Dissertation and Capstone Defenses

April 4-14, 2017

(Titles and Abstracts ordered by date)
Chen Chen, Ed.D. Candidate  

**Romantic Transfer: From Science to Social Ideologies**  
Tuesday, April 4, 4:30-6:00 p.m., Gutman 440  
Committee Members: Helen Haste (Chair), HGSE; Robert Selman, HGSE; Matthew Schneps, MIT, UMass Boston.

The transfer of learning is arguably the most enduring goal of education. The history of science reveals that numerous theories transfer from natural-science to the socio-political realm, but educational practitioners often deem such transfers romantic and rhetorical, ignoring the opportunities and challenges such transfers may hold. In terms of opportunities, romantic transfer encourages students to relate science to events in social life and further to discover new ways to understand social issues and propose social hypotheses. In terms of challenge, romantic transfers are often based on superficial and even imprecise understandings of science and depend on oversimplified labels and metaphors. In many cases, the romantic transfers are imaginative. Although logically romantic transfers are based on analogical resonance, empirically they are hardly proven to be valid. Nevertheless, when students imagine social and ideological implications of the hard science terminologies and theorems, they are at risk for considering the emergent ideologies as proven by hard sciences that are often considered authoritative, objective, and universal. Literal understanding of science-inspired by still unexamined ideologies can lead to maladaptive and even dangerous social actions. Because many of the romantic transfers are interdisciplinary and controversial, teachers may avoid explicit discussion about romantic transfer with students, and do not wish to assume responsibility of doing so. However, the question remains whether avoiding explicit discussion and debates about romantic transfer would inhibit students from spontaneously romanticize science concepts. This dissertation presents four studies that systematically investigate questions of romantic transfer—informal, emergent, and metaphorical boundary transections from natural science to social ideologies that often occur unexpectedly.

My first study shows that participants who scored high in transferential thinking style also scored high in scientism beliefs and that participants who scored high on both tend to give literal interpretations to (religious) text. Following, my second study shows that students who reviewed the conservation of energy in physics are more likely to believe that luck is conserved, a naïve karmic religious idea. My third study shows that students are able to transfer spontaneously from theories in physics to more politically charged contexts. Specifically, students who learned the theory of entropy are more likely to prefer tightened social control, whereas students who learned self-organization theory are more likely to prefer stronger individual agency and relaxed social control. Study 4 involved interviews with the participants from Study 3 and shows that students’ narratives about social control are largely consistent with the thermodynamic concepts they have learned. Occasionally, students can critically evaluate the plausibility of their romantic transferences.

This dissertation shows that science instruction implicitly empowers students to make social hypotheses and to engage in moral-civic-political discourse. To consider pedagogies that respond to such an opportunity without falling victim to hasty generalizations, we need both science and civic educations to equip students with the methods to examine self-generated social hypothesis. We also need pedagogies that promote the awareness and tolerance of metaphors to offset the dangers of literalism.
Mariama Grimes, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Leading the Implementation of the Strategies for Children Community Readiness Initiative
Wednesday, April 5, 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Eliot Lyman room, Longfellow Hall, 2nd floor
Committee Members: Elizabeth City (Chair), HGSE; Mark Moore, HKS; Chris Martes, CEO of Strategies for Children

Strategies for Children is a nonprofit organization that works to expand access to high-quality preschool for all Massachusetts children. In 2015, under the guidance of a revised strategic plan, the organization undertook a new approach to its work by focusing on improving the preschool infrastructure in local communities. This capstone examines my leadership of the initial phase of the strategic plan implementation. I focused much of my effort on evaluating the needs, barriers, and attitudes surrounding access to preschool in the community. As a result of these discussions I was able to exercise influence on the development of a community plan for preschool lead by the local school district. The impact of my work on the way that Strategies for Children performs community work was less conclusive. I utilize Harvard Kennedy School of Government Professor Mark Moore’s Strategic Triangle framework to examine how the manner in which I sought to establish legitimacy and support and build organizational capacity might explain why my project proceeded the way it did. My project raises questions for Strategies for Children about what “community” means to the organization and how it approaches community work. One implication of my work for the sector is that preschool needs can vary by community and therefore input should be sought from a diverse set of stakeholders early in any planning process.
Sarah C. Warren, Ed.L.D. Candidate
An Assets- and Equity-Based Approach to Multilingualism, Multiliteracy, and Multiculturalism: Harnessing the Development of a District-Wide Strategy to Foster Learning, Shift Mindsets, and Seed System-Level Change
Monday, April 10, 8:00-9:00 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1
Committee Members: Eileen McGowan (Chair), HGSE; Andrés Alonso, HGSE; Mary Bourque, Superintendent, Chelsea Public Schools

In the United States and globally, there is growing recognition of the extensive cognitive, emotional, social, and economic benefits of multilingualism, multiliteracy, and multiculturalism. At the same time, a double standard persists in the way that society—and many education systems—view language development: monolingual English speakers who learn a second language are typically seen as high achievers, lauded for developing a valuable 21st-Century skill. However, students who are in the midst of learning English as a second language (while simultaneously studying core academic content in English in most cases) are often viewed through a deficit-clouded lens—labeled as “Limited English Proficient,” over-classified as learning-disabled, and/or insufficiently challenged by educators who may mistake still-emerging English capacity for a lack of overall academic ability. Meanwhile, many school systems do not capitalize on students’ linguistic and cultural heritage to support learning and academic achievement, which not only contributes to language loss among children, but also represents a significant missed opportunity to increase student engagement; build a positive sense of social, cultural, and academic identity; and improve learning outcomes.

This strategic project aimed to challenge this deficit-minded orientation by infusing a school system with an assets- and equity-based perspective on students’ linguistic and cultural heritage. Over the course of nine months, I worked with a dynamic and dedicated team of educators in Chelsea Public Schools to develop a district-wide strategy for cultivating, valuing, and formally recognizing multilingualism, multiliteracy, and multiculturalism. Chelsea is a vibrant gateway city just north of Boston, Massachusetts that has long served as the first home to recently arrived immigrants from around the world. Today, approximately 85% of students in the district are Hispanic and over 25% are classified as English Language Learners.

In this capstone, I describe and reflect on our effort to develop and win support for a strategy grounded in research, best practice, and local context; to lay the foundation for its successful implementation; and to harness this process to begin establishing the mindsets, structures, and educational approaches that would contribute to a strong assets-oriented culture throughout the system and ultimately, we hoped, improvements in student outcomes.
Rev. Tyler S. Thigpen, Ed.L.D. Candidate  
Cross-Sector Collaboration to Design Breakthrough School Models: Strategic Community Building for Transcend  
Monday, April 10, 9:00-10:00 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3  
Committee Members: Jal Mehta (Chair), HGSE; Irvin Scott, HGSE; Jeff Wetzler, Co-Founder, Transcend

Traditional “industrial model” schooling was created for a different era. Student outcomes have flat-lined, and student motivation is disturbingly low. To see both the change and leap in outcomes students deserve, we must engineer a new design of school for the 21st century. One of the most significant barriers to developing and spreading relevant school models is the lack of research and development in education (R&D). Transcend is a nonprofit organization created in 2015 for this purpose. As a doctoral resident with Transcend, my project question was: how might Transcend build the relationships necessary to deliver on its promise of new breakthrough school design? Through illuminating connections between Transcend’s organizational resources, activities, and desired long-term outcomes; identifying cross-sector sources of value that are relevant to Transcend’s mission; framing and communicating Transcend’s value to multiple stakeholder groups strategically and across the education sector; and exchanging value with stakeholders in alignment with Transcend’s current or emerging capabilities, this work led to: (1) moderately strong coherence among internal staff to undertake relevant community-building activities with partners; (2) favorable, but as of yet inconclusive, evidence that current partners find it advantageous to work with Transcend as they collectively pursue breakthrough school design; and (3) strong evidence that Transcend’s network is attracting new partners to advance its mission for breakthrough school design.
Michael Figueroa, Ed.L.D. Candidate  
Putting the Horse before the Cart: A County Office of Education’s Journey to Support School Districts in System-Level Problem Analysis  
Monday, April 10, 10:30-11:30 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1  
Committee Members: Kathy Boudett (Chair), HGSE; Andrés Alonso, HGSE; Rob Arias, Chief Deputy of State and Local Initiatives, Kern County Superintendent of Schools

In recent years, California overhauled its basic structure and funding system for Lead Educational Agencies (LEA). This movement provided LEAs with more local flexibility and converted the county office of education role to the primary accountability and support partner. Kern County Superintendent of Schools utilized this restructuring to transform the way it provided support to school districts. To begin, KCSOS hired a new team of five former district and site administrators who would later become known as the Learning Network. In the early design work, a focus on continuous improvement emerged and two key questions quickly materialized: How does the county office of education make complex problems visible for district leadership teams, so prospective theories and strategies are high leverage and effective? And, how does problem analysis lend itself to stronger systems of continuous improvement?

Drawing from research about what systemic problems are, why they are important, and tools for how to identify and understand them, I will argue that deliberate and rigorous problem analysis is the first and necessary step in building a system of continuous improvement. In this Capstone, I describe my efforts to develop a curriculum guide for facilitating system-level problem analysis, to create and implement a pilot institute to apply the curriculum, and find ways to meaningfully engage the members of the LN team in both of these endeavors.

Analysis in this Capstone reveals two key insights: (1) organizations counseling others in problem analysis need to model and measure these efforts in their own work; and (2) people learn the how behind problem diagnosis through experiencing processes and protocols.
Christine Marie Ortiz Guzman, Ed.L.D. Candidate
equityXdesign: Leveraging Identity Development in the Creation of an Anti-Racist Equitable Design Thinking Process
Monday, April 10, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3
Committee Members: Martin West (Chair), HGSE; Matthew Miller, HGSE; Jeff Wetzler, Co-Founder, Transcend

Educational Equity has been situated as the civil rights issue of our time. While arguably the focus of education reform efforts over the last 50 years, progress has been slow if present at all. This capstone describes my journey in creating equityXdesign, a set of technical tools that come from the merging of equity consciousness with design thinking methodologies. With a premise that racism and equity are products of design and can be redesigned, we believe by equipping bureaucrats with design tools that are centered in equity, individuals will be able to disrupt and redesign systems of oppression.

This capstone documents the philosophical underpinnings of and process used to create and test aspects of the equityXdesign framework as well as the personal identity development process I engaged in as co-creator of the process. I argue that it is the interaction of my identity development journey with my entrepreneurial creative path that served to push each aspect forward, making identity work a necessary component of any innovation or entrepreneurial project that seeks equity.
Mark Martin, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Building Regional Intermediary Capacity Towards Equity, Access, and Excellence in Tennessee’s Grades 7-14/16 College and Career Pathways
Monday, April 10, 2:00-3:00 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1
Committee Members: Martin West (Chair), HGSE; Ronald Ferguson, HKS; Nancy Hoffman, Vice President and Senior Advisor, Jobs for the Future

Career pathways offer students future direction and relevant, engaging learning experiences that are designed to lead them to and through a postsecondary degree or credential and ultimately on to successful occupations with family-sustaining wages, upward career trajectories, and economic mobility. Although one essential lever to successful career pathways is strong and supportive state level policy and leadership, career pathways development and implementation must ultimately take place within regional ecosystems that encompass economic labor sheds, including postsecondary institutions and employers. Cross-sector regional partnerships among educational institutions (secondary and postsecondary), employers, and workforce development are critical to developing the programming, curriculum, and career-readiness opportunities students need to step boldly into their futures. The success of such partnerships hinges on the capacity of cross-sector stakeholder collaborations, often referred to as regional workforce intermediaries, to effectively convene, organize, and execute the work.

Though Pathways Tennessee has been working across the state to expand career pathways in Tennessee since 2012, as of the end of the 2016 school year, fewer than one percent of students statewide had completed high-quality school-to-career pathways. Likewise, fewer than seven percent of students were graduating with early postsecondary credits, a strong predictor of postsecondary degree attainment. As state-level agencies partner to lead and support the work of Pathways Tennessee, regional intermediary capacity must expand to execute the work. My strategic project focused on building the capacity of regional leads, regional intermediaries, and regional stakeholders to effectively design, pilot, implement, and continuously improve career pathways.

Two themes resonated throughout the project, equity and sustained commitment. Absent a steady focus on these two aspects of career pathways design and execution, career pathways programming inevitably fails to serve all students or reach its full potential. In Tennessee, data analysis revealed substantial racial gaps in access and completion of high-quality pathways programs. Additionally, as Pathways Tennessee and its regional intermediary partners experienced shifts in personnel, policies, and politics, it became clear that the necessary work to improve pathways statewide would be negatively impacted without sustained commitment from all pathways stakeholders. Ultimately, I was only able to complete a portion of the capacity-building work I had hoped to achieve through my strategic project. This was due, in part, to the responsible and strategic decision for Pathways Tennessee to temporarily pull back from directly supporting regions to instead formulate a coherent long-term vision and plan for improving and expanding career pathways statewide.
Andrea LaRocca, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Teacher Absenteeism: Engaging a District to Understand Why It Happens and What It Means
Monday, April 10, 3:00-4:00 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3
Committee Members: Lisa Lahey (Chair), HGSE; Mary Grassa O’Neill, HGSE; Jennifer Lepre, Chief of Human Capital, Providence Public School District

A teacher being absent more than 10 days in a school year has been demonstrated to negatively impact student achievement (Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008), and the U.S. Department of Education calls teacher attendance a “leading indicator” of school improvement and educational equity (“U.S. Department of Education,” 2013). Miller reports that in Rhode Island, 50.2% of teachers are absent more than 10 days in a school year, which is the highest rate in the U.S. (2012). In the 2015-16 school year, 58% of teachers in the Providence Public School District (PPSD) were absent more than 10 days, a rate which has been consistent over the last three school years (LaRocca, 2016). In PPSD, this rate of absence impacts student achievement, creates operational challenges, and suggests employee disengagement.

The strategic project that is the focus of this Capstone was to lead a diagnostic process to understand the root causes of teacher and teacher assistant absenteeism in PPSD by engaging those who are part of the problem in defining the problem. In this project, I hypothesized that absenteeism was a sign of disengagement and that, therefore, engaging teachers, teacher assistants, and principals in determining the root causes of absenteeism would be a critical first step in addressing absenteeism. This project also represented PPSD taking a more multifaceted diagnostic approach to problem definition than the District typically has in the past.

Throughout this Capstone, I argue that diagnosis of the root causes of absenteeism and the engagement of those who are part of absenteeism in that diagnosis are necessary first steps to addressing absenteeism in a school district. We discovered multiple root causes for teacher absenteeism in PPSD, many of which compound each other and represent complex cultural challenges that cannot be solved by technical solutions alone. Viewing these causes through motivation theory additionally allowed for prioritization, and analyzing what was learned about the process yielded equally vital information about root causes. With this framing in mind, the most critical root causes for PPSD to address are a lack of trust and weak relationships between teachers and the administration, a lack of recognition for teachers, and teachers feeling overwhelmed and under-supported. These issues can be addressed at both the technical level and at the more complex, cultural level; technical intervention can begin to create behavioral change and traction for the complex, cultural interventions that will lead to more sustainable change around absenteeism.

Based on our experiences in PPSD, I recommend other school districts engage in diagnostic work when addressing teacher absenteeism and consider what is learned through the process and means of engagement as much as what is learned through information gathered about root causes. The diagnostic work that I led in PPSD was a critical step in defining the problem and has created the conditions and initial buy-in necessary to address teacher absenteeism further and to create more widespread ownership of the problem.
David Hay, Ed.L.D. Candidate
From Communication to Coherence: Leading Change
Tuesday, April 11, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1
Committee Members: Andrés Alonso (Chair), HGSE; Deborah Jewell-Sherman, HGSE; Edie Sharp, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Chancellor, New York City Department of Education

This capstone chronicles the task of internal communication in service of coherence making, as part of a comprehensive change underway within the New York City Department of Education. School district leaders everywhere face the difficult task of building and maintaining the focus and energy of their employees in spite of myriad external distractions. Inevitably, change means disrupting the existing status quo, necessitating the need to reach a new state of equilibrium, or coherence. This process is called coherence making. Working in the most complex school system in America, the author examines strategies for coherence making. The author explores ways in which a leader can create opportunities for employees to engage in coherence making.

Charged with advancing the vision summarized by the slogan “Equity and Excellence for All,” the author set out to explore ways in which leaders might engage stakeholders in the sensemaking necessary to achieve coherence. Within the framework of the capstone, equity means providing children in every part of the city with uniformly high expectations alongside the unique supports and resources necessary for each child to achieve those expectations. Under this definition, equity is not the same as equality, and access alone is insufficient.

Conducting a series of employee town halls, targeted messages, and additional engagement opportunities provided valuable data about how employees perceive the organizational vision and how individual work aligns to the vision, assisting in the process of coherence making. The tactics employed during the project put into practice communications strategies aimed at connecting employees to the vision at the emotional as well as the intellectual level.

The author outlines several leadership challenges and lessons learned. Leadership lessons include (1) building trust by becoming known, (2) viewing leadership as reciprocal, rather than transactional, (3) creating opportunities for stakeholders to create coherence, (4) investing in additional leaders, (5) dedicating time to leadership priorities, (6) tailoring messages to the local context, (7) developing champions for the work, (8) making strategic planning part of the work, (9) normalizing incoherence as a natural part of the change process, and (10) engaging people in cooperative problem solving, rather than solution execution.
Michael LaRosa, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Helping Teacher-Created Ideas Survive and Thrive
Tuesday, April 11, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3
Committee Members: Monica Higgins (Chair), HGSE; Irvin Scott, HGSE; Molly McMahon, Program Director, IDEO

How might we encourage educators’ ideas and innovative approaches, and support those ideas and innovations in surviving, sustaining, and growing?

This essential question is relevant and important for the U.S. education sector given continued calls for innovative instructional improvements coexisting with the difficulty of stewarding change in school contexts. A strategic project situated in IDEO (a design and innovation firm), The Teachers Guild (one of its entrepreneurial ventures), and the Design for Learning studio (one of its organizational groups) investigated this essential question.

This capstone illustrates that while innovation may be sparked productively through enterprising, well-connected, influential, early visionaries, education leaders and organizations aspiring to broad, positive social impact in the education sector must: (1) attend explicitly and regularly to socioeconomic inclusion and racial diversity; and (2) engage public education agencies as they enroll the preponderance of our nation’s children. This may require adaptive work from educators and their organizations to achieve. Regular, intentional practice can scaffold this adaptive work. Internally, shared stories and aspirations can establish purpose for such adaptive work. Externally, stakeholder visibility and financial resources can set and sustain the momentum of this adaptive work. Rather than employing externally-facing accountability and financial incentives in the context of top-down directives (as in Race to the Top or No Child Left Behind), jointly crafted stories and aspirations should provide the motivating intention.

This capstone further illustrates that the stimulation, survival, sustenance, and growth of education innovations may be enhanced by: (1) enhancing educators’ sense of self-efficacy; (2) bolstering educators’ capacity for story-driven leadership; (3) focusing policy attention toward relationships and connection rather than toward systems and content; and (4) linking educators across usual educator roles and across typical system boundaries.

The Design for Learning studio’s and The Teachers Guild’s experience in this strategic project reinforced that stories and data-driven evidence are not dichotomous, but complementary—stories may provide an engaging point of entry to later evidential data. Further, designing innovation programs for individual educators may yield meaningful personal impact but likely attenuated sector-level impact. In contrast, designing collaboration across roles and schools reduced barriers to and accelerated teacher-driven innovation.
Samuel A. Mehr, Ed.D. Candidate

Social Functions of Music in Infancy

Tuesday, April 11, 10:00-11:30 a.m., Eliot Lyman room, Longfellow Hall, 2nd floor
Committee Members: Howard Gardner (Chair), HGSE; Elizabeth Spelke, FAS; Catherine Snow, HGSE; Steven Pinker, FAS.

I explore music's early role in social cognition, testing the hypothesis that infants interpret singing as a social signal. Over six experiments, I examine 5- and 11-month-old infants' social responses to new people who sing familiar or unfamiliar songs to them (Mehr, Song, & Spelke, 2016, Psychological Science; Mehr & Spelke, 2017, Developmental Science). I manipulate song familiarity with three training methods: infants learn songs from a parent; from a musical toy; or from an unfamiliar adult who sings first in person and subsequently via video chat. I use two main outcome measures: a test of visual preference for the singer of a familiar song; and, in older infants, a more explicitly social test of selective reaching for objects associated with and endorsed by novel individuals. I also test infants' memory for the songs they hear in these studies. I find that infants garner social information from the songs they hear, which they subsequently act upon in the context of social interaction; when songs are not learned in a social context, infants recall them in great detail after long delays. These results demonstrate a social function of music in early development. Music is not just pleasurable noise: it is a member of a class of behaviors, including language, accent, and food preference, that reliably inform infants' social behavior.
Annice Enyonam-Kwawu Fisher, Ed.L.D. Candidate

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

Tuesday, April 11, 2:00-3:00 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1
Committee Members: Deborah Jewell-Sherman (Chair), HGSE; Ronald Heifetz, HKS; Anne Williams-Isom, Chief Executive Officer, Harlem Children’s Zone

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 have had three classes of high school graduates, 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-imagination 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.
I served as a resident at Education First (Ed First), a national, mission-driven, for-profit organization that provides a wide array of policy- and strategy-related services to support states, districts, policymakers, advocates, and practitioners in K-12 education. From 2006 to 2015, the organization grew from a one-woman start-up to a 50-person consulting firm with client relationships with some of education's most influential organizations, including the U.S. Department of Education and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In early 2016, for the first time in the organization’s history, it found itself with declining revenues. Ed First’s partner owners seized this opportunity to step back and take stock of what they had accomplished, the challenges they were facing, and what the future might hold. I was brought in to Ed First to provide analysis and make recommendations on their business model, specifically how well it was organized to deliver impact and sustain itself financially, and to help identify its current and future positioning within the education marketplace. This Capstone examines my work at Ed First to capitalize on the organizational urgency to strengthen the firm’s business model, restoring its financial positioning and its capacity for impact on the field of education. My work draws heavily on Clay Christensen’s jobs-to-be-done and business model frameworks, undergirded by research on the history and utility of mission-driven for-profit organizations. Through Mark Moore’s strategic triangle framework and Ron Heifetz’s adaptive leadership framework, I deconstruct my work and mine the successes and challenges of my efforts and the implications for my own personal leadership, for Ed First and for the education sector writ large.
Kerry Donahue, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Beyond Minimally Adequate: Building Public Support for High-Quality, Accessible Charter Schools in South Carolina
Tuesday, April 11, 4:00-5:00 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 1
Committee Members: Paul Reville (Chair), HGSE; Deborah Jewell-Sherman, HGSE; Elliot Smalley, Superintendent, South Carolina Public Charter School District

This capstone examines a strategic initiative to bring about policy changes that would facilitate the growth of high-quality charter schools specifically serving historically underserved students in the state of South Carolina. Operating from within the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), the state’s only statewide charter school authorizer, I develop and execute a strategy to gain increased public support for the SCPCSD’s new strategic priorities of increasing charter school quality and access. I couple an in-depth analysis of the policy environment, leveraging the work of Mark Moore and John Kingdon, with a chronicle of my efforts to build the SCPCSD’s influence in its environment. Results from the initiative include the SCPCSD’s increased understanding of the policy environment and how to influence it; the development of new relationships with key decision makers and influencers; and the policy environment’s increased receptivity to the SCPCSD and its strategic goals. Analyzing the initiative through the lens of policy change and organizational strategy, I find that the deep resistance of democratic systems and their institutions to change requires organizations to be willing and to have the capacity to reshape the values of the people within the system through engaging coalitions in sustained problem-solving work. Ultimately, I argue that given the public nature of schools—whether they be charter or district-managed—and their position within our democratic system, any education reform initiative requires a companion political initiative to ensure that the environment is willing to adopt and sustain the reform.
Y. Debbie Liu, Ed.D. Candidate
Understanding Systems Problem Solving: What Sets Expert vs. Competent Players Apart in High-level Gameplay
Wednesday, April 12, 10:00-11:30 a.m., Longfellow 229
Committee Members: Tina Grotzer (Chair), HGSE; Chris Dede, HGSE; Eric Klopfer, MIT.

My dissertation explores what sets competent and expert systems-problem solvers apart, using a multi-player online arena setting in World of Warcraft (WoW) as a model system of study. Expert players comprise the top 0.1% of the player population, while competent players comprise the top 0.5%. Systems problem solving in WoW arena is an iterative, real-time process of theory-testing, decision making, and action taken toward a desired system outcome, where one’s behavior in the system has a direct effect on the system. Expertise in WoW arena is defined by the ability to consistently reach a desired end state, requiring one to recognize complex system attributes (e.g. feedback loops, path-dependencies, non-linear effects, time-delays, etc.) and leverage those characteristics in their decision making and actions. Using grounded-theory research methods, I found subtle differences between expert and competent players in their acquisition and application of in-game and systems knowledge and skills, with the most notable differences found in their attitudes towards learning and demonstration of emotional intelligence. Implications of my study include the critical role “soft” skills, which traditionally receive less attention in schools, may play in the development of content-specific or “hard” skills such as systems problem-solving. My findings also lend support to the growing argument that attitudes (e.g. growth mindsets, perseverance, passion, and grit) may be a stronger predictor of professional excellence and success in life than academic intelligence. Lastly, computer games—an inherent system of varying complexity—provides the perfect environment to both limit and augment the real world, for learners to engage in decision-making and problem solving within a systemic framework to better resolve complex 21st century challenges.
Bonnie B. Mackintosh, Ed.D. Candidate
A Matter of Perspective: An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between the Early Math Skills and Social Competence of Children from Low-Income Families
Wednesday, April 12, 1:30-3:00 p.m., Larsen 106
Committee Members: Catherine Snow (Chair), HGSE; Robert Selman, HGSE; Meredith Rowe, HGSE, Dana Charles McCoy, HGSE.

The U.S. is calling for expansion of preschool to help close the well-documented income-based achievement gap. Children from low-income families often enter kindergarten academically behind their higher income peers and recent findings indicate gaps in social-emotional aspects of school readiness as well, illustrating how early these gaps emerge and raising questions about cross-domain relationships. Therefore, this two-study analysis—which includes both a secondary and primary data analysis—explores the relationship between children’s social competence and their early academic development, specifically in the domain of math. The secondary data analysis draws a subsample (N=3485) from the Head Start Impact Study, (U.S. DHHS, 2010) a large, nationally representative study of Head Start, to investigate the potential mediating role of children’s social competence in explaining early math skills for children randomly assigned to Head Start. Results from a confirmatory factor analysis indicated good model fit for the latent construct with positive social skills and teacher-child relationships as indicators of social competence. Moreover, children’s social competence was positively related to math achievement during the Head Start year. As a complement, the primary data analysis uses longitudinal growth modeling (N=76) to explore the within- and cross-domain relationships between children’s a) interpersonal, social problem-solving skills and b) early math skills during a preschool year. Participants in Study 1 were recruited from a preschool in Massachusetts serving mostly children from low-income and minority families. Results show that children have positive, linear math learning trajectories that vary by age when not accounting for children’s social competence. Children’s development of flexibility in social problem-solving is associated with changes in the rates at which children learn math skills across a preschool year when controlling for baseline child demographics. Children’s adaptive social problem-solving strategies show positive, non-linear growth trajectories. Scores on adaptive problem solving show an intriguing relationship (p = .12) to later math growth, a finding that should be pursued in a larger study. Taken together, the results from these two studies suggest a relationship between children’s social competence and early math skills that may warrant more attention to social skills in preschool curricula, especially in programs where challenging, developmentally-focused math curricula are being introduced.
Ali Imad Fadlallah, Ed.L.D. Candidate

Music Forward’s Movement to Improve Life Outcomes for Underserved Youth: Championing Career & Technical Education, STEAM, and Personalization

Wednesday, April 12, 2:00-3:00 p.m., Larsen Hall, Room G08

Committee Members: Deborah Jewell-Sherman (Chair), HGSE; Irvin Scott, HGSE; Laura Clark, Director of Programs, House of Blues Music Forward Foundation

This Capstone for the Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.) Program captures my Residency experience as a Program Adviser for the House of Blues Music Forward Foundation (“Music Forward”) in Hollywood, CA, an autonomously running 501(c)(3) organization, and the only non-profit operating within Live Nation’s ~$8Billion family of companies. Music Forward runs five key programs (one of which I developed and piloted during Residency) serving diverse youth aged 12-22 in eight underserved regions across America, with the mission of “accelerating real-life skills for youth using music as the bridge to successful careers.”

In this Capstone, I combine research and reflection from the field to bring the core task of my Residency to life: leading the design (or redesign) and implementation of programs and initiatives that help youth translate the skills they have gained from Music Forward’s programs into promising jobs and careers. Through a Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), I surveyed the literature across Career and Technical Education (CTE); personalized, or student-centered learning; and STEAM (Science, Technology, Education, Arts, and Mathematics) education. Based on my research, interviews with practitioners, and own experience in the field, I argue that in order to best deliver on its mission, Music Forward should partner with specific schools within its target demographic; namely, those who have adopted CTE school models that are STEAM or “Arts, Media and Entertainment” (AME) based, with an emphasis on student-centered learning, given these schools’ propensity toward career preparedness, collaboration, and collective impact.

Given the critical role of multi-party collaboration in ensuring the success of Music Forward’s programs, I utilize a “collective impact” framework as a tool for analyzing the organization’s relationship with (and dependence upon) strategic partners. Ultimately, I conclude that Music Forward must act as a collective impact convener to optimize its impact on a student’s life and career outcomes. Finally, I discuss Music Forward’s urgent need to secure funding to support the continued growth and sustainment of career pathway related initiatives.
Mary C. Wall, Ed.L.D. Candidate
A Bias Toward Teams: Are We Teaming Well? Does It Even Matter?
Implications for Teams in Public School Districts from a Case Study at Boston Public Schools
Wednesday, April 12, 3:00-4:00 p.m., Askwith Hall, Longfellow Hall
Committee Members: Mark Moore (Chair), HKS; David Cohen, HGSE; Karla Estrada, Deputy Superintendent, Academics and Student Supports for Equity Team, Boston Public Schools

Teams are at the heart of change efforts in public school districts all over the country. Within central offices, the nature of the systems-level reform generally requires collaboration amongst diverse people with diverse perspectives, sitting across bureaucratic silos and altitudes, who come together to respond and react to school needs and district priorities. Teams are thought of as inherent to the work of public education, as a structure that can harness expertise and capacity to address complex, seemingly intractable problems that have dogged districts for decades.

But are teams really necessary to get the work done? If they are, what chances do teams have to flourish or survive amidst the bureaucratic accountability that characterizes most school districts – or to advance the tough work of change that district leaders task them with?

In this capstone, I explore and challenge what I consider to be a fundamental bias towards teams and teamwork in public K-12 school district change efforts. While the intent to seek cross-functional collaboration holds potential to unlock innovative solutions, I argue that by and large public school districts are not yet set up to enable the success of teams – and I question whether or not it matters. Many district change efforts still move forward even when teamwork breaks down, largely because of the bureaucracy districts were seeking to overcome when they set teams up in the first place.

In bureaucratic systems, team performance often goes under-recognized as the buck stops at individuals. While this approach is certainly expeditious, it has vast potential to undercut vertical and horizontal collaboration within organizations as well as to undermine the values and priorities that districts like Boston have put forward by exploiting the inequities of business-as-usual. Making forward progress toward district goals in spite of teams thwarts collaborative teeming efforts in the long run. It leaves little incentive for team members to change behavior, it preserves the status quo, and it distances district leadership from the system it has envisioned to better address teaching and learning needs.

I discuss these arguments through my lens of ten months of residency at Boston Public Schools, working on long-term instructional change strategies seeking to organizationally alter ways that central office provides supports to schools. I argue that – absent concerted efforts to cultivate the right task environment for teams to succeed – teams, their individual members, and the change efforts they seek to implement are likely to languish as districts fall back on the same structures that have produced limited outcomes for decades.
Catherine Pozniak, Ed.L.D. Candidate
**Leading, Learning, and Disequilibrium: Defining the Role of a Harbormaster Organization in a System of Schools**

Wednesday, April 12, 4:00-5:00 p.m., Larsen Hall, Room G08

Committee Members: Kathy Boudett (Chair), HGSE; Martin West, HGSE; Chris Meyer, Chief Executive Officer, New Schools for Baton Rouge; Preston Castille, Board Chair, New Schools for Baton Rouge

This capstone examines the role of a new type of education nonprofit in education reform efforts. Referred to as “harbormasters” or “quarterbacks,” these city-based organizations represent a shift to locally developed and executed strategies to improve outcomes for preK-12 education.

My residency took place within a harbormaster called New Schools for Baton Rouge (NSBR) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. NSBR is a 501c3 organization with a mission to ensure that every child in Baton Rouge has excellent school options. NSBR’s initial goal was to create 12,000 high quality seats for the highest need students in North Baton Rouge, a cluster of neighborhoods where more than three dozen schools have a ‘F’ rating on the state report card. As the organization closes in on its original goal, NSBR is leveraging its early success to expand quality choice options for a total of 30,000 high-quality seats for students across the city.

With this in mind, NSBR is contemplating the long-term implications of Baton Rouge’s evolving education ecosystem and its own role in the city’s system of schools, which includes four traditional school districts, the state Recovery School District, public charter schools, a diocesan school system, and private schools.

My charge was to determine the solutions that must be in place for a system of schools to thrive in Baton Rouge. On a systemic level, the strategic project examined legacy costs (primarily teacher pension costs), enrollment, facilities, and parent engagement. On an organizational level, the strategic project considered how a civic organization like NSBR might position itself to ensure the system has both equity and coherence. In particular, the project asked whether NSBR’s primary lever for driving systemic improvement is by managing a competitive portfolio of schools or if NSBR should transition to a more central role in an increasingly decentralized system.

In addition to developing frameworks and tools that will guide NSBR’s future course of action, I examined the internal conditions that must exist for organizations like NSBR to address the adaptive challenges facing the sector. NSBR’s success hinges on its ability to become a learning organization and to navigate sustained periods of disequilibrium.
As of spring 2017, more than 50 million students attend public schools in the United States. However, the number of new college enrollees who desire to enter education as a profession is at its lowest level in nearly 50 years. According to data gathered by UCLA’s Cooperative Institutional Research Program, as of 2016, barely 4% of college freshman plan to pursue education as a major, which is down from nearly 12% just a few decades ago (Flannery, 2016). The percentage of Black teachers is even lower. A recent study by the Department of Education entitled, “The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce,” shows there is a significant gap, by race, in the desire to go into teaching. Although nearly 50% of elementary and secondary students are of color, less than one in five U.S. public school teachers are individuals of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The reality of a lower percentage of Blacks in teaching is a complex issue because the decreased presence of Black teachers occurs at different points along the teacher career pipeline.

Adding to the teacher shortage is the reality that many new teachers’ dissatisfaction leads them to leave the profession within a few years. According to the Education Commission of the States, lowering teacher attrition and increasing teacher supply and quality in high-need areas like special education, math, science, and underserved schools are two ways to address specific teacher shortages (Woods, 2016). Additionally, research suggests that enhanced preparation and mentoring programs can have a positive impact on increasing the number of teachers and lowering teacher attrition (Scriber & Akiba, 2010).

In an effort to reverse the declining numbers of well-qualified aspiring educators entering the teaching profession, Educators Rising, a rebranding of the organization formerly called Future Educators of America, is innovatively re-imagining ways to support the development of sustainable teacher pipelines to effectively prepare aspiring educators for rewarding, long-term careers in education.

This capstone focuses on the following three initiatives: 1) the creation of a co-curricular, school-based career pathway program (EdRising Academy Curriculum) to support diversity in Grow-Your-Own aspiring teacher programs for 11th and 12th grade students in local communities; 2) the development of assessments (Educators Rising’s “Aspiring to Teach” micro-credentials) for students to demonstrate fundamental teaching skills in five discrete areas; and 3) the implications of that work for the larger teacher-preparation sector, as well as for the site, and for myself.
Shashwata Prateek Dutta, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Making Advanced Courses More Equitable and Effective: Aligning Approaches, Philosophies, and Decision-Making Structures in Bellingham Public Schools
Thursday, April 13, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Longfellow Hall, Room 229
Committee Members: Martin West (Chair), HGSE; Mary Grassa O’Neill, HGSE; Greg Baker, Superintendent, Bellingham Public Schools

This capstone outlines my strategic project on creating a coherent system for advanced course taking across Bellingham high schools. The Bellingham School District has three dual-enrollment and dual-credit options available for high school students: Advanced Placement, College in the High School, and Running Start. Each high school has their own structure, vision, and philosophy on how students enroll in those advanced classes. However, school board members, district officials, and high school principals realized this model was ineffective and sought a more coherent system. In order to create coherence and alignment for advanced course enrollment across different high schools, I first attempted to understand why each high school created their own system to begin with. From this research, three broad themes emerged: 1) not all stakeholders believed all students can learn at high levels; 2) disaggregated data of students accessing advanced classes was difficult to obtain; and 3) different leaders in high schools had different philosophies on how high school students succeed. These themes not only uncovered incoherence, but revealed mindsets and structures that hampered equitable access to advanced course enrollment. Therefore, the outcome of this project not only brings coherence to advanced classes, but also makes them more equitable and accessible for traditionally disadvantaged populations. This capstone describes the strategies and tactics as well as the successes and failures of the attempt to create a coherent, equitable, and accessible system for advanced classes across Bellingham high schools. From this work, Advanced Placement test fees were fully subsidized for students eligible for free and reduced lunch, College in the High School is in the process of being reformed with fewer partners, students who need extra support in Running Start will begin to receive it, and a wide-ranging conversation around the role of quantitative data has begun.
Zachary Herrmann, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Partner Up: The Role of Collaboration in Education
Thursday, April 13, 10:30-11:30 a.m., Eliot Lyman Room, Longfellow Hall
Committee Members: Kathy Boudett (Chair), HGSE; Deborah Jewell-Sherman, HGSE; Jennifer Cheatham, Superintendent, Madison Metropolitan School District

Individuals and organizations collaborate when they are unable to achieve their goals on their own. Considering the complex and ambitious goals of many education organizations, the education sector would appear ripe for collaboration. This capstone explores the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in collaboration between education organizations by focusing on district-university partnerships. District-university partnerships must navigate significant challenges, including differences in organizational culture, ways of working, theories of action, and goals. But these differences must not be viewed solely as challenges to overcome; they are also opportunities to be leveraged. Indeed, differences are precisely what lead to unique capabilities and perspectives: essential elements for effective collaboration.

District-university partnerships provide a complex context for leadership. Effective leaders must be able to cross organizational boundaries, work effectively in situations with little or ambiguous formal authority, create systems and structures where currently none exist, develop partnership goals and processes that can coexist with those of each partner organization, and see themselves as leaders of emerging organizations. To do so, leaders must draw upon expertise not only in education, but from other disciplines and processes as well, including negotiation, collaboration, and business.
Margaret Troyer, Ed.D. Candidate

Teaching by the book? Teacher Implementation of an Adolescent Reading Intervention

Thursday, April 13, 1:00-2:30 p.m., Gutman 440
Committee Members: Nonie Lesaux (Chair), HGSE; James Kim, HGSE; Catherine Snow, HGSE.

This dissertation examines teacher implementation of an adolescent literacy intervention with a coaching component, guided by questions about fidelity of implementation (FoI) and curriculum adaptation. In the first of two studies, I used data from observations of teachers (n=17) in nine schools during the 2013-14 school year to conduct a nuanced descriptive analysis of FoI. I also analyzed weekly logs completed by literacy coaches (n=3) to examine variation in quantity and intensity of coaching. I then compared variation in coaching with variation in FoI, and finally compared FoI to outcomes for students (n=287). FoI at observation 1 was found to predict coaching time, and FoI across both observations predicted student outcomes. This emphasizes the critical role of investigating implementation in order to better understand the results of intervention research.

In the second study, I used qualitative methodology to analyze adaptations made by four experienced teachers in one school that sustained implementation of this curriculum after the intervention trial had ended. Six focal adaptations were identified, three each from two teachers, and analyzed for productivity using criteria from Debarger and colleagues (Debarger, Choppin, Beauvineau, & Moorthy, 2013). Of the six, only two met criteria for productivity. This suggests that making productive adaptations is difficult, and that teachers should be supported to do so through educative curriculum materials and effective professional development.

In addition, an account of teaching practice methodology was used to define each teacher’s orientation toward the curriculum (Simon & Tzur, 1999), and then to determine whether this orientation demonstrated assimilation or accommodation to intervention principles (Coburn, 2004). I found that the vast majority of time spent implementing the curriculum included adaptations, and that each teacher’s adaptations were different. Although one teacher demonstrated assimilation and accommodation to intervention principles, the other three primarily demonstrated assimilation. These findings suggest the importance of understanding teachers’ orientations toward curriculum in order to provide more tailored professional development which may help teachers accommodate to the most critical pedagogical features of a curriculum.
Janine de Novais, Ed.D. Candidate  
Brave Community: Teaching and Learning Race in College in the 21st Century  
Thursday, April 13, 2:00-3:30 p.m., Larsen 203  
Committee Members: Natasha K. Warikoo (Chair), HGSE; Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, HGSE; Lawrence D. Bobo, FAS.

Sociological evidence consistently demonstrates that racial progress coexists with persistent racial inequality in American society. Recently, increased evidence of police brutality against black citizens, as well as the 2016 presidential election clearly confirms that, even in the wake of the Obama era, racial conflict plagues American democracy. There is a widely held consensus that college is an optimal time to engage American undergraduates with the challenges and possibilities of the country’s racial diversity. With that in mind, I explored whether college classrooms in particular, might be optimal spaces for this engagement. I investigated the experience of undergraduates at a private, selective university, to ask how classroom experiences in courses on race might influence students’ understanding of race, if at all. I found that, drawing from the academic grounding that the classroom provided, students displayed increased capacity to engage with one another in intellectually courageous and empathetic ways. Further, I found that students’ understandings of race became more complex and more self-authored. I call this process—linking classroom dynamics to learning about race—brave community.
Ola J. Friday, Ed.L.D. Candidate

Widening the Shot: Strategic Design and Development of the Pennsylvania Early Care and Education Career Pathway and Career Pathway System

Thursday, April 13, 2:00-3:00 p.m., Eliot Lyman Room, Longfellow Hall

Committee Members: Paul Reville (Chair), HGSE; Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell, HGSE; Tracey Campanini, Chief of Staff, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development & Early Learning

The early care and education (ECE) workforce plays a vital role in supporting the development of our youngest learners, and putting our youth on track for a lifetime of success. These critical practitioners work hard for little status or compensation. The profession is grappling with advancing the skills and competencies of practitioners already in the field and lifting the barriers to entry for those new to the profession. This complex work requires innovative strategies, new policies, and comprehensive supports, particularly in light of the low compensation in this sector. State government organizations, such as the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), are well-versed in the challenges and rewards of this important work. OCDEL is committed to supporting the advancement of the early care and education workforce through policies, procedures, regulations, programs, and funding.

During my residency, I led the Career Pathways Work Group in revising the Early Learning Keys to Quality Career Lattice. I used this discrete charge as an entry to engage the team in a broader strategic planning effort. I employed the career pathways approach and its focus on career pathways and career pathway systems to guide my work and broader strategic planning efforts. I engaged in a three-phased approach where I: (1) used vision setting to establish a larger goal for the team’s efforts; (2) facilitated a shift in the team’s focus from narrow—the redesign of the career lattice—to broad—career pathways system development; and (3) guided the team’s initial engagement in the systems design and development processes. My goal was also to use the Career Pathways Work Group as an example of the cross-functional strategic planning and implementation that should be central to all of OCDEL’s work.
Nicole Magnuson, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Advancing and Sustaining the Oceanside Promise, a Collective Impact Initiative Anchored within Oceanside Unified School District
Friday, April 14, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3
Committee Members: Paul Reville (Chair), HGSE; Mandy Savitz-Romer, HGSE; Duane Coleman, Superintendent, Oceanside Unified School District

In addition to preparing students academically, public schools are increasingly expected to address the complex social, emotional, and safety needs of students. Collective impact, first defined by Kania & Kramer (2011) as “a commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” has emerged as a framework for bringing cross-sector partners together to share ownership of student success. Its data-informed, continuous improvement orientation drives collective action to address root cause issues and to achieve large-scale social impact.

This capstone documents the leadership and support I provided to Oceanside Unified School District (OUSD) and its community partners to advance and plan for the long-term sustainability of the Oceanside Promise (The Promise), a collective impact initiative anchored within OUSD. FSG’s Five Conditions of Collective Impact and StriveTogether’s Cradle to Career Theory of Action were used to assess the current state of the partnership, its backbone capacity, and in the development of a multi-year strategic roadmap. My strategic project involved working with district leadership, the Oceanside Promise Foundation (The Foundation), and The Promise partners to clarify roles and direction, create coherence, and facilitate shared ownership of The Promise and its long-term sustainability. In addition to my professional and academic experience, literature regarding collective impact, critical leadership competencies, and organizational and community coherence informed the strategic project’s planning and execution.

This capstone provides insight into the challenges and opportunities of a district-anchored collective impact initiative. Most notably, how shared community ownership must be intentionally cultivated and how collective impact challenges the mindsets and competencies of educators and community members with a traditional view of how school districts and communities partner. Thus, the implications for site and sector sections elevate the conditions that would better support the success of innovative school districts assuming the role of backbone support in collective impact initiatives.
Jessica D. Rose, Ed.L.D. Candidate
Impact Through Partnership: How District Central Offices Can Foster Principals’ Development as Effective Instructional Leaders Through Systems of Support, Development, and Accountability
Friday, April 14, 2:00-3:00 p.m., Gutman Conference Center, Area 3
Committee Members: Elizabeth City (Chair), HGSE; Andrés Alonso, HGSE; Frank Tiano, Assistant Superintendent, Framingham Public Schools

Public schools in the United States have not historically nor do they currently serve all students excellently and equitably. Principals are key stakeholders in educational transformation as the second most impactful in-school factor in student achievement and as the leaders of learning in over 98,000 schools across the country. Their role has shifted considerably over the past twenty years to include instructional leadership as well as building management. Most principals are not fully prepared through pre-service training and district central offices are increasingly re-defining their role to include the continued development of school leaders. While many types of support are utilized to help school leaders grow, principal evaluation has garnered considerable attention in the past decade. Research reveals that evaluation, like many supports, is not being effectively implemented in ways that are helpful to principals or impactful on their practice. My work in a Massachusetts district began as building a principal evaluation system but morphed to focus on developing individualized supports to principals. In the capstone that follows I describe the evolution of the project and lessons learned, particularly concerning the relationship between district central office and school leaders and how one might leverage that partnership for school and district improvement.