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SUPPORT THROUGH STRENGTHENING RELATIONAL TIES : AN EXAMINATION ON THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERSHIPS IN CLOSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS FOR STUDENTS

Sondra D. Davis

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the National College of Education at National Louis University

National College of Education

National Louis University

April, 2020

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Abstract

Oftentimes I have witnessed a disconnect between addressing student need and the services a community partnership provides. I conducted a qualitative study to examine the impact a faith-based community partnership had on its participating students. I interviewed directors, staff, and parents, as well as completed numerous onsite observations to gather evidence. I discovered that the level of effectiveness is contingent upon the commitment that takes place between the school and partnered organization. Partnerships are essential to efforts to expand when, where, how, and what students learn (Little, 2011). If expectations are jointly created with all parties engaged in ongoing communication and continual progress monitoring, it highly influences a more beneficial outcome of success for students.

Preface

In the seventeen years I have worked for Chicago Public Schools, I am often charged with securing additional funding to acquire community partnerships. For example, if there were additional activities I wanted to include in my arts program such as choreography, drama and/or band, I was responsible for securing the funds and seeking out the organization(s) to fulfill the need. Also, being the facilitator of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) I was required to research, review and recommend associations capable of addressing school priorities noted in the Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). Oftentimes the purpose of these partnerships were to create a resource of supplemental services that fulfill a current need within the school. The initial intent is for it to operate as an additional means of support. However, I have observed that in the majority of these instances the existing gap that was meant to be closed, unfortunately was not.

As an educator and leader, I know the significance of establishing effective community-based partnerships. When done successfully, they are able to implement practices that allow student needs to be addressed and improved. This study allowed me to examine services as well as determine barriers that prohibit partnered organizations from fully serving in the capacity needed to become a more efficient support system.

I conducted this research utilizing a faith-based organization that provides after-school support for students. Time was spent observing students, their activities, interviewing directors, parents and instructors. Evidence indicated that both the school and organization's commit of working together by collecting, analyzing and revisiting data aided in manifesting successful

outcomes. This result reiterated for me the value that lies in creating and executing a shared vision.

Because expectations were clearly defined, documented and monitored throughout the entire process of this particular partnership, desired results were achieved. Observations coupled with data analysis allowed me to verify my findings. This leads to the recommendation of all schools being required to create an action plan, collect data, document the process and monitor/track progress.

This paper is advocating for schools and partnered organizations to increase communication and document works so that services rendered during partnerships, directly align and target the insufficiencies that exist. By building stronger relational ties between the two entities, a more focused plan can be executed to ensure that the probability of success is ultimately maximized for all students.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Educational reform is meant to improve the current structures that deem to generate inequitable conditions. As written in the in the World Declaration of Education for All(1994), "Every person, child, youth, and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs" (p.3). There is an ongoing battle of plans to reform education and leverage circumstances that exist within schools. This requires engaging all stakeholders to align and execute actions congruent to the vision and mission of the district.

The district that utilizes the program I have chosen to evaluate has 642 school and 355,156 students. According to Central School District's Stats and Facts (Chicago Public Schools, 2020), 76.4% of that total are economically disadvantaged students. 83.3% of that student enrollment is Hispanic and African- American. The American Psychological Association (para 3, 2020) states that "school systems in low-socioeconomic status communities are often under resourced, negatively affecting students' academic progress and outcomes" (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). In an effort to "eliminate barriers to success and ensure equitable opportunities for all students" Central School District created a five year vision. It entails making the attainment of a high-quality education available to all students.

The overall concept of its plan is to guarantee that "every child in every school receives equitable support and opportunity" (Chicago Public Schools, 2020, para.1). Three commitments make up its mission of utilizing a holistic approach to improve addressing student need: academic progress, financial stability, and integrity. The integrity component states the significance of creating strong relationships both in and outside of the district. It emphasizes the significance of achieving a collective impact.

This approach at its core utilizes shared accountability as a means of resource to address student need. The district's website also notes the belief that improvement is reliant upon a commitment of "continually engaging school communities and partners to support student success". To aid in the fruition of improving conditions, an Office of Family and Community Engagement in Education ($FACE^2$) was formed. It has the same ideology at its base of working to "cultivate and maintain healthy working relationships with parents, families, community members and education stakeholders, by establishing a reciprocal exchange of strategic plans and concepts pertaining to the quality of schools and improvement of educational outcomes for all students" (Chicago Public Schools, 2020, para.1). It recognizes that all stakeholders are vital in the transformational efforts of improving educational experiences for students. `

FACE2 has a framework that consists of 6 departments. One of them is the Office of Faith Based Initiatives (OFBI). The mission of this particular department is as follows:

> It is committed and dedicated to bridging the gaps between Chicago Public Schools and the faith based communities of Chicago. Our mission is to establish effective partnerships with faith based institutions city-wide. We understand the role of faith based leaders as valuable resources, and know that these partnerships actively engage the community and contributes towards the success of our students and schools (Chicago Public Schools, 2020, para.1 & 2).

With laws about the separation of church and state, I did not realize that these types of partnerships were permissible to exist within public schools. In my experience as a leader and educator often charged with the responsibility of obtaining partnerships, I never knew that connecting with a faith- based organization was an option. This discovery sent me on a quest to find the organizations associated with faith and a holistic approach noted as its principle means

of supporting student learning. I researched all the faith-based organizations that worked with Central District schools in this manner. Based on the substance of my examination, one organization's outcomes caused it to emerge to the surface of my inquiry, By the Hand.

Purpose

By the Hand is a faith-based organization that partners with Central School District to fulfill the requirement of "servicing students in the most under-resourced neighborhoods." It is a Christ-centered, after-school program in Chicago whose mission vows to take kids by the hand and walk with them through college, helping them have abundant life—mind, body and soul" (By the Hand, 2020, para.2). The organization's principles stem from the biblical foundation of John 10:10, which states that: The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (King James Version). Students are girded with the Word of God as a means to teach them that they are all created in God's image and should love and respect themselves and each other accordingly (para. 5).

The By the Hand website states that its participants "become fearless crusaders, defenders of others and doers of good. It indicates that "they are sharing abundant life with their family, neighbors and classmates. They are The Solution our city needs" (2020, para.3). The after-school program not only serves as a ministry that encourages students to hope, teaches them about faith, who they are in Christ and how His acceptance grants them agape love and unmerited grace. It notes how "God's transforming power and the many people who come alongside the kids at different times in different ways, aids them in making tremendous strides to succeed in school—and life" (2020, para.1). While attending the program students are granted

opportunities to partake in worship through prayer, and such activities as choir, chapel and bible study.

They currently have five locations where faculty and staff work with students inside their facilities to conduct services. These services not only involve a holistic approach of using practical strategies, but also provides academic assistance, spiritual guidance, health care, and supply food for the participants. The website goes on to state that By the Hand emphasizes a system that uses measurable goals as a means to track student progress. The program currently works with over 1,500 inner city children to improve developmental conditions and increase potential outcomes.

Academically, they give all participating students targeted instruction, providing skills that assure they make grades no lower than a "C". In terms of the "body" aspect, they give students supplies and medical services that allow them to receive physicals, eye exams, and daily nutritional meals. Spiritually, they also offer students tools to gain a relationship with Christ, as well as understand the bible and learn the significance it has to their pursuit of achieving success.

Evaluating this program allowed me to examine the effectiveness of services, study the implementation of its procedures, and increase awareness about the benefits associated in partnering with a faith-based organization. This research identifies steps that can be taken to fortify resources and strengthen relational ties that can impact students, the community and schools. This examination has the potential to boost collaborative efforts and establish frameworks that are better equipped to provide students with the tools they need in order to succeed.

Rationale

By the Hand's website (2020) stated claims of their commitment of working with under privileged students influenced me to take a deep dive in to their practices. The needs of the student makeup in the Central School District strongly reflected the services provided at By the Hand. This drove me to research the history and regulations of faith-based organizations being partnered with public schools.

In 1964, President Johnson was one of the first who declared that work done by religious groups being partnered with the government was instrumental in making change happen (Black, 2004). Over the years, as time progressed the government subsidized several faith- based organizations to provide social services. Battles ensued and this conjunction warranted opposition because of the continued belief that church and state should remain two separate entities. As a result, the support received by the government to these organizations hinged upon them keeping their religious connotations separate from their public acts of service (Formolica et. al, 2003).

On January 29, 2001, President Bush introduced his new public policy initiative. This policy was a proposed plan to federally fund faith-based initiatives that "offered government funding to churches who provided social services to the needy." (Formolica et al., 2003) According to the *Social Policy: Essential Primary Sources* (2006), Bush proposed that faith-based organizations assume a greater role in providing social-service programs without breaching the separation of church and state. He contended that the main focus of the initiative was to remove the legal barriers that restricted faith- based organizations from being a part of public programs. This change in policy created an avenue of shared accountability by implementing acts of service that addressed conditions within public sectors.

At its core, Central School District's vision and mission has this same ideology of having shared accountability amongst stakeholders. My research indicated that granting schools the opportunity to partner with a faith based organization, such as By the Hand, provides students with an additional source of support. Structurally its framework offered activities from varied areas of enrichment for students. By the Hand affords them with techniques that broaden their horizons. It allows them to discover new ways of understanding how to exercise alternative coping mechanisms. As they learn to embrace different strategies for handling challenges, they are more apt to make efforts that positively impact their community as a whole.

By the Hand is a student-centered program that offers services for free. By offering this no cost option for parents, it provides a safe place for children to receive intentional support and instructional interventions. The program is individualized to cater to students specific areas of need. By the Hand collects data, monitors progress and works to ensure that students remain on track academically, as well as tend to the social emotional facet of its participant. In order to broaden the lens of opportunity for students (Milner, 2015), I decided to study the code of conduct and operational practices utilized at By the Hand.

During my doctoral studies, I took a course called Community Engagement at National Louis University. The majority makeup of the class consisted of the Central School's District principals and assistant principals. Our professor indicated that she had invited a guest speaker to our class for that day. She inquired if anyone had heard of Central District's Faith-Based Initiative. No one in the room had heard of this program. The guest speaker was the director of the program. His presentation involved clarifying the purpose of his department. He gave a brief synopsis of the program's history. He explained that his department was responsible for partnering faith - based organizations with schools within the Central School District .

Everyone in the room was oblivious to the fact that such a program existed. He detailed the programs associated with his department and how they had changed the lives of so many stakeholders. Details were given on how the faith-based community partnerships made a difference. It made everyone in the room eager to learn more about it. Some of the benefits conveyed by the director included how student improved academically and made significant gain. This was accredited to the measures taken by the faith-based organization's willingness to acquaint themselves with its students, find ways to build their areas of strengths, as well as address their areas of need.

I was both excited and disappointed. I was excited because I thought that these types of programs had the potential to fill gaps of inadequacies for students. The disappointment came in the realization that most individuals in the room had never heard of these types of partnerships existing in schools. This made me wonder how many other people were not aware of the Central School District's Faith-Based Initiative Program. I contemplated what could be done to aid these types of programs to gain the momentum needed to reach beyond its current state of existence. My contemplation of how to boost this program to the next level, is what further influenced my decision to evaluate it. After several failed attempts to contact the Central School District's Faith-Based Initiatives office, I decided to go another avenue and directly contact one of the faith-based organizations that offered their services to students within the district. That is when I discovered "By The Hand".

According to Central School District's website, its intentions are to provide all students with the support they need to achieve success. They acknowledge that one of the best ways to do so is by creating strong partnerships. As noted by Milner (2015), these partnerships are fortified when they are formed between school, home, and the community. The reinforcement of

collaborative efforts can provide the additional resources needed to mentor, tutor, and empower students. Faith -based partnerships, like that of By the Hand, have the potential to identify challenges and aid in resolving issues that oftentimes are neglected. This study examined the range of services that inform the contributions community faith-based organizations have on student learning . It evidenced value related in these types of partnerships and how the alignment of practices are instrumental when improving student outcomes.

Goals

The goal of this program evaluation was to increase awareness of impact and identify how establishing collaborative faith-based partnerships has the potential to improve student learning and development. Researchers (Regnerus & Elder, 2003), conducted a study indicating when youth from low-income neighborhoods attend church, their academic performance improves. The Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society conducted over 600 studies and identified how positively religion effects the physical, mental and social health of individuals. Results of such research indicated that participation in church activities were directly linked to the improvement of student's academic achievement (Farmer, et al, 2010).

Churches are often deemed as the pillars of their communities, especially in low income areas. "Schools cannot achieve goals and objectives of the institution alone" (Powell et al., 2011, p.64). The establishment of faith-based partnerships within schools has the potential to not only aid in bridging the gap between school and community, but also provide the additional support needed to closing it academically. The overall focus of this program evaluation will specify the significance of faith-based partnerships and identify some of the effects it has on improving student outcomes.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this evaluation is: What efforts are being made at the By the Hand Program to provide support for its participating students? The findings associated within this study aided to increase awareness and gain knowledge on the implementation process, as well as examined the effectiveness of faith-based partnership and distinguish area of needs and improvement. This method of study served as a means to state purpose of intent and ascertain the benefits of its affiliations. Therefore, the secondary questions used to guide this study were:

- What is the framework of a faith-based partnership within a school ?
- How do key stakeholders describe the actions and expectations for the program?
- What are the strengths and areas of need for these partnerships that inform strategies and actions needed for improvement?
- How can the impact of positive student outcomes be increased?
- What actions and policies must be executed to reinforce relational ties between school, home and faith-based partnerships?

Having conducted years of data analysis, I know the role of significance that root cause questioning can achieve (Paulise, 2017). These research questions framed my thinking and established the course of actions needed to thoroughly execute this study. It allowed me to obtain the data needed to gauge student participation, understand its relation to their learning and development, as well as verify the results that emerged due to their involvement.

SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I examined research related to the collaboration of school-community faith-based partnerships with a focus on the practices designed as resources to improve student performance (promote student enhancement). First, a study was done to clarify the meaning of "opportunity gaps". Then I examined literature on faith-based partnerships within schools. Next, I examined the strategies implemented within the partnerships and how they support student needs. Finally, I analyzed the benefits, challenges as well as their association to student success (achievement). Through this review, I was able to construct the conceptual framework needed to explore and understand views on the impact of students participating in faith-based community partnership programs.

"Opportunity Gaps" in Education

The achievement gap for students spans beyond "achievement" to encompass what Darling-Hammond (2010) refers to as "opportunity gaps". These gaps as noted by Byrk et al. (2010) derive from students living in impoverished condition where "schools start in different places and had different local resources on which to draw" (p.13). The Chicago-based study further clarifies the account of such circumstances as the following:

> a deteriorating local economy and the flight of middle-class whites and blacks had left some neighborhoods with high levels of joblessness, welfare dependency, family deterioration, violent crime, and drug addiction. These larger contextual changes substantially reduced the institutional resources in some communities while multiplying the problems that their leaders had to confront. (p.21)

Consequentially, these are the types of issues mentioned as attributing factors to a higher concentration of student need. Other factors included the inability to "build and sustain a collective capability to support comprehensive change, the sense of isolation, resignation, and hopelessness found in the community infused the school itself" (Byrk et al., 2010, p.10).

Payne (2008) further expresses this through the explanation of demoralized schools. Defining its environment as "criminally under- resourced" and consisting of "weakened social infrastructures" (p.31). The culture of "varied standards, fragmented curriculum, styles of discipline, and beliefs amongst staff were noted school-level impediments for students" (p.81). He also indicated the "absence of trust is as much a reaction to school failure as a cause of it" (Payne, 2008, p.36). The disparities of these components were noted as some of the makeup associated with existing gaps.

Findings of this study referenced making a shift to incorporate "opportunity gaps" as a systemic issue. Carter and Warner (2013) noted this manner in the following:

> Vast opportunity gaps limit children's future prospects everyday in school in almost every community across America. Talent is being wasted particularly among those living in poverty and in disadvantaged communities of color. Children in these communities are not reaching their full potential and are not closing the gap in achievement -precisely because they are not receiving equitable and meaningful opportunities to reach that potential. (p. 3)

This resonated in Share's (2018) suggested need to frame the "achievement gap" issue accurately. Doing so required holding everyone accountable for student outcomes, not placing the responsibility on kids for systemic issues" (para. 8). The article acknowledges how "solutions outside of the school walls can come from every sector to address the gap and influence potential

outcomes for students" (para. 11). The study of Bryk et al. (2010) clarified that the "broad base of organizational strength across essential supports was much more likely to occur in school communities with bonding social capital— where neighborhood collective efficacy was strong, residents were active in local religious institutions, and the incidence of crime was relatively low". It also noted that "weak reports were more common in schools located in contexts with low levels of religious participation and collective efficacy, and few social connections beyond the neighborhood" (p.188).

Faith-Based Partnerships Structure

Research for Action (2008) conducted exploratory studies in Philadelphia to establish the significance of community partnerships between schools and faith-based organizations. These partnerships consisted of committed churches working together with schools to create support for students. Principals involved in the study stated that they felt these partnerships "made learning more relevant and improved school climate" (p.2). Similar results were reported from the Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools Community District who utilized faith-based partnerships as an additional resource to address multiple areas of student need (Chambers, 2018). This was further corroborated in Shirley's (2001) findings, that identified faith partner collaborations as being a fundamental source of providing "mentoring, literacy activities, and after-school programs" (p. 227). These types of activities were noted as being designed to reinforce student learning as well as increase their self-efficacy.

Research from schools partnered with faith- based organizations in Detroit noted how services were conducted in a safe environment where both student and parent involvement was encouraged (Chambers, 2018). Training sessions were given that equipped parents with tools to assist student improvement in both academic and social issues. As stated by Epstein (2010), "

partnerships provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community" (p. 82). When organizations partner to provide these additional resources, it generates the equitable conditions needed to eliminate student barriers of success.

According to the findings of this study, there is a broad base by which faith- based organizations can partner with schools. Some faith partners give their support to schools monetarily. They inquire with the school's leadership team and determine what supplies are needed and then they have their congregation make contributions (Beck, 2014). Beck's research highlighted how church sponsorships also included feeding students by providing breakfast or afterschool snacks. Rahn's (2018) research corresponded the same sentiment in his findings noting that services provided by these types of partnerships were vital for students. Even though some research findings revealed efforts made by faith partners to be an additional source of support, its acceptance did not come without challenges.

Challenges of Faith-Based Partnerships

Several researchers reported the greatest challenge the assurance of maintaining the separation of church and state (Beck, 2014). Conjoining schools with faith partners constituted in some cases the idea that the members of the church would try to "proselytize" students (McCabe, 2017; Shirley, 2001). Shirley's research also noted there was concern that as students became involved with instruction and activities led by church members "professionalism maybe compromised" (p.235).

Researchers of the *Intersector Project* (2017) indicated that another issue pertaining to partnership was the lack of communication. It stated that in order for the collaboration to be successful there had to be clear expectations from the school about the aspirations they desired to

obtain from the partnership. Indications also alluded to school leaders being clear about the vision of their school and how the faith partner will aid in accomplishing that mission.

The aforementioned *Research for Action (2008)* findings noted challenges as: "lack of staffing dedication, lack of time for staff support, lack of time for students to receive services, and lack of sufficient funding to support the partnerships" (p. 3). The study also revealed the significance that leadership has in being the determining factor of how challenging the collaboration between the faith partner and school will be. Lines of communication remaining open in several of these studies are noted as reasoning for successes to occur.

Faith -Based Partnership Success

Research demonstrated a positive link between school and faith-based partnerships. The activities offered by the church had many benefits such as reducing student stressors and being a support system to reinforce learning (Farmer et al., 2010). Green, Hilton, and Joseph (2011) deemed their study to have found the collaboration to act as a "supplement for the gaping holes" that exist within the schools, even going on to acknowledge them as "important allies" (p.66).

Jordan and Wilson's (2017) findings from their comparative case study also indicated the values associated with schools and faith -based partners. They reported benefits that resulted in the collaboration as "promoting shared leadership, tackling racial issues, and aiding to ensure the educational success by offering programs that boost their social and emotional development" (p.93).

Colgan (2001) conducted research using three schools to gauge whether student performance had improved. After interviews and observations he determined in his findings that there were "immediate boost" in the performance as well as a more cohesive bond forming

between school and the community (p.12). Strengthening relational ties between all stakeholders provides the clarity needed for continuity of purpose to be established.

Reevaluating Community Involvement

The idea of pushing beyond the school walls to seek the necessary resources for aiding student success has to become more concrete. It is the involvement of working cooperatively that changes the trajectory of student performance (Farmer et al., 2015). The ability to advance students takes determining what is required and then committing to finding the resources needed in order to obtain it. Making the community a part of the solution is a vital point of achieving meaningful impact for student success.

Studies noted by Gross et al.(2015) stated how the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) viewed partnerships as an integral part of the "evidence-based theoretical framework for a fully braided, inclusive educational delivery system that extends beyond the school to include families and community" (p.10). The article (Gross et al., 2015) goes on to state that research confirmed schools that develop strong community partnerships have :

(a) a higher percentage of students performing on grade level (Sheldon, 2003

(b) increased parental volunteerism (Anderson et al., 2010),

(c) supported school reform efforts (McAllister, 2013),

(d) increased student test scores (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Sheldon, 2007),

(e) increased student attendance rates (Sheldon, 2003, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004),

(f) connections for students to learning opportunities outside of school (Blank et al., 2003) (p.10).

The SWIFT framework studies concluded that the "four school factors that appeared to contribute most to the promotion of strong community partnerships were (a) strong school leadership, (b) inviting school culture, (c) teacher commitment to student success, and (d) collaboration and communication among partners" (Gross et al., 2015, p.23).

Conclusion

My analysis of literature reviewed the structure of frameworks that existed between the partnership of schools and faith-based organizations, the challenges and successes of their collaboration and the impact student involvement derived from the association. Through the culmination of its research I was able to characterize elements of substantiation. It demonstrated how schools making alliances with faith partners can strengthen their ability to provide services needed for students. It also indicated various aspects of how and if these partnerships were capable of being supportive means of addressing areas of need for students.

Engaging stakeholders to assume accountability requires a collective understanding on the principles of its realization. The findings in these examinations distinguished some of the benefits associated with faith-based community partnerships. This qualitative study will aid to further establish relevancy and identify the areas of insufficiency in bridging the gaps of opportunity for students.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

The program evaluation is a process of examination that is done to gather evidence, analyze and assess data and determine a program's effectiveness. Patton (2008), states that, "Program evaluation is undertaken to inform decisions, clarify options, identify improvements, and provide information about programs and policies" (p.40). During this study I used a qualitative approach for my data collection. This information was used as a means to research the level of efficiency the program's services had in supporting student achievement. The methodological process consisted of formulated questions that addressed the areas of framework surrounding this research . As indicated by Patton (2008), it aided me to distinguish within the program "what works from what doesn't" (xviii).

In order to study the experiences of implementation conducted at By the Hand, data was gathered from one-on-one interviews, observations of onsite classes and activities, and a culmination of multi-document analysis. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Observations were conducted and documented. An examination of articles, reports and information from the By the Hand website was used to perform document analysis. These varied sources of data were used as points of reference in the account of examining frameworks and the organizational impact it had on students.

By the Hand's vision and mission declared that they work to achieve "academic excellence while nurturing the whole child—mind, body, and soul" (By The Hand, para.1, 2020). Utilizing a qualitative approach of collecting data, I was able to classify the program's strengths and challenges and "probe the richness of human experience" (James, Milenkiewicz & Buckman, 2008, p.63). This allowed me to gain an understanding of the individuals directly

involved with the organization, as well as well provide insight about students prior to their participation and what, if any, changes had occurred. This process also helped to distinguish value in relation to the benefits its services provided for students within the program. It granted me further opportunities of differentiating the attributes these types of partnerships entail as well as determined the resource level of support it affords.

Participants

Students, instructors, directors, and parents involved in the program were an essential part of my collection of data gathering. The By The Hand program states that it offers a "holistic approach to assisting students." Using qualitative inquiry to gather information from the participants provided the purposeful sampling needed as indicated by Patton (1990). During onsite observations I was able to explain the intent of my study with directors, instructors and parents . All interested parties were given a Consent Form (Appendix A). They were also given a Protocol Form (Appendix B) to acknowledge that each agreement of participation would have the highest anonymity. I assured them that a safe environment would be created to openly discuss if they felt the organization's strategies and actions addressed student needs.

Data was gathered from the interviews I conducted with 2 parents, 3 instructors and 3 directors. This process broadened perspective by offering multi-layered replies and opinions of what occurred at the facility. Observing student activities and onsite interactions allowed me to determine whether a correlation existed between interviewee responses and the organization's student achievement data. This process allowed me to gain a more in-depth understanding of whether the procedures and practices offered by the organization were effective means of additional support for students.

Data Gathering Techniques

Developing a greater understanding on the range of services provided by the organization required identifying the variables I needed to examine. Data was collected using a qualitative research methodology. As stated by Patton (2008), " qualitative data in program evaluation is aimed at letting people in programs express their reactions in their own terms rather than impose on them a preconceived set of limited response categories" (p. 435). By conducting interviews, onsite observations and analyzing multiple forms of documents about the organization aided in the examination of gauging effectiveness.

Interviews

I conducted a total of 8 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews in person and by phone. The interviewees included: 3 directors, 3 instructors and 2 parents. The directors and parents were interviewed onsite and the instructor responses were gathered over the phone. The one-on-one format allotted the freedom for individuals to speak candidly about the organization and its practices. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in length. The same questions were asked of all subject's in order to gain multiple perspectives regarding the services provided at By the Hand. The semi-structure interviews contained open-ended questions that targeted my research topics and allowed the flexibility needed for subjects to expound upon their views and opinions (Victor, 2017).

Questioning directors helped me to understand the principles and operations from a leadership lens. Interviewing instructors I was able to identify practices and assess procedures. Obtaining parental perception further evaluated the actions that existed within the program. As noted by Patton (2008), when data is gathered separately from different informants, it "acts as a way of checking the consistency of findings from different data sources" (p.442). The

interviewing process identified practices, revealed commonalities and discrepancies, as well as classified trends.

Observations

During the organization's hours of operation I completed 5 onsite informal observations, with a total of approximately 12 hours. Gathering information in this manner allowed me to examine the implementation process of the program. I observed a series of small and whole group student activities, as well as team and parental meetings. Conclusions were drawn based from the actual events I observed. This aided to authenticate program functionality as well as distinguished the type of culture, climate, and environment that existed within the organization.

Document Analysis

Utilizing this technique, I analyzed multiple sources of relevant information. For example, I read articles about the organization, perused the website to study and listen to student stories and testimonials, as well as reviewed several years of annual reports. This examination provided an additional means by which to establish, weigh and assess findings obtained during the interview and observational process . Bowen summed up the overall concept of document analysis as "a process of evaluating documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed" (as cited in Triad 3, 2016, p. 33). Studying the data of these documents revealed organizational structures, outlined its history and provided the evidence needed to substantiate information in regards to effectiveness.

Conducting the data gathering techniques for this research required establishing a premise of confidentiality. This was clarified and provided within the ethical considerations.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance to the Participatory Action Research (PAR) guidelines, ethical actions were executed throughout the entire process to ensure sound research occurred. On my initial onsite observation, I was introduced to all members of the staff and faculty. I was allowed to speak freely with each of them individually. During that time I explained the context of my research. In order to maintain fidelity, I spoke with each individual as a potential participant. I acquired permission by being forthright in all of communication(s) (Milenkiewicz & Bucknam, 2008, p. 29). Once involvement was confirmed, via email I distributed the aforementioned protocol and consent forms to all participants. In order to protect identities and operate from a sense that guaranteed confidentiality, phone interviews were conducted. This process aided to create and solidify the trusting relationships needed for complete discretion to occur.

Data Analysis Techniques

Throughout the process of analyzing data I compared and contrasted information, which enabled me to verify organizational infrastructure, goals, objectives and stated outcomes. Ultimately, the course of actions utilized during this process aided to answer my research questions. It identified the interventions and solutions that worked in impacting students and their development. It also allowed me to establish whether or not the organization's claims of assurance during partnership fulfilled its obligation of being an additional source of support for students.

Interviews

During the interview process I asked a series of pre-determined questions that directly aligned to my research. Each interview was recorded and the subject's feedback was saved to the device, and numbered accordingly. I also took notes throughout the conversations. I dictated

their responses in a journal with the subject's name, the date, and time of interview. The information was documented in a journal that contained questions that were numbered as well as had space provided for each subject's answers.

Once each interview was complete, I listened to the recordings several times and transcribed them verbatim using my computer. This analysis was a culmination of all these techniques to ensure the recollection of the interviews were factual (Victor. 2017). I then coded responses by highlighting key words and phrases that emphasized reoccurring themes. Next, I charted and assigned each of the codes into categories. Each category was labeled which aided in the process of establishing significance in accordance to the questions of this study. It also allowed me to summarize findings and conclude recommendations for further development.

Observations

In order to analyze the observational data, I used the field notes I gathered during onsite visitations. The collected data was kept inside a journal, with each day of entry dated, time stamped, and labeled indicating site location. These notes documented services, student behaviors, and recorded the experiences I observed . After thoroughly reading the notes, I coded and categorized them by areas of focus in relation to my research questions. I made a list of the reoccurring themes that emerged. Williams suggested, after indicating themes to "look for patterns in the data, identifying regularities or irregularities, which aid to establish substantial connections" (as cited in Given, 2008, p. 248). This information allowed me to understand the procedures of operations within the organization and further assess the conditions in which they took place.

Document Analysis

By gathering multiple forms of data, which included articles about the organization, information from the website, and several years of annual reports; I reviewed, differentiated and evaluated content. This process consisted of listening to student testimonials on the website, taking notes, highlighting, and extracting from each informational source the aspects that continuously emerged. These elements provided the lens needed to identify patterns and establish codes. This progression formulated the means for categories and themes to develop.

Conclusion

Conducting this triangulation method of research rendered the data needed to perform a more in depth analysis. I utilized the findings of this methodological approach and identified each part of its contribution as it related to the organization as a whole. This course of action provided a means to "think systematically" and "understand the interrelationships that existed" within the structure of its practices (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 97).

Section Four: As - Is Results Analysis

This section describes the Four C's Framework and how it was used to identify the present state of the organization. It elaborates on the current arenas outlining awareness of context, culture of limited community engagement, obscured continuity conditions and the inconsistency of systemic competencies within the organization.

Utilizing the Four C's Framework (Wagner et al., 2006) data was organized as it related to the following components: contexts, cultures, conditions, and competencies. Wagner et al., (2006) referred to context as "knowing more about the worlds from which students come"(p.104). It involves analyzing the external factors of the organizational structures, and in its totality encompasses the remaining three elements needed in constituting change.

Culture is the makeup of "shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school" (Wagner et al., 2006, p.102). It is recognized as the internal collective opinion of understanding, while conditions are noted as the "external architecture surrounding student learning" (p.101). The" repertoire of skills and knowledge that influence learning" is defined as competencies (p.99). It is the developmental structure set in place to build and enlarge capacity.

The "As Is" diagnostic tool (Appendix C) aided to categorize the organization's data within each of these four arenas. Consequently, this process revealed the existing levels of contributions that faith-based community partnerships had in closing opportunity gaps. It also worked to establish the areas that were in need of change. This section will integrate data results as a means to support the themes that emerged.

Summary of Findings

The examination of data constructed within the 4C's framework (Wagner's et al., 2006) enabled three themes to emerge. A need exists for a more in depth awareness of context and conditions. Greater efforts must be made to understand external factors and how they influence relations. A culture of limited community engagement and collaboration also surfaced. The narrowed scope of opportunities for connections with stakeholders were reported as hindrances to strengthening ties within the community. Lastly, the variants of systematic competencies within the organization were inconsistent for creating conditions of continuity. The culmination of these findings unveiled the avenues where utilizing more cooperative communication could reinforce the organizational efforts needed to increase student achievement.

Awareness of Context

The document analysis of By the Hand's website and annual report (2019) noted that the context of where the organization's reside are within neighborhoods where demographics include "thirty-five percent of all residents and forty- eight percent of children, live below the poverty level". Increasing the success rate of the organization's ability to continually improve student outcomes requires faith-based community partnerships, like that of By the Hand, expanding efforts to understand the "historical, economical, and social context" of the communities they service (Wagner, 2006, p.104).

Observations and interviews confirmed the environmental and conditional state by which these partnerships operated. During site visits, while waiting for students to enter By the Hand facilities, I saw desolate areas filled with vacant properties. Participating students live in these neighborhoods. These areas are plagued with some of Chicago's highest crime rates, such as Austin, Englewood and Altgeld Gardens. High quality services are a rarity. The current state of

conditions that exist within these communities echo a critical need for interventions to take place.

The atmosphere has a definite effect on the students that participate in the By the Hand program. As indicated by Parent 1," a lot of student's don't hope. They think there are no hopes of even going to college. I even wondered if things could change for my daughter, and then we heard about By the Hand." Parent 2 substantiated this further in stating that "students here come from broken homes. At first they don't even like all the work they have to do when coming to By the Hand, but once they get used to it...it changes".

Recognizing the context of which By the Hand serves is significant to understanding how each element of the program has the potential to provide additional means of support for the children within their community.

Culture of Limited Community Engagement

When school's partner with an organization, the intention is for all entities to work together; the administrators, teachers and parents, to ensure that students receive what they need. The data findings of this study noted limited collaboration was a cause that perpetuated the lack of clearly defined all-inclusive frameworks to exist. Teacher 2 stated it best, " In a good partnership, you cannot bypass the community!" Leaving out such a vital source does not allow understanding to penetrate at every level of available opportunity of advancement.

Living with the sense of lost hope as mentioned previously, has resulted in the fixed mindsets and diminished voice that inhibit increased relational ties. According to interviewees, By the Hand needs to do more to include the wealth of opportunities that already exist within the communities where they partner. Teacher 2 stated it as, "There has to be an exchange with the people in the community." Not taking advantage of what parents have to bring to the table

minimizes engagement. This was confirmed for me as I spoke with parents. When I questioned them about data and the sources surrounding their collection, both parents could not speak to any aspect of it. Their lack of responses about it and other aspects of the program such as practices and procedures demonstrated that additional means of communication was required.

I found a similar disconnect between the organization and school. Priorities of putting students at the forefront was evident. However, schools have their own vision and mission outside of the ones By the Hand adheres to. Director 1's ideology of it "not being adversarial" builds trust and valued support. Meetings that include all stakeholders are not scheduled and therefore some expectations go unidentified and roles not clearly defined. As long as multiple belief systems maintain degrees of separation, then there is little likelihood that these types of partnerships will make the necessary connections to fully manifest change.

Obscured Continuity Conditions

By the Hand's after-school program is one that puts strong emphasis on faith, academic excellence and nurturing the whole child. Its vision and mission reflects an unwavering constitute of its leadership. Students are assured to gain a sense of hope by having several areas of need addressed through the organization's holistic approach.

Further developing its competencies entail all stakeholders being aware of the conditions relevant for student success. The blended learning program provides students assistance that are reading below grade level. The program also provides spiritual guidance, tutoring, mentoring, medical, dental, and counseling services as well as nutritious meals. And yet as stated by Parent #2, "Only people in the building know about it".

With all the organization has to offer, 7 out of the 8 individuals I interviewed said they only learned about the organization's existence and its program through word of mouth or

happenstance. For example, Teacher 2 stated that, "A friend of mine told me about it." Director 1 said that," I lived by one of the sites." Director 2 responded, "I heard about it from a family friend." These responses aided to answer one of my research questions. How can the impact of positive student outcomes be increased?

Increasing student impact entails additional means of promoting the organization and the benefits its partnership provides. Word of mouth, happenstance and in-house awareness does not suffice. Director 3 made a valid observation from being involved at By the Hand, " Outside the school partner, does the community even really know about us? We have to do something different. I think it is about spreading the word. Outreach is the only way. People need to know about our results." Interviewee responses confirmed this noting that there were hardly any occasions where all stakeholders participate in meetings or activities together. Optimizing opportunities to interact with all entities within the partnership is a key element to its growth potential.

Annual reports noted an operating budget of millions of dollars. Donations provide the majority of funds used to maintain its operations and determines its degree of services. The amount of these donations determines the abilities the organization has to fully function within the community. This same concept is also prevalent with the effectiveness of the partnership in relation to its levels of significance and engagement. The extent by which an organization is able to thrive within a community, is strongly based upon the value that is placed on the work being done.

A crucial part of an effective partnership is one that involves collaboration between all parties. Director 2 stated that, " I make all my team aware that when we go into a school, we are there to help them...we are in their house so to speak. We can't be upset if they are unable to meet

or things to don't go how we planned that day." I found this approach to be admirable; however, one that needed cultivating to maximize results. There has to be a joint commitment of continual emphasis on the vision and mission of the partnership as a whole.

This has to involve setting forth the expectations for each entity of the partnership. All stakeholders must establish relationships that permit them to be actively involved in the process. Doing so requires clearly defining roles, goals and itemized action plans of implementation.

Organizational Inconsistency of Systematic Competencies

The organization has a strong unwavering constitution to its vision and mission for students achieving what they need to succeed. The feedback from interviews, observations and document analysis' reverberated its importance. Once context is understood, the act of operating from a sense of oneness within the organization must be established in order to render the external changes that need to occur. Payne (2017) stated several impediments to program implementation. Some of them will be noted in this section such as "lack of program coherence, inappropriate pace of change, ambiguity of roles and an instability of key personnel" (p.172).

Analyzing documents revealed that several data sources where collected within the organization. Student attendance, grades, tracking of nutritious meals, eye exams, dental visits, attendance, retention, professed faith and church attendance. Once collected, it is sent out of state, summarized and used by the highest levels of leadership to inform decision-making. However, when a director who worked onsite was asked about the data, here was the response:

> "I stay away from data unless I have to do a report on it. Data is just used on the surface level in terms of different activities and things discussed in the leadership team meeting. Connectedness from site to site varies."

Directors 1 and 2 also could not elaborate on how data was used and only spoke about what type of data was collected. A shift has to transpire where it is more than just information. Time must be dedicated in staff meetings to discuss, analyze and identify its significance. Understanding data at all levels within the organization provides the clarity needed to appropriate standards for continuity to exist.

The core of this existence is contingent upon individuals within the organization maintaining structured frameworks. Parent 1 stated, " The staff keeps changing. More stability needs to happen. Teachers come and go." I think it would do them good if they did a better job to sustain the teachers. I think it would help with growth and success." Teacher 2 went on to say that, " Teachers have to really be invested to work here." Director 2 explained how the lack of volunteers and staff shortage made the opening of one site questionable at the beginning of the school year. There was a consensus amongst interviewees that more had to be done to inform all employees of the organizational policies, procedures, practices and expectations. If new hires are not privy of expectations then the result remains the same, a revolving door of employees.

In regards to elevating instructional practices for students requires teaching beyond the blended technology based reading program. Lessons must offer more authentic means of engagement so that students do not become complacent, but instead are continually challenged. A shared commitment of the vision has to filter down and permeate from top to bottom. As stated by Teacher 3, "Holistic instruction can't just be a job. It has to be people who are sensitive to the people where we work." Upon this examination I found that part of establishing that sensitivity entails discovering new ways to accomplish increased collaboration and engagement.

Interpretation

These findings are some of the reasons that partnership effectiveness is apparent, but not optimal. Failure to assume ownership within the capacity of the partnership, lessens the understanding of a shared vision. This confines the practices associated with attaining the continuity required for student achievement goals to be accomplished. Shifting mindsets will entail adaptive change to take place (Heifetz et al., 2009). Communication has to be increased so that gaps can be bridged to combat student insufficiencies. Director 1 stated, "We have to tap into conservations that ask parents, hey what is it you think your child needs?" This information must then be shared with schools to create more cohesive plans of action. All entities involved in the partnership haven't worked together to create a collective course of action. Responses from multiple interviewees within the organization concluded that they saw a need for including others in the decision-making process.

Judgments

In returning to the study's primary and secondary research questions, responses and data gleaned from it provided important insight as well as answered some of the proposed questions. These research questions included:

What efforts are being made at the By the Hand Program to provide support for its participating students?

- What is the framework of a faith-based partnership within a school ?
- How do key stakeholders describe the actions and expectations for the program?
- What are the strengths and areas of need for these partnerships that inform strategies and actions needed for improvement?
- How can the impact of positive student outcomes be increased?

- What actions and policies must be executed to reinforce relational ties between school, home and faith-based partnerships?

Data exemplified that By the Hand has a concrete structure that strategically works with students at their individual levels of learning. Director's 1, 2 and 3 expounded upon all the services that the organization provides for its students. They confirmed that procedures in place allow each student to receive personalized attention. Parent's 1 & 2 recounted stories of how the program "goes beyond teaching." Each of them shared instances where By the Hand offered them help financially. Data evidenced that the program provides wrap around services that nurture its students holistically. Interventions are used that challenge students to think critically and make sound decisions. Results were demonstrated even further as I witnessed students being required to utilize self reflection and their ability to use the Word of God as premise to determine direction and have positive outcomes.

The findings of my data mirrored noted claims of the program's objectives. It evidenced students being nurtured to achieve excellence on multiple levels. This was confirmed by various participating students via the By the Hand website (2020) testimonies, on how being a member of the program transformed their lives. For example, Student 1 indicated that, " By the Hand is a great place to be. My life before coming to By the Hand was terrible. I used to gang bang; hang in the streets a lot. I did not know nothing about college and now that I am in By the Hand, I know that I am going to college. We can get dental and eye exams and counseling, if we need it. I plan to go to Taylor University with a full ride. I am excited. I am thankful that By the Hand came in to my life right now".

Student 2 stated, " I used to been getting in a lot of fights. They teach me how to do the right thing and how to make a good choice." Student 3 spoke about how she used to skip class.

She stated that, "Everybody in here is like family. At first, I didn't go to church at all. Where right now, God is my savior. I go to church every Sunday. By the Hand changed my life. It's been amazing". Student 3 stated, " By the Hand does give kids hope. My grades were like really, really bad. Kids are able to come in everyday and see that they are able to do whatever they want to do as far as their career goes and getting closer to Christ. They are always there whenever I need them".

Student 4 affirmed that response as she shared her story. She pointed out that," It's an amazing program. I never really believed in myself before I came to By The Hand. I didn't even think I could get into college. They believed in me and it made me believe in myself. They were literally a bridge between me and the education that I thought never was possible. I made the Dean's list. I'm co-editor of my school's magazine. I'm studying for the LSAT. I've done some things I thought I never even could do, because of By The Hand. I don't think I can put in to words how thankful I am for By the Hand, that's how big of a part they played in my life".

Student 5 stated, " I was really disobedient and disrespectful. They make sure that I am on track. They make sure that I am on track and I am focused on looking at colleges. I got people pushing me it's like you got a whole crowd full of positive people behind you. By the Hand is amazing". Student 6 begins her portion of the video with stating the mission of By the Hand verbatim. She goes on to say that, " My favorite thing about By the Hand is that they not only teach us God but they help us with our school work. That's like their main thing... learn about God, go to school, get an education, be something in life. By the hand has helped me out tremendously".

The students in the video talk about how the program builds character and offers enriching activities. All of them in the video boast about their improved grades as well as their

dispositions. Student 5 as well as other students in the video could not only recite the By the Hand theme bible verse of John 10:10 (mentioned earlier), but were able to describe the living manifestation of it being demonstrated in their lives due to their connection with being a part of the program.

Academic deficiencies are addressed through technological applications and tutoring. Feedback from interviews and observations confirmed the approach of having a blended learning program at all of their sites. I was able to validate the website's claim of student learning opportunities that allowed them to rotate two to three times a week, between two learning stations for 20 to 30 minutes:

- Computer stations where they work individually and at their own pace on Lexia Reading Core5 software.
- Homework stations where students receive assistance from team leaders and/or volunteers.

The research data clearly indicated that services provided from By The Hand addresses issues by establishing and maintaining strong relationships with its students. Students are given enrichment based on practical applications. Outside of the academic and religious connotations they receive medical attention and are taught lifelong skills. For example during interviews Director's spoke about how they learn to cook, problem solve as well as confirmed opportunities of medical and counseling services. Strategies are given to students to propel them forward and progress is tracked to ensure they are effectual.

By the Hand keeps detailed records of student accounts academically, socially and spiritually. They track progress at the facility as well as utilize the partnered school's data from

report cards. All data is then sent to their out of state facility to tabulate percentage levels of effectiveness and highlights the areas that need improvement.

There were many instances shared and confirmed with me by directors, teachers and parents indicating that By The Hand does whatever it takes to assist its students. It was stated that the organization diligently works to find resources that are capable of altering hopeless conditions for its students. Whether that means to receive assistance monetarily or even shelter and food for the families of its students. These accounts demonstrate how the program is not only capable of reaching beyond gaining knowledge of student circumstances, but the relentless effort it makes to find the resources needed to create solutions.

Recommendations

Increasing the level of student impact within the partnership requires more communication amongst all stakeholders. By the Hand has to create avenues that broaden their lines of communication. As indicated by Director 1, "Our work has to be intentional. We can't really go into the community without working with them." Changes need to be made that will strengthen relational ties and establish the social infrastructure needed for collaboration to occur . Actions taken within the program were found to be incredibly accomplishing for students and yet, data findings confirmed a slight absence of coherence in regards to shared accountability. As noted by Payne, "Sharing decision making really can help move schools to a higher level" (p.43).

Advancing the work being done within the partnership requires enlarging the borders of it. Collaborative efforts have to shift to a more broadened perspective of inclusion. As noted by Loria (2018) "there’s tremendous power in establishing partnerships between schools and local community organizations, especially with nonprofit or mission-driven organizations"(para.1). It

goes on to state that "educators need to see evidence that students are gaining skills that complement their curriculum, while also becoming more involved and engaged citizens of the community" (para.3).

Connections that fortify relations between the school, organization and community must take place. This was reiterated throughout the interviews, observations and document analysis process. Collectively establishing a greater sense of support for students requires cohesively planning and implementing targeted action. As long as each entity within the partnership acts independently of each other, it negatively affects the potential opportunities of further improving student progress. Section five focuses on the change plan that needs to transpire to maximize results. The strategies and actions needed for these recommendations are specified in section six.

SECTION FIVE: To Be Framework

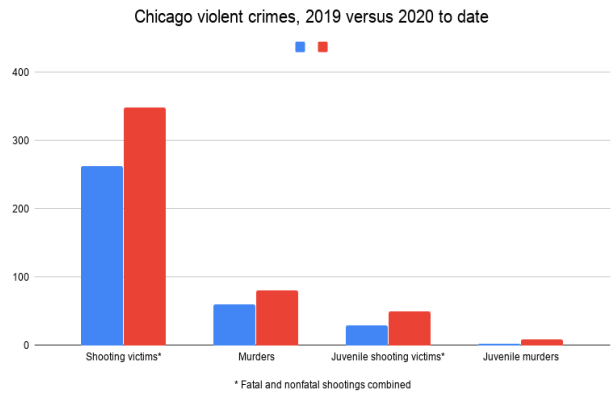
Introduction

Establishing a more effective partnership requires strengthening relational ties between the organization, school and community. As stated by O'Keefe (2011)"We can't rely on local, state, or federal governments to take ownership of the issues we face locally. We need to work as a community to nurture our schools." Interview responses called for a change in practice to engage all stakeholders. Components needed for improving the social infrastructure for increased collaboration to occur involves the organization attaining understandings of the context existing within the communities they service. In order to further unify operational continuity, findings indicated a need for appropriating conditions and establishing consistency of the systemic competencies within the organization. The overall desired outcome for the partnership was noted as achieving an encompassing culture of a shared leadership style that produces the ownership needed to encourage team accountability.

Envisioning the Success: To-Be

Increased Awareness of Context

As violence continues to be a serious issue in the streets of Chicago, having faith is the solace used by many minorities to aid them in overcoming their tribulations. "Chicago has seen a 43% rise in killings so far this year vs. 2019" as noted in the chart below from the Chicago Sun-times (Main & Charles, 2020).



As noted by Daly (2009), faith-based organizations have shown their ability to save and change lives. With the noted reverence of religion in the aforementioned neighborhoods, faith-based partners can be utilized as a means to break down barriers that often exist between school, home, and the community. As stated by Director 1, "We need to realize that where we are, in these neighborhoods, everyone expresses themselves differently." Outcomes of success are contingent upon the alignment of all stakeholders working together and advocating for students to receive the equitable opportunities necessary for improvement.

Developing an understanding for the context of the neighborhoods within the communities where the organizations are located aids to build up its students and sustain them to reach beyond their current state of existence. This has the potential to change their perceptions about attaining success. Director 1 indicated, " We have to help students realize that their lives don't have to be the way it was for grandma or some of the rest of their family." In order for the trajectory of student achievement to improve, each entity of the partnership has to take responsibility and be held accountable. More members of the community, school, and organization must find ways to work together and delve deeper to achieve greater levels of student progress.

This study revealed a need for a more concentrated effort of increasing communication and advancing opportunities of engagement. Once the organization increases collaboration with stakeholders it will allow planning to be more strategic in targeting student need. By creating a team that consist of the organization, school administration, faculty and parents within the community will aid to open lines of communication. Current organizational structures of By the Hand demonstrated progress; however, more time must be dedicated to identifying how the practices being implemented during the partnership benefit students and their learning.

A Culture of Community Engagement

By the Hand facilities exist within impoverished neighborhoods where, as noted by both interviewed parents, individuals are used to experiencing broken promises and unorganized structures concerning partnerships. As stated by Director 1, "We need to sit down together and collaboratively figure out the issues." This is the type of action that increases collaborative efforts to enable respectful relationships to be formed. Doing so also offers the stability needed in order to establish trust amongst stakeholders. Teacher 2 stated that, " We can't be afraid to allow community in, it is beneficial."

When the organization diligently pursues engaging all stakeholders in the process by which it operates, a more cohesive bond can develop. This establishes the grounds for continuity to not only exist but also grants opportunity of understandings that clarify frameworks of practice. It also allows them to become more consciously aware of the value the partnership has to offer its students and the community, which has the potential to shift thinking and ultimately transform mindsets.

As indicated by Director 1, "students, staff and parents are always developing, recycling, and growing." Constructing a purposeful team of individuals from the school, community and

organization strengthens relational ties and lessens the possibility for disconnections to continue. As expectations are clearly defined it shapes a common language that cooperatively formulates a unified voice of shared accountability.

Appropriating Conditions for Continuity

An integral part of shifting conditions within the partnership requires commitment and adherence to its vision and mission. Establishing a predetermined calendar of meetings and professional development provides the structure needed for stakeholders to train and work together. Abiding by the schedule enables discussions to take place, input to be given, ideas to be heard, as well as ensures that practices remain aligned and areas of need are addressed.

Shifting organizational practices to a state of sharing information with all stakeholders raise awareness and peaks interest that potentially can provide additional means of finance and resources to enlarge program capacity. Engaging stakeholders in the decision making process, clarifies course of actions for attaining more effective strategies, comprehensive approaches and interventions. Making these changes constitutes a state of connectivity that builds a more cohesive partnership between the organization, students, school and community.

As involvement efforts are boosted, increased communication can occur and perpetuate the catalyst for more meaningful relationships to be established. Engaging all stakeholders must go beyond the usual surface level of interactions that have previously occurred within the partnership. Dispelling the current belief system of contextual and conditional shortcomings requires executing actions that accomplish results. As tangible elements are rectified to induce real change, then the existing belief and value systems can be restructured.

Organizational Consistency of Systemic Competencies

Creating structured frameworks for students requires fortifying practices that take place within the organization. With increased communication, benefits can be realized, expectations can be established and a unified vision can be ensured. "Most efforts to improve education have at their core a focus on professional development to build competency" (Wagner et al., 2006, p.99). As mentioned previously, ongoing training must be provided for all stakeholders. In order for alignment to ensue, it has to begin with each member of the organization having a clear understanding of policy, protocols and procedures.

Obtaining a unified stance across all organizational sites entails reinforcing appropriate measures to attain consistency. Regarding instruction, the organization works with students using a technological computer-based program. Enhancing student experiences involves thoroughly training staff, creating a standardized curriculum and setting up a tracking system, monitored by parents, teachers, and By The Hand encouraging a shared sense of responsibility as by directors and teachers during the interviews. Time must be taken to incorporate more in depth conversations in staff meetings. Having strong teams within the organization aids to accomplish establishing them outside of it. This is an integral step of moving in a direction where all stakeholders are informed and are actively engaged in the partnership.

Obtaining a greater sense of continuity provides the focus needed to improve student progress. As stated by Teacher 3, "We have to be more certain of the instruction and activities we do, so students will come back." As the By the Hand team works closer with stakeholders, new learning communities can be created that provide ongoing developmental opportunities. Assuring constant communication with all parties maintains that continuous cycles of improvement remain intact.

Interview findings indicated varied skill set levels amongst the By the Hand staff. Offering continual opportunities where dialogue is exchanged and constructive feedback is obtained reveals what works, what doesn't and surfaces the necessary modifications for creating a more effective partnership. It is the involvement of working cooperatively that changes the trajectory of student performance (Farmer et al., 2015). Establishing knowledgeable teams that are required to regularly review and analyze data, as well as making them responsible for training others to do so, serves to develop more informative references within the partnership. As stakeholders participate in training opportunities, best practices are able to collectively take place at home, school, and within the organization.

Conclusion

Having a faith-based partner, like By The Hand, serves as a means to not only bridge the gap that often exist between school, family, and the community, but it also has the capability to be a big part of the solution. Implementing the change plan noted in this section further advances the intent of the partnership's mission of supporting students to maximize their potential outcomes of success. Section 6 defines the strategies and actions needed to do so.

SECTION SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Conducting the program evaluation allowed me to diagnose the system by clarifying structures that exists within the By the Hand organization. As indicated by Patton (2008) "the purpose of program evaluation is to increase effectiveness and provide information on whether hopes are actually being realized" (p.42). Studying the implementation process of the procedures offered by the organization, I was able to identify the context, culture, conditions, competencies arenas of change and its relation to the potential of faith-based partnerships impacting student success (Wagner & Keagan, 2006).

I used the Wagner & Keagan (2006) change leadership model to determine three key strategies and the accompanying actions needed for the By The Hand organization to evolve from its current "As Is" status of existence to the idealistic "To Be" state of being. The first strategy is to restructure the collaborative channels between stakeholders. As a means to increase support, the second strategy is to leverage resources. Lastly, the final tactical approach is to develop a progress monitoring system to gather evidence and indicate effectiveness.

Restructure Collaborative Channels

Evidence revealed that By the Hand has worked to create strong ties of relational trust. As I coded interview responses, I discovered that certain avenues could be adjusted to strengthen communication and establish a more cohesive bond amongst all stakeholders. There are various actions that can be taken to acquire the restructuring of their current collaborative endeavors. For example, creating an action team that consists of the participants parents, teachers of the school, and the teachers of the organization could provide the platform for each entity to have voice. The team needs to establish and adhere to a calendar of pre-scheduled

monthly agenda and norm based meetings so protocols and procedures are structured to achieve desired outcomes.

This will allow them to become more actively involved in the decision making and problem-solving processes for planning school improvement. Studies by the *National Network of Partnership Schools* (2017) indicated that "schools with strong Action Teams for Partnerships that met regularly, evaluated their efforts, and obtained support from their districts had higher quality partnership programs that improved over time". The experiences that I have encountered when utilizing partnerships has confirmed this as well. Structuring opportunities to work together breaks down walls of isolation that oftentimes create division and a lack of cohesiveness.

Making opportunities available that encourage involvement, provides a greater potential for it to occur. Other actions that can strengthen relational ties include By the Hand increasing home and school visitations, hosting monthly parent and teacher workshops, hosting professional development and training sessions that include all stakeholders, as well as sponsoring school events. This will aid to increase engagement, clarify expectations, acquire continuity, as well as indentify the practices that take place within the partnership. Further broadening the scope of communication can also include monthly newsletters, gathering feedback through conducting surveys, creating a suggestion box, documenting and distributing data more frequently. Merely executing these activities are not enough. They must be coupled with vetted stakeholders who regularly collect and share information, ultimately cultivating conditions that promote substantial student achievement.

Leverage Resources

Communication is key in obtaining the buy-in needed to generate momentum for creating and sustaining successful partnerships. It provides awareness to the existing and potential possibilities of distinguishing them as additional means of support. For example, finding ways to involve parent communities, assigning roles to parents, teachers, and representatives of the community, as well as encouraging and offering site visits allows resourceful options to be gathered for advancement. Forming an action team of stakeholders to establish a needs assessment can also be a tool to aid in distinguishing relevancy of practices executed within the partnership.

When opportunities are offered that enlighten the knowledge base of stakeholders as to how the system works within the partnership, they are more apt to share in the responsibility of it. Contacting businesses via phone calls and/or letters, creating and continuously updating an asset map, as well as advertising to relay successes are also other ways to extend collaborative efforts. Providing networking events that are not only social outings but also informational, serves in bridging gaps to appropriate expectations.

Monitoring Progress

Creating a system that continually assesses and indicates progress levels of the partnership is instrumental in sustaining relational trust. Inviting stakeholders to collectively develop questions for data sources, establish goals and identifiable outcomes, actions plans and items, observe the implementation process, as well as utilize rubrics and timelines, will aid to solidify validity. A formal obligation must be made by the action team to meet and assess organizational practices and outcomes. Engaging them to have a hand in creating and conducting surveys and observations, as well as tracking the coinciding factors of intent within

the annual school plan, monitoring student attendance and behavioral incidents will further pool them together to achieve a more unified front to gauge effectiveness.

Having all entities take ownership will develop the conditions necessary in producing best practices that are most beneficial for students. Having a committed action team will create the platform needed to eliminate the communicative gaps that have hampered the potential possibilities for students.

Table 1

Strategies and Actions Chart

STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
Restructure collaborative channels between stakeholders *(school, home, & partnership)*	● Create an action team of parents, school, and organization ● Schedule monthly meetings on calendar for action team ● Create opportunities for ongoing professional development & training to establish and maintain continuity ● Provide monthly workshops to link home (parents), school (students) and the organization (community) ● Sponsor events to share ideas, clarify expectations & increase engagement opportunities ● Provide monthly newsletter or place it on website to indicate success ● Establish avenues to receive feedback about partnership actions; such as online surveys or a suggestion box at each BTH facility or school ● Institute Parent Cafe's at each BTH site ● Invite all stakeholders to be a part of improvement processes both decision -making and problem solving ● Involve all parties (school, community, parents) in school improvement planning ● Work together to establish norms for meetings ● Broaden cultural awareness by strengthening relational ties (increased home visitations and/or school activities)
Leverage resources to increase support	● Create & update an asset map ● Establish & involve parent committees ● Assign parent leaders & representatives of the community ● Broaden scope to contact businesses via phone calls or letters ● Advertisements to broadcast successes ● Provide networking events to inform elements of partnership ● Encourage and offer site visits ● Create & distribute needs assessment to

	parents
Develop a progress monitoring system to indicate effectiveness	● Collectively develop questions to create data sources ● Continue data collection to include tools such as surveys, interviews, questionnaires & student results ● Monthly meetings are conducted to discuss data ● Collectively establish goals, action plans, and items ● Establish goal - linked practices ● Action team monthly track & share student behavior incidents (maintaining anonymity of students) ● Action team monthly track & share student attendance(maintaining anonymity of students) ● Identify trends of student achievement ● Use tools (interviews & surveys) to document & share results identifying strengths & areas of need ● Create and track annual school plan ● Create a timeline for each goal and action plan including each step ● Action team establish a rubric to assess current practices of the partnership ● Action team conducts onsite observations ● Develop, distribute, & document self-assessment tools for each member of leadership in the partnership

Implementing these strategies and actions will evolve the current state by which the partnership operates. With all stakeholders working together to create stronger ties, students are not the only benefactors, it also creates a closer sense of community. Executing actions that demonstrate a willingness to improve collaborative efforts restores the hope that is often lost

within under-resourced and impoverished neighborhoods, shifting mindsets to grasp the possibility of change.

SECTION SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The program evaluation focused on examining the impact made with students that participate in the faith- based organization, By the Hand. The objective of this evaluation was to increase awareness about the program's impact and identify if and how establishing collaborative faith-based partnerships has the potential to improve student learning and development. After conducting research at various By the Hand locations , it was evident that organized community based partnerships do indeed have the potential of making a significant impact on its participating students.

By the Hand is a structured organization whose services include "nurturing the whole child- mind, body, and soul" (By The Hand, 2020). They have managed to systematically create a check and balance system that caters to addressing each child's specific area of need. Services rendered are documented, monitored and revised on a continual basis. Studying the actions taking place during the implementation process of the program confirmed for me reports that partnerships are considered beneficial in supporting and adding value to the educational experience of students (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). The success of the level of work being done on behalf of students within the By The Hand organization, caused me to research the regulations regarding being a partnered organization with schools in the state of Illinois.

All of my years working within the Chicago Public Schools has entailed securing partnerships with organizations to supplement the services being offered within the school. Obtaining the partnerships was a very time consuming process. Research had to be done, conversations and usually grant writing had to take place, along with obtaining final approvals

for the program's acceptance. Time and time again, once the contract was signed, I was disappointed in the lack of effort demonstrated in providing the services that initially had been guaranteed.

The findings of my evaluation's research validated that By the Hand partnerships employ specificity within the criteria of its program to ensure its agreement of being impactful and improving student achievement. Its noteworthy success further substantiated to me that the current practices in place for assessing the services of community based partnerships within Illinois need to be rectified. Doing so will give insight to the effectiveness of the provider's and bring about a more in depth sense of accountability. Research of Little (2011), confirmed that meaningful partnerships are the ones that are "essential to efforts of expanding when, where, what, and how students learn" (as cited in Little, n.d., para. 1).

As stated by Milner (2015), in order for real reform to be achieved "schools must develop partnerships that support students and their families in and outside of the school" (p.47). The Illinois Administrative Code 23 section 675.40 indicates that supplemental educational services, also known as external partnerships, must undergo an evaluation process in order to determine effectiveness. Outlined criteria within the policy indicate that administrators as well as the Illinois State Board of Education are to verify whether the partnerships have served the purpose of their initial agreement. Programmatic requirements include completed evaluations that are to assess performance and distinguish impact.

According to Section 675.40 of Code 23, partnerships are supposed to be "specifically designed to increase student achievement" (p.10). Practices are to align to the Illinois Learning Standards and must have objectives that are consistent to that of the school's academic program. The policy also involves administering high quality instruction, identifying achievement gaps

and establishing learning goals for students. Achieving compliancy within the standards of this policy will require that the lines of communication remain clear, open and constant. These elements echo the recommendations associated with the findings of my program evaluation and my proposal for the change plan.

Policy Statement

In accordance to Central School's District commitment of providing every child from every community with a high-quality education that prepares them for success (Chicago Public Schools, 2020), I am recommending that the State of Illinois further clarifies the language affiliated with assessing the implementation process and outcomes provided by partnerships within its schools. The evaluation of each partnership needs to obtain specified documentation that links the school's expectations to that of the partnerships results. Essential components must be created within each part of the codes to stipulate the particular strategies that will be used to address and support student need. Designing a more effective monitoring system will also aid to certify goals, deter miscommunication, as well as accurately document the activities taking place, which is key in determining whether or not student needs are being met.

Establishing these additions to the policy will further emphasize the liabilities associated with the connecting schools to the organizations that provide the community partnerships. Specifications within the language will be acclimated in a more detailed manner by which to appropriate the services being rendered. Stipulations must also require ongoing documentations of data to be submitted throughout the duration of the partnership. It should include feedback from multiple sources such as students, parents, administration, and teachers. As indicated in the current policy, section 675.90, observations must be conducted and the findings of those visitations reported. Incorporating mandated data analysis' will aid to drive services that target

areas of need as well as determine possible methods that can be used to fortify connections essential in maximizing student achievement.

When partnerships are executed purposefully it has the potential to create equitable learning experiences that provide alternative options for students. Adapting approaches that not only state the expectations of having a partnership but is also significant in actively building the collaborative efforts necessary to sustain high standards. Improving the assessment processes has to include regulations that place emphasis on building stronger frameworks. This is key to accomplishing the goal of attaining student intentionality. Making these changes in the structural content of the policy will increase the probability of community partnerships improving student achievement and being a vital source of support within schools.

Analysis of Need

I am recommending that the state of Illinois further clarifies the language affiliated with assessing the implementation process and outcomes provided by partnerships within schools. This implication was established from the findings I attained in the research I conducted in my program evaluation and change plan (Davis, 2020). Outcomes indicated that communication needs to increase between partnered organizations and schools in order to solidify expectations. Incorporating new specifications within the Illinois Administrative Code 23 will allow more cohesive partnerships that are goal-orientated about supporting and meeting the needs of all students.

For example, when I conducted research for this study, I found Central School District to have minimal evidence of ongoing assessments of services provided by its partnered organizations. The inability to obtain feedback and ample ratings from the district about services of previous school partnerships, indicated that current progress monitoring system's are

insufficient. Principles need to be enforced that honor the regulations outlined in the Illinois Administrative Code mandates. An examination of this suggestion implicated additional areas of which to target change including education, economics, social, political, legal, moral and ethical aspects.

Educational Analysis

The *National Education Association Policy brief* (2008), states that "the whole community has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people" (p.1). The brief indicates having stakeholders, organizations, and individuals in the community working together can establish the support needed for goals to be accomplished. It notes how partnerships are one of the ways that students can receive more educational opportunities. When executed purposefully it has the potential to create equitable learning experiences that are conducive for all students.

Improving the assessment process by including specified evidence-based regulations, will place emphasis on creating strategic frameworks. This is key in constructing goals that are intentionally geared toward student advancement. Choosing to adapt this new approach will consist of partnerships doing more than just stating expectations. They will have to provide documentation confirming efforts made toward actively building the collaborative relationships necessary in sustaining high standards and achieving results. Making these changes in the structural content of the policy will increase the probability of community partnerships improving student achievement and being a more vital source of support.

Economic Analysis

There are potential economic benefits associated with this recommendation . As stated by Roza (2010), "districts have not followed through on overcoming the effects of poverty by

trying to invest more in high-needs students" (p.9). She also notes that students are at various educational levels when they arrive at school. It is the schools responsibility to obtain and utilize the funds needed to aid them in meeting the performance standards.

Partnering with an organization to tackle some of the learning challenges that exist is a way to ensure that the needs of students are addressed. As indicated by Odden (2012), " extra help services require substantial resources" (p.23). Implementing practices that stem from strong collaborative community-based partnerships within schools will supply them with those additional services. These partnerships have the potential to alleviate the cost of other alternative resources.

Social Analysis

As mentioned in my change plan, having shared accountability of a vision and mission, executed with a clearly defined goal of meeting the needs of students, aids to maximize their success and reinforces structures to achieve impact (Davis, 2020). Ensuring that goals are aligned will solidify a more cohesive relationship between the partnered organization and the school. As teachers and partnered organizations collaborate and compose an action plan, the actual needs of the students can be established. Working together to implement and continually document practices that address those needs strengthens the relational ties between the organization and the school.

This process allows teachers to receive the additional support that oftentimes are not accessible to them. It opens opportunities to become actively engaged with the partnered organization. Milner (2015) stated that working to build these types of relationships can "shape what happens to students" and drive the work they put towards desired outcomes (p.101). It also provides a more tailored approach of creating and monitoring strategies that target student needs.

Coming together to establish mutual goals is beneficial for students because it will allow them to receive the supplementary services they need. Implementing a more effective monitoring system will not only track activities, but also aid to guarantee that they remain student- centered. These actions have the potential to improve student outcomes as well as the culture and climate of the school.

Political Analysis

"Policies are thought to encompass more than its text but it also includes the legislation and accompanying regulations " (Smith et al., 2003, p.3). As written in the Illinois Administrative Code 23 section 675.40, partnerships are supposed to document goals that link their services to the needs of students within the schools. Over the past decade that I have worked with community-based partnerships very seldom are expectations upheld. Being able to fully incorporate a system that requires documentation of verified data that reveals effectiveness guarantees a more productive partnership.

Partnerships should not be allowed to disregard the requirements associated with the policy. They should do the necessary work to not be considered an outside entity, but a valuable resource that enables transformative change to occur. Modifying the policy to ensure that services are aligned will create the structured framework and collaborative platforms schools and partnered organizations need in order to achieve student improvement.

Legal Analysis

Illinois Administrative Code 23 section 675.40 identifies that visitations will be done by the state to determine whether supplementary services, such as community-based partnerships are fulfilling their initial intended goals. My experiences with partnerships have not encountered state visitations. This allows schools and partnerships to remain incompliant with the state

mandated policy.

In 2015, a new law passed to replace the No Child Left Behind Act. The new law called the Every Student Succeeds Act was signed in to law by President Barack Obama. It acknowledges that all states are responsible for holding schools accountable for student achievement. The ed.gov (2020) website further indicates three aspects of the ESSA that further substantiates my policy recommendation:

1) advancing equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students
2) helping to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions
3) expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change

All of these provisions align to what I am advocating. Schools and community-based partnerships must have measures in place to determine effectiveness. When there is no data to verify that goals have been accomplished, then there is no means to assess if the partnership was successful. The new law reinforces the necessity of shared accountability. This policy modification will provide a more structured framework that guarantees expectations are established, documented, and monitored to target student need and focus accountability to ensure success.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

All students deserve the right to obtain a high-quality education. Partnerships have the power to facilitate access to a wide range of learning opportunities and developmental supports (Little, 2011). Creating a more ethical process of assessing practices implemented by partnered organizations will ensure that objectives are in alignment. Making adaptations to the policy can

potentially decrease the miscommunication that oftentimes keep a cohesive bond from forming between the school and the community partnership.

No longer will organizations be able to enter in to an agreement with the promise of meeting certain needs and not deliver. Setting standards where all students take part in activities that are intentional in supporting their educational experience divulges more opportunities for their advancement. Both the school and partnered organization needs to be committed to continual improvement. Working together to have an effective monitoring system will aid to abolish the negligent methods of practice that I have witnessed taking place.

Efforts of a more collaborative framework between the schools and community partnerships will build relational trust as well as aid in developing a more positive school environment. The partnership will be viewed as an asset and also valued as such. Modifying this policy will morally appropriate actions within the school to provide favorable learning conditions for all students.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

One of the social barriers to school change is "poor internal communications" (Payne, 2008). As changes in the policy take effect, it will generate more opportunities of collaboration for staff. They will be able to work collectively as a team to establish and accomplish goals. As they incorporate the procedure of collecting ongoing data regarding the community partnership, it will enable them to become active participants in the implementation process. This type of action will establish a more cohesive sense of continuity and also has the potential to form and strengthen relationships.

These relationships will be pivotal in impacting community engagement. As the staff becomes more involved in the decision-making and monitoring process with the partnered

organization, they will be more equipped to respond to the needs of the community. As mentioned by Milner (2015), when decisions are made that consider the conditions that exist within the community it promotes the connections necessary to achieving real school reform.

As organizations examine the results of schools having a more refined structure when working with partnerships they will be more apt to do so. Data will provide evidence that indicates commitment to purpose. This has the potential to increase the development of forming new community-based partnerships with outside entities such as businesses, churches and other organizations. As stated in the Harvard Family Research Project (2010), "through fostering connections, partners are able to create a web of supports in which the linkages add up to more than the sum of their parts**.** These connections provide a more seamless approach to learning that addresses the complex conditions and variety of environments in which children learn and grow" (p.3).

This recommendation for change in policy is beneficial for all stakeholders. As students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, and the community understand their roles in the process, a more effective system will be constructed. Stakeholders will be able to mutually establish and share a common goal for student success. This will contribute to all members speaking, understanding, and operating with a common language. These increased collaborative efforts will serve to support the overarching goal of improving student achievement by having more informative community-based partnerships across the system.

The Harvard Report (2010) also indicates that "recognition of the belief that schools cannot do it alone, education innovations call for a more intentional focus on aligning school and non-school supports for students" (p.2). I am advocating for this policy change to shift its current aspects to an evidence -based model partnership, where specific data must be gathered and documented. In doing so, it will assure that interventional practices are aligned to address

and meet the needs of all students.

SECTION EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Initially this research stemmed from a place of dissatisfaction that I endured when partnering with reputable organizations that did not uphold their obligation(s) of producing guaranteed student outcomes. My experiences have resulted in several organizational shortcomings. For example, commitments were not kept, there was a lack of communication and practices were filled with inadequate implementation of what was needed to accomplish intended goals.

After verifying that claims made at *By The Hand* were accurate, I wondered what could be done within the educational system to duplicate these same types of results in other community partnerships between school and organizations. As noted by Beck (2014), schools can't do it alone. This research is meant to develop a deeper understanding of how an effective partnership can be more beneficial for students. Therefore, the first goal of this program evaluation was to examine the validity of services provided from the *By The Hand* faith-based organization. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how community partnerships such as these can be supplemental means of support. By observing organizational practices I was able to substantiate the significance these types of partnerships contribute to improving student outcomes.

Gathering data designated that these types of partnerships are indeed an additional means of support for bridging gaps of student learning opportunities. It created an avenue of resolutions for the actions needed to increase the potential for greater student outcomes. This examination excavated the following research questions for any school district acquiring community partnerships and desiring to evaluate their effectiveness:

- What are the claims of the organization regarding students and their learning?

- What is the framework of the partnership within the school ?
- What actions are implemented during the process of interactions?
- How will services be monitored to determine student progress?
- What collaborative efforts will be done to maintain communication throughout the partnership?
- What data will be collected to determine program effectiveness?

While studying the practices implemented by the partnered organization, I was able to observe a range of prospects available to participating students. They received strategically planned activities. There was tailored instruction with a multi-tiered curriculum, one on one individualized tutoring, field trips, medical services, home visits and classes that taught them how to reflect, make better choices and change their direction. This sentiment was resonated during one of the parent interviews I conducted. She stated that, "By the Hand works with each child to make sure they have what they need to be successful, whatever that takes. It has changed my daughter's life."

Throughout this evaluation themes emerged that indicated having an effective community partnership, such as By the Hand, was a valuable source of additional support for students. In part this was due to the organization continually documenting student outcomes of its services and utilization of data to monitor the level of success. Having this type of system allowed them to track outcomes and was one of the main factors I found to attribute to student achievement. Even though this study noted that collaborative efforts between schools and the partnered organization were already in place, my observations presented a glimpse of the magnitude of untapped possibilities that could occur if communication was increased.

Utilizing Wagner 's et al, (2012) 4C's framework of context, conditions, competencies, and culture as mentioned in earlier sections, I was able to take the existing circumstance of the partnership and determine potential direction required to achieve a more fortifiable means of stability. Four factors were apparent for school district's considering community partnerships as a probability of additional support for student improvement : context of shared accountability; a culture of commitment to clearly defined expectations and frameworks; competencies of protocols and monitored implementation; and conditions that propose collaboration of ongoing communication. The interviews I conducted with directors, parents, and instructors affirmed the need for all stakeholders to align and execute these elements. They expressed that by working together unified structures could accomplish closing achievement gaps and leverage learning opportunities of student insufficiencies.

Discussion

Creating a more comprehensive means of communication will align all stakeholders to effectively support students and their overall development. This study allowed me to determine whether community partnerships have the ability to provide additional means of support to improve student outcomes. The goals associated with this evaluation entailed examining the services that community partnerships, like By the Hand provides for its students. I was able to analyze data and gather evidence to substantiate claims. I identified what areas of need were addressed through their holistic approach. This allowed me to distinguish ways of building capacity that strengthens systems of support for students. The process helped me gain multiple perspectives and provided sources for evaluating advantages of participation.

Findings of the interviews revealed that there is a slight detachment that occurs between them and the partnered school's priorities. I discovered that By the Hand is diligent in collecting

data to verify that their services are sufficient for students onsite; however, there is a disconnect that does not allow the information to be shared with the partnered school's continually throughout the year. This presented to me the need for increased collaborative efforts between all stakeholders. Doing so would allow a more cohesive structure to be established. This was further justified from an interviewee's comment of "wanting the organization to seek out the richness that existed in the community."

Observations allowed me to witness the activities provided by the organization. I was able to distinguish how student interactions occurred and what outcomes they produced. For example, there was a student that was not following the instruction of one of the team leaders. He was immediately brought to the director and she was able to say a few words that caused him to self -reflect and redirect on his own. I knew from his reaction and ability to calm down with just a few words from the director, that the method he used to do so was taught to him. It was evident that this was part of a protocol that students had learned and were expected to follow.

This was obvious in several situations that I observed. I saw students partake in activities, learn skills and execute them while interfacing with each other. They were able to independently demonstrate coping mechanism strategies that deescalated situations as well as exhibit their ability to work and improve academic performance. This further affirmed for me that the practices I witnessed during observations and interviews were congruent to the metrics stated on their website (By The Hand, 2020):

- 100% of students have a personal and saving relationship with Jesus Christ
- 100% attend and are involved in a local church
- 100% able to share faith with others
- 100% enrollment

- 80% or better attendance
- 80% or better retention
- 75% passing all of their classes at school. preferable making ABCs
- 80% score in the 25th percentile or higher on standardized tests
- Staff with 80% or more home and school visits each month

It was apparent that all staff at By The Hand were invested in students and their success. Expectations were high and the mission was clear; students were first priority. The schools they work with have the same ideology at their core. This is why my organizational change plan addresses the need for increased collaborative efforts. If both the school and partnered organization work together then more potential outcomes can be developed. Having mutual understandings between both entities utilizing ongoing communication create a more focused plan of action to directly target student need.

Acquiring this change leads to the policy that I am advocating: all schools and community-based partnerships being required to have a more cohesive system of accountability. If schools and partnered organizations continually document and monitor services rendered, it would build stronger relational ties that are instrumental to improving student outcomes. In my experience of working with community partners oftentimes the initial agreement is not fully executed.

I have found that when expectations are not clearly defined, services do not align to the needs of the school's goals. It is necessary to have a shared vision that drives a common mission. This can only be accomplished if all parties involved are aware of the desired outcomes. As stated by Gross et al., (2015) "collaboration is only as good as the communication among the

partners" (p. 25). Lack of communication ultimately obstructs clarification causing student need to be misconstrued and unaddressed.

Leadership Lessons

As a leader and educator, conducting this study reiterated the significance of clear expectations, action planning and progress monitoring. It resonated for me that communication is key to establishing and sustaining strong relational ties. Schaefer (2015) notes that "True leadership describes unified action of leaders and followers (stakeholders) working together to jointly achieve mutual goals. It is collaborative" (p.75). This study emphasized that gathering data is only one aspect in determining success. Results have to be shared, analyzed, and continuously tracked to ensure that the measure of accomplishments are gauged accordingly.

Findings of this examination revealed that in order for a partnership to be successful, it is up to the leader of the school to closely work with the organization. The manner of which the partnership functions with the school is contingent upon the leader's ability to be direct in communications and committed to a stance of uncompromised value in regards to meeting expectations. I learned that leaders not only determine direction but also are responsible for driving it. "Leaders must recognize their own initiative, want to lead, and be willing to assume responsibility" (Schafer, 2015, p. 77). If they are not involved throughout the entire process, then it is highly unlikely that the partnership will flourish.

Conclusion

Strengthening relational ties is a critical part of addressing the opportunity gaps that currently exists for students. The potential of impact for any partnership hinges upon commitment. Engagement must consist of establishing and maintaining relationships that work

together to achieve desired results. Imagine a unified system of educational support where all stakeholders reverence the significance of equitable conditions.

What if organizations, communities and schools collectively prioritized a plan of action to address the needs of all students? What if that was coupled with a requirement of tangible evidence to authenticate each partnership's claim of student success? Kemp (2017) states that, "Community collaboration with schools complements and reinforces values, culture and the learning opportunities that schools can provide for their students " (para.1). This study has taught me that in order to maximize student outcomes, an obligation of ongoing communication and persistent documentation must be inclusive in the original plan of intention of all partnerships. Doing so will aid to channel efforts of establishing a more united front against the hindrances that deter students from experiencing an effective partnership and all the benefits it has to offer.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent (Adult Focus Groups)

My name is Sondra Davis, and I am a Doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking that you participate in this study, "A Program Evaluation on The Impact of Community Faith-Based Partnership"**,** occurring from April 2018-September 2018. The purpose of this study is to explore views of the impact made with students that participate in the faith -based organization "By The Hand". This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Sondra Davis, at National Louis University, Chicago.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the process and impact of faith-based partnerships. Participation in this study will include:

- A focused group interview scheduled in the spring or summer of the 2018 academic year.

  Participation in this study will be involved in a focus group interview. Each group will include 2 to 3 individuals. The group interview will be conducted in a semi-structured format in the conference room of your school building. The interview consists of 12 open-ended questions. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately 30- 45 minutes. While an audio-recording of the interview will be done to assist with the analysis of transcripts, your identity will remain anonymous. Your responses will be coded for categorization purposes. Any other identifying information will not be connected to your interview responses. Participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform practices at "By The Hand" but participants' identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in my home office. Only I will have access to data.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the Chicago Public School District and other schools districts looking to initiate or refine community faith-based partnerships.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, sdavis56@my.nlu.edu to request results from this study.

In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Sondra Davis, by email, sdavis56@my.nlu.edu or phone, 773-704-2978.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that l have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact:

- Dr. Harrington Gibson email: harrington.gibson@nl.edu; or by phone at 224-233-2290, Assistant Professor/NLU Director for Educational Leadership Doctoral Program,

  or

- Dr. Shauti Knauth email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu; phone: 312-261-3526, Director of Engaged Research, IRB Chair is located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. The purpose of this focus group is to gain ideas for improving implementation and evaluation of community partnerships with faith-based organizations in the district. All answers will remain confidential. Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the discussion.

- I am going to ask you several questions; there is no particular order but I do request that everyone take part in the discussion. I ask that only one person speak at a time.

- Feel free to agree or disagree. This as an open discussion and you are welcomed to respond to what others are saying. Your opinions are valued. The more you share the more I learn.

- Please speak from your own experience and do not worry about others opinion.

- Answer only the questions you are able to speak to.

- A digital recording of this discussion is being made today. I am also taking notes. These tools are only being used as a means to accurately document information. All answers will be deemed confidential. You will remain anonymous in all accounts of this research. Upon completion of the study all materials, including recordings, will be destroyed associated with this study. During the course of this research all materials will be kept password-protected.

- This discussion is going to take about 30- 45 minutes.

- Explicit oral explanations will be given at all times and may be asked for further clarification at any time

- You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time without penalty.

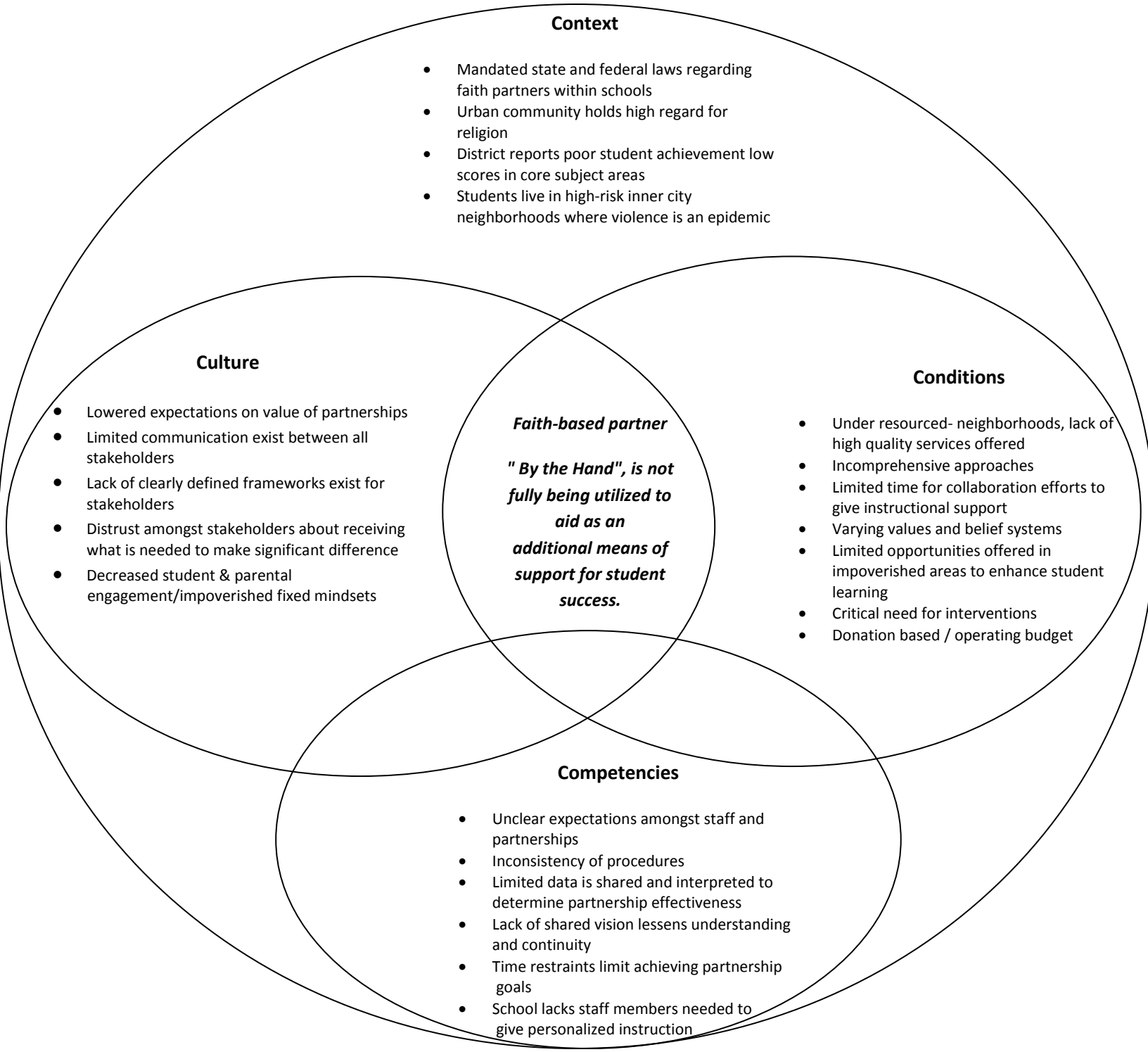
Please feel free to ask any questions before we get started.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to be a part of the "By The Hand" organization?
2. How does By The Hand's enrichment activities impact student development?
3. What activities offered at "By The Hand" motivate students to learn?
4. How would you describe “By The Hand's " holistic approach? How does the approach support student needs?
5. What guided you to want to be a part of the" By The Hand" organization?
6. What can be done to increase participation at faith-based organizations such as By The Hand?
7. How do the instructional practices connect to the holistic approach offered at By The Hand?
8. What practices take place that address the totality of student development?
9. What data is collected to evaluate effectiveness?
10. What are the strengths and areas of need you have observed within the organization?
11. Is there anything I should consider including in my study that you think is significant about community faith-based partnerships?

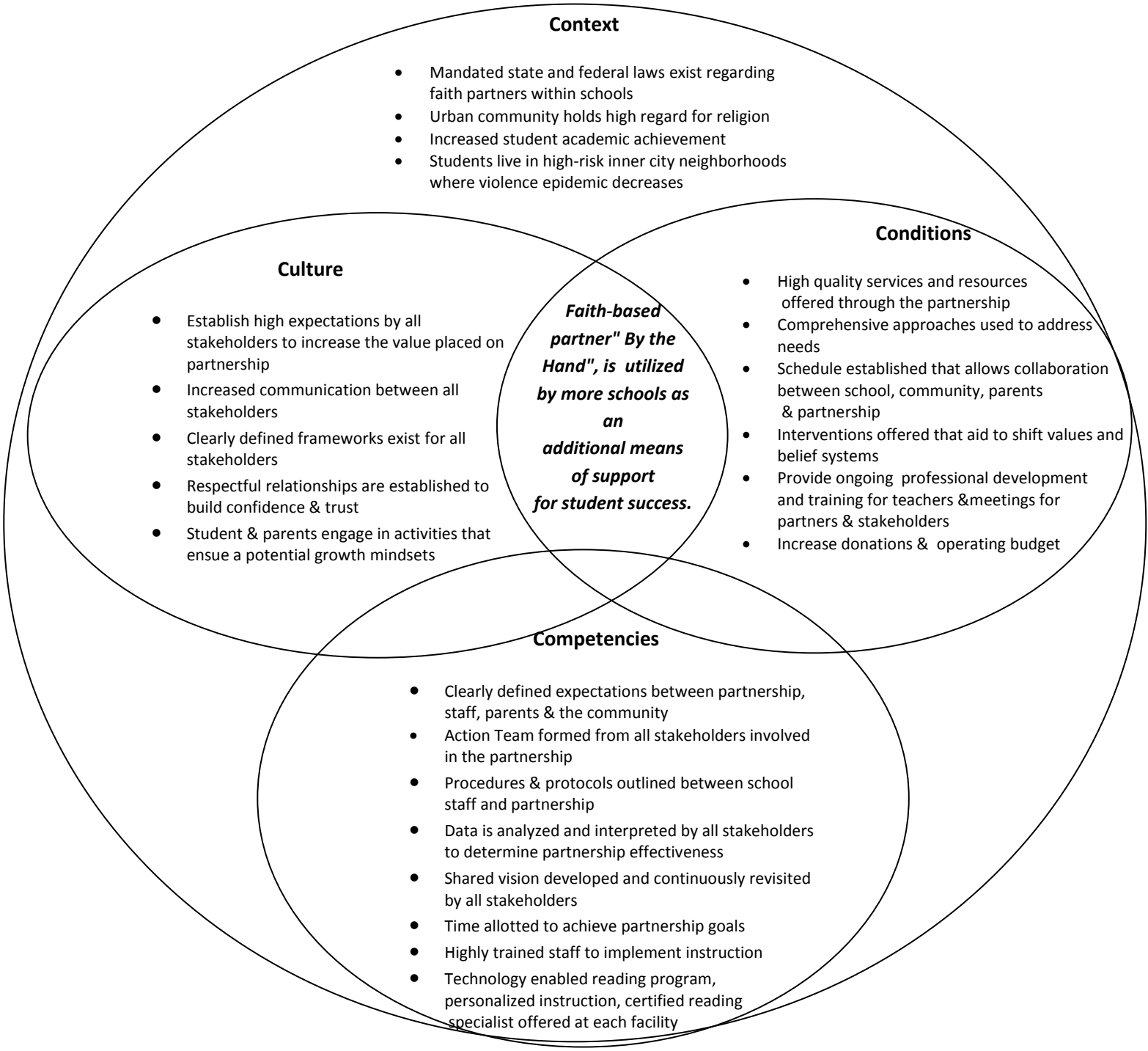
APPENDIX D

"As Is" 4 C's



APPENDIX E

"4 C's To Be"



APPENDIX F: ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 23 Section 675.40

Each provider's SES program shall be conducted at or from a location other than a private dwelling and:

a) include an appropriate, nationally recognized diagnostic assessment for use in identifying students' weaknesses and achievement gaps upon which to build an individual student plan and learning goals, except that, for the 2005-06 reporting period, a diagnostic assessment other than a nationally recognized assessment may be used by providers approved prior to July 1, 2005, upon notification to ISBE;

b) use targeted remediation/instruction that is aimed at addressing the individual skill gaps revealed during the assessment and that is based upon an individual learning plan;

c) include a post assessment linked to the diagnostic assessment to determine whether student gains occurred and to further develop a plan for either re-teaching skills or identifying new skills for instruction;

d) align with the Illinois Learning Standards set forth at 23 Ill. Adm. Code 1, Appendix D, in the area of reading and/or mathematics;

e) be consistent with the academic program a student experiences in the regular school day;

f) use instructional practices that are high-quality, research-based, and specifically designed to increase students' academic achievement; and

g) assign as tutors only individuals who hold or are qualified to hold the letter of approval that is required for service as a paraprofessional in a program supported with federal funds under Title I, Part A, of the ESEA, as described in the rules of the State Board of Education at 23 Ill. Adm. Code 25.510 (Paraprofessionals; Teacher Aides), provided that, in the case of tutors who reside outside the United States, the requirement for United States citizenship or legal presence in the United States shall not apply.

(Source: Amended at 32 Ill. Reg. 4046, effective February 26, 2008)

APPENDIX G: ISBE 23 ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 675 675.20

SUBTITLE A SUBCHAPTER o

"Supplemental educational services" or "SES" means additional academic instruction that is provided outside of the regular school day and designed to increase the academic achievement of eligible students in schools required to provide these services in accordance with NCLB. These services may include academic assistance such as tutoring, remediation, and other educational interventions.

(Source: Amended at 40 Ill. Reg. 3099, effective January 27, 2016)