



October 2020

Partnership Turnaround: Year Two Report



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PARTNERSHIP TURNAROUND: YEAR TWO REPORT

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**Partnership Turnaround:
Year Two Report**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





**Education Policy
Innovation Collaborative**
RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

October 2020

Partnership Turnaround Year Two Report: Executive Summary

Overview

This interim report is part of a multi-year evaluation of the implementation and efficacy of Michigan's [Partnership Model](#) of school and district turnaround. The Partnership Model aims to build district capacity to improve outcomes in chronically low-performing schools and districts by fostering a coalition of partners from the [Michigan Department of Education \(MDE\)](#), [Intermediate School Districts \(ISDs\)](#), and local communities. Identified [Partnership districts](#) and charter organizations crafted three-year [Partnership Agreements](#) that highlighted districts' specific needs, established strategies to address those needs, and detailed measurable achievement and process goals. If these goals were not met by the end of the three-year period, schools would be subject to high-stakes accountability consequences, including the potential for reconstitution or closure. The state also allocated roughly \$6 million in each year of the reform to date in the form of [21h grants](#) to support districts' efforts to meet their goals.

This is the second of four annual reports that will be released as part of our evaluation of the Partnership Model. These reports are different and separate from the [Review of Goal Attainment \(RGA\)](#) process the [Office of Partnership Districts](#) conducts with Partnership districts. The Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) is the strategic research partner to MDE, and although MDE requested the analysis documented here, our evaluation and its results are independent of MDE and the conclusions and recommendations are EPIC's own.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the implementation of the Partnership Model in the third year of the reform (2019-20) and to assess the efficacy of the reform in improving teacher and student outcomes by the end of the second year of the reform (2018-19). To do so, we use an event study design that leverages longitudinal data on students and educators throughout the state, combined with analysis of data from Partnership teacher and principal surveys, interviews with Partnership leaders, and case studies of three Partnership districts. This

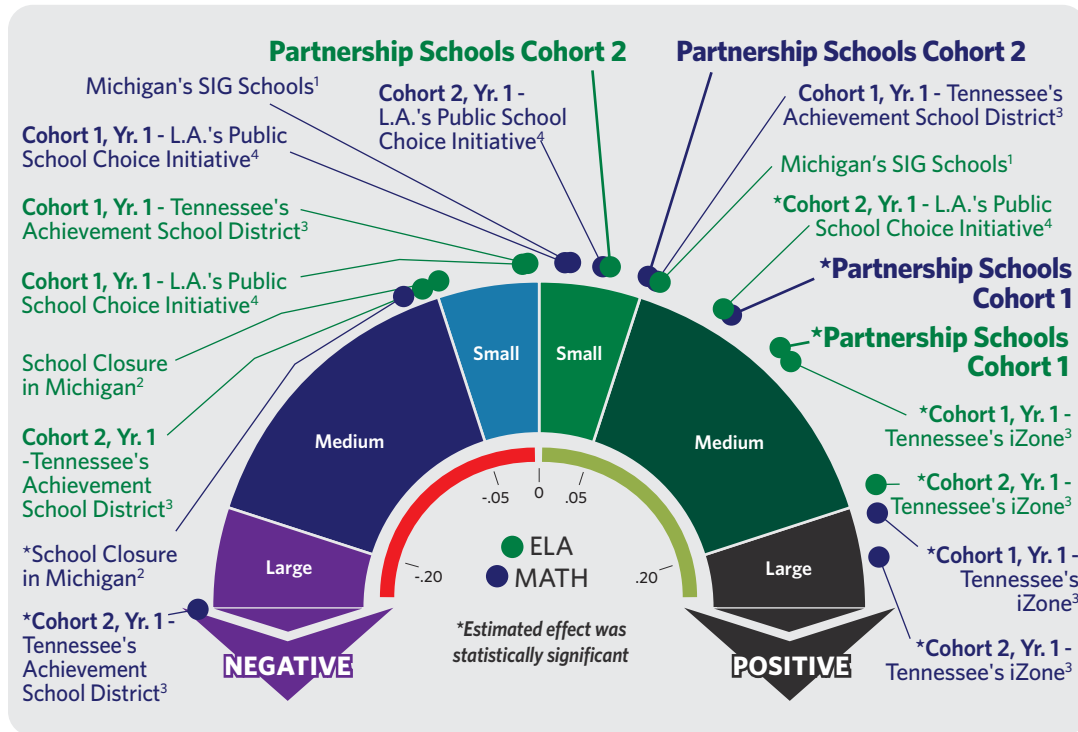
multi-method approach allowed us to answer questions not only about the impact of the reform, but also how the model was implemented, how educators perceived implementation, and how and why implementation varied depending on different contexts.

MAIN FINDINGS

After an Initial Year of Student Achievement Growth in Cohort 1, Progress Was Evident but Uneven

Students in the first cohort of Partnership schools made significant achievement gains in third-through eighth-grade math and English language arts (ELA) in their first year of implementation relative to the year they were identified as Partnership schools. These ELA gains continued into the second year, and high school students in Partnership schools fared significantly better on the ELA SAT test in the second year of implementation. Math scores did not continue to increase in the second year of Partnership. Relative to similar turnaround interventions, math and ELA gains for Cohort 1 schools were moderate to large in magnitude.

FIGURE 1. Partnership Cohort Effect Sizes Relative to Similar Interventions



Notes: ¹Rice, Bojorquez, Diaz, Wendt & Nakamoto (2014); ²Brummet (2014); ³Zimmer, Henry & Kho (2017); ⁴Strunk, Marsh, Hashim, Bush-Mecenas & Weinstein (2016).

Students in the second cohort of schools experienced no significant achievement gains in the first year of Partnership implementation in either math or ELA. While the overall outcomes were less positive for Cohort 2 than for Cohort 1, the Cohort 2 effects are comparable in size to similar turnaround interventions. Figure 1 places these results in the context of other turnaround interventions studied nationally.

Partnership Did Not Significantly Affect On-Time High School Graduation, High School Drop-Out, or Grade Retention in Either Cohort

Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), the school district with the largest number of Partnership schools, fared better with continued dramatic decreases in high school drop-out rates beginning in the first year and continuing into the second year of implementation in Cohort 1 schools. Students in Cohort 1 DPSCD Partnership schools also saw a small decrease in grade retention in the first year of implementation, though this dip returned to pre-intervention levels the following year.

Human Capital Continued to be a Formidable Challenge, Though Leaders Were Optimistic That Their Efforts to Recruit and Retain Highly Effective Educators Were Beginning to Pay Off

Educators in Partnership schools and districts reported that human capital was critical to successful turnaround. In particular, they highlighted the importance of high quality leaders and an effective and stable teaching staff. However, challenges related to low compensation and the stigma associated with the low-performing label impeded recruitment and retention efforts in Partnership schools and districts. Partnership districts implemented a variety of initiatives to mitigate challenges associated with recruiting and retaining educators in low-performing schools. Strategies included initiatives to make teacher compensation more competitive, “grow-your-own” programs to certify local teachers, implementing hiring practices to attract teachers who were viewed as “good fits” with the school context, improving culture and climate, and offering opportunities for professional development. Partnership leaders were increasingly optimistic that their efforts to stabilize the teacher work force would yield positive results, and teachers reported that they were more likely to remain in their schools.

Partnership Schools Focused on Several Areas of School Operations to Improve Student and School Outcomes

Partnership school teachers were more likely than their **non-Partnership school** counterparts to report increasing focus on data use and increased principal effectiveness in making data-driven decisions. Similarly, Partnership leaders reported that Partnership schools and districts focused heavily on the use of data to guide improvement efforts. In addition, Partnership schools and districts focused on family and student engagement and implemented strategies to improve culture and climate.

The Partnership Model’s Strategic Planning Process Provided a Useful Framework for School Improvement

Partnership leaders said this planning process helped them to identify the most critical goals for improvement, use data to inform instruction and continuous improvement, and enhance communication within and outside of their districts.

Challenges Associated With the COVID-19 Pandemic Were Exacerbated in Partnership Districts

The communities in which Partnership districts reside already face obstacles related to higher poverty and lower educational attainment than other communities in the state. In addition to implementing Partnership Agreements, Partnership districts were more likely than non-Partnership districts to have to address remote learning challenges related to technology, reliable internet access, and remote learning in general.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Patience is Warranted

Early evidence suggests that the Partnership Model is helping schools implement systems for school improvement and Partnership schools and districts are improving in some student and teacher outcomes. School and district reform take time, and a growing literature suggests a need to continue supporting low-performing schools and districts over multiple years.

Improving Education in Partnership Districts is Central to Any Goal of Equalizing Educational Opportunities for Traditionally Underserved Students in Michigan

Partnership districts are home to a disproportionate number of students who are economically disadvantaged, Black and Hispanic, and households in these districts have significantly lower incomes and educational attainment than those in non-Partnership districts.

Partnership Districts Continue to Need Assistance to Improve Their Supply of High Quality Educators

Human capital remained among the greatest impediments to school improvement efforts in Partnership schools and districts. Policymakers aiming to improve low-performing schools should bolster local initiatives to recruit and retain highly effective educators and develop the existing educator work force.

Additional Funding is Critical for Improvement Efforts

While state funding for Partnership has supported turnaround efforts, many district leaders shared that the level of funding was not sufficient to finance the resources necessary to achieve turnaround. There is a strong evidence base that shows money matters in education—and in particular for underserved and under-resourced schools and districts like those in Partnership. Investing in these low-performing schools, even and especially in a time of particularly scarce resources, will be critical to advancing the turnaround process.