

Systems for Scaling Community Schools

Question 1. Goals

The specific objectives of this two-phase, mixed methods study are to (1) understand the policy and practice mechanisms associated with the National Education Association's (NEA) community school training program, and (2) determine how those mechanisms are contributing to a system for sustainable community schools in the United States.

The proposed research focuses on an important strategy for mitigate the devastating effects of poverty on students' well-being and academic performance. A growing movement of over 8,000 Full-Service Community Schools in the United States address the effects of inequitable neighborhood conditions through collaborative partnerships to simultaneously support educational reform and community development. Community schools remove barriers to learning by cooperating with community-based organizations to provide services and supports, (e.g., extended learning opportunities, counseling, case management, food pantries, health care). Research has documented the positive effects of the community school strategy on academic and behavioral outcomes for children and youth. For these reasons, the Biden administration funded community schools in the American Rescue Plan and increased federal funding for community schools from \$30 million to \$65 million in the current budget cycle.

Unfortunately, the community school strategy is complex and challenging to develop and sustain. Although adept leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a community school, the scholarly literature offers little information about how school and community leaders are trained to lead these efforts and develop the intense collaboration needed to provide equitable access to learning for all students. The nation's largest educators' union, the NEA, has embraced the community school strategy and developed a cohort program that provides national support to local leaders interested in developing community schools. For several years, the NEA has been working with schools in small districts and major cities throughout the United States to scale and sustain community schools, but little is known about these efforts. To date, no one appears to have conducted research into the mechanisms associated with this national training program or assessed its impact on local-level implementation.

The proposed research was developed in cooperation with officials within the NEA and examines how the NEA created systems for scaling and sustaining community schools. This work is significant in (a) focusing on an organization that is seldom involved in scholarly conversations around school reform, and (b) examining a systems approach toward developing equity-centered partnerships. The NEA's work has potential to shape the field's understanding of how to systematically develop leaders with the skills and dispositions to develop equity-centered school-community collaborations at a time when the community school movement is poised for major expansion.

Question 2. Advancement of Scholarly Program

I have studied community school leadership for eight years and published four peer-reviewed journal articles on the topic. My research in this area started with a five-year longitudinal study of three community schools in one school district (i.e., *Spanning Boundaries and Balancing*

Tensions: A Systems Perspective on Community School Coordinators, 2019; Growing Connected: Relational Trust and Social Capital in Community Schools, 2020). From there, my community school research advanced to a regional study that involved community school leaders in four states to identify the dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary to lead community schools (i.e., *Community School Leadership: Identifying the Qualities Necessary for Developing and Supporting Equity-Centered Principals, 2020; Betwixt and Between Justice and Inaction: Full-Service Community School Principals and Community Equity Literacy, 2022*). Through these investigations, I have determined that without explicit instruction in how to develop equity-centered partnerships, school leaders often default to a “command and control” mindset that alienates partners and causes community school initiatives to falter. The proposed study extends this research and furthers my long-term goal of determining how to create cohesive systems for training community school leaders and scaling community schools nationally.

Question 3. Detailed Plan

Phase 1 focuses on the systems created to scale this work (e.g., training program, community organizing, and policy efforts), required 45-60 minutes semi-structured Zoom interviews with persons related to the NEA initiative. These interviews involved 16 NEA officials and state-affiliates associated with (a) the development of the training program, (b) implementation of the training program, and (c) national education policy efforts focused on community schools at the national level. Data also included reviews of NEA documents (e.g., curriculum, policy agendas, policy templates) related to the community school initiative.

Phase 2 focuses on how mechanisms associated with the training are translating into practice. Phase 2 involves a deeper dive into why some schools are seeing changes in academic and non-academic indicators during the community needs assessment phase. The specifics of Phase 2 will develop based on the results of phase 1. During the broader examination of the NEA training program at the national level, NEA stakeholders will identify specific school districts that are participating in the training program and have schools at various stages of the needs and asset mapping. From the potential districts, my co-researcher and I will select one school district where we can qualitatively determine how the NEA training is translating into practice and statistically analyze how needs and asset mapping may relate to outcomes such as academic achievement test scores, attendance rates, and incidents of exclusionary discipline. Phase 2 involves interviews with 20 to 30 school and community stakeholders about the NEA program and community school development, collection of outcomes data, and inferential statistical analysis of the data. Quantitative data include metrics commonly collected by schools during regular accountability reporting, rather than new measures designed specifically for the study.

Although the district site for Phase 2 has not been yet identified, both researchers on this project have experience conducting mixed methods analyses with other school districts and are familiar with all methods used throughout both phases of the study. The mutual association of the researchers and schools with the NEA will facilitate access to the research site. As school districts invest substantial resources into their community school initiatives, we anticipate that the target school district will welcome objective data associated with its effectiveness.

Timeline of scholarly activities over SOSA award period

Time Period	Activities
Activities completed prior to SOSA period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IRB approval (phase 1 obtained, phase 2 will be obtained Winter 2021) Interviews with NEA officials (Fall 2021) Identification of participating district and schools; collection of historical outcomes data (Spring 2022) Draft journal article 1
September 2022- December 2022 * SOSA release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase 2 interviews with school district stakeholders Preliminary analysis of interview data; follow up interviews, as necessary Present findings from phase 1 at UCEA conference Complete and submit manuscript for journal article 1
January 2023 - August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued analysis of interview data Collect and analyze outcomes data Prepare conference proposals with findings from phase 2 for UCEA and AERA Report preliminary findings to NEA and participating district stakeholders
September 2023 – December 2023 *SOSA release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present at UCEA Share findings with national and regional community school organizations Prepare manuscript for journal article 2
January 2024 – June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present at AERA Submit manuscript for journal article 2

Question 4. Expected Scholarly Outcomes

The results of this study have potential implications for educational leadership preparation program faculty, community school practitioners, and researchers. The scholarly outcomes will be tailored to these audiences. Academic audiences will be reached by presenting papers at two peer-reviewed conferences where I regularly share my work: the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) annual conference. AERA is the premier international conference for educational researchers and UCEA is the main organization devoted to school leadership faculty. I will also reach scholarly audiences by publishing two papers of about 11,000 words in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals such as *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* or *Leadership and Policy in Schools*. Peer-reviewed journal articles and presentations are Tier 1 scholarly outcomes as outlined by my department's (EASE) disciplinary standards. To reach practitioners directly involved in community school initiatives, I will present the findings to the members of the NEA's training cohorts and to the three community school organizations I am currently involved with: (a) the Community Schools Hub, (b) the Community Schools Research Practice Network, and (c) the New York and New Jersey University-Assisted Community Schools Network. I will also share the findings with people in the emerging community school movement in Trenton and work with them to put what was learned in the study into practice in their schools.

Question 5. Prior SOSA Awards

2017 Award	Productivity
<p>Project: Comparative Study of Student Learning Objective State Policies and Implementation</p> <p>Proposed Outcomes: 2 peer-reviewed journal articles 1 article targeted for practicing principals</p>	<p><u>Project-Related Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2022: “This is the piece of the pie we can control”: Educators’ experiences with student learning objectives as performance measures. <i>The Elementary School Journal</i>, 122(4), 591-615. (Tier 1, journal, 11,700 words) ○ In press: Evaluating technical and issue bias in teacher evaluation policy briefs and state handbooks. <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>. (Tier 1 journal, 14,000 words) <p><u>Project-Related Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How the misuse of research led to teacher evaluation policies with unintended consequences. Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting, Virtual. ○ Student learning objectives: How classroom-level teacher evaluation measures contribute to educator alienation. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of UCEA, New Orleans, LA.
2019 Award	Productivity
<p>Project: Developing and Supporting Community School Principals</p> <p>Proposed Outcomes: 2 peer-reviewed journal articles 2 scholarly conference presentations</p>	<p>Due to COVID disruptions, my research shifted to a more general focus on community school leadership and policy related to family and community engagement.</p> <p><u>Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2022: “Betwixt and Between Justice and Inaction: Full-Service Community School Principals and Community Equity Literacy.” <i>Urban Education</i>. (Tier 1 journal, 11,000 words) ○ 2022: Searching for equity-centered change agents: An investigation of family and community engagement in teacher evaluation frameworks. <i>Education Policy Analysis Archives</i>, 30(1), 1-27. (Open access, Tier 2 journal, 11,200 words) ○ 2021: Leadership for family and community engagement: A qualitative policy analysis of state principal evaluation processes. <i>Educational Administration Quarterly</i>. (Tier 1 journal, 12,300 words) <p><u>Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using Green’s Community Equity Literacy framework to deconstruct principals’ leadership practices in full-service community schools. Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting, Virtual. ○ Examining changing state principal evaluation regulations in response to the <i>Every Student Succeeds Act</i>. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of UCEA, Virtual.