Successful School-Based Partnerships: What Does it Take?

Contents

Introduction

Schools and districts have long partnered with external organizations to deliver programming to students, both during and after the traditional school day. The potential benefits of such school-based partnerships for students can include improving social and academic outcomes, providing continuous services across multiple years, and exposing them to more diverse learning opportunities and to community resources. Likewise, schools can benefit from reinforcement of skills taught in classrooms, an improved school culture and reputation, and added resources and staff support.[1] Partnerships also can increase parental engagement at a school, which can promote student success as measured by grades, attendance, attitudes toward school, motivation, and graduation rates.[2]

Less is known, however, about whether and how school administrators and staff can coordinate partnership efforts in effective and efficient ways. Further, the optimal conditions for developing and maintaining partnerships whose goals align both with schools and districts and with partnering organizations and agencies are not fully understood.

This report describes findings from an evaluation that documented approaches, successes, and challenges of partnership coordination efforts in Philadelphia facilitated by the Community Partnerships VISTA Project of the **Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND)** and by the United Communities' **Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative (SEPC)** Partnership Coordination project. Each of these organizations implemented its own partnership coordination strategies in 19 School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools during the 2014/15 school year. This evaluation tried to understand the roles and functions of *partnership coordinators* and the extent to which partnership coordination efforts promoted *integrated activities and partner collaboration* that aligned with a school's needs and goals.[3]

Who was involved in this study?

During the 2014/15 school year, SEPC assigned two full-time partnership coordinators to six schools in South Philadelphia, where there are large immigrant and refugee populations. These partnership coordination sites were selected through existing relationships United Communities and SEPC had with schools and their staff. Their 2014/15 work represented an expansion of partnership coordination services from only high schools to both elementary and high schools.

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1   Harvard Family Research Project. (2010). Partnerships for learning: Promising practices in integrating school and out-of-school time program supports. Retrieved from: http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/partnerships-for-learning-promising-practices-in-integrating-school-and-out-of-school-time-program-supports

2   Ellis, D., & Hughes, K. (2002). Partnerships by design: Cultivating effective and meaningful school-family-community partnerships. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

3   In addition to this findings report, the evaluation team developed case studies profiling specific strategies, successes, and challenges of partnership coordination at eight schools. See Appendix A for the case studies.

PHENND's partnership coordination efforts also had expanded over time, from 5 schools in 2013/14 to 13 schools in 2014/15. PHENND partnership coordinators were AmeriCorps VISTA members placed citywide in schools selected through an application process.

The SEPC coordinators were assigned to multiple schools and had indefinite assignments; PHENND coordinators had one-year VISTA assignments.[4]

Which data informed this study?

The evaluation team collected data through surveys, interviews, meeting observations, and an end-of-year reflection meeting. Observations from partner meetings at schools were triangulated with survey and interview data of multiple stakeholders, including partnership coordinators, PHENND and SEPC leaders, partner organizations, and school and district staff. At the end-of-year reflection meeting, partnership coordinators and leadership from PHENND and SEPC shared their perspectives on the roles and functions of coordinators in the schools.

The evaluation team collected all data during the 2014/15 school year.

Exhibit 1: Data Sources

Collection Method	Stakeholder(s)	SEPC (6 schools)	PHENND (13 schools)
Surveys	Partner staff	17 respondents (4 schools)	63 respondents (10 schools)
	Partnership coordinator	2 respondents (6 schools)	11 respondents (11 schools)
Interviews	Partner Staff	9 interviews (13 interviewees)	1 focus group; 11 interviews (18 interviewees)
	Partnership coordinator	2 interviews (2 interviewees)	11 interviews (11 interviewees)
	School staff (principals and other staff)	3 interviews (3 interviewees)	8 interviews (9 interviewees)
	PHENND/SEPC leaders	1 interview (1 interviewee)	1 interviews (2 interviewees)
	District's Office of Strategic Partnerships (Executive Director)	1 interview (1 interviewee)	1 interview (1 interviewee)
Meeting Observations	Partnership coordinator with partners and school staff	5 observations (4 schools)	10 observations (5 schools)
End-of-Year Reflection Meeting	Partnership coordinators and PHENND/SEPC leaders	2 coordinators, 1 leader	13 coordinators, 2 leaders

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[4] Some VISTAs elect to renew their assignment for an additional year. During the 2014/15 school year, one PHENND coordinator was in her second year at the same school.

What are the roles and functions of partnership coordinators?

Data collected during the 2014/15 school year revealed several roles and associated benefits of partnership coordinators assigned to schools. Each is described below.

✓ **Serve as liaison between school and its external partners**

The primary role of partnership coordinators was to serve as the **liaison between the school and its external community partners**. In this role, many coordinators responded to e-mail and phone requests from partners seeking to offer either short- or long-term programming. Several partner interviewees reported it was helpful to have a point of contact in the school for logistics such as scheduling events and activities or for securing space for those activities in a timely manner. This reportedly helped to alleviate the burden on school staff for coordinating with individual partners and vice versa.

In some schools, partner interviewees credited the partnership coordinator with repairing strained school-partner relationships. They did this by serving as a point of contact for the organization, but particularly by helping school staff become more aware of and better understand the partner's services.

According to survey data, 70 percent of PHENND partners and 80 percent of SEPC partners agreed that the partnership coordination efforts increased communication between their organization and school staff. These data may suggest room for improvement in coordinators' efforts, or they could reflect that several partners already had good relationships and communication pathways with the schools they work in, or both.

✓ **Raise awareness of partner resources**

Partnership coordinators helped **organize information about partner contacts and available services.** Making this information available in a central location was valuable to school staff and to partners, especially in schools partnering with a large number of organizations. Sharing this information reportedly increased both the use and awareness of what partner services and resources were available.

Coordinators used various means to raise awareness about partner activities, including flyers, bulletin boards, websites, and social media. Using similar means, some coordinators expanded partners' reach by recruiting students to participate in partner programs or activities. Several coordinators supported events that drew partners and community members into the school, such as Family Literacy Night, College Financial Aid Night, and benefits awareness workshops.

Exhibit 2 suggests that survey respondents had **varied perceptions of the extent to which the partnership coordination efforts enhanced the overall implementation** of organizations' activities and programs in the schools. Coordinators were much more likely to strongly agree that implementation improved. Most partners agreed that implementation improved, though some PHENND partners were unsure of this and some disagreed with the statement.

Exhibit 2: Enhancement of Partner Activities and Programs

Question	Response	Coordinators	PHENND Partners	SEPC Partners
Overall implementation of partner activities/programs	Strongly agree	54%	23%	13%
	Agree	38%	49%	81%

Question	Response	Coordinators	PHENND Partners	SEPC Partners
has been enhanced as a result of the partnership coordination efforts.	Disagree	0%	14%	0%
	Strongly disagree	0%	4%	0%
	I don't know	8%	11%	6%

✓ **Conduct needs assessments and match school's needs with partners' services**

To help bring partners into the school, and to better match school needs with partner services, **partnership coordinators conducted needs assessments, partnership inventories, and resource mapping exercises**. Coordinators and school staff reported these efforts were most effective when school leaders and staff first articulated and prioritized school needs, and when coordinators helped identify service gaps and overlaps. Coordinators from PHENND and SEPC relied on school-level data and information gathered—informally and formally—from teachers, students, and parents to identify school needs. PHENND encouraged its coordinators to use specific tools and surveys to guide needs assessment conversations with schools and partners.

In addition to assessing needed and available human, financial, and in-kind donations, **coordinators identified ways to reduce duplication, and in some cases pool resources, across partners** (e.g., coordinating resources and efforts to host a large college fair, instead of separate, smaller fairs).

Coordinators also worked to identify and recruit additional partners to meet their school's persistent or emerging needs. All partnership coordinators we surveyed reported an expansion of partners in school year 2014/15. About half of partners for both PHENND and SEPC agreed there was expansion of partnerships, and the other half reported not knowing. Most coordinators reported that partnerships also increased in value or quality. However, only about half of partners agreed that value or quality had increased, and most of the rest reported they did not know.

A similar pattern of discrepancy between survey data from coordinators and survey data from partners was evident in response to a question about matching school and partner needs. Despite generally positive remarks overall, only 15 percent of partnership coordinators surveyed agreed their school(s) had a clear process for matching needs with partners. SEPC partners were more likely to agree (67 percent) than were PHENND partners (36 percent). PHENND partners also were more likely to report not knowing.

Collectively, these data suggest there is room for improvement before schools have clear, transparent processes for matching needs between schools and partner organizations.

✓ **Facilitate communication, planning, and collaboration among partners**

Partnership coordinators were responsible for facilitating communication, planning, and collaboration among partners. The evaluation team hypothesized increased awareness and communication cultivate cooperation, and are initial steps on the pathway to coordination and eventually aligned, integrated efforts. Exhibit 3, created with information adapted from the developers of the PARTNER tool,[5] suggests
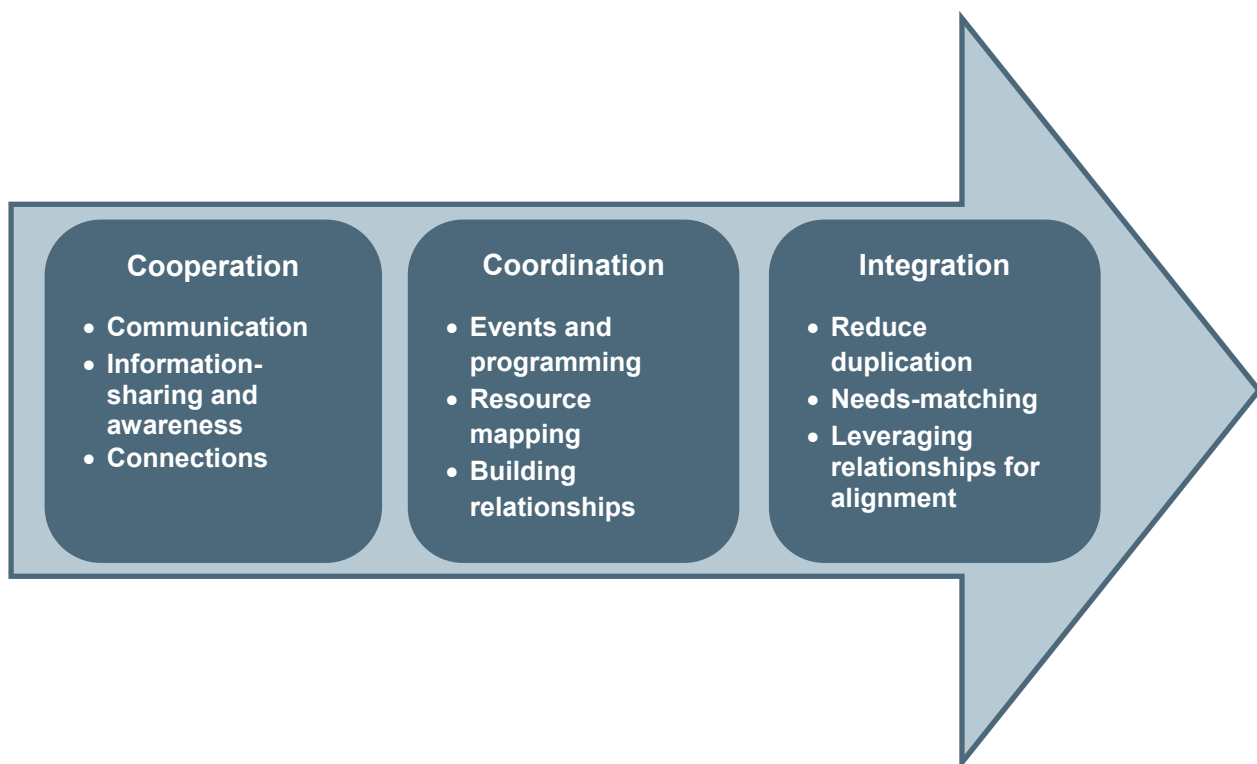
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[5] The evaluation team adapted wording in survey items from the University of Colorado Denver's *PARTNER (Program to Analyze, Record, and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships)* tool to imagine a continuum of partner collaboration.

partnership collaboration can be conceptualized as a continuum, from *cooperation* to *coordination* to *integration*.

In Exhibit 3, partnerships at the *cooperation* level are characterized by basic information sharing and partners learning about one another and about school needs. Partners may develop loose connections to one another and learn about available resources through partner meetings and updates. Partnerships at the *coordination* level are building relationships with one another to collaborate on events or coordinated programming. This also may include partners mapping resources to understand services available to the school and community they work in. The *integration* level involves partners making purposeful and strategic use of relationships and assets to meet student needs effectively and efficiently. Integration also is marked by partners making efforts to identify gaps and overlaps in resources, and to match school needs with partner services.

Exhibit 3: Continuum of Partner Collaboration Types

Cooperation
- **Communication**
- **Information-sharing and awareness**
- **Connections**

Coordination
- **Events and programming**
- **Resource mapping**
- **Building relationships**

Integration
- **Reduce duplication**
- **Needs-matching**
- **Leveraging relationships for alignment**

One primary way partnership coordinators fostered collaboration among partners was by hosting partner meetings. Based on observations and interviews, **partner meetings took a variety of forms during 2014/15.** Coordinators were expected to schedule monthly partner meetings, but several reported difficulty in doing that. Some encountered scheduling conflicts, while others lacked sufficient buy-in and support from school leaders or partners or both to sustain ongoing meetings. Several interviewees, including coordinators and partners, indicated they did not believe frequent all-partner meetings were necessary, especially if there were not clear goals—and roles for individual partners—for each meeting.

When all-partner meetings proved difficult to schedule, some coordinators held individual meetings with partners to understand their needs and to promote goal setting or needs matching. Other coordinators reported that targeted, strategic meetings with a few partners, often about a common type of programming, were more efficient and effective. Several stakeholders favored these smaller, strategic

meetings over frequent all-partner meetings. Nevertheless, interviewees acknowledged it could be valuable to gather all partners occasionally.

To keep partners engaged and to maintain momentum around partnership coordination efforts, **coordinators kept in contact with partners between meetings**. Some coordinators sent regular partner activity updates to all partners, while others contacted partners individually. This communication was especially necessary when scheduling challenges made it difficult for some partners to attend meetings regularly. Partner interviewees expressed appreciation for coordinators' follow-up on action items from meetings. Others suggested coordinators could do more. They mentioned reaching out to partners beforehand to explain their specific roles in meetings, and even involving them more actively in meetings (e.g., by leading specific trainings or discussions about students' needs and services provided).

Survey data from partners showed **most who attended meetings found them useful in increasing collaboration between partners**. SEPC partners were more likely than PHENND partners to agree or strongly agree that partnership meetings were useful in this way (93 percent versus 64 percent), but nearly one-third of PHENND partners skipped this question. In addition, most coordinators and partners responding to the survey agreed that the partnership coordination efforts enhanced *awareness* among partners. Most agreed that partnership coordination increased *communication* between partners. As shown in Exhibit 4, again, not as many PHENND partners agreed as did SEPC partners.

These data may suggest a need for even more efforts to facilitate communication between partner organizations. Another possibility is that some of the PHENND partner organizations already were communicating with one another prior to the arrival of the partnership coordinator.

Exhibit 4: Partner Awareness and Communication

The partnership coordination effort has helped…	Coordinators	PHENND Partners	SEPC Partners
…my organization become more aware of other partner organizations serving the school	Total = 92% Strongly Agree = 69% Agree = 23%	Total =82% Strongly Agree= 42% Agree= 40%	Total =94% Strongly Agree = 44% Agree = 50%
…to increase communication between my organization and other organizations partnering with the school	Total =92% Strongly Agree = 38% Agree = 54%	Total =68% Strongly Agree = 30% Agree = 38%	Total =94% Strongly Agree = 50% Agree = 44%

✓ **Support schools' parent and community engagement efforts**

The majority of partnership coordinators **supported their schools' parent and community engagement efforts** in a number of ways. They interacted with parents in the school and at school events, such as open houses, back-to-school nights, and report card conferences. Nearly all reported assisting with the planning and outreach for parent cafes and School Advisory Councils. Coordinators also provided students and families with information about city-wide services and benefits available to them. Some coordinators attended community events and meetings to develop relationships with local businesses and community leaders. All coordinators gave examples of their using social media, websites, newsletters, and direct phone calls to communicate, conduct outreach, and recruit volunteers.

Some school staff credited coordinators' efforts with improving the reputation of a school within its community by their sharing positive press and using marketing to celebrate and highlight partnership activities and successes in the school.

✓ **Provide other administrative support to schools**

Partnership coordinators from several PHENND schools described roles they played in their school that extended beyond partnership coordination and parent and community engagement. Several coordinators provided administrative support in the main office of their school, answering phones, greeting visitors, and even covering the office while the secretary was on lunch break. Others delivered daily attendance sheets to teachers in classrooms. At least one coordinator served as an extra set of hands during lunch recess.

In all of these instances, the coordinators described the extra duties as resulting in good will and greater buy-in from school staff for the partnership efforts. Partner interviewees, however, cautioned that serving too many "all-hands-on-deck functions" could distract coordinators from performing their primary roles and functions.

What skills do partnership coordinators need to effectively manage and maintain school-partner relationships?

Several interviewees described the slow, incremental nature of fostering collaboration between schools and partners, as well as among different partner organizations. In addition to scheduling and facilitating partner meetings, coordinators used various strategies to maintain momentum for partnership coordination and collaboration. Coordinators and partners who attended the end-of-year reflection meeting identified **several skills and behaviors critical to coordinators' success**, including those in Exhibit 5.

Exhibit 5: Skills Employed by Partnership Coordinators

Communication	Leadership
✓ Exercised good oral, listening, and written communication skills to provide clear and consistent messages to partners and school staff ✓ Consistently responded to partner inquiries and followed through on identified next steps ✓ Sent meeting minutes, reminders, and contact information to all partners	✓ Engaged in strategic, higher-level, and forward-thinking planning to encourage collaboration ✓ Took initiative, asked questions and showed commitment to the school and its partners ✓ Balanced being relatable and enthusiastic with being assertive, yet mindful of boundaries
Technology	**Professionalism**
✓ Employed varied communication methods for diverse audiences, including websites, newsletters, social media, presentation tools, and personalized phone calls and emails	✓ Conducted work in a timely and reliable manner ✓ Exhibited "soft" skills, such as office etiquette, dressing for the occasion, and an understanding that impressions and perceptions of school staff, parents, and partners matter

Organization	Flexibility and resilience
✓ Tracked all partners and contacts and readily provided this information to stakeholders ✓ Approached work in a detail-, task- and goal-oriented way to maximize engagement with school staff and partner organizations ✓ Used organizational tools to schedule and publicize events and activities hosted by partners at the school and in the community	✓ Acted quickly to recalibrate expectations (e.g., when a meeting doesn't go as planned) ✓ Adapted to diverse stakeholders, audiences, situations, and feedback ✓ Accepted the need to learn new skills and functions while "on the job" ✓ Displayed resilience, persistence and patience in challenging settings and circumstances
Interpersonal	**Systems awareness and resourcefulness**
✓ Communicated comfortably with strangers, and made them feel welcome in the school ✓ Made efforts to recognize names and faces and remember details about partners and programs ✓ Maintained composure during difficult situations or conversations ✓ Engaged in authentic, respectful interactions with community leaders and partners ✓ Acted as a "team player" who was willing to assist with event and program planning, including recruitment, advertising, fundraising, and scheduling access to school facilities	✓ Recognized challenges facing low-income neighborhoods and schools, but avoided a deficit approach to working with staff, students, parents, and partners in these settings ✓ Sought information on district policies and procedures (e.g., truancy guidelines, code of conduct, volunteer policies) ✓ Understood how principals, teachers, and schools work, including basic logistics and functions ✓ Made efforts to identify and understand resources and services offered by partners ✓ Identified resources, grants, events and trainings available to the school and its partners

What challenges did partnership coordinators face?

✓ **Partnership coordinators were required to secure buy-in from multiple stakeholders**

One very prominent theme that emerged during the 2014/15 data collection was the importance of introducing—and explaining—the roles and functions of the partnership coordinator to multiple stakeholders (such as principals, school staff, and partners themselves). In fact, this **understanding and perception of the functions shaped relationships, stakeholder buy-in, and the extent to which many coordinators felt successful in their role**. Principals were in a position to establish the vision and expectations for partnerships. Those principals who fully embraced PHENND's or SEPC's partnership coordination model were able to secure buy-in from teachers, staff, and partners by explaining the purpose and goals of the coordination efforts. Several **principals (or their delegates) were instrumental in supplying coordinators with needed information about the school community, its priorities and needs, and existing partnerships**, including procedures for engaging with partners.

Coordinators reported it was helpful to understand their expected roles so they could engage school staff and partners without fear of overstepping boundaries. PHENND coordinators had access to a binder of resources to help articulate and shape their roles and functions, set goals with schools and partners, establish communication with partners, and better match needs and align school and partner goals. The binder also included a "Year at a Glance" document and the "VISTA Assignment Description," which

served as guideposts for the VISTAs' work and could be referenced during initial and ongoing conversations with school leadership.

Schools introduced and explained the partnership coordinator role in varying ways and to different degrees. Some schools introduced the coordinator to staff on Professional Development days, while others introduced the coordinator to staff individually or expected the coordinator to make their own introductions. **Buy-in from teachers and school staff proved critical to helping coordinators understand student needs** so that they could effectively match and coordinate partner resources to fill those needs. Partners reported teacher and staff buy-in are also critical to continuity and stability in partnerships over time. Several noted it was valuable for partners to engage with school staff during and between partner meetings. Individual intake sessions with partners were scheduled by some schools to introduce partners to the coordinator. Other schools opted to host an introductory meeting with multiple partners. In either case, interviewees reported it was helpful for the coordinator to get a complete sense of all of the partners working in the school, and for the partners to become aware of the coordinator. In schools where such introductions were not made, coordinators reported their efforts were delayed, in some cases to the extent they felt ineffective in their role.

Articulating and communicating the roles and functions of partnership coordinators required deliberate planning and consistent messaging about how to access, communicate, and interact with the coordinator. Depending on whether they were affiliated with PHENND or SEPC, coordinators were assigned full-time to a single school or to multiple schools within a particular community, respectively. Interviewees across both models emphasized the importance of understanding coordinators' schedules and accessibility so that partners knew when and how to reach them.

Survey data captured perceptions regarding how clearly school leaders defined and communicated the coordinator's role and functions at the beginning of the 2014/15 school year. Exhibit 6 suggests in general, **the roles and functions of the partnership coordination efforts were clear to partners,** especially for those in SEPC-coordinated schools.[6]

Exhibit 6: Articulation of Coordinator Roles and Expectations for Collaboration with Partners

Question	Coordinators	PHENND Partners	SEPC Partners
The roles and functions of the coordinator were clearly articulated…	…to the school admin Total = 62% Strongly Agree = 38% Agree = 23% … to other school staff Total = 31% Strongly Agree = 0% Agree = 31%	Total = 79% Strongly Agree = 22% Agree = 57%	Total = 88% Strongly Agree = 25% Agree = 63%

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[6]   Because SEPC worked in fewer schools and sponsored only two partnership coordinators, it is possible there was less variation in the role and how SEPC introduced it to school and partner staff.

The expectations regarding how partner organizations were to collaborate with the coordinator were clearly articulated	Total = 25% Strongly Agree = 8% Agree = 17%	Total = 72% Strongly Agree = 22% Agree = 50%	Total = 81% Strongly Agree = 25% Agree = 56%

Coordinators agreed the roles and functions were clearly articulated to school administrators at twice the rate that they agreed they were articulated to other school staff. The survey data also revealed a wide divergence regarding the clarity of expectations for collaboration between coordinators and partners. Coordinators were far less likely than partners were to agree these expectations were made clear. It is possible that coordinators were more tuned into the need for partners to be clear about how to interact with them. Regardless, these data suggest there is not only a need to articulate goals and roles, but also expectations for how to implement partnership coordination efforts.

✓ **Partnership coordinators were required to develop, maintain and mend relationships**

Developing relationships, trust, and rapport takes time, and this became especially evident in relationships between school leaders and partnership coordinators. Some school principals deliberately included coordinators in meetings, discussions, and decisions. Others kept coordinators at a distance. Where coordinators were included in leadership meetings and decisions, they felt like the "right hand" of their school's principal and were able to approach partnership communication and coordination more seamlessly than were coordinators who constantly had to seek—and wait for—input or approval from an administrator.

Interview data suggests principals and coordinators had to strike a balance between supervision and guidance, understanding school culture and needs, and the coordinator having enough autonomy to take initiative and make decisions. In some schools, principals appointed a staff member (e.g., counselor, lead teacher, dean, school nurse) to serve as a liaison to partners and community members, and coordinators learned to work effectively with them to varying degrees of success. As the case study reports reveal, some negative relationships emerged. In those instances, coordinators became or felt excluded by principals or other school liaisons from many, if not all, partnership activities and communications.

Building and maintaining relationships between school staff and partner organizations was also important. School leadership and staff turnover exacerbated needs at some schools, and it complicated buy-in, planning, and efforts to understand school needs and identify resources to meet those needs. In at least one school, partnership coordination activities were not launched for several months because both the principal and coordinator were new to the school. In many schools, principals were viewed as "gatekeepers" who were welcoming—or unwelcoming—to partners to varying degrees. Even in schools where principals delegated partnership coordination to a school liaison or a partnership coordinator or both, interviewees believed the principal influenced the extent to which a school was open to partnering and the types of partnerships allowed in the building.

Some partners, especially those with established histories and relationships with schools, strongly preferred direct communication with school administrators and/or teachers, and intentionally circumvented the partnership coordinator. In these instances, some principals firmly backed the coordinator and redirected such partners to the coordinator. Others allowed this behavior to persist throughout the school year.

✓ **Partnership coordinators had to navigate complicated school and community contexts and understand how to effectively involve partners in those contexts**

Data collected for this study confirmed that partnership coordination is complex work, and schools are often challenging settings to navigate. In particular, **each school, community, and set of partners presents unique challenges to partnership coordinators**. Several interviewees reported that district and school priorities and initiatives shifted frequently, which made continuity and alignment between schools and partners more complicated. For example, some schools in the sample were on a list of schools slated for closure or reorganization by the district. Staff and partners at such schools found it difficult to focus on long-term partnership goals. In some schools, staff and teachers resisted partnering with outside organizations. Reasons given for this included insufficient time to meet and plan with partners, perceptions that program implementation with partners would be too burdensome or disruptive to teachers' schedules, and a concern that schools lacked sufficient resources and capacity to make use of partner programming.

In schools and communities with an abundance of need, stakeholders reported it was **difficult to prioritize and select specific needs to address**. In turn, this complicated efforts to plan, coordinate, and match partner services with school needs.

Communities served by coordinators had varying levels and types of needs and resources, each of which influenced whether and how partners engaged with schools. Some schools served more economically diverse families and communities, while others served high-needs populations primarily. Local community engagement was very high in some schools, with a large number of well-resourced partners and potential volunteers. Other schools struggled to recruit partners. Some schools reportedly had reputations for negative, chaotic climates, which led interviewees to speculate these schools were less desirable locations for partner organizations. Safety concerns and a lack of transportation reportedly limited student participation in some programs held after school, especially those held off-site.

Partner organizations presented a different set of challenges to the schools they worked with. In many instances, the mission or scope of a partner's work was driven by funding, and **funding parameters sometimes limited the extent to which partners could adapt or expand to align their services with school needs**. Some interviewees described tensions between "resource bringers", who provide services at no cost to the school, and "service providers", who often require school resources to implement their programs. In at least one school, these tensions reportedly hampered collaboration and integration across partners. Partner organizations that needed funding from schools to sponsor programming noted few opportunities to collaborate with schools lacking funds. Further, a few interviewees described how relationships between school staff and partner organizations can either help or hinder a partner's access to and integration into a school community.

To what extent were school and partner goals aligned?

Several interviewees reported they believe it is important to move beyond networking and being aware of other partners, and instead work toward coordinated, aligned efforts to identify, target, and meet student needs together.

As noted earlier, **principals play a critical role in establishing the vision and expectations for partnerships with external organizations**. Some principals were more hands-on and up front about the mission and goals of their school's partnerships, including the roles of individual partners. Others did not

articulate such information as much. Through their actions—or inactions—principals molded the extent to which a school was open to partners, the type of partners it welcomed into the school, and the expectations for collaboration among partners.

A recurring theme in the interviews was that **it is important to establish clear goals and indicators for partnerships at the onset of the school year, and that it is helpful to align these goals with school priorities, such as those in the school action plan**. Partnership coordinators at some schools contributed to collaborative goal-setting and needs-matching activities. For example, the evaluation team observed two meetings in which partners were encouraged to think about their role and the value it brought to the school, and to imagine the school without their services. In some schools, leaders and staff acknowledged that they did not have the capacity and perspective to think beyond just bringing partners in, and that coordinators were helpful in thinking about greater alignment and needs matching.

Survey data, however, revealed varied perceptions about the extent to which respondents agreed the partnership coordination project increased the alignment between the goals of the school and its partner organizations. Exhibit 7 suggests the coordinators and SEPC partners were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the coordination efforts increased goal alignment. Yet, almost half (46 percent) of PHENND partners reported they did not have enough information to answer the question.

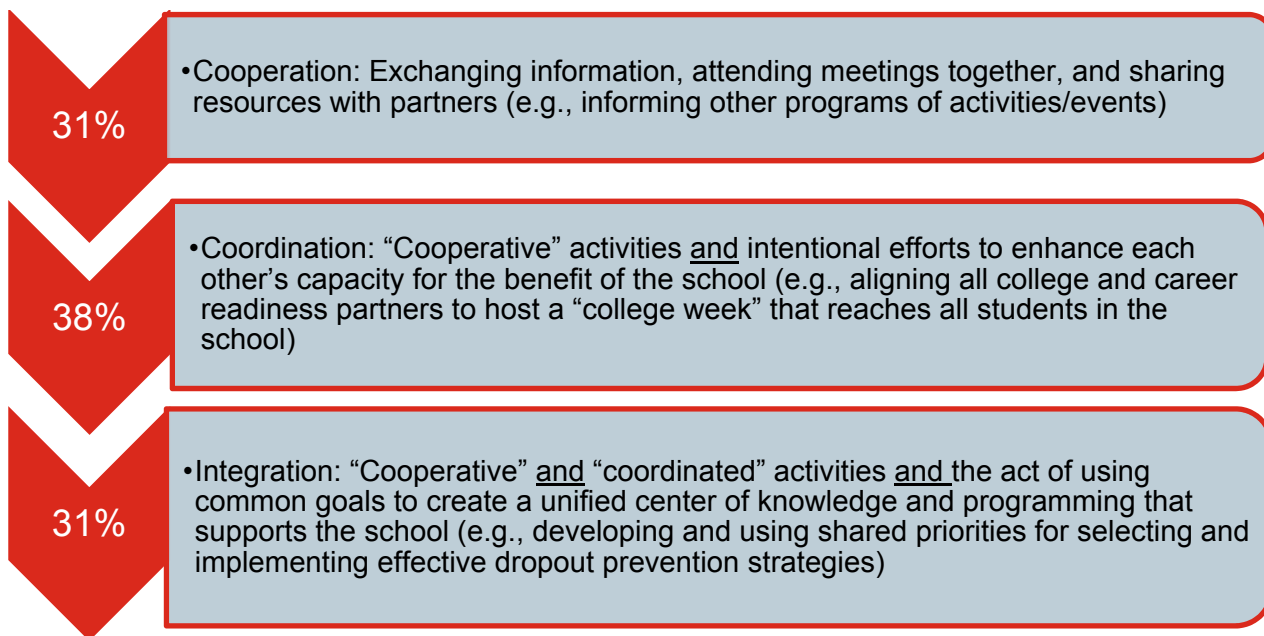**Exhibit 7: Effects of Coordination on Alignment of School and Partner Goals**

Question	Response	Coordinators	PHENND Partners	SEPC Partners
Participation in the partnership coordination project has increased the alignment between the goals of the school and its partner organizations.	Strongly agree	38%	19%	20%
	Agree	46%	32%	60%
	Disagree	8%	4%	0%
	Strongly disagree	0%	0%	7%
	I don't have enough info	8%	46%	13%

Some coordinators used school- and student-level data to engage partners in conversations about aligning resources with specific school and student needs. In addition to needs assessments, schools and partners used program participation data to track student engagement with available services. Partners from South Philadelphia High School, coordinated by SEPC, continued to rely on their previously established data-sharing with the school to understand the impact of student participation in their various programs and services. At Penn Treaty, a PHENND-coordinated school, the evaluation team observed the coordinator leading partners in examining data to address persistent truancy. Participants used PHENND's "Taking Strategic Action" tool to plan a course of action to address the problem. Following this meeting, partners led student focus groups to assess the reasons for truancy. Information from students led to a pep rally and school beautification project. Strategic meetings and additional trainings for the staff also followed the initial meeting.

Data suggest that moving beyond cooperative information sharing and short-term coordination to integrated partner activities is a difficult task that requires intentional planning and goal setting. During 2014/15, partnerships at study schools represented different phases along the cooperation-coordination-integration continuum (see Exhibit 3). As the case studies demonstrate, partnership collaboration processes are dynamic; they are influenced by relationships among school staff and partners, as well as by school and community contexts. Further, their degree of success may change over time. Communication

efforts, such as those made by partnership coordinators, can increase awareness, build relationships, and enhance cooperation and coordination among partners—but those efforts do not guarantee collaboration or alignment of goals and activities. Exhibit 8 shows how coordinators rated whether partners at their school engaged in cooperative, coordinated, or integrated activities.

Exhibit 8: Coordinators' Views of Collaboration Engaged in by Partners

31%	•Cooperation: Exchanging information, attending meetings together, and sharing resources with partners (e.g., informing other programs of activities/events)
38%	•Coordination: "Cooperative" activities <u>and</u> intentional efforts to enhance each other's capacity for the benefit of the school (e.g., aligning all college and career readiness partners to host a "college week" that reaches all students in the school)
31%	•Integration: "Cooperative" <u>and</u> "coordinated" activities <u>and</u> the act of using common goals to create a unified center of knowledge and programming that supports the school (e.g., developing and using shared priorities for selecting and implementing effective dropout prevention strategies)

Despite the relatively even distribution of the coordinators' perceptions, the case studies, which included data collected from partners and school staff as well as coordinators, suggest most of the schools had partners that engaged in *cooperative* activities. Just a few school partnerships demonstrated *coordinated* or *integrated* activities.

What resources and supports do partnership coordinators need to fulfill their responsibilities?

In addition to **support and buy-in from school leadership**, partnership coordinators identified other resources, training, and support that were instrumental to their efforts during 2014/15.

Both PHENND and SEPC offered their partnership coordinators professional development, provided them with supervision and mentoring, and made them aware of resources available to assist their coordination efforts. PHENND and SEPC also granted their coordinators access to broader networks. For example, PHENND offered additional resources to its VISTAs through connections to local nonprofits and institutions of higher education, as well as access to student volunteers and student teachers, professional development for teachers and principals, social work resources, and citywide agencies and intermediary organizations. SEPC's affiliation with United Communities and its deep history in South Philadelphia were beneficial because they allowed its partnership coordinators to connect students and parents via "one-stop shopping" to services available through United Communities. SEPC coordinators also had access to partners through the monthly Community Council meetings hosted by United Communities.

PHENND hosted monthly trainings and meetings with all of its coordinators. Sample topics included meeting facilitation skills, grant writing, and matching school needs with partner services. Given its smaller number of coordinators, SEPC provided more informal, individualized training and support. SEPC also sent the coordinators to conferences and encouraged them to participate in an online course on collective impact.

Coordinators from each model had opportunities to collaborate and exchange promising practices and strategies with fellow coordinators. PHENND's cohort model provided its coordinators with access to a number of others who could share their diverse experiences from working in schools across the city. The SEPC coordinators, on the other hand, each worked in multiple schools concentrated in South Philadelphia, and they had opportunities to connect and exchange ideas when they were not at one of their assigned schools.

> **Training and Resources Requested by Partnership Coordinators**
> - Information about district and school contexts
> - Tips for facilitating relationships between schools and partners
> - Planning documents and tools to articulate school needs and partnership goals
> - Communication tips, including leadership and meeting facilitation
> - Interpersonal management (including volunteer management)
> - Grant writing and fundraising
> - Accessing and using data
> - Marketing and public relations (including social media)
> - Opportunities to visit other schools and coordinators

Interviewees reported several resources the District's Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) provided. These included access to training, technical assistance, and institutional knowledge of the district, schools, and various partner organizations; connections and opportunities for interagency collaboration; information about corporate sponsorship and in-kind donations; and information from the Partnerships Database.

With the help of its assigned PHENND VISTAs, OSP developed the Partnerships Database to help align and match school needs with partner services. There are three primary aspects of the database:

- "School snapshots"—Schools complete surveys to articulate their existing portfolio of partners, including the strengths and needs of their network. Schools also present a "wish list" to signal their partnership priorities, which can help with needs matching and defining the scope of school-based networks.

- "Partnerships Census"—Current partners that are "resource bringers" to schools provide information about their funding sources, the schools they serve, and enrollment in programs or services. Partners are also asked about their desire to expand to additional schools, and their capacity to do so.

- The "Partnerships Inquiry" —New and existing partners looking to establish additional partnerships with schools complete this form to begin the process of being matched with a school.

Prior to the 2014/15 school year, OSP provided the PHENND VISTAS with a training that included an initial overview of the District and its partnership efforts. OSP's newsletters provide information on available trainings, which can be helpful to schools, partners, and coordinators.

Multiple interviewees testified that OSP was very helpful in thinking through school-level challenges related to partner recruitment and coordination. One specific area of assistance was helping to navigate

leadership dynamics and challenges at schools, including how best to approach school leadership and to gain access and buy-in from schools. OSP also helped connect schools with corporate sponsors to plan events and to bring in resources such as volunteers or financial donations.

Conclusion

Several key themes about partnership coordination efforts emerged from data collected during the 2014/15 school year.

1. Partnership coordinators in both PEHNND- and SEPC-coordinated schools held multiple roles that required a broad skillset.

2. Establishing and maintaining relationships proved a difficult, but necessary, ingredient for collaboration between schools and partners, as well as among partner organizations.

3. Clear articulation of coordinator roles and functions increased buy-in from school staff and external partner organizations.

4. When schools were able to identify and prioritize student needs that external partners could address, coordinators and partners found this helped pinpoint gaps and overlaps in service, increased the likelihood partners could work together to align their efforts, and helped avoid duplication of efforts.

5. Partners reported high levels of satisfaction with the partnership coordination project, with the great majority of survey respondents reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied (PHENND = 83 percent; SEPC = 93 percent).

Interview, survey, and observation data offered several examples of positive school-level outcomes that resulted from the partnership coordination efforts, especially in those schools that previously lacked any such coordination. Partnership coordinators filled the necessary role of liaison between schools and partners. Interviewees credited several coordinators with increasing and/or renewing partnerships with individual schools. Several coordinators supported school-level needs assessments, identified new partners, and provided resources and information to schools, partners, and parents to help meet those needs.

Appendix A: 2014/15 School Case Studies

Purpose

School-level case studies complement the aggregate collection and analysis of data on the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND) and Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative (SEPC) partnership coordination models. Case studies highlight how various school-level characteristics and contexts influenced whether and how school partner organizations moved along a continuum from basic *cooperation and information sharing* to *integration and alignment*.[7] Further, particular coordination approaches and their associated successes and challenges yield insight about which promising strategies may be generalizable, and which may lend themselves only to specific contexts. Finally, case studies illustrate the primary findings that emerged during data collection, which include:

- Partnership coordinators hold multiple roles that require a range of skillsets

- Establishing and maintaining relationships is necessary, but difficult

- Clearly articulating coordinator roles and responsibilities increases buy-in from school staff and external partner organizations

- Coordination efforts can result in several positive school-level outcomes

Methods

Case studies were conducted in a set of schools that were perceived by PHENND and SEPC leadership to have varying degrees of cooperation, coordination, and integration. Each case was informed by data collected from at least four interviewees representing three primary stakeholder perspectives: coordinators, school leadership, and partner organization leaders. Survey data and observations of school partner meetings complemented the case study interviews.

Of the 13 schools where PHENND placed partnership coordinators in school year 2014/15, five schools were selected in collaboration with PHENND for case studies: Schools A, C, E, F, and H. Of the six schools where SEPC placed partnership coordinators in 2014/15, three were selected: Schools B, D, and H.

The following eight case studies (and their coordinating organization, PHENND or SEPC) are in order of *most* to *least* integration among school partners.

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[7]   As detailed in the report, the evaluation team adapted the partnership continuum used by the University of Colorado Denver's *PARTNER (Program to Analyze, Record, and Track Networks to Enhance Relationships) Tool.* This continuum depicts partnership efforts moving from **cooperation** to **coordination** to **integration**, with indicators of each type of partnership network.

School A (PHENND)

In 2014/15, School A was in its second year of involvement with the PHENND partnership coordination initiative. The sample of School A data included a focus group of seven core stakeholders, including partner organization leaders and a teacher. The focus group was complemented by interviews with the coordinator and the guidance counselor, observations of three stakeholder meetings, and survey data from seven partner organizations.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

The coordinator, who was in her second year in the role at School A, explained having experienced growing pains as she familiarized herself with the role, the school, key stakeholders, and the community. She described several factors that contributed to her eventual success in the position, especially in the second year. Specifically, she noted a **need to take initiative and to be persistent, open-minded, creative, and willing to assume leadership roles**. Interpersonal skills, coupled with consistent follow-through on commitments, reportedly also contributed to the coordinator's success. The coordinator's use of current technology and social media tools reportedly spurred fruitful connections within and beyond the school walls, including for partners who may have missed partnership meetings or were unaware of certain resources.

Relationships

During her two-year tenure, the School A coordinator made efforts to build relationships, and **school leadership and staff support were critical to her growth and to her implementation of coordination functions**. The coordinator sought out and developed relationships with multiple school staff members, including the principal, the guidance counselor, the school nurse, and two teachers. These relationships were important to building trust and to partner coordination, integration, and collaboration over time. The coordinator built internal confidence and awareness, and several stakeholders reported the coordinator excelled at establishing a "gentle presence." One noted:

> It's really important not to come across as this outsider who is coming in to fix all your problems—more as someone who just is trying to help and trying to make sure that the resources that are already available are being utilized the best that they can be.

This approach was not only productive in interacting with school leaders, teachers, and community leaders, but also important to germinating relationships with and among partner organizations. As one focus group participant said in praising the coordinator,

> You can't just come in trying to take over and call the shots. You've got to make sure that you tread lightly when you first come in, and build those relationships and then cultivate them throughout the year.

Even when facing early obstacles, **regular feedback and backing from school leadership facilitated the coordinator's sense of self-efficacy**. For example, while the coordinator initially consulted leadership to navigate relationships with partners, she evolved to managing interpersonal communication independently and assertively. Such confidence led to universal appreciation and her full integration into the school community: "There's not one person in this building that doesn't know who she is. Every teacher knows who she is. She's fabulous."

Role Articulation and Buy-in

School A school staff and organization partners were aware of the coordinator's functions, and her placement in the office adjacent to school leadership and to the main office expedited her becoming "deeply integrated into the school community." One focus group participant testified, "There's so much power just being in the building and having access to staff, administration, and students." In addition to proximity enabling quick and easy access to school leadership, the coordinator found **"face time is super important" to gaining a true sense of collective student need**. Spending time in the main office and outwardly broadcasting partner activities to parents, regardless of their reason for being at the school, also served as a promising tactic for nurturing parent engagement. The coordinator's closeness to the school community was also reflected in six of seven partner survey respondents indicating they were "very familiar" with her, and six of seven reporting they interacted with her weekly or daily.

The School A coordinator's efforts benefitted from sustained buy-in of all key stakeholder groups. In addition to the positive relationships that school leadership and partner organizations had with the coordinator, **teachers exhibited commitment to coordination**. Two teachers consistently attended stakeholder meetings and were active partners during and after meetings. Both teachers presented ideas for potential events, helped to plan activities, and articulated students' needs. Such involvement and investment reportedly contributed to the long-term stability of the school-based partner network.

Broad partner buy-in and authentic collaboration was on display during a stakeholder meeting when the guidance counselor alerted the coordinator and partner organizations about prevalent truancy. Facilitated by the coordinator and PHENND's "Taking Strategic Action" binder tool, the group spontaneously brainstormed resolutions and next steps. This meeting prompted student focus groups about engagement, which led to a school pep rally, a spirit week, and beautification efforts. Additionally, follow-up attendance meetings took place, and multiple partners offered to assist in mitigating truancy.

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

The buy-in and integration the coordinator enjoyed at School A contributed to tangible outcomes related to the partnership coordination efforts. Partner surveys showed unanimous agreement that **the amount of partnership has increased since coordination began, as has the extent of communication, mutual awareness, and collaboration among partners**. There was also universal belief that **coordination has bettered program implementation**. Further, six of seven partner respondents articulated that partnership quality improved, and five of seven stated that the efforts enhanced goal alignment between School A and its partners.

Enhanced collaboration and coordination has reportedly resulted in **less duplication among partner organizations**, as well as improved school capacity for meeting the holistic and diverse needs of students. The guidance counselor recalled:

> I'll tell you the one thing that really sticks out is going from not having one stakeholder agency or community partner in our high school, because we were becoming a high school, to having— there's not one thing that our high school students can't feel supported on. Everything from social-emotional needs, to college and career needs, to after-school programs, to getting a job— and her just being a huge part of bringing in all those stakeholders, outside community members, to service every single one of my high school students is probably the biggest [accomplishment].

Six of seven partner survey respondents reported that stakeholder meetings were useful for increasing collaboration and alignment between partner organizations and the school. One open-ended survey response, however, insinuated that there is room for improvement in this regard:

> There are some places where organizations partner, but much of the time we're still working in silos. I don't know if the stakeholder's meetings are enough to actually establish true partnerships. They mostly serve to update each other and share ideas/brainstorm.

This respondent also expressed that "whole-school initiatives" are usually the purview of the sponsoring partner organization, rather than treated as an integrated school activity, and that "more people at the table would also be helpful." These comments reflect the dynamism of the continuum of collaboration, and **different stakeholders may perceive the network's progress in different ways.**

The coordinator's efforts to build relationships with local businesses and community leaders were pivotal to addressing pressing school and community issues. Because of the coordinator's leadership, a cadre of community leaders—including school leadership, the police, local politicians, and community-based health providers—banded together to tackle a local drug problem that was directly affecting School A students and the school's surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, the coordinator's grassroots efforts led to local monetary and in-kind donations. Finally, generating community-based student volunteer opportunities helped "draw positive attention to our school…in a neighborhood where they're not really accepting of our students."

This case study offers examples of how School A's coordination efforts helped move partners from basic communication and cooperation to more coordination and greater integration. Core partners were located onsite at School A and were embedded into the fabric of the school, but **before the "connector" function of the partnership coordinator role was introduced, partner organizations primarily operated in isolation**. As unearthed via a focus group, there is much overlap among organizations serving needy public school populations, and they often "struggle with how to complement each other." Without an intermediary coordinator, organizations "share numbers and meet the same outcomes, or they're in competition, vying for the spot. It never ends up supporting the kids in the way you want to."

At School A, due to the relationship building facilitated by the coordinator, competition transformed into collaboration "because we're getting to know each other as partners much better." Beyond fostering these productive relationships, a knowledgeable central point person enabled this network to connect with resources and stakeholders in the school and community.

School B (SEPC)

SEPC has supported partnership coordination at School B since 2011. Prior to hiring a full-time coordinator for School B (and School G) in December 2014, SEPC established partner meetings at School B and helped to decrease program duplication, to enhance communication between the school and external partners and among the external partner organizations, and to address school climate challenges.

The case study sample for School B included interviews with SEPC's director, its high school partnership coordinator, School B's counselor, and two external partner representatives. Surveys from three partner organizations and the coordinator and observations of two stakeholder meetings supplemented the interviews.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

Multiple interviewees attested to the coordinator's capacity for keeping partners and conversations on task and for moving discussions along. Interviewees commended the coordinator for being easy to engage and for fielding and asking questions about both work and more informal matters. Partners also praised her organization, writing, and memory. The SEPC counselor concurred that the coordinator does "a great job of the logistical stuff," such as communicating with partners and scheduling meetings. Doing this reportedly eased some administrative burden. While SEPC has been providing technical assistance and support to School B for a number of years, **the dedicated coordinator role provides "more attention" to the school** and makes the counselor feel more at ease "asking for things" from SEPC.

Relationships

SEPC's partnership coordinator enjoyed the benefits of relationships already established between SEPC and the principal, SEPC and the community, and School B and the network of organizational partners. Before SEPC's full-time partnership coordination began, United Communities Southeast Philadelphia's long-standing case management expertise helped School B address truancy and nurture support for SEPC's work. School B also is included in United Communities' Community Council meetings, which enabled the school staff to show "we care about more than just this building, we care about the neighborhood and the network." All three partner survey respondents reported they are "very familiar" with the coordinator, and that they meet with her monthly.

Interviewees shared mixed perceptions about the coordinator's part-time presence in the school. The coordinator explained that SEPC is "still trying to troubleshoot our way through how you become a part of a school community." One partner interviewee agreed that spending more time in the school is pivotal to gaining a perspective about "the things that go on" and to help the coordinator adapt the role according to identified school needs. Other interviewees signaled that situating the coordinator onsite is not requisite to the role, especially because the coordinator is "pretty flexible. Even if she hasn't been here, I know how to reach her right away. And she's very dependable. I've asked her for a few things, and they've been done right away."

The counselor agreed that the coordinator being mostly offsite is not an issue. More important, he believes, is the coordinator's long-term commitment to the role. **A longer tenure lends itself to the position's primary function: "the job is all about building relationships."** Especially when there is frequent turnover in schools and at the partner level, instability of coordinators could "make it complicated" to sustain momentum. A multi-year coordinator "will be able to appreciate the way we do things."

Role Articulation and Buy-in

The principal at School B was praised for his openness to partners. One partner explained, "That kind of administrative support is really crucial to how successful all the programs are." The other partner agreed, characterizing the principal as "pretty much all in when it comes to partners. He's a very big believer in these organizations." Both partners implied that the principal's support was a breath of fresh air relative to teachers and other school staff. One partner interviewee reported, "He has a way of letting everybody know you have a certain role in the school, and this is what you need to fulfill." Doing this, the interviewee explained, helps organizations feel as if they are part of a "support system" that is helping students "not just academically, but socially and emotionally, too. And, attendance-wise."

Despite clarity on the principal's expectations for partners, **there was less clarity regarding the partnership coordinator's role**. The three School B survey respondents agreed the goals of the partnership coordination project and the roles and functions of the partnership coordinator were clearly articulated at the beginning of the school year. They also agreed they were clear regarding the expectations for collaborating with the coordinator. One interviewee, however, explained he initially "didn't know or understand" the coordination initiative's purpose, but came to appreciate it over time as SEPC's director consistently clarified the project's role—of efficiently connecting partners and students to resources and reducing overlap. School staff also lacked information on the coordinator position. The school counselor acknowledged that an introduction of the coordinator at the beginning of 2015/16 should include clear explanation of the coordinator's function, and that this articulation "needs to be more than just a one-time blip."

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

Concurrent with the coordinator beginning her employment, SEPC's director and School B's counselor completed the creating of an Excel spreadsheet to "track students by partner." The tool is updated quarterly and can be accessed by each partner, the school, and SEPC. It includes GPA, grades by content area, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores, attendance rates, cuts, and other student-level data. The spreadsheet also features school-level data, such as average daily attendance, which can be broken down by each partner organization's cohort.

The partnership coordinator was able to use this information in one of her first stakeholder meetings. The partners "were able to look at the data and kind of start to pull conclusions from it," such as that 10th-graders "are least connected to services in general" and "are failing at the highest rate." This awareness prompted stakeholders to ponder how this population can be "more connected" and "about what can we do better and how can we do better." In addition to precipitating targeted planning, shared data "really supports partnership work," the coordinator professed, and stimulates partners to "think through what they are doing on a larger scale."

For example, the act of jointly reviewing data cultivates thinking about "the school as a whole," sharing "best practices," and how to collaborate. One partner interviewee suggested harnessing data to foster teacher buy-in regarding partner programming and to highlight students' strengths. These examples of data sharing display how **data can help target supports to meet student needs and can promote collaboration and integration between school partners**. The integrated approach to partnerships in School B was fostered by the principal's welcoming attitude toward partners able to fill targeted student needs, by several years of data-driven assessment of partner contributions to the school, and in part, by the formal partnership coordinator assigned to the school by SEPC.

The school counselor credited the coordinator with bonding "partners with partners." In addition to helping coordinate "bigger-scale" events within School B, the coordinator has bridged organizations serving School B with outside networks and resources. One partner spoke of how the coordinator has linked his organization with community resources and members "that I might not necessarily know about unless they were actually housed in the school" or because "our roles really don't intersect." The coordinator also linked School B partners to broader coalitions, including around substance abuse and supporting students from "fractured homes." SEPC's coordination has strengthened relationships, and has also provided neutral guidance about programming and approaches to student need: "[It] also kind of gives us a focal point of 'Are we doing the right thing and are we addressing the right issues?'"

All interviewees reported value in stakeholder meetings for laying the basis for collaboration and alignment. The three survey respondents also reported **partnership meetings were useful in increasing collaboration among partners and increasing alignments between the goals of the school and its partner organizations**. The counselor deemed the meetings "tremendous" for collaboration, by compelling partners to communicate and "start building their own relationships." He cited two organizations that now collaborate, but might not "if we don't stick them in a room once a month." Partner interviewees agreed that the "group space" of meetings fosters connections among willing partners:

> It gives a chance for the many providers at [the high school] to share and discuss what is going on in their programs. Teachers have meetings to do this, but since we are all outside staff, it can be difficult if we had to find our own space to do this. It is great to have someone coordinate it all for us and make sure we are all communicating.

All survey respondents agreed **the SEPC partnership coordination effort helped their organization become more aware of other partner organizations serving School B and helped to increase their communication with other partners**. They also agreed partnership coordination efforts enhanced their organization's implementation of activities and programs. All survey respondents agreed partnership quality improved, that the coordination efforts enhanced goal alignment between School B and its partners, and that they were satisfied with the SEPC partnership coordination project.

Despite the generally positive perceptions of the partnership coordination efforts at School B, the counselor acknowledged there was room for growth beyond enhanced communication and coordinating events together. In particular, interviews and observations unearthed challenges associated with meetings. SEPC's director conveyed that attendance at meetings "has shrunk a little bit," but that current attendees are "consistent," "really willing to work together, and interested in connecting." Even regular meeting participants indicated that some meetings "have been more productive than others" due to insufficient direction about the goals of meetings and a lack of shared accountability among partners. **More "clear directives" about the "intent" of meetings could help encourage attendance and productivity during meetings, lest partners without updates "just sit there."**

To improve goal setting and participation, a partner interviewee offered that partners could be given more responsibility for planning and participating in meetings. According to this interviewee, if there are not pressing action items, other strategies could include recruiting guest presenters or scheduling trainings relevant to partners, teachers, and students. Another tactic suggested for aligning partners within a diverse network would set up "working groups" among similarly oriented organizations.

Both partner interviewees also stated that stakeholder meetings in summer could be integral to reducing any "gap" in momentum and to helping partners "fulfill services" over the summer. If not summer meetings, end-of-year gatherings should involve "concrete" plans for the following year.

School C (PHENND)

The 2014/15 school year was School C's first year of involvement with the PHENND partnership coordination project. The case study sample for School C included interviews with three partner stakeholders and the coordinator, in addition to observation of one stakeholder meeting. Partner surveys and a coordinator survey also supplied data.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

The School C coordinator was credited with having excellent communication capacities and was described by partners as "incredibly reliable" and "so responsive" in following through on action items. One partner indicated that such responsiveness is even more crucial in overburdened school contexts where principals are already difficult to reach:

> It's just critical for the school's ability to get other new partnerships in place.…When the principal is really responsive to email, they get stuff because the partners keep working with them. And the principals that don't respond to email end up getting less.

This partner interviewee even reported that she referred potential partner organizations to certain schools based on the level of anticipated responsiveness. Another interviewee praised the coordinator for his listening skills, including how he operated "with an eye to how he can improve."

In addition to his efforts to align partners via meetings and to serve as a logistical liaison, School C's coordinator integrated himself into the functioning of both school- and community-based organizations. For example, he assisted the Home and School Association with school tours, and helped the Friends of School C playground group with fundraising for a new play space. **One partner reflected on the importance of the coordinator spending most of his time in the school and serving as a pivotal liaison between the school and the community and parents.** In this capacity, the coordinator reportedly handled stressed parents with composure and grace by clearly communicating the school's engagement efforts and "maintaining his professionalism." One interviewee suggested the coordinator could make more of an effort to spend time in the community to socialize and develop informal relationships and understandings, which could help highlight the school's assets.

Relationships

Upon assignment to School C, **the coordinator sought as much background information about the school and community as possible**. He also sought to cultivate a relationship with the principal, something that was complicated by the principal also being new to the school.

The coordinator reported he eventually established "a very good working relationship" with the principal, and noted the principal's willingness "to pull me in on more school issues, more school topics" and grant him "more access to what's going on…so I can do things that are more helpful." This synergy helped reduce the principal's administrative burden, provided the coordinator with more "credibility," and enabled the coordinator to efficiently interact with partners and other school staff. Partner interviews corroborated the **harmony between the coordinator and principal.** One interviewee recollected how the coordinator stood in for the principal at a meeting where the principal was scheduled to attend, "and then [the principal] was able to come in and just pick right back up."

Beyond the observed cooperation between the coordinator and principal, long-time School C collaborators also embraced the principal's openness to external partners. One veteran partner reflected about how her relationship with School C vastly improved under the current principal, as compared with multiple negative experiences with School C's prior leadership.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

Despite establishing a positive working relationship with the principal, the coordinator had to internalize a role that "wasn't concrete." The lack of clear expectations and parameters for the role initially left him overwhelmed. Multiple study participants, including **three of five partner survey respondents,**

reported the functions and expectations of the coordinator's role at School C were not clear. When partner organizations first approached the coordinator about logistical details of space and scheduling—a primary function of coordination—the coordinator lacked the awareness and "power" to satisfy requests. Even when the coordinator attempted to represent the principal, he initially had to consult the principal for answers.

The coordinator acknowledged that the lack of role clarity made it "very difficult to rally all of the teachers around the idea of participating or attending [partnership meetings]." In an effort to establish rapport and legitimacy among school staff, the coordinator covered the office desk during the secretary's lunch hour and distributed memos throughout the school in the morning. These actions helped facilitate familiarity and trust-building, but not necessarily buy-in for the partnership coordination efforts.

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

All survey respondents agreed that **inter-partner awareness increased due to coordination, and that the coordinator had some effect on collaboration**. Four of five reported enhanced communication, improved school capacity to manage partnerships, and overall satisfaction with the partnership coordination model. One partner interviewee reported the productive rapport between the principal and the coordinator led to positive outcomes: "It really is a positive interaction, and I think with two positive bodies it can just be a recipe for more positivity and kind of be infectious in the school." Other partners identified the coordinator as "the go-between" and "the de facto guy if you want a meeting with the principal," that the coordinator "has been enormously helpful for the community partners that want to get in front of the principal, and for getting a response and getting everything scheduled."

Observation of a partner meeting provided evidence of how **a principal's vision and investment can stimulate collective goal setting, alignment, and collaboration**. At School C's first formal all-partner gathering, the principal shared school-level data about academic performance and attendance at School C versus data from "higher-performing" local comparison schools. The **principal stressed how each partner organization was integral to improving these outcomes and tasked them with articulating how their organizational goals aligned with School C's school performance goals**. This discussion not only signaled the principal's commitment to school improvement and to the partner network, but also presented a tangible lens through which organizations could view their spheres of influence and through which the network could measure progress.

However, conversations subsequent to this meeting revealed that such **vision is only one piece of the puzzle in fostering long-term network integration and collaboration**. Partner leaders confirmed that the meeting's framing did not necessarily translate into actionable plans:

> [A follow-up meeting] continued the focus on thinking about how [partner] work matches up, but I don't think it really accomplished anything to make us more aligned than we were before, other than setting the expectation of how we should be aligned. Because what I'd like to see happen as a next step would be for the partnership coordinators to start seeking out partnerships and developing relationships that align with [school] needs and gaps.

This perspective highlights the complexity of achieving consensus among stakeholders about the most appropriate data to mobilize around, and the most judicious avenues to take in responding to needs identified in the data.

During the same stakeholder meeting, the coordinator also implemented an activity to promote alignment between school and partner goals. The coordinator began the meeting by prompting the partners to imagine how the school would operate without their services, encouraging stakeholders to clarify how each individual organization fits into the school's mission.

Perceptions of the stakeholder meetings organized by the coordinator varied. Each interviewee saw value in bringing partners together to share information, network, and discuss goals; however, there was a sense that **all-stakeholder meetings should be less often and more thoughtfully planned.** One partner reported, "I think that the fewer meetings the better and the clearer the expectations the better.…I don't see the point of getting all the partners together frequently."

As an alternative to monthly all-stakeholder meetings, this partner proposed an initial "goal-setting conversation" among all partners in the beginning of the school year, and a spring meeting to reflect on progress and plan for the following year. Another interviewee concurred that a meeting at the start of the school year or "midsummer" could lay the groundwork for collaboration, where stakeholders could "try and hammer down how it is we can all work together, and allow it to be strongly encouraged that we do reach out to one another, and have a good understanding of each person's roles."

Despite having room for improvement in partnership integration, **School C represents a school moving beyond simple cooperation to greater coordination**.

One partner reported School C has become much more accessible, lines of communication are more open and transparent, and that she now feels a sense of "amazing respect" and is "in better connection with all the people that I needed to be this year." This discussion underlined how a principal's openness to external organizations markedly molds a school's partner network. It also presented other insights about how different stakeholders perceive the coordination role. Multiple interviewees commented how the leadership of School C's parent-teacher association is more accessible, and that **the partnership coordinator increased parents' access to the principal and nurtured productive relationships with the association**.

At School C, leadership turnover, as well as a new partnership coordinator, delayed coordination efforts. Before implementing the coordinator role as designed, both the principal and the coordinator needed time to understand the school and neighborhood contexts—"[Name of neighborhood] is very much its own hub." The first formal stakeholder meeting of the school year did not occur until January. One partner also worried turnover within the partnership coordinator role could hinder partnership efforts, noting "Somebody has to be that constant in the school.…I just think that consistency is very important, especially in those type of roles."

School D (SEPC)

School D's first year implementing SEPC's partnership coordination model was 2014/15. The School D case study used interviews with SEPC's director, the coordinator in charge of elementary schools, School D's counselor, and four partner organization representatives. Observations of two stakeholder meetings and surveys from the coordinator and partners provided additional data.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

Interviewees described School D's coordinator as organized, helpful, and responsive. Multiple interviewees commended the coordinator for "follow-through" after and in between meetings to supply information. She was "very up-to-date" and was credited with keeping partners informed if they missed a

meeting. Another partner confirmed that the coordinator is "very helpful" to providing resources in a timely fashion: "Whatever you request for, she'll look for it and get it to you right away."

Interviews also unearthed several beneficial practices the coordinator used for facilitating partner meetings. Meetings occur at consistent times, and the coordinator constantly "reiterates that and makes sure that everyone knows the next time they're gonna meet, and that's super helpful." The pace and length of meetings is appropriate, and the coordinator helps "keep people on task" and "focused." She also is "really excellent about identifying follow-up actions and who is responsible for what before each meeting ends." Other qualities of the coordinator included her flexibility and adaptability. She also achieved a delicate balance between being helpful and reliable, yet never "overstepping."

An interviewee also commended the coordinator for being able to link others and ensuring familiarity among partners. For example, the school counselor described the coordinator's role in matching school needs to partners, especially in relation to services for middle school students. Interviewees suggested such enhanced communication, including social networking and data sharing across partners, can build awareness and rapport among partner organizations and help them work together to efficiently target students' needs.

Relationships

The three survey respondents reported they were either familiar or very familiar with the coordinator, and reported they met with her about once a month or every week. School D's coordinator reportedly benefitted from the relationship with the school counselor, but the **counselor's preference to be directly involved in partnership work left the coordinator removed from many of the school's partners**. A partner survey respondent also conveyed concern over a lack of access and communication with the principal. This stakeholder criticized SEPC's model over PHENND's model, because SEPC coordinators have more of a relationship with counselors than with principals when "working with both positions is important and needed."

The counselor expressed appreciation for the coordinator's role in devising a "resource map" (in collaboration with the Philadelphia Education Fund) to clarify available resources and to pinpoint gaps. According to the counselor, this tool will be helpful "moving forward." A partner interviewee concurred that an institutionalized coordinator whose primary function includes connecting the school and partners to resources is vital, given that "everyone else is doing 18 million other things per day."

SEPC's community-based orientation and access to a plethora of bundled services, which were cited as advantageous to the local community, parents, and students, facilitated some of the coordinator's contributions to the school. As the counselor reported, given School D's "high immigrant population," SEPC's "in the community" approach and link to language translation services have been "very helpful" to the school. United Communities' "point of reference" as a "one-stop shopping" center serves as a community hub for accessing services and resources. During report card conferences, the coordinator invited United Communities case managers to aid parents in applying for benefits.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

School D's coordinator was introduced to school staff at a professional development day, but she primarily collaborated with the counselor. To compensate for the principal being overextended, the counselor was designated as School D's school-based liaison for SEPC's coordination, which facilitated a clear channel to the school. But because the coordinator was relegated to work with and through the counselor, the coordinator was unsuccessful in scheduling a meeting with the principal in 2014/15.

This arrangement also reportedly hindered the coordinator's ability to foster relationships with internal and external partners. The counselor reported the coordinator assisted in "following through on" and implementing projects involving stakeholders. But **the counselor also explicitly discussed her personal preference for managing external partnerships herself**:

> To be one hundred percent honest, sometimes we'll have partnerships with people and I notice they don't always follow through.… I am a micromanager, and I am in charge of a lot of stuff in the school—so I usually just kind of do it myself.

Challenges aside, there were reportedly opportunities for teachers to understand and invest in the coordination initiative. The school nurse, seen as a respected school leader, was incorporated into meetings and other coordination processes. In addition to helping to plan and implement professional development sessions, the coordinator also helped with celebrations and trips, which germinated relationships with staff and students.

The three survey respondents reported both **the goals of the partnership coordination project and the roles and function of the partnership coordinator were clearly communicated at the beginning of the school year.** They also agreed being clear regarding the expectations for collaborating with the coordinator. However, discrepancies between what stakeholders understood of the partner network and SEPC's role in coordinating it were evident when discussing the coordinator's base of operation. The counselor and more deeply involved school partners expressed no reservations about the coordinator's base being offsite, due to her efficient communication and follow-through. By contrast, a less attached stakeholder suggested that the arrangement limited the impact of the coordinator's influence: "She's not in the building every day, so it's not like [she] is doing projects that affect the day-to-day running of the school. It's more about introducing partners to the school and getting them to the table." This partner emphasized that spending more time in schools, as PHENND's coordinators do in the VISTA model, enables those coordinators to become much more familiar with both school staff and students. Such contact provides "a little more insight into what resources are there, and what are some gaps, and what to pursue."

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

In 2014/15, SEPC's primary contribution to School D's partnership network was via stakeholder meetings. Meetings mostly served to distribute information across partners, to buttress communication, and to coordinate events such as parent cafés.

All survey respondents credited the partnership coordination efforts with helping their organization become more aware of other organizations serving School D and with helping to increase communication with other organizations. Two respondents found the partnership meetings to be very useful for increasing collaboration among school partners, while the third found them to be useful. Further, two of three partner respondents reported partnership quality improved and that the efforts helped align goals between School D and its partners. All three respondents were satisfied with the SEPC partnership coordination project.

For School D's counselor, partner meetings ensure that "everyone is on the same page at the same time" and alleviate "pressure" on the counselor "to make sure I'm checking with those people on my own time." Meetings also serve as a way to enhance "expectations" and awareness about school issues such as truancy.

However, multiple interviewees projected a sense that there is room for broader participation and for moving beyond information sharing. Although one interviewee spoke of observing "change" and "movement" by way of meetings, the general sense from interviewees was that meetings only served to provide updates about programming. Multiple interviewees acknowledged meetings bolstered bonds and communication between organizations serving School D, and one reported they led to fresh relationships and "a lot of activity with other partners," such as parent cafés.

Still, one partner confessed, "I'm more of just a participant, I feel like sometimes. I don't have really much to contribute to the meetings." Another partner interviewee offered advice on how to nurture participation and move meetings along effectively. One recommendation involved strategically identifying "plants among the stakeholders, and having people who I already know are gonna be my allies in a particular objective or keeping the meeting going."

Similarly, another partner noted, "improved collaboration between partner organizations and School D staff" at meetings can help "find solutions to challenges at the school bigger than what any one of our organizations could address alone." Another interviewee suggested facilitation training and tools could be harnessed to improve meetings and to promote authentic long-term collaboration. According to one partner, "getting updates from people ahead of time and making those agenda items…[makes it] quicker to run through them." Another partner suggested that asking attendees to furnish business cards could help partners to meet and maintain contact with one another.

Summer planning was also requested by one interviewee, to transcend the "tyranny of the urgent" and to "reassess, revamp, and plan for next year." Goal setting and aligning could be facilitated by greater awareness of the principal's "goals for the upcoming school year, and how we can bring in more of our services to help achieve particular goals."

Partnership interactions at School D demonstrated some aspects of collaboration, but could largely be categorized as cooperative.

School E (PHENND)

The 2014/15 school year was School E's first year of involvement in PHENND's partnership coordination initiative. The data sample from School E included interviews with the coordinator, the grade lead teacher, and two partner representatives, as well as an observation of a make-up "binder session" with principals involved with PHENND's coordination. No partners returned surveys, but School E's coordinator and principal both completed a survey.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

The lead teacher commended the coordinator's progress organizing and planning activities without many tools. However, **there were some initial gaps in the coordinator's ability to understand and articulate school needs.** The lead teacher explained she and other school staff had to assist the coordinator due to her "coming in brand new, not having experience even in a school…[never mind] kind of having a general sense of what some of the needs might be. And feeling unsure about everything."

The coordinator reported a need to be flexible, while a tolerance for ambiguity, a "calm demeanor," and the capacity to rise "above the fray" also enabled her to persevere in her role within a hectic environment. According to the lead teacher, the coordinator is "easygoing" with stressed students and "likes kids." The lead teacher stressed the importance of professionalism, including "office etiquette," especially since the

coordinator was so visible to staff, parents, and other school visitors. The coordinator reportedly demonstrated growth in this area during her time at School E.

As the coordinator grew increasingly comfortable with the school and its partners, in-person interactions were complemented by other modes of communication. The coordinator harnessed phone calls—particularly with veteran partners—email, a bimonthly "School E Mustang Gram Newsletter," and "Artist of the Month" to reach both partners and parents. However, she didn't use social media because she believed, "our community, it would not benefit them." Interestingly, School E's principal indicated in a survey that social media is important to the school and to the role of the partnership coordinator.

Relationships

The partnership coordinator role at School E complements the work of the lead teacher, who assists with "timing and scheduling," as well as with identifying partners and implementing programming. Despite having access to the lead teacher, **the coordinator initially felt hampered by her lack of access to the principal.** The coordinator reported difficultly securing meetings with the principal, which complicated efforts to schedule partner meetings for the school's 40+ partners. Eventually, the coordinator and principal agreed to a regular meeting time for stakeholders. The principal committed to being present during this window, albeit often for a very brief period.

In addition to stalling coordination, the principal being overextended complicated supervision: "It was hard for her to see the work that I am doing because I was doing a lot of work and she was all over the place. And she wasn't seeing the outcome of it." The coordinator and principal resolved this dilemma via a "VISTA Week at a Glance" Google document, which enabled the principal and lead teacher to monitor the coordinator's work and to track items that required administrative attention.

Another tactic for increasing supervision and coordinator-leadership relationships involved the coordinator taking the initiative to hold a midyear review with PHENND's VISTA project manager, the principal, and the lead teacher. While admitting that it was "nerve-racking leading up to it," this session ensured that the coordinator was meeting the expectations of both the principal and PHENND, and that "everyone was on the same page." Given that the coordinator role can be very challenging and involves navigating complex contexts, without much compensation, "it's a relief to know that I'm doing my job right and the stress isn't for nothing." Accordingly, the coordinator advised that all coordinators should adopt this practice with their school-based supervisor to allow for mid-course feedback.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

At School E, **the coordinator's primary roles were defined and clear to the coordinator, principal, and lead teacher.** The principal and lead teacher "understood my role completely before I got here," enabling the three core players to be

> really on the same page.…They know that my job is not to go make copies. It is not to go and fetch a student from a classroom, or to break up a fight, or to do anything outside of my role. They know.

In addition to the school's leadership agreeing on the role before her arrival, the coordinator benefitted from meeting with the principal before her service term even began. She also was able to meet one partner organization in the summer preceding her start.

Though the main office was "very cramped" and "tense," the coordinator intimated that "it was the best place to put me because I'm right there so everyone knows my role and they do not forget that I'm there." Admitting that not all in her position would thrive in such a stressed context, the coordinator expressed appreciation for "being in the middle of it" and directly interacting with all stakeholders: "It just makes me feel more part of the school."

The leadership's backing was helpful to overcoming partner resistance to the coordinator serving as a filter between partners and the principal. The principal verbally reinforced the role and also empowered the coordinator to field all emails and phone calls from partners.

Ultimately, it is the principal who makes the final decision about whether a partner fits into the school's mission and budget, however. Some partners resisted communicating with the school through the coordinator, requesting a direct channel to the top. For example, one interviewee recognized the coordinator's capacity and commitment, yet reported only limited interaction with her in favor of the principal. One long-term school partner recommended that the coordinator make a special attempt to schedule "a couple of hours with the partners that are there regularly" and that "have a long history working with School E" to appreciate their contributions and "the amount of time that we've been there." Another partner interviewee reported authenticity, transparency, and humility are necessary when engaging the community: "We don't need people who come with attitude, ego, and all that kind of craziness—trying to block anything….So, look at us as partners, and we can all work together for the benefit of the children."

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

Interviewees suggested all stakeholders "know where to reach" the coordinator, particularly teachers and external visitors; and internal staff appreciate the additional support in a hyper-extended workplace. The extra capacity allowed by the coordinator serving as "point person" prevents the administration from "being bothered by people constantly trying to get information." This not only helps the school, but also hastens information sharing with partners "to keep those partnerships going the way we want them to," in the words of the lead teacher.

Although some teachers did not initially understand or perceive value in the role of partnership coordinator, **the coordinator's relationships with teachers have evolved to the point where teachers rely on the coordinator for information and support regarding partnerships.** By seeking help to arrange assemblies or engage parents, teachers harness the coordinator role effectively, while also making the coordinator "really feel appreciated and respected within this school." In an effort to be both visible and helpful to the school community, the coordinator published and personally distributed the school's newsletter. The lead teacher emphasized how pivotal this undertaking was to the school community, and consistently expressed how the coordinator eased administrative burden in taking it on.

By the end of the school year, **there was evidence the partnership coordination supported the principal and lead teacher's efforts to match school needs with partner services**, such as enrichment, tutoring, and mentoring. Resource mapping and needs assessments facilitated by the coordinator—in partnership with the Philadelphia Education Fund—reportedly helped identify and fill gaps in services. PHENND's coordination "binder" features several tools for needs-matching, such as a diagram of themed "buckets" depicting needs. This tool helped School E acknowledge its wealth of arts enrichment partnerships, "but no partnerships for literacy…a huge issue in this school."

Despite the positive internal relations developed by the coordinator, interview data suggest collaboration among partners was limited. The coordinator united with the Philadelphia Education Fund and the United Way to hold biweekly meetings, but meetings with other partners proved challenging.

At first, the coordinator "really struggled with" not convening monthly stakeholders meetings, which was an expectation of the role. Over time, she realized that forcing monthly meetings was "pointless" to the many partners who were already engaged "constantly." Emphasizing meetings may not be a linchpin to coordination, the coordinator testified: "I'm not really sure if these meetings have brought together any new partnerships." Instead, she believed meetings mostly linked partners that "should have been connected anyway."

After the coordinator realized frequent all-partner meetings were not optimal at School E, she instead mobilized "mini-meetings" to "just catch up" and "make sure everything is in line that is supposed to be happening." In this regard, partnership efforts at School E generally can be characterized as more cooperative than collaborative or integrated.

Needs matching and goal setting were reinforced by the principal verbalizing the school mission at a stakeholders' meeting, as relayed by the lead teacher:

> To develop students who are able to read, write, and communicate effectively. And that's the primary goal. And then to keep them safe in a place that they wanna be. And all the partnerships that we develop can impact that on some level.

Despite these efforts, one partner indicated she felt more like a service and information provider than a true partner in long-term mission alignment, integration, and collaboration. She did, however, acknowledge that these ideals are "realistic," that other program staff have more direct contact with School E, and that she is "not that deep into the work."

School F (PHENND)

School F's first year of involvement with PHENND's partnership coordination was the 2014/15 school year. Data collection involved interviews with the coordinator, the teacher leader, and two partners. The coordinator, principal, and five partners also completed surveys.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

The coordinator garnered buy-in with School F staff, parents, and students by helping in the main office. The coordinator also made efforts to organize and communicate information to diverse audiences in multiple ways regarding events, partners, and resources. These efforts were intended to link the school to its community and external partners, and to invite the community into the school. Principal and partner interviewees, however, expressed **frustration about poor follow-through communication, which stalled coordination.** Logistical communication included "vague details"; one partner believed she was not receiving "the whole picture." One series of interactions culminated in neither the coordinator nor anyone from the school being present when a group of volunteers arrived at a time the coordinator negotiated. As one interviewee explained, such blunders cause partners to "lose interest," especially volunteers.

In addition to challenges with communication, the coordinator's unfamiliarity with the school context affected perceptions of her contributions to the school. Two interviewees reported **the coordinator did**

not have an adequate grasp of the school's specific needs, services provided by the network, or volunteer protocols. Such understanding, one partner believed, should be in place prior to engaging partners and is critical to matching school needs with partner services.

Relationships

Both **partner interviewees saw the coordinator role as a layer between them and the school as a problem.** One stated, "the relationship we have with School F is really determined with who the principal is at School F." Both said they preferred a direct logistical avenue. Further, partner-school relationships at School F are "renewed" and "renegotiated" each year—when that happens and "macro stuff is decided," the coordinator "isn't really involved with any of that, our relationship. And I'm not sure she needs to be, if that's anything that she should do."

By a partner's own admission, such a "narrow-minded" orientation by partners is limiting to integration and collaboration.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

The coordinator and her role were introduced early in the school year, and all five partner survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed **the goals of the coordinator's role were clearly defined.** The teacher leader mostly spoke positively of the role; this did not carry over to the partner interviewees. One partner reported she barely knew about the defined role or regular partner meetings, that it took until December to realize the coordinator "existed." Another partner explained, "Having someone in the basement who's not very visible" hinders buy-in.

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

The lead teacher explained that the coordinator employed multiple modes of needs assessment, "heard what our concerns were," and helped accrue more resources, services, and volunteers to meet School F's many needs. For example, the coordinator secured professional development resources and a grant for a new playground, and she organized a literacy night for parents.

By serving as a logistical liaison, the coordinator restored a historical partnership that had "died off" for several years. All five partners surveyed reported the coordinator helped them become more aware of other organizations in the school. Four out of five agreed the coordinator helped increase communication among partners. Four agreed coordination efforts helped increase the school's overall capacity to implement partnerships. Three reported increased alignment between the goals of School F and the partner organizations, and two agreed partnership quality improved.

Despite openly expressing reluctance toward coordination, the two partners interviewed signaled that **providing more of a bridge to teachers was helpful, even in terms of scheduling.** The coordinator contributed to event planning, and helped with logistical planning and access to the building. As one partner declared, a "point of contact is vital," and the coordinator was instrumental to the success of several events, including service days for local volunteers.

Partnership efforts at School F appeared largely cooperative. Internal staff appeared to have higher regard for the value of the coordination position than did external partners.

School G (SEPC)

Like its role at School B, SEPC has been involved at School G for a few years, but 2014/15 was the first with a dedicated coordinator. Data collection regarding School G included interviews with SEPC's director, the coordinator managing high schools, School G's principal, and four partner interviewees. Three partners and the coordinator also completed a survey.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

Conflicting agendas and personalities both complicated coordination at School G and were evident at partner meetings. One partner remembered a stakeholder who would attend "once every four months" and "just completely take over the conversation, and the goal of the meeting would not be necessarily addressed." The coordinator articulated that mediating such divergences is one of her primary roles, especially when "two people walk out of meetings with different ideas about what the meeting was about." She approached such dilemmas by "talking to each one of them and coming up with a solution, and marrying the two ideas. And going back to both of them and telling them, 'This is what we are going to do.'"

One partner characterized School G as a school that requires coordination to recruit partners, as opposed to just managing partners. She noted that School G has seen partners leave "because everyone's lost their funding." When a longtime service-learning partner lost funding and halted programming at School G, the coordinator made it a priority to identify other organizations in the city that could potentially fill its programmatic gap.

Relationships

SEPC's overall relationship with School G's principal was described as positive and productive. The principal described the coordinator as "very comfortable here" and reported the coordinator had an "open" relationship with staff. Yet, the principal also acknowledged obstacles to reaching certain staff, much of which he attributed to his own relationship with teachers. The coordinator saw the value in working with teachers to get a better sense of school needs, but the principal sometimes directed the coordinator to some teachers over others. As he explained,

> I think she is closer to the teachers who I view as the ones who are the 'doers,' because those are the people I go for and I introduce them to her. And when I need something, this is the person I talk to—'Get to know that person, this person.'"

Interviewees described challenging aspects of School G's school climate and culture. Multiple interviewees depicted the principal and staff as being "very overwhelmed," and the principal concurred. One partner described the principal as constantly "frustrated" and "exhausted." **Several interviewees indicated that communication with the school was difficult, and that the principal serving as the first line of communication was not ideal.** The principal admitted that he and the leadership team are "pretty much specialized inside this building" due to an overabundance of need and scant capacity. "We know nothing outside."

External boundaries aside, an onsite partner felt "ignored," and communication breakdowns led to an insufficient appreciation for students' needs. This partner's organization in particular serves students with disabilities and was not able to receive timely information about that population. This interviewee suggested SEPC could play a role in smoothing communication with staff beyond the principal. Another partner echoed the challenge of not being able to zero in on specific student needs that could result in

referrals to other partner services: "We're most functional in a school where somebody, whoever it is—it could be a teacher, it could be a counselor, it could be anyone—knows the students and funnels them to us." Another partner suggested an overtaxed administration and staff at School G complicates student recruitment and participation in partner programming there.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

All three survey respondents agreed the goals of the SEPC partnership coordination project were clearly defined at the beginning of the school year, and that the roles and functions of the coordinator also were clearly articulated. Only two of the respondents, however, reported having a clear understanding of the expectations regarding how partners were supposed to collaborate with the partnership coordinator.

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

The three School G partners who completed a survey agreed the **partnership coordination efforts helped their organization become more aware of other organizations serving the school**, and that the coordinator helped increase communication among the partners. Two survey respondents reported the partnership meetings were helpful for increasing collaboration among partners. All three agreed **coordination efforts enhanced implementation of their organization's activities and programs.** One of three partner respondents agreed that partnership quality improved, and two that the efforts enhanced goal alignment between School G and its partners. All three respondents reported overall satisfaction with the SEPC partnership coordination project.

Interviews revealed that coordination meetings were valued as increasing mutual awareness, connections to resources, alignment, and goal setting. But there was also a sense that, most likely due to a combination of challenges, momentum for partner meetings waned by spring 2015. Beyond "conflicting agendas" that do not generate "productive conversation," multiple interviews suggested communication about meetings fell off by April. One partner contrasted this lull with the progress made during the 2013/14 school year, when partners met more frequently and reportedly were more successful in matching partner resources and services to student needs. This partner reported that a regular "core group" of stakeholders met in 2013/14 to address student engagement and used shared data to target grade 9 "to improve a variety of outcomes."

The interviewee described the data analysis function associated with coordination as "very valuable." It enabled the network "to focus on their work" and overcame school capacity limitations. Data sharing also reduced programmatic overlap, and uncovered attendance and program participation patterns. **Interviewees recommended more strategic meetings, with partners taking more ownership over the meetings.** One requested meetings among like-minded partners, and another encouraged more focus and data sharing in meetings. One interviewee reported a need to move from "what programs do" to "a different level."

According to another partner, communication from the coordinator is important, especially when partners lose touch with the school or one another:

> It's [the coordinator's] role to collect who's been coming and to analyze who's been absent. And I know that broken down, that can be a lot of work. I know that it could be, but whom does it fall upon? If it's not [the coordinator], who is it in the school?

Another partner suggested SEPC could facilitate more transparent goal setting for 2015/16—"a sharing of visions," especially since "visions change year to year"—and that this might help with partnership

coordination. Such efforts could potentially aid School G's partners in moving further along the continuum from cooperation and collaboration to integration.

School H (PHENND)

School H's first year of PHENND partnership coordination was the 2014/15 school year. This case study used interviews with the coordinator, the principal, and three partners. The coordinator, principal, and partners also completed surveys. No partner meetings were observed.

Roles and Skillsets Employed

School H's principal acknowledged the coordinator did "a lot of great things," including used social media to engage students, parents, and outsiders. The coordinator also planned a successful "Advanced Manufacturing" week and helped other events by mobilizing volunteers. Some interviewees, however, suggested **the coordinator did not demonstrate proficiency in the role, hindering her ability to play a significant role in partner meetings.** One partner expressed concern about the coordinator's etiquette, communication, and attire in a school setting.

Relationships

The coordinator characterized her relationship with the principal as both negative and unproductive. PHENND supported the coordinator and principal in navigating their differences. Still, **divergent expectations and working styles between them led to tense interactions, resentment, and growing misunderstanding** about each other's roles, goals, and preferences.

Role Articulation and Buy-in

Two of three partners surveyed reported the functions of the coordinator were clearly defined, and the same two partners reported they were "very familiar" with the coordinator and interacted with her weekly. The third survey respondent disagreed that the coordinator's role was clearly defined and reported interacting with the coordinator only one or two times per quarter. One interviewee reported confusion about when the coordinator was available.

A lack of clarity about the coordinator's role and primary functions proved to be a source of discord at the school level. The principal questioned who was responsible for role articulation, and both the principal and the coordinator reported ambiguity about the coordinator's functions. This ambiguity led to the coordinator implementing isolated coordination or support activities, which were not brought to fruition or did not reach enough stakeholders to nurture appreciation for her role and value. The principal lamented, "A lot of things have been in the works, but no completion."

Partnership Coordination Outcomes

The coordinator played a role in facilitating some of the large-scale projects planned for School H, including a new playground. She made efforts to secure donations for the school and helped organize a School Advisory Council. Two of the three survey respondents reported the coordination efforts helped increase their awareness of other partner organizations and that they helped increase communication with the school. Two reported the coordinator was helpful in increasing collaboration between partners and that partnership quality improved; one reported better alignment between partners resulted from the coordination efforts.

Although the coordinator played a small role in partner meetings at School H, there are a wealth of resources and local investment in the school. Interviewees reported the principal is a believer in

partnerships and open to external organizations. One partner praised the principal for being "exceptional" in voicing school needs, and reported he is tenacious in pursuing resources to fill gaps.

Still**, the school may need to make greater efforts to ensure partnerships are integrated and inclusive beyond a few key partners.** One interviewee explicitly pinpointed a gap between service providers and "resource-bringers" at School H, which suggests ongoing partnership coordination and communication may be necessary to resolve tensions and align the efforts of multiple partners serving the school. **Partnerships at School H were characterized as largely being managed through the principal.** While he welcomed partners into the school, there appeared to be little encouragement for partners to collaborate with one another.