curriculum and competencies leveraged the creativity throughout the system to develop innovative solutions for the college and career readiness challenge. This process validated staff and allowed them to learn skills to bring best practices into their work and to respond to challenges with a long-term intentional approach versus the typical reactive short-term fix. Continuing to convene the *One Promise* steering group provides an advisory board capacity to ensure all the moving pieces flow and make adjustments and recommendations as needed. That group also can begin to harness the power of after-school programs and day school to partner on a holistic college and career readiness model. Pushing interventions into the K-8 pipeline and sharing data can be a way to mitigate some of the academic deficits of the incoming freshman class. Some charter schools with pipeline models push into middle school with interventions and host summer camps before high school to start the transition process and begin to close achievement gaps. Reimagining the partnerships with eighth grade is another innovative way to push into college and career readiness earlier. Lastly, using parents as partners is key. Hosting a college and career readiness series to help parents understand
the essential mind-set, knowledge, strategies, and techniques that are key to college success will
strengthen what happens in school with reinforcement at home. It takes a village to raise a child,
and I believe Promise can be more intentional with how it activates its village (community,
parents, Board, donors, HCZ leaders, school leaders, partner organizations).
Implications for Sector

Address the Belief Gap That Keeps Educational Inequity as the Status Quo

In their chapter, “Illusion of a Broken System,” Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) were brutally honest about fixing systems with entrenched problems that people view as dysfunctional: “embarrassing or not, the organization prefers the current situation to trying something new, where the consequences are unpredictable and likely to involve losses for key parties” (p. 18). As harsh as it sounds, it makes sense. We have all heard the old adage that situations are designed to get the results they currently achieve. Many in the education reform sector believe that adage, we continuously fail to implement long-term sustainable change that eliminates systemic inequities of the status quo.

What do I mean by this? There is a market for education reform where groups come in and develop elaborate plans to change the system. Once implemented, the changes and improvements last for a short time and then the system usually flips back to the status quo when key personnel leave the organization. This occurs because we approach these change processes as “fixing” a system and a people rather than helping all stakeholders understand how to stomach the uncertainty that comes with taking risks and shifting power dynamics in the name of achieving equity. The key parties with traditional power in education are district leadership, school leadership, boards of education, investors, long-term influential employees, unions, and local government associations. Many in those categories do not see the totality of the gravity of the broken system. Arguably, if you ask those without traditional power (students, families, community leaders), many will tell you the system does not work for them, and therein lies the conundrum. How do you approach systemic change from two opposing orientations?

Answering this question means education reformers have to own their belief gap about “the assumptions, values, and beliefs they hold about organizations, students, teachers, administrators, and communities’ capacity to learn, grown, and improve” (Jewell-Sherman, n.d.).
What do reformers believe about the ability to learn and grow of communities of color? If reformers believe communities do not have the capacity to improve themselves without the help of the wealthy donors or strategists from well-resourced backgrounds, then we will continue to see the same dynamics play out. I believe reformers enter communities with open hearts and a genuine desire to help. However, that genuine desire never releases the full power to communities of color and other underrepresented groups. The power remains tethered to the outside philanthropist/problem-solver, thereby creating a dependency on outsiders to “save” communities. “Saving” often comes in the form of foundation dollars to support communities and consultant organizations that guide community changes. A frequent condition of foundation support is that programs run according to foundation beliefs about how communities should learn and grow rather than tailoring strategies to meet community needs. Burton and Barnes (2017) challenged foundations to reframe their beliefs about what communities can achieve with or without their support, challenging them to alter their model from one of charity to one of community empowerment and social justice.

Heifetz et al. (2009) note that anyone who points out the disconnects or the gaps in espoused and enacted values is not popular because they are trying to prove that something that works for them is dysfunctional, which ends up in a battle (p. 18). This truth emerges as high-stakes and high-accountability charter schools start to realize that the strategies that helped them successfully raise the achievement rates of high-poverty populations do not correlate with college success for their graduates. How do you encourage an organization to modify a strategy that appears to work for them? Part of the answer is to discover data showing that the long-term effects of the model require change. This is especially true when people seek to name the racial and class belief gaps that underscore much of the work being done in communities that keep them dependent on the outsider instead of placing the power into the hands of those in the community. All education stakeholders must ask themselves if they have the courage to address the adaptive challenge of achieving educational equity. Thus, what I propose is a shift from applying quick
top-down technical fixes to address educational inequity toward working instead with a wider set of key stakeholders, getting their perspective on the effectiveness of the system and finding common elements of assets and growth. From there, we can use their synergy to begin the tough conversations on taking risks to address the major issues. In essence, I advocate for giving the work back to the people to determine the innovative practices that will solve their community challenges. I recognize that this seems time-consuming in the face of persistent failures that require quick change, but the current process is not working. We need a new approach that involves engaging the full table versus a selected few. I suggest we make time to address the adaptive challenges with new strategies and pepper in technical fixes to solve the smaller ones. As Heifetz suggests, it may be that we can move faster by moving slower, wasting less time with mistakes and recovery.

There is an ecosystem around young people in high poverty communities that holds the “broken system” in place. That system sends the message that you cannot learn unless millions of dollars are invested in your school, outsiders send in their solutions, and you behave according to the standards of the White upper middle class. That statement may sound harsh, but it is the reality of the current approach to education reform, which places communities at the outskirts of designing solutions to improve their community rather than at the center. If we put our stock in the people, then we need to value those who work in education (e.g., teachers, communities) and make sure they have all the tools needed to run an effective educational system for all our young people.

**Name College and Career Readiness as an Adaptive Challenge**

Ensuring college and career readiness is a national challenge; it is not unique to Promise Academies. The national college matriculation, remediation, and persistence rates bear this out. These rates are even more startling when you disaggregate data by communities of color and low-income students. Many solutions, such as no-excuses charter schools, produce short-term results but fail to have long-term impacts across racial, ethnic, and class lines. The difficulty of ensuring
that all young people are college and career ready plagues all schools. To name this as an adaptive challenge would require the United States to admit that as a system we fail to consistently deliver high-quality education for all. College and career readiness is an adaptive challenge because our schools were not set up to educate everyone to go to college. The foundational core of the educational system is broken. Therefore, to address the national college and career readiness crisis, we have to fundamentally rethink schooling and then offer incentives for creative thinking outside the box to address this issue. There is a clear urgency to get this right because of the national focus on postsecondary degree attainment. Around the country the message is loud and clear: we need to prepare young people for college and career readiness. As of the year 2020, 65% of jobs will require postsecondary training. We find ourselves in a ripe time of strong public and political will when we could truly advance college access and completion for all. However, the incentives in the current education system do not align with this national need.

At present high school incentives are based on student performance on state tests and sometimes performance on ACT/SAT; no rewards go to schools that holistically prepare their young people for postsecondary pathways. Instead of basing rewards on standardized scores, why not incentivize schools that provide non-cognitive skill development, those who cultivate Conley’s know, think, act, and go skills in students? Why not incentivize schools where young people thrive throughout their high school years and go on to college completion. Districts and Charter Management Organizations should ask schools to provide strategies for preparing young people to be college and career ready. Traveling the country, I have asked educational leaders with college and career readiness in their mission statements about their intentional approach to accomplish that goal; almost none of them provide a response that demonstrates intentionality. Many operate without a clear strategy and remain stuck in the rut of some people succeeding while others do not.

In the age of the White House Summit on Next Generation High Schools and Super XQ
goals, we must think about how to institutionalize the reimagination of high schools outside of a few schools that win high-dollar grants or those with donors. Moreover, how do we provide a true college and career readiness approach for all young people despite their demographics? Demography should not be destiny when it comes to adequately preparing all kids for college and career. Many of the P–20 councils lack the funds and accountability structures to hold K–12 and higher education responsible for student progression to and through the high school to college pipeline. I propose writing these measures into federal, local, and state legislation as a means to hold communities accountable for providing equitable experiences to all young people. When U.S. high schools integrate the knowledge, strategies, techniques, and skills for all students to become college and career ready, the country can truly say that educational inequity has been obliterated.

We cannot keep applying the same technical fixes of unintentional approaches to prepare kids for college by using basic checklists. We must think about using best practices like Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness as a starting point for communities to diagnose the current state and convene stakeholders to develop creative solutions to address this challenge. To do that, we have to first believe that all kids are able to learn college and career readiness techniques, strategies, and skills and that they have the ability to thrive in college.

**Explore and Exploit Success: Continuous Improvement Is Key to Ongoing Success**

Organizations like HCZ must consistently reflect on their practices in order to ensure their current and future success. I used the stakeholder interviews to model this process by asking stakeholders to get on the balcony, to look internally at practices that contribute to and detract from successful preparation for high school and college success. That information provided a multi-stakeholder lens to dissect the system, capitalize on the assets, and think about solving the problems. Conducting a large-scale internal review of the effectiveness of the theory of change and of achieving their mission is key for long-term organizational success. Many high-profile organizations like Teach for America and GEAR-UP have had to conduct these internal
In order to stay abreast of the needs of the current times, Harvard Business School Professor Tushman and coauthor O’Reilly (2004) encourages organizations to become ambidextrous by exploring and exploiting while they are on top of their game. Tushman and O’Reilly offer examples of what caused organizations like Polaroid, Ford, IBM, and others to decline at the height of their success. Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky also note a similar example with the fall of GM, cited earlier in this capstone. O’Reilly and Tushman (2004) argued that the companies failed because they rested on their laurels while at the top and missed the cues from their authorizing environment that signaled changing customer needs. Because these organizations focused solely on exploiting their current strengths, they missed the new competition slowly moving into the market and responding to the changed needs of customers. Over time, the competitor replaces the national powerhouse. O’Reilly and Tushman (2004) encourages organizations to explore innovation while they’re at the height of their success while still exploiting their success. Exploring innovation while maximizing their current successes can help innovative educational organizations and schools focus on diagnosing the changing needs of the populations they serve. Adopting this continuous improvement process is essential to meeting the changing needs of students and families in the education system. Educational organizations have to figure out a way to constantly review, revise, and innovate in the face of continuous data feeds. Even well-intentioned and well-thought-out models like TFA, GEAR-UP, and HCZ need periodic reviews to ensure that they are actually structured to deliver on what their mission indicates is their purpose.

While most educational organizations have continuous improvement cycles, none truly operate like an explore-and-exploit model that allows for both affirmation of success and innovating for the future. The explore-and-exploit concept may also help these national models think critically while retaining their sacred identities as national models, thereby providing the identity-based courage to truly learn and grow as the community needs change.
Conclusion

The quest to achieve educational equity in the United States appears to require the mind-sets and behaviors of adaptive leadership. The process of guiding HCZ through an internal analysis of how effectively it makes students ready for college and career epitomized Heifetz’s concept of leading on the line. The audacious mission of the HCZ Promise Academy Charter high school—to ensure that all kids are accepted by and succeed in college—coupled with handling the daily crises occurring in the lives of students and the community elevates the criticality to deliver on that mission with as little error as possible. A well-known organization like HCZ could have rested on its laurels because its high school and college graduation rates surpass the national averages of low-income, first-generation African American students. However, given HCZ’s commitment to delivering excellent services to young people and their families, the organization decided to embark on the process of revealing aspects of its model that work and several parts that require immediate improvement. The high-stakes, high-accountability environment of HCZ can sometimes push staff to focus more on execution than on learning from their practices and their high school through college pipeline data. With its first full-pipeline cohort of graduates in the class of 2017, it is important to ensure that Promise Academy high schools are designed to produce the type of high-quality results required to guarantee that all its students are set up for college success.

My Ed.L.D. residency gave me the opportunity to help HCZ dig deep into the high school structure to determine its current assets and challenges and how to get to the root of its growing challenge of preparing college- and career-ready graduates. I designed Phase I with two overarching objectives: determine the current assets and challenges in the system from a multiple-stakeholder perspective by collaboratively developing the strategies for system improvement. Leading this type of organizational diagnosis as an outsider presented its share of political challenges. Asking a highly acclaimed national model to consider altering its structure without a
guarantee for success pushed some staff to the frontier of their competence. Some HCZ staff wanted to dig deep, but other resisted. This led to the need to manage politics in order to position this important work where staff were empowered to take the lead in addressing their college and career readiness challenges creatively. The steadfast commitment to “get it right for kids and their families” prevailed as dynamics shifted and the momentum of the work picked up, allowing time to start to create solutions before residency ended.

Using the findings from the RKA that focused on problem diagnosis, school improvement, and organizational change, I developed the following theory of action:

If I

• systematically and intentionally listen to voices from PA I, PA II, and HCZ partners, use that information to guide the reimagination of the high school experience,

• provide a holding environment for stakeholders to engage in open and honest conversations about the gaps in effectiveness within the current high school structure,

If I

• equip Promise staff and additional collaborators with tools for school improvement (diagnosis, analysis, and improvement planning)

Then

• we will collectively design a school reform process that honors and validates stakeholder perspectives and moves HCZ toward developing the best solutions to achieve the goal that guarantee students are equipped to graduate from college.

Given the adaptive nature of HCZ’s approach to eliminating generational poverty for the Harlem community, I utilized Jewell-Sherman’s DID framework for school system improvement and Heifetz’s adaptive leadership framework to analyze how the project unfolded over the course of
Throughout the residency, I experienced a variety of successes and challenges with leading Phase I of One Promise. While the DID framework elucidated the gaps across the school system, I found myself employing adaptive leadership tactics to keep the work at the center of attention in the midst of HCZ’s inertia, which often allowed crises to engulf the day. Creating a school improvement process that honored, validated, and included stakeholders in the change process required an immense amount of work and commitment from HCZ staff and me to push through politics and ego and do what we know is right to address the college and career readiness challenges. The successes and failures can be explained by getting on the balcony, holding steady, giving the work back to the people, creating a holding environment, and allowing a crisis to expand my informal authority. Even with this, I underestimated the difficulty of leading change at HCZ and the multiple holding environments it would take to facilitate that. Here is what worked: the stakeholder interviews, asset and problem diagnosis, root cause analysis, using DID and adaptive leadership as analytical frameworks, and introducing the idea of marrying best practices with on-the-ground HCZ knowledge. Things that didn't work were lack of communication and clarity around the work in the greater HCZ/Promise ecosystem; positioning the work for success, given the highly politicized culture; excluding other HCZ voices during the initial One Promise strategy sessions; and not teaching the HCZ team the adaptive leadership and DID frameworks. I also missed the opportunity to engage Dr. Speller as a partner so we could simultaneously build holding environments. Here’s what surprised me: the amount of time it took to navigate the politics, the communication and lack of transparency of various HCZ units, and the disconnect between K–8 and high school with regard to their approaches to schooling and college and career readiness. A diverse team of stakeholders began to develop a comprehensive 9–12 foundational curriculum based on Conley’s proficiency approach to college and career readiness; started to develop competencies to guide the personal, social, and academic development of college- and career-ready Promise high school students; and will deliver a set of
recommendations for Phases II and III of One Promise. Even though I am confident the solutions are strong, I’m concerned about implementation with fidelity given reactive nature of HCZ. In the face of high stakes and high accountability, I commend the HCZ Promise Academy team members for trusting an outsider to lead them into the next unknown territory of school improvement. I leave HCZ and Promise Academy leadership with the following considerations for continuing the momentum of *One Promise*:

- Develop a clear and consistent message as you approach the work from a college and career readiness lens.
- Continue to address the belief and opportunity and capacity gaps that threaten the consistent delivery of the Promise Academy mission.
- Get on the balcony (see the system, learn from the system, and execute from that learning).
- Give the work back to the people by utilizing the power of stakeholders and the HCZ pipeline.

Before it became trendy to take responsibility for making sure all students succeed from birth to college, HCZ already owned that responsibility. HCZ’s initial strategy allowed it to achieve monumental success in a relatively short time, but in the face of changing demands for access to high-quality education that prepares students for college and career success, Promise Academy must seriously consider rethinking its current delivery method. It should focus first on employing solutions that address the root causes of the system’s most pressing challenges and then providing the structures and processes for consistently carrying out standards of practices to achieve the college and career readiness expectations of its mission. Leaning into the changes put forth by Phase I will require HCZ and Promise staff to leverage their major assets: “whatever it takes philosophy,” teacher commitment to student success, and the current college-going culture to usher students, family, teachers, and staff to the next phase of *One Promise*. Harlem is changing
and its fate is unknown. The community still needs HCZ; it is truly Harlem’s beacon of hope. I wholeheartedly believe Promise Academy high schools can and will continue to set the standard for what it means to truly *crush* the odds of generational poverty by consistently preparing all its graduates to succeed in high school and college. If actualized, HCZ’s new and improved college and career readiness approach will transform not only the lives of Harlem youth but of the entire world.
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Appendices

Appendix A

HCZ Mission Statement & Overview of the Pipeline

HCZ Mission Statement:
The Harlem Children’s Zone is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty in Central Harlem by working at scale to build community, strengthen families, and ensure our children succeed from birth through college.

We make sure:

- Our children become curious, self-sufficient, life-long learners.
- Our parents and caregivers are engaged as partners.
- Our children demonstrate perseverance, so when they hit a roadblock, they work their way through it until they succeed.
- We create opportunities for our children to explore ideas and feelings through the visual and performing arts.

Pipeline of Services

The HCZ Pipeline, or continuum of services, provides children and families with a seamless series of free, coordinated, best-practice programs. We focus on the needs of children at every developmental stage with specific programs addressing pre-natal care, infants, toddlers, elementary school, middle school, adolescents, and college.

Academic excellence is a principal goal of the HCZ Pipeline, but high-quality schools are only one of the means we use to achieve it. Others include nurturing stable families, supporting youth development, improving health through fitness and nutrition, and cultivating engaged and involved adults and community stakeholders.

Children can enter the HCZ Pipeline at any age and they will be supported with high-quality programs. We have aggressive outreach efforts and multiple entrance points because we want families to easily access the HCZ Pipeline whenever they are able to do so. Once they have entered, we do not want them to leave. We promise parents that if their children regularly attend our programs, we will prepare them for college. We have made good on that promise, even when children first enter the HCZ Pipeline in their teens. Today, HCZ has approximately 500 students in college who participated only in our after-school programs, and not in our charter schools or early childhood programs. However, we have found that the earlier a child enters and the longer he or she remains in the HCZ Pipeline, the greater the cumulative impact.

Overall, we seek: (1) maximize educational achievements for poor children; (2) ensure that each of the programs in the pipeline is strong and incorporates best practices; (3) foster strong links across programs to smooth transitions and guarantee that programs are pedagogically continuous; (4) stay community-based and responsive to local community needs; and (5) provide relevant data to program staff so that they can improve services, and to policymakers and decision-makers so that they can get the best return on their investments.

Each of the HCZ programs has been developed using hard evidence of what works for poor children and their parents. All HCZ programs, when looked at individually, are effective. But the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. HCZ Pipeline programs consistently produce outcomes that meet or exceed nationally, state, and city averages.

From “The Whatever It Takes” White Paper on the Harlem Children’s Zone
Appendix B

Harlem Children's Zone

PROGRAM KEY

- Purple = Early Childhood
- Pink = Middle School
- Blue = College
- Orange = Elementary
- Teal = High School
- Green = Family and Community
Appendix C
Promise Academy I and II Profile

Promise Academy Mission Statement:
The mission of the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy Charter School (HCZ Promise Academy) is to provide high quality, standards-based academic programs for students, grades K-12, from underserved communities and underperforming school districts and to provide students with the skills they need to be accepted by and succeed in college. HCZ Promise Academy promotes high achievement in all subjects through a demanding curriculum, extensive supportive services and the use of data-driven teaching methods. HCZ Promise Academy is committed to promoting academic accomplishment, positive character development, healthy lifestyles and leadership skills. In partnership with the Harlem Children’s Zone, HCZ Promise Academy addresses the educational and developmental needs of each student.
Appendix D

Secondary and Collegiate Programs Areas of Responsibility

Executive Director for Secondary and Collegiate Programs

- College Success Office
- Post-Graduate Institute
- Career Services
- Promise Academy I
- Promise Academy II
- High School
Appendix E
One Promise Stakeholders

One Promise
Appendix F
Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework

Coherence Framework
We developed the PELP Coherence Framework to help leaders recognize the interdependence of various aspects of their school district – its culture, systems and structures, resources, stakeholder relationships, and environment – and to understand how they reinforce one another to support the implementation of an improvement strategy. The framework has roots in what business has taught us about organizational alignment. However, that knowledge has been elaborated by what we know about reform in education. Throughout its development, the framework has been informed by our interactions with senior leaders of large urban districts who face unique managerial challenges because of the size and complexity of their school systems, and often because of the poverty of the communities they serve as well. Putting a district-wide strategy into practice requires building a coherent organization that connects to teachers’ work in classrooms and enables people at all levels to carry out their part of the strategy. The framework identifies the organizational elements critical to high performance and poses a series of diagnostic questions about each element, all in an effort to bring them into coherence with the strategy and with each other.

The framework assists with achieving and sustaining coherence by:
- Connecting the instructional core with a district-wide strategy for improvement.
- Highlighting district elements that can support or hinder effective implementation.
- Identifying interdependencies among district elements.
- Recognizing forces in the environment that have an impact on the implementation of strategy.

Key framework elements include:
Adapted from Tushman and O'Reilly's Congruence Model, 2002
- **Instructional core**: The core includes three interdependent components: teachers' knowledge and skill, students' engagement in their own learning, and academically challenging content.
- **Theory of Change**: The organization's belief about the relationships between certain actions and desired outcomes, often phrased as an "if… then…” statement. This theory links the mission of increased performance for all students to the strategy the organization will use to achieve that goal.
• **Strategy:** A coherent set of actions a district deliberately undertakes to strengthen the instructional core with the objective of raising student performance district-wide. Gaining coherence among actions at the district, school, and classroom levels will make a district's chosen strategy more scalable and sustainable.

• **Stakeholders:** The people and groups inside and outside of the district - district and school staff, governing bodies, unions and associations, parents and parent organizations, civic and community leaders and organizations.

• **Culture:** The predominant norms, values, and attitudes that define and drive behavior in the district.

• **Structure:** Structures help define how the work of the district gets done. It includes how people are organized, who has responsibility and accountability for results, and who makes or influences decisions. Structures can be both formal (deliberately established organizational forms) and informal (the way decisions get made or the way people work and interact outside of formal channels).

• **Systems:** School districts manage themselves through a variety of systems, which are the processes and procedures through which work gets done. Systems are built around such important functions as career development and promotion, compensation, student assignment, resource allocation, organizational learning, and measurement and accountability. Most practically, systems help people feel like they do not have to "reinvent the wheel" when they need to get an important, and often multi-step, task done.

• **Resources:** Managing the flow of financial resources throughout the organization is important, but resources also include people and physical assets such as technology and data. When school districts carefully manage their most valuable resource--people--and understand what investments in technology and data systems are necessary to better support teaching and learning, the entire organization is brought closer to coherence.

• **Environment:** A district's environment includes all the external factors that can have an impact on strategy, operations, and performance (i.e. regulations and statutes, contracts, funding and politics).
Appendix G
One Promise Parent Survey

SURVEY PURPOSE
The purposes of the parent survey were to gather information from parents on what we do well and what we need to do to better serve their students. The Executive Director for Secondary and Collegiate Programs invited current parents to participate in the anonymous survey. The hope was to use this information to better partner with parents and ensure their voices are included in the planning process. 41 parents participated in the survey.

DEMOGRAPHICS (N=41)
For parents who took the survey, we had distributive mix across the grades.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
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</table>

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND SUMMARIES
We designed the survey to gather feedback from parents on various aspects of the school experience including course options, college preparation, extracurricular activities, as well over thoughts on our strengths and areas of growth. The subsequent information includes the survey questions, graphs (for Likert responses) and categories (for qualitative questions). Data from the qualitative questions were coded, categorized, and reported based on the frequency of responses.

Question 1: What aspects of Promise Academy High School do you think we do well? (select all that apply). If you do not see an option that represents your perspective, use the "other" option to write-in your response.
- The greatest areas of strength included: Engaging Parents, After school, Preparing students for college and careers, Bard Early College, College Planning, AP and General Course offerings.
Question 2: What aspects of Promise Academy High School do you think we need to get better at doing? (select all that apply) If you do not see an option that represents your perspective, use the "other" option to write in your response.

- The biggest areas of growth were Opportunities to travel internationally, After school, Summer Exposures, Student Clubs and Organizations, and School Culture.

Question 3: What type of extracurricular activities would you like to see for your students (for example, internships, plays, etc.)?

- The activities with the most responses included:
  - Internships (STEM and career interest)
  - Plays
  - Sports (swimming, soccer, lacrosse, etc.)

- Other responses included:
  - Leadership/Life skills program
  - Choir

Question 4: What type of classes would you like to see offered to your students?

- Business
- Foreign language (French, other than Spanish)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM, robotics, computer science, graphics, etc.)
- Driving
- Career/Trade (home economics, hands-on/shop, fashion industry, etc.)
- Arts (music, dance, etc.)
- Soft skills & College readiness (public speaking, citizenship, college prep, etc.)
Question 5: What do we do well with the college preparation and planning process? (select all that apply) If you do not see an option that represents your perspective, use the "other" option to write-in your response.

- College Tours
- Offering Advanced Placement courses
- SAT/ACT Prep
- Helping your student choose which school to apply to that best meets their academic & career goals

Question 6: What do we need to get better at doing with the college preparation planning process? (select all that apply) If you do not see an option that represents your perspective, use the "other" option to write-in your response.

- Applying for scholarships
- Helping your student choose which school to apply to that best meets their academic and career goals
- Understanding the costs of college
- Understanding the services provided by the College Success Office

CONCLUSION AND THEMES

Completed voluntary by parents, this survey provides initial insights on areas of strength and growth for Promise Academy high school. This information should be used as helpful insight to inform the conversations for “reimagining the high school experience.”

Emerging themes:

- Parents want more diverse course offerings and extracurricular activities.
  - Supported by responses to questions 2, 3, 4
- Parents want to expand their knowledge about the college process and Promise supports with the college process.
  - Supported by responses to questions 2, 4, 6
- Parents felt Promise did well with helping students prepare for college in some areas such as course offerings and college planning.
  - Supported by responses to questions 1 and 5

Based on the themes, Promise Academy should consider bringing more opportunities to help the students become more well-rounded through their academic and co-curricular activities. Also, parents appear satisfied with the college planning process and exposing their students to different types of colleges; however, they desire more knowledge on the financial aspects, in-house HCZ college support services, and how to help their students select the best college match.
Appendix H
School-based Interview Agenda

INTERVIEW AGENDA

WELCOME (1 minute)
Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. I appreciate your willingness to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW (1 minute)
“Re-imagination of the high school experience,” which involves reflecting upon our current work with preparing our students to persist to and through the high school and college pipeline. A core part of this process entails hearing from stakeholders to get an understanding of what we do well and the challenges within our current system. I am reaching out to you because your work with our students provides a unique viewpoint of the Promise Academy experience across the high school and college pipeline.”

Overall Objectives of Phase 1 (short term)
Determine the current assets and challenges within our system
   • Diagnose the most pressing problems within the current system from multi-stakeholder perspectives
   • Analyze the problems and root causes
      • Develop the strategy for improvement
      • Develop a Theory of Action to address the problems
Design the initial system-level strategy and sequencing for change
   • Create the outcomes for Phase 2 and 3

GROUND RULES (2 minutes)
1. I WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING.
   We would like everyone to participate. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.

2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS
   Every person's experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. I want to hear a wide range of opinions.

3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE
   We want folks to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.

4. I would like to TAPE RECORD THE interview I want to capture everything you have to say. I won’t identify anyone by name in the report. Your will remain anonymous.

QUESTIONS: (15 minutes)
1. What do you think we do well in high school to equip Promise Academy Students to succeed in high school and college?
   Think of this in terms of
• teaching and learning: three interdependent components: teachers' knowledge and skill, students' engagement in their own learning, and academically challenging content

• working with stakeholders (The people and groups inside and outside of the school and school staff, governing bodies, unions and associations, parents and parent organizations, civic and community leaders and organization)

• culture: The predominant norms, values, and attitudes that define and drive behavior in the school

• systems and processes: Structures help define how the work of the school gets done. It includes how people are organized, who has responsibility and accountability for results, and who makes or influences decisions. Structures can be both formal (deliberately established organizational forms) and informal (the way decisions get made or the way people work and interact outside of formal channels). Systems: School manage themselves through a variety of systems, which are the processes and procedures through which work gets done.

• resources (allocation of time, people, money): Managing the flow of financial resources throughout the organization is important, but resources also include people and physical assets such as technology and data. When schools carefully manage their most valuable resource—people—and understand what investments in technology and data systems are necessary to better support teaching and learning, the entire organization is brought closer to coherence

2. What do you think we need to get better at doing to equip Promise Academy students to succeed in high school and college?
   • teaching and learning
   • working with stakeholders
   • culture
   • systems and processes
   • resources

3. We have started to notice PA students arrive to CSO and college underprepared both academically and soft skills, what do you think contributes to these challenges?

4. Is there anything else you would like to say about ways the HCZ can best support its students with high school and college success?

**Partner Interview Agenda**

**INTERVIEW AGENDA**

**WELCOME** (1 minute)
Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. I appreciate your willingness to participate.

**PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW** (1 minute)
“Re-imagination of the high school experience,” which involves reflecting upon our current work with preparing our students to persist to and through the high school and college pipeline. A core part of this process entails hearing from stakeholders to get an understanding of what we do well and the challenges within our current system. I am reaching out to you because your work with our students provides a unique viewpoint of the Promise Academy experience across the high school and college pipeline.”

Overall Objectives of Phase 1 (short term)
Determine the current assets and challenges within our system
  - Diagnose the most pressing problems within the current system from multi-stakeholder perspectives
Analyze the problems and root causes
  - Develop the strategy for improvement
  - Develop a Theory of Action to address the problems
Design the initial system-level strategy and sequencing for change
  - Create the outcomes for Phase 2 and 3

GROUND RULES (2 minutes)
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   Every person's experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. I want to hear a wide range of opinions.

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   We want folks to feel comfortable sharing when sensitive issues come up.

4. I would like to TAPE RECORD THE interview I want to capture everything you have to say. I won't identify anyone by name in the report. Your will remain anonymous.

QUESTIONS: (15 minutes)
1. What do you think we do well in high school to equip Promise Academy Students to succeed in high school and college?

2. What do you think we need to get better at doing to equip Promise Academy students to succeed in high school and college?

3. We have started to notice PA students arrive to CSO and college underprepared both academically and soft skills, what do you think contributes to these challenges?

4. Is there anything else you would like to say about ways the HCZ can best support its students with high school and college success?
Appendix I
Stakeholder Interview Analysis

Research Questions
Overall, I wanted to learn:

1. What factors (teaching and learning, working with stakeholders, school culture, systems and processes, and resource allocation) contribute to the successful preparation of current Promise Academy high school students and graduates?
2. What factors (teaching and learning, working with stakeholders, school culture, systems and processes, and resource allocation) contribute to the under preparation of current Promise Academy high school students and graduates?

TOP factors that contribute to: “Successful Preparation” (PELP Coherence Components)

• **Whatever it Takes Philosophy (Culture, Resources, Stakeholders)**
  o Additional Codes:
    ▪ Above and beyond to help students succeed
    ▪ Caring and Strong Student-Staff Relationships
    ▪ Collaboration with stakeholders to help students and schools succeed
    ▪ Use of Resources for Innovation & Improvement

• **Teacher Commitment to Student Success (Teaching and Learning, Systems)**
  o Additional Codes:
    ▪ Teacher Creativity
    ▪ Differentiation to Meeting Student Needs
    ▪ Data driven instruction/teacher practice

• **College Going Culture (Teaching and Learning, Resources)**
  o Additional Codes:
    ▪ Bard Early College Program
    ▪ Access to Summer Exposures (career and college)

TOP factors that contribute to “Under preparation” (PELP Coherence Components)

• **Teacher/Staff Development (Teaching and Learning, Culture, Systems, Resources)**
  o Additional Codes:
    ▪ Standardized approaches to onboarding, training, ongoing professional development
    ▪ Building staff capacity to do their job effectively
    ▪ High staff turnover (including loss of talented staff)

• **Curriculum (Teaching and Learning, Culture)**
  o Academic Additional Codes
    ▪ Intentional 9-12 curricular focused on college and career and world
    ▪ Rigor
    ▪ Diversity in the curriculum and co-curricular
    ▪ Poor Reading and Writing skills
    ▪ Resources (technology, library, space)
• Overemphasis on the Regents Exam
  o Life Skills Development Additional Codes
    ▪ Non-Cog Skills
    ▪ Social-Emotional Skills
    ▪ Promise Privilege

• Partnerships (Stakeholders)
  o Additional Codes
    ▪ Increase Partnerships with Parents
    ▪ Exposure outside of Promise
      o Participate with other HCZ programs
      o Community Partnerships

• Developing Student Agency & Accountability (Culture, Systems, Teaching and Learning)
  o Additional Codes
    ▪ Student Accountability
    ▪ Handholding and Coddling
    ▪ Lack of safe opportunities to fail, grow, and problem solve
    ▪ Lack of opportunity for student voice, autonomy, independence
    ▪ Regimented School Schedule

• Intentional Structures and Systems for Consistently Carrying out the Work (Culture, System, Teaching and Learning)
  o Academic/Curricular Codes
    ▪ College and Career Readiness (process and approach)
    ▪ Use of student data for improvement
    ▪ Use of Pipeline
  o School Culture Codes: (Culture, Systems, Teaching and Learning)
    ▪ Overuse of Discipline & Impact on Instruction
    ▪ Adult-Student respectful communication
Appendix J
One Promise Strategy Session 1

One Plan, One Purpose, One Promise

November 21, 2016

Agenda:

Positive Opening Ritual: If you close your eyes and envision the last day of school, what would a successful year in your role look like? (15 minutes)

So I can share...(5 minutes)
  o  What do you need to feel comfortable to bring your full self to our meeting?

One Promise Real Talk (20 minutes)
  o  What excites you and/or frights you about this process?

Syncing – One Promise Capstone recap & open questions (10 minutes)

What did we learn? – Initial High Level Sharing (40 minutes)

T'ing up the December One Promise Meeting (10 minutes)

BREAK (5 minutes)

Joint College Process update (20 minutes)
  o  Start, Stop, Continue
  o  In your what does an ideal partnership look like?

Positive Closing Ritual: (5 Minutes)
  o  Who am I and What do I bring?
Appendix K
One Promise Strategy Session 2

One Plan, One Purpose, One Promise

December 12, 2016

Agenda:

Positive Opening Ritual: What is the 1 thing you believe your current role allows you to contribute to Promise Academy that you previously were unable to do? (5 minutes)

Level Setting: High, Lo, Buffalo...(10 minutes)

Phase 1: One Promise (15 minutes)
  o Philosophy (what don’t I know that I should know?)
  o December 12: Preview, Process, Feedback
  o December 19: Current State, Group Norming, Causal Analysis
  o January: System Improvement Map & Theory of Action, Reimagining Insights from Stakeholders
  o February: Develop Strategy for Improvement
  o March: Prioritizing and Sequencing Change
  o April: Implementation Plan
  o May: Planning and Road Map for 17-18 & Role of Group moving forward
  o Questions?

In your what does an ideal Phase 1 process look like? (5 minutes)

What did we learn? (50 minutes)
  o Why Interviews?
  o Review and Reflect on What we learned
  o What does the State Of and Causal Analysis look like?

BREAK (5 minutes)

Who should be at the table? (10 minutes)

Positive Closing Ritual: (5 Minutes)
  o What do you bring/can commit to help us have a successful Phase 1 process
Appendix L
One Promise Strategy Session 3

One Plan, One Purpose, One Promise

January 18, 2017

Positive Opening Ritual (5 minutes)
• What are you most looking forward to in 2017?

One Promise Strategic Planning Reset (15 minutes)
• Phase 1:
  o Part 1: Asset and Problem Diagnosis
  o Part 2: Root Causes and Visioning (in progress)
  o Part 3: Develop School Improvement Strategy & Sequencing the Change (upcoming)
• Positioning the work
  o Vision for Change \(\rightarrow\) Competencies \(\rightarrow\) Curriculum development
  o Joint College Process Group & Curriculum Working Group (who should be at the table?)
  o Loop back to this group

Curriculum Root Causes (15 minutes)
• Why Root Causes? To make sure we attack the heart of our challenges versus staying at the surface.
• Prioritize the roots

Strategic Visioning (40 minutes)
  Theory of Action: Cause and effect statements that the team thinks will lead to the desired results.
• Think and Dream Big---what is your ideal vision for your schools?
• Develop the Vision: If we… Then,…

Joint College Updates/Preview (10 minutes)
• Shared Vision for Senior Seminar
• College Tracking System Demos
• Plan for Juniors
• Events: Application Celebration, Parent-Student Financial Aid Night, SAA PD on 2/1
• Feedback/Additional Expectations

Positive Closing Ritual (5 minutes)
• One thing I plan to do for self-care this weekend is?
Appendix M
Fishbone Diagram

Title: Fishbone: Root Cause Analysis-Curriculum

Lack of an Intentional 9-12 curriculum (college and career readiness)
- Lack of intentionality with developing course curriculum
- Difficulty tracking lesson plans and the curriculum
- Inconsistencies with teacher tenure

Riger
- We do not let ineffective teachers go, we reward teachers who have a work ethic and try
- To achieve rigor is hard because you have to plan A LOT and it is time-intensive outside of class.
- Some teachers set the bare minimum for students
- Inconsistencies on how to scaffold the curriculum with a variety of students at different levels
- The students come into 9th grade underprepared

Overemphasis on the Regents Exams
- Judged by the data and evaluated on effectiveness based on regents
- Incentives are tied to the Regent’s exams
- Teacher bonuses and employment tied to the Regent’s exams

Curriculum: What factors contribute to the under-preparation of Promise Academy high school students and graduates?
- Staff turnover
- Don’t have the capacity of the staff to teach diverse electives
- Staff do not think outside of the box
- Lack of intentionality with developing course curriculum

Poor Reading and Writing Skills
- Teachers need to use their data to improve practice

Life skills development
- Challenges with delivering a consistent and deliberate schedule
- We do not have an intentional 9-12 focus

Lack of Diversity across the curriculum

Data supporting the need for change:
Promise College Matriculation and Persistence Data, SAT scores, Regents Scores, and interim school assessments.

Annie Fisher
Appendix N
College and Career Readiness Overview

Readiness v. Preparedness*

Leading College and Career Readiness expert David Conley (2007/2010) defines college and career readiness as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

The National Assessment Governing Board defines preparedness as a subset of readiness, “which focuses on academic qualifications, which are measured by NAEP. Readiness includes behavioral aspects of student performance—time management, persistence, and interpersonal skills, for example—which are not measured by NAEP” (Technical Panel on 12th Grade Preparedness Research Final Report, 2009).

Conley’s Proficiency Approach to College & Career Readiness

The mission of the Harlem Children’s Zone Promise Academy Charter School (HCZ Promise Academy) is to provide high quality, standards-based academic programs for students, grades K-12, from underserved communities and underperforming school districts, and to provide students with the skills they need to be accepted by and succeed in college. HCZ Promise Academy promotes high achievement in all subjects through a demanding curriculum, extensive supportive services and the use of data-driven teaching methods. HCZ Promise Academy is committed to promoting academic accomplishment, positive character development, healthy lifestyles and leadership skills. In partnership with the Harlem Children’s Zone, HCZ Promise Academy addresses the educational and developmental needs of each student.

**Non-Cognitive Skills (Factors)**

In addition to content knowledge and academic skills, non-cognitive factors represent the sets of behaviors, skills, attitudes, and strategies that are crucial to student academic performance. These factors include: academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills.

*Defining and Measuring College and Career Readiness, Educational Policy Improvement Center by David Conley.
**Teaching Adolescents to Become Better Learners by Farrington et. al.*
Three Principles and Key Processes

Three principles of development related to college access and success:

- Developmental stages matter and should inform practice.
- Young people can and should be active agents in the college-going process.
- College going is an interconnected process that is shaped by and in turn shapes young people’s social, emotional, and cognitive development as well as their social contexts including families, peers, schools, and communities.

Key Processes:

- Identity development, self-concept and aspirations, motivation and goal setting, self-regulatory skills, and relationship development.
Appendix O

One Promise Curriculum Retreat & Staff define College Readiness

Friday, February 17, 2017

Welcome & Retreat Objectives (9:00am-9:05am)
Welcome: Mac and Annice
Objectives
  - Develop a baseline understanding of college and career readiness
  - Identify places to integrate college and career readiness techniques into the curriculum
  - Provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their instructional practices
  - Foster cross-school collaboration in curriculum breakout sessions

Positive Opening Ritual (9:05-9:15)
  - Pair and Share: If you could give your high school self advice, what would it be?

What is College and Career Readiness (9:15-10:05am)
  - Mission Alignment
  - How do you define college and career readiness?
  - Review C&CR handout
    - What, So What, Now What? (Individual and Pair N Share)
  - Conley Proficiency Brainstorm (Large Group)
  - Curriculum Groups

Break: 10:05-10:15am

Curriculum Department Breakouts (10:15-11:10am)
  - See handout for locations and agenda

Instructional Practices Breakout Sessions (11:15-12:15pm)
  - Select a workshop (25 min/workshop & 5 min transition times), rotate at 11:40am
    - Literacy across content, Regents prep structures, Achievement folders, relationships & classroom management, differentiation, group work

Closing Ritual (12:15-12:30pm)
  - In a #

Promise Staff define College and Career Readiness
Appendix P

College and Career Readiness Departmental Vision Statements from the
One Promise Retreat

**History:**
Our vision is for students to move beyond the content knowledge and advance to a level in which they understand their world, become critically conscious citizens, make thoughtful connections between the past, present and future, make evidence based arguments in an effort to synthesize information.

**Science:**
The Promise Academy Science curriculum fosters a growth-mindset for students to produce questions, hypotheses, iterations, and evidence to test every day phenomena that will produce a global citizen and community actor.

**English:**
The English department fosters reading and writing skills, as well as language and literacy to support students across contents. They utilize and build skills and knowledge to prepare for college success and beyond.

**Math:**
The Math department of Promise Academy HS aspires to the highest standards of excellence in teaching and service. We strive to empower students to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

**Language:**
To stress the application of learning a language beyond the instructional setting. To prepare learners to apply their language learning skills at every proficiency level.

**Art:**
Think outside the box!

**PE:**
To educate minds, develop healthy bodies and promote positive attitudes towards lifetime physical activity, fitness and sport skills.
### Appendix Q

**One Promise Curriculum Working Group**

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<tr>
<th>HCZ Affiliation</th>
<th>Position</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy II Charter School</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy I Charter High School</td>
<td>Assistant Principal for Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy I Charter High School</td>
<td>Science Teacher</td>
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<td>Promise Academy II Charter High School</td>
<td>Science Teacher</td>
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<td>Promise Academy II Charter High School</td>
<td>History Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bard Early College</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harlem Children’s Zone/Promise Academy Charter High Schools</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor for High School and College Success</td>
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Appendix R

*One Promise Competencies Working Group*

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<td>Promise Academy I Charter High School</td>
<td>Dean for Culture and Student Success</td>
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<td>Promise Academy II Charter High School</td>
<td>College Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy II Charter High School</td>
<td>Director for Afterschool Programs &amp; Geoffrey Canada Community Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise Academy Charter High Schools</td>
<td>College Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Strategic Advisor for High School and College Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlem Children’s Zone/Promise Academy College Success Office</td>
<td>Senior Director for College and Career Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bard Early College</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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</table>
Appendix S
One Promise Polarity Map

Develop an intentional approach to meeting HCZ’s mission

Positive Results of Focusing on the Right Pole
1. Meet people where they are at
2. Build the capacity of the team
3. Sense of internal accountability
4. Listening

Learn and Execution

Positive Results of Focusing on the Left Pole
1. Meet people where they are at
2. Tangible
3. Speed

Neutral or Positive Name of Left Pole
Neutral or Positive Name of Right Pole

Negative Results of Over-focusing on Left Pole to the Neglect of Right Pole
1. Unsettling
2. Time-wasting if the topic is not relevant
3. Stuck in a frame (rabbit holes)
4. Lack of listening

External Forces halt and crash the work

Deeper Fear
Result of both downside quadrants

GPS = Greater Purpose Statement
Why?
Result of both upside quadrants

GPS = Greater Purpose Statement
Why?
Result of both upside quadrants

Thanks to John Scherer, Center for Work and the Human Spirit
Appendix T

One Promise Curriculum Working Group Summary

Curriculum Working Group: First Meeting Agenda

One Promise: Curriculum Working Group
Thursday, March 02, 2017

Positive Opening Ritual (10 minutes)
• What did you enjoy about your high school classes (if you did not enjoy anything, what would you have liked to experience)?
• Timekeeper volunteer:

One Promise Background (10 minutes)
• 3 parts: Asset and Problem Diagnosis, Root Causes and Visioning (IP), School Improvement Strategies & Sequencing Change
• P 1: Asset and Problem Diagnosis:
• P 2 & 3: Intentional 9-12 Curriculum and College and Career Readiness Competencies

Purpose and Group Charge (15 minutes)
• The Curriculum working group will develop an intentional 9-12 academic and co-curriculum connected to the competencies and New York state standards. Foundational!
• Departmental Vision statements
• Curriculum grounded in YOUR professional experience, HCZ context, Promise mission, and college and career readiness best practices.
• Working Sessions
• Need to fully commit to the group:
  o Expectations, Hopes, Fears

Curriculum Retreat & Greater Curriculum Efforts (5 minutes)
• Keeping the momentum from the retreat
• Inman: Curriculum partnership efforts for this academic year

Curriculum Real Talk: (20 minutes)
• “The level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement. They can complete such entry-level, credit-bearing courses at a level that enables them to continue in a major program of study they have chosen.” Conley
• 9, 10th, 11th, 12th grades
• Strengths, Gaps, Content
Conley’s Proficiency Approach Promise Academy Self-Assessment

Directions: Rate each skill (such as ‘problem formulation’) twice – How well does Promise promote this skill on a scale of 1 to 5?

How well do you/teachers incorporate this skill into your/their content area? (1 = not at all to 5 = extremely well). Provide evidence (i.e., what evidence/examples of this practice might I see if I peaked into the school?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher A</th>
<th>Key Content Knowledge</th>
<th>Key Cognitive Strategies</th>
<th>Key Learning Skills &amp; Techniques</th>
<th>Key Transition Skills &amp; Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of knowledge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key terms and terminology</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Info</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing concepts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Knowledge and Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribute</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Problem Formulation**
- Hypothesis: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to develop hypotheses based on their observations.
- Strategy: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to apply relevant strategies to formulate problems.
- Analysis: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to analyze data and draw conclusions.

**Ownership of Learning**
- Goal Setting: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to set and achieve goals for their learning.
- Persistence: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students demonstrate perseverance in the face of challenges.
- Self-Awareness: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.
- Motivation: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are motivated to learn and engage in the process.
- Responsibility: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students take responsibility for their learning.

**Learning Techniques**
- Time Management: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to manage their time effectively.
- Study Skills: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to study effectively.
- Test-Taking Skills: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to perform well under test conditions.
- Note-Taking Skills: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to take effective notes.
- Memorization/Retention: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to memorize and retain information.
- Strategic Planning: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to plan their learning effectively.
- Collaborative Learning: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to work effectively in groups.
- Technology: 3
  - Evidence: 2
  - Education: The students are able to use technology effectively in their learning.
**Bolstering College and Career Readiness Proficiency Activity**

Assignment: Bolstering skills in the content area (brainstorm): Areas with a 3 or below think about a practice/activity/idea we could implement to bolster that skill in your content area. Try to poll at least one other teacher to get their opinions.

**Teacher A**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Domain (Cognitive strategies, content knowledge, key learning techniques, key transition skills)</th>
<th>Rating (score and evidence)</th>
<th>Practice/Activity/Idea to bolster proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Transition skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ need college essay writing classes, research methods, how to study. Perhaps a college readiness class (teaching how to file faces, meal prep, study, gap, find internships and jobs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Common planning time, more content specific PDs, content specific resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Techniques &amp; Ownership of Learning</td>
<td>Strategic Reading</td>
<td>We need teacher run PDs on how to diversify lessons. Perhaps a school wide specific test taking strategies. Most exams could be passed if we teach students how to take the exam. PDs on how to do collaborative learning and projects. More support by special education and learning specialist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership of Learning</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Students need a say in their learning. This should be student run lesson parts. Student council for education. Peer student mentor. Individualized goals for each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual information:</td>
<td>a. 3</td>
<td>Taking the memorization of facts and connecting them. Teaching basic writing skills program. Getting them to do more than just pass the regents mentality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Strategies</td>
<td>Challenge level:</td>
<td>Computer or tablet resources for every classroom that must be maintained by the specific teacher. AP training on how to make class rigorous and not just teach to the bottom. Workbooks for students who are more advanced to continue and practice independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Knowledge &amp; Skills</td>
<td>Effort: (mindset)</td>
<td>We must give praise and awards to those who consistently put in the effort. Dress down, student of the month etc. Those students who are not showing effort must be put on progress reports and continue to check up on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum Working Group Progress Summary

Overall Progress:

- Provided background context on Phase I, stakeholder diagnostic, root causes analysis, and what led to the creation of working groups.
- Established a holding environment for the working group to have open and meaningful discussions about the current state of the system and what it takes to consistently prepare Promise students for high school and college success.
- We discussed the hopes, fears, and how to help people manage the loss associated with change, should the work of this group move forward for implementation.
- Set a foundational understanding of college and career readiness and Conley’s Four Keys to College and Career Readiness.
- Conducted an internal self-assessment of Promise school-based and teacher practices compared to Conley’s Four Keys to College and Career Readiness Proficiency.
- Identified areas of system-wide strengths and growth as it relates to consistently promoting the Four Keys.
- Involved additional teachers in the diagnostic process by seeking their feedback in between working group meetings.
- Brainstormed opportunities to bolster Four Keys Proficiency in micro-ways.
- Scoped out the remaining work for completing Phase I.

Remaining Work:

- Review Departmental vision statements and identify 30,000 ft. opportunities to accomplish Four Keys proficiency according to discipline areas.
- Map 30,000 ft. opportunities to New York State Standards and current curriculum.
- Identify pathways for implementation and measuring student mastery.
- Build the arc of the foundational curriculum across grades 9-12 grades.
- Develop a plan for teacher development and transitioning students.
- Prepare recommendations for phasing in the curriculum over the next 3 years.

Considerations for Implementation:

- Who will hold the work and track accountability once the residency ends?
- What are the safeguards to ensure the work is implemented with fidelity?
- What HCZ stakeholders do we need to engage?
- How do we communicate the proposed changes? Gather feedback?
- How do we keep this “new way of doing things” at the center?
- How does this approach live within a culture that is focused on the Regent’s exam?
Appendix U
One Promise
College and Career Readiness Competencies Working Group Summary

Competencies Working Group: First Meeting Agenda

One Promise: Competencies Working Group
Friday, February 03, 2017

Positive Opening Ritual (10 minutes)
• What factors led to your college success?
• Timekeeper volunteer:

One Promise Background (10 minutes)
• 3 parts: Asset and Problem Diagnosis, Root Causes and Visioning (IP), School Improvement Strategies & Sequencing Change
• P 1: Asset and Problem Diagnosis: 24 interviews across school-based and non-school based stakeholders.
  o What factors (teaching and learning, working with stakeholders, school cultures, systems and processes, and resource allocation) contribute to the successful preparation [under preparation] of current Promise Academy high school students and graduates?
  o Assets:
    ▪ Whatever it Takes Philosophy (culture, resources, stakeholders)
    ▪ Teacher Commitment to Student Success (teaching and learning, systems)
    ▪ College Going Culture (teaching and learning, resources)
  o Areas of Growth:
    ▪ Teacher/Staff Development (teaching and learning, culture, systems, resources)
    ▪ Curriculum (teaching and learning, culture)
    ▪ Partnerships (stakeholders)
    ▪ Developing Student Agency & Accountability (culture, systems, teaching and learning)
    ▪ Intentional Structures and Systems for Consistently Carrying out the Work (culture, systems, teaching and learning)
• P 2 & 3: Intentional 9-12 Curriculum and College and Career Readiness Competencies

Purpose and Group Charge (15 minutes)
Develop 3-5 core competencies to ensure Promise Academy students are college and career ready upon graduation.
• Competencies grounded in professional experience, HCZ context, Promise mission, and college and career readiness best practices.
• Need to fully commit to the group:
• With each competency answer the four questions to guide implementation.
  o Goals and Expectations: What should Promise students know and be able to do to achieve college and career readiness?
  o Outcomes and Measures: How do we know when Promise students are meeting expectations for college and career readiness and success?
  o Pathways and Supports: What should Promise Academy provide to enable students to achieve college and career success?
Resources and Structures: What does Promise Academy need to enable student readiness for college and careers?

College and Career Readiness Overview (20 minutes)

• Current College/Career Opportunities: College Visits, Summer Exposures (Jr Year), Career-themed clubs (partnerships through Development), Rep your College Day, Career Fairs, Rep visits to Promise Academy, Promise College student Alumni Panel, CSO push-in with Senior Seminars, Career Services push-in with Senior Seminars, College Expos/Fairs, Bard Early College, Dual Enrollment at CUNY
  Review C&CR Handout (5 minutes)
What do YOU think Promise students should know and be able to do to achieve college and career readiness?

- Students should have at least a 10th grade level of literacy and writing ability and mastery of math through trigonometry.
- They should also be able to complete assignments and meet deadlines.
- Students should know how to identify and reach out for the resources that can help them when needed.
- Students should be able to manage their time and prioritize life’s tasks (crudely).
- Students should be able to take initiative and follow through on their plans.
- They should see themselves as agents of their own success.
- Students should at least have a foundational knowledge of what they are passionate about.
- They should know it will take an immense amount of hard work to achieve their goals.
- Their reading and writing skills should be at least average if not exceptional.
- They should be able to maneuver and thrive in different types of environments and around different types of people.
- They should know how and when to ask for help if necessary.
- They should have an idea of their short-term and long-term goals not only personally, but academically and career wise.
- Students should be able to write at a level of sophistication appropriate to a young adult, including the ability to complete a basic research paper.
- Students should know how to navigate new spaces, places, and resources.
- Students should be able to successfully perform and complete the basics of what it takes to succeed as a freshman, i.e., getting to class on time, getting to class at all, knowing how to use Blackboard or whatever academic portal the school uses, getting their textbooks, keeping up with reading and assignments.
- Students should have some minimal understanding of “what they want to be when they grow up” or at least have begun to explore this so that they take the appropriate courses and seek the appropriate career exposures to refine this.
- Student should know:
  - fundamentals of writing
  - how to critically analyze a text,
  - actual content knowledge that is tested on the regents—so when it appears in other places they can recognize and apply that knowledge
  - How to prepare for exams (mindsets, behaviors, skills)
  - How to take notes and use those for retention of information
  - Know why they want to go to college or career
  - How to monitor their progress in class and in general
  - How to speak about their talents, strengths
  - What their strengths are
  - All of the non-cogs
  - How to bounce back from failure
- Personal: Students should be able to self-advocate.
- Professional: Students should be able to do practical things like write an email, communicate properly etc.
- Students should have public speaking skills.
- Students should know how to identify things that interest them and possible career goal.
- Academic:
  - Students should have an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.
  - Students should be at their correct reading level or above.
- Students should be performing at or above grade level in their STEM areas.
- Students should understand study skills and have the perseverance to sit in a lecture hall, take notes, and effectively produce classwork.
- Students should first have an understanding of who they are and where they are going.
- Learning their passion and what they are working towards.
- Students should know and be able to master time management.
- Students should be able to complete Algebra 1 and its Regents in 8th grade.
- Students attendance should be higher than 98%.
- Students should be able to take notes on their own.
- Students should read 40 minutes-90 minutes daily.
- Students should have 2-3 hours of homework per night.
- Students should earn a 80 or above in all freshman course.
- Students should be active agents in their college process.
- Self-advocates.
- Students should be able to set goals for themselves.
- Time management.

### Elevate a Competency and Ideate

#### C&CR Implementation Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Expectations:</th>
<th>Outcomes and Measures:</th>
<th>Pathways and Supports:</th>
<th>Resources and Structures:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What should Promise students know and be able to do to achieve college and career readiness?</td>
<td>How do we know when Promise students are meeting expectations for college and career readiness and success?</td>
<td>What should Promise Academy provide to enable students to achieve college and career success?</td>
<td>What does Promise Academy need to enable student readiness for college and careers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should know how to identify and reach out for the appropriate resources when needed</td>
<td>- When they can identify the different roles of staff</td>
<td>- Orientation</td>
<td>- Longer orientations and grade specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- When they can identify the different locations of resources (main office, health center, guidance, etc)</td>
<td>- Monthly town halls and check ins</td>
<td>- Dedicated Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- When they can advocate for themselves and peers</td>
<td>- Student ambassadors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- When they are able to communicate with staff, peers, and teachers</td>
<td>- Lesson Plans with Advisories</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- When they can identify challenges in a current system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- When they understand “chain of command”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- When students get “stuck” at a point in an assignment they know how to access resources (library, internet, other teachers, other)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## College and Career Readiness Inventory: Current Activities

Goal: 1) Identify current best practices and 2) Use these practices to support competencies development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman Boys and Girls mentoring Program</td>
<td>Exam test-taking skills</td>
<td>Summer Exposures</td>
<td>Senior Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college Literature (includes discussions of time management, note-taking and organization in preparation for college courses)</td>
<td>Pre-College Literature (includes discussions of time management, note-taking and organization in preparation for college courses)</td>
<td>College Advisory</td>
<td>College Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hannah Arendt Conference at Bard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hannah Arendt Conference at Bard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>College Tours/Visits</td>
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<td>Fresh Start</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Specialized exposures like WCS, LaunchPAD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Promise Team presents weekly at Seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promise Team leans in around school selection, looking at financial aid</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CST works with students to ensure they have a finalized resume</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Conley’s Proficiency Approach Promise Academy Self-Assessment**

Rating 1: How well does the school promote this skill on a scale of 1 to 5? (1 = not at all to 5 = extremely well). Provide evidence to support your rating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Strategies (Group 1)</th>
<th>Learning Skills and Techniques (Group 2)</th>
<th>Transition Knowledge and Skills (Group 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Formulation (Hypothesize &amp; Strategize Questions)</strong></td>
<td>Ownership of Learning (goal setting, perseverance, self-awareness, motivation, help-seeking, progress monitoring, self-efficacy)</td>
<td>Contextual (Awareness &amp; Norms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1: 3.5</td>
<td>Rating 1: 2</td>
<td>Rating 1: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: When students are unsure of an assignment instruction or assignment, they will ask questions in fear of getting it wrong or not knowing the answer, or receiving a bad grade. For example in my life skills class, we began using our cell phones to help answer the students asked me tons of questions on vocabulary, whether it was positive or negative etc., before I was able to give them any assistance.</td>
<td>Evidence: I believe this happens in some contexts but not as a norm across both schools. Evidence: by the amount of work and incentives it takes to get students to meet their goals, monitor progress, and ask for help when they get stuck. I do believe many have a positive self-efficacy but we need to translate that into academics. I also think motivation varies as evidenced by the response rates to requests.</td>
<td>Evidence: I don’t think there is a clear delineation between where the students are, what they want to go, and how to get there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research (Identify &amp; Collect Sources)</td>
<td>Learning Techniques (time management, study skills, note-taking skills, memorization, strategic reading, collaborative learning, technology)</td>
<td>Procedural (Institutional Roles &amp; Actions Process)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1: 3.5</td>
<td>Rating 1: 3</td>
<td>Rating 1: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: Students think Google is the most reliable source and are not aware of how important and the fundamental skills of texts like journal, peer reviewed articles.</td>
<td>Evidence: I think in some of these areas our students are doing well and some teachers incorporate this into their classrooms. Based in Regent, we know that memorization and note-taking skills are there. I would say reading and writing and collaborative learning is a gap as well as time management. In Dr. Speller’s study and my formative assessments, Promise Academy indicates challenges with note-taking and time management. I think kids are savvy with technology, we just have to help them learn more strategies for working with it.</td>
<td>Evidence: I think there has been a lot of great work from the senior team around the college selection process, and many of the students have bought in and become active participants in the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation (Analyze &amp; Evaluate: Take info and identify key themes and main ideas)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial (Tuition &amp; Financial Aid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1: 3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rating 1: 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence: I think there is a lot of work done around financial aid and it requires a lot of attention. But I think the Promise culture of paying for things for students inhibits a true financial literacy education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication (Organize &amp; Construct)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural (Postsecondary Needs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1: 3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rating 1: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence: Students have been stuck in the Promise world and the Promise hinders their entire lives, and the Promise universe operates much different than the real world, and unfortunately the students have demonstrated results existing in both worlds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision &amp; Accuracy (doing something right and self-check) and monitor own progress - able to measure my success and know where I am at</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal (Self-Advocacy in an institutional context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1: 3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rating 1: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence: Some students have this understanding and can measure their success but most students will measure based on grades and will wait until the last minute to ask for help and will often rely on make-up work or extra credit to get ahead in the classroom.</td>
<td>Evidence: I think this varies by student but overall students will struggle advocating for themselves outside of Promise because advocacy looks very different inside Promise than it does outside Promise.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Narrowing the Competencies**

Directions: Read the competencies, Select the top 2 you think are important for students to master before graduating from Promise Academy, Map your top 3 on to Conley’s Think, Act, and Go: (where are the overlaps, gaps?), Select your top 2 to share with the group for recommendation for adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Number</th>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Conley Key Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1            | • Students should have at least a 10th grade level of literacy and writing ability and mastery of math through trigonometry.  
• They should know it will take an immense amount of hard work to achieve their goals. | I think the basics of reading, writing, and math cover the academic fundamentals and a strong work ethic covers almost everything else.                    |
| 2            | • Students should be able to successfully perform and complete the basics of what it takes to succeed as a freshman, i.e., getting to class on time, getting to class at all, knowing how to use Blackboard or whatever academic portal the school uses, getting their textbooks, keeping up with reading and assignments.  
• Public speaking and how to prepare | This covers ownership of learning- for example when you master the art of public speaking it teaches you how to set goals, it creates a comfort to self advocate, it gives you practice with fighting for a cause or educating a group on a cause and being able to back up what you say (This goes to learning how to write, learning how to cite, learning how to use the textbook to find the info etc. This also covers all three of Conley’s strategic goals |
| 3            | • Students should be able to self-advocate  
• Students should be able to set goals for themselves | Students should be able to self-advocate- This is a Key Learning Skill that shows ‘Ownership of Learning’  
Students should be able to set-goals for themselves-this is a key learning skill that shows ownership for learning |
| 4            | • Students should know how to identify and reach out for the resources that can help them when needed  
• They should know it will take an immense amount of hard work to achieve their goals. | Ownership of learning, Self-advocacy, Research, Contextual/aspirations |
| 5            | • Students should see themselves | Ownership of learning (self-efficacy, help- |
as agents of their own success
• They should know how and when to ask for help if necessary.

Digging Deeper: A look at the competencies and measurement (next pathways and then resources)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Proficiencies that can be gained</th>
<th>Ways we can measure it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students should have at least a 10th grade level of literacy and writing ability and mastery of math through trigonometry.</td>
<td>Key terms, link ideas, organizing concepts</td>
<td>GPA, Regents, Course grades +analysis of the syllabus ACT/SAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They should know it will take an immense amount of hard work to achieve their goals</td>
<td>Persistence, Self-Awareness, Self-Efficacy, Progress-Monitoring</td>
<td>Course Grades (Trends), Goal Attainment (set goal and monitor attainment), Surveys (time spent on task)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should be able to successfully perform and complete the basics of what it takes to succeed as a freshman, i.e., getting to class on time, getting to class at all, knowing how to use Blackboard or whatever academic portal the school uses, getting their textbooks, keeping up with reading and assignments.</td>
<td>Aspiration Postsecondary norms Norms and culture</td>
<td>Attendance, Use of Infinite Campus, Overgrad/Naviance/ usage patterns, Keeping up with reading, Compare and Contrast Junior Year, Response to electronic communication</td>
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**Competencies Working Group Progress Summary**

Overall Progress:

- Provided background context on Phase I, stakeholder diagnostic, root causes analysis, and what led to the creation of working groups.
- Established a holding environment for the working group to have open and meaningful discussions about the current state of college readiness and what it takes to consistently prepare Promise students for high school and college success.
- Discussed the hopes, fears, and how to help people manage the loss associated with change, should the work of this group move forward for implementation.
- Spent time discussing the belief gaps, opportunity and capacity gaps, and the adaptive change needed in order to ensure the competencies are implemented with fidelity.
- Set a foundational understanding of college and career readiness and Conley’s Four Keys to College and Career Readiness.
  o Practiced the full cycle of competency development (Goals and Expectations, Outcomes and Measures, Pathways and Supports, Resources and Structures)
- Conducted an internal self-assessment of Promise school-based practices compared to Conley’s Think, Act, and Go Proficiencies.
- Identified areas of system-wide strengths and growth as it relates to consistently promoting the aforementioned.
- Inventoried current college and career readiness activities across both schools.
- Narrowed the “brainstorm” competencies, debated why each competency was selected, and mapped to Conley’s.
- Scoped out the remaining work for completing Phase I.

Remaining Work:

- Finalize competencies and wordsmith the language (map to the Four Keys).
- Identify ways to measure the competencies.
- Determine pathways for competency development.
- Identify resources that are needed to ensure fidelity of implementation.
- Build the arc of the competencies development across grades 9-12 grades.
- Develop a plan for staff development and transitioning students.
- Prepare recommendations for phasing in the curriculum over the next 3 years.

Considerations for Implementation:

- Who will hold the work and track accountability once the residency ends?
- What are the safeguard to ensure the work is implemented with fidelity?
- Which HCZ stakeholders do we need to engage?
- How do we communicate the proposed changes? Gather feedback?
- How do we keep this “new way of doing things” at the center?
- How does this approach live within the “Whatever it Takes” culture?