Michigan's Partnership Schools: An Analysis of Round 4 Identification

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INTRODUCTION

The Partnership Model of School and District Turnaround fulfills Michigan's requirement to intervene in low-performing schools under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). Schools are identified for Partnership based on the state's School Index System. Once identified, Partnership schools and the districts in which they are located (called Partnership districts) receive additional support from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and their intermediate school districts (ISDs) and face additional accountability measures. The Partnership Model has been in place since the 2016-17 school year, when the first round of low-performing schools were identified for support and oversight. The state identified a second and third round of Partnership schools in 2017-18. Schools in all three rounds were released from Partnership status this past year, as the intervention is intended to last three years, though all districts opted to remain in Partnership through the COVID-19 pandemic. In November 2022, MDE identified the fourth round of Partnership schools and districts. Round 4 is the first identification of schools since the COVID-19 pandemic, which paused the calculation of Michigan School Index scores for two school years.

Here, we provide an overview of the schools that were reidentified and newly identified for inclusion in the fourth round of Partnership, as well as those that were released from Partnership status. First, we describe the characteristics of schools identified for Partnership status. Then, to contextualize the identification of these schools, we describe changes over time in the school accountability measures used for identification. Finally, we highlight school factors that distinguish reidentified and newly identified Partnership schools from those released from Partnership status. We find:

ABOUT THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL INDEX SYSTEM

The Michigan School Index System was developed after the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) and first used in accountability policy for the 2016-17 school year. The purpose of the School Index is to rank schools in Michigan based on academic and school quality measures. MDE uses M-STEP data to calculate the student growth and student proficiency components of the index, which make up 34% and 29% of a school's score, respectively. The school quality and student success component— which includes attendance, access to advanced coursework, and access to physical education and art classes—makes up 14% of the score. Graduation rate makes up 10% of the index scores for high schools. English learner progress (10%), general assessment participation (2%), and English learner assessment participation (1%) make up the rest of the score.

1. 109 schools in 51 districts were identified for Round 4 Partnership status. The prior Partnership cohorts included 120 schools in 36 districts. Thus, the "bottom 5%" of schools are now spread out across a greater number of districts.

2. As in previous rounds, a very large majority of Partnership school students are Black and economically disadvantaged. This reflects the persistent relationship between racial and socioeconomic inequalities and educational opportunity and outcomes.

3. Michigan School Index scores (used for accountability designations) declined on average for reidentified, newly identified, and never identified schools, but were similar to pre-pandemic levels for released schools. As a group, released schools stand out compared to others across the state for their academic performance coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Educators in released schools reported a stronger school culture and climate, more effective school leadership, and fewer human capital challenges than reidentified schools. These factors may help explain released schools' more positive outcomes.

DATA AND METHODS

We used three sources of data to describe trends and patterns in Partnership school performance and characteristics to offer some insight into their progress and challenges and to inform ongoing school improvement efforts (Loeb et al., 2017). First, we used historical school accountability scores that are publicly available from the MDE website. Second, we used student-level administrative data to capture school and district demographics and other characteristics. Third, we used measures of

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), states must identify their lowest performing schools for school improvement interventions. In Michigan, these schools are identified based on either a School Index score in the bottom 5% of the state or a high school graduation rate below 67% of students. Michigan's Consolidated State Plan for ESSA requires MDE to identify schools for the **Partnership Model** every three years (though identification was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic). Districts that have at least one Partnership school, labeled Partnership districts, are required to create an improvement plan for schools in the district called the **Partnership Agreement**. Districts write and develop these Partnership Agreements in concert with their ISDs, MDE, and district partners. The Agreements include improvement goals for schools in the district, how districts plan on reaching those goals, and how districts will intervene if schools do not reach their improvement goals.

school culture, school leadership, human resource hindrances, and teachers' employment intentions from EPIC's annual survey of teachers and principals in Michigan's Partnership districts. While we examined several other factors, we focus here on the culture, leadership, and human capital factors that stood out.[1] Table 1 provides a summary of these data sources.

TABLE 1. Data Sources				
Data Type	**Characteristics of Interest**	**Data Source(s)**	**Years**	**Subgroups**
Historical state accountability data	Composite and component index scores	MDE and CEPI	2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2021-22	All Michigan schools
Student-level administrative data	School and district demographics	MDE and CEPI	2016-17 through 2021-22	All Michigan schools
Teacher surveys	Measures of culture, leadership, human resource hindrances, and teacher employment intentions	EPIC-developed survey (see Appendix A for more details)	Fall 2018, fall 2019, spring 2021, spring 2022	Round 1, 2, and 3 Partnership schools

Throughout, we refer to four different categories of Partnership status: 1) reidentified for Round 4 Partnership status, 2) newly identified for Round 4 Partnership status, 3) released from earlier rounds of Partnership status, and 4) never identified for Partnership status. Table 2 provides detailed definitions of these categories.

TABLE 2. Definition of Partnership Status Categories	
Partnership Status	**Definition**
Reidentified	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that were reidentified in Round 4.
Newly identified	Schools that were not previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that were identified in Round 4.
Released	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and that were not reidentified in Round 4.
Never identified	Schools that were not identified for Partnership status in any of the four rounds.

FINDINGS

An Overview of Round 4 Partnership Schools

For Round 4 of the Partnership Model, 109 schools were identified for Partnership status.[2] Table 3 provides an overview of Round 4 Partnership schools. Fifty (46%) were reidentified from previous rounds, whereas 59 (54%) were newly identified. Most schools were identified because their index scores fell below the identification threshold (i.e., bottom 5% of school performance).

TABLE 3. Partnership Schools in Round 4	
Characteristic of School	**N (%) of Schools**
New or Reidentified?	
New Partnership school	59 (54%)
Reidentified school	50 (46%)
School Type	
Traditional public school (TPS)	74 (68%)
Charter school (PSA)	35 (32%)
Reason for Identification	
Michigan School Index in bottom 5%	86 (79%)
Graduation rate below 67%	10 (9%)
Michigan School Index and graduation rate below thresholds	13 (12%)

Note: This table shows school-level descriptive statistics for schools that reidentified or newly identified for Partnership status in November 2022. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability data files.

In total, the Round 4 Partnership schools are in 51 districts, which will enter into Partnership Agreements with MDE. Seventeen (33%) were Partnership districts in previous rounds, while 34 (67%) are new Partnership districts. The increase in the total number of Partnership districts reflects the fact that Partnership schools are spread across a greater number of districts in Round 4 relative to earlier rounds. For example, while half of the previously identified Partnership schools were in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), fewer schools were identified this round in DPSCD and the majority of previously identified DPSCD schools were released. In addition, more charter schools (which are often part of stand-alone districts) were identified this round, increasing the total number of districts.

The Majority of Students in Partnership Schools Are Black and Economically Disadvantaged

Table 4 compares the demographics of Michigan's Partnership and non-Partnership schools. As in previous rounds, Round 4 Partnership schools are disproportionately high-poverty and racially segregated compared to other schools in Michigan (Strunk et al., 2020). The large majority of students in Partnership schools are identified as Black and economically disadvantaged—a much larger share than in never-identified schools.[3] The demographic composition of Partnership schools reflects the historical and persistent relationship between racial and socioeconomic inequalities and educational opportunities and outcomes (Carter & Merry, 2021; Reardon et al., 2022).

TABLE 4. Characteristics of Schools by Partnership Status				
	Reidentified	**Newly Identified**	**Released**	**Never Identified**
Number of schools	50	59	59	3,063
Identified for Partnership Round 4?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Avg. 2021-22 MI School Index Score	19.31	22.20	31.24	60.48
Student Demographics in 2021-22				
Economically disadvantaged	92.1%	89.3%	90.7%	56.7%
English learner	4.0%	4.7%	5.6%	6.7%
Special education	17.7%	15.0%	16.2%	15.5%
Black	85.0%	73.1%	82.5%	15.1%
Latino	4.8%	6.5%	7.3%	8.9%
White	5.8%	13.6%	6.5%	67.1%
Other race/ethnicity	4.5%	6.8%	3.7%	8.8%
School Type				
Traditional public school (TPS)	84.0%	54.2%	88.1%	89.4%
Charter school (PSA)	16.0%	45.8%	11.9%	10.6%
Grade Levels				
Elementary school (grades K-5)	56.0%	66.1%	81.4%	61.4%
Middle school (grades 6-8)	38.0%	42.4%	66.1%	36.5%
High school (grades 9-12)	36.0%	35.6%	13.6%	33.4%
Previous Partnership Identification Round				
Round 1	36.0%	-	27.1%	-
Round 2	34.0%	-	35.6%	-
Round 3	30.0%	-	37.3%	-

Note: This table shows school-level descriptive statistics from 2021-22 for schools that were reidentified for Partnership status, newly identified for Partnership status, released from Partnership status, and never identified for Partnership status. The data excludes schools that did not receive an accountability designation in November 2022. Data came from student-level administrative data and Michigan's historical accountability data files. Other Race/Ethnicity includes students identified as Asian, American Indian or Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

While newly identified Partnership schools enroll a somewhat lower share of Black and economically disadvantaged students, this is due mostly to the few schools newly identified based on graduation rate alone. Schools identified based on low Michigan School Index scores have comparable levels of Black and economically disadvantaged students (see Appendix B for more details).

Fifty-nine schools were newly released from Partnership status, shown in the third column of Table 4. These released schools are demographically similar to their reidentified counterparts. One notable difference is that fewer released schools serve students in grades 9-12 (i.e., high schools) compared to the reidentified schools. In the following sections, we highlight other characteristics that distinguish released schools from reidentified and newly identified schools.

Schools Released From Partnership Status Had Stronger Academic Outcomes Than Other Schools in Michigan

As noted above, MDE identifies Partnership schools based on their Michigan School Index scores, graduation rates, or both. Since Michigan has used the same Michigan School Index for accountability since 2016-17, these data offer a window into school performance trends over time.[4] (The COVID-19 pandemic paused the calculation of the Michigan School Index scores for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.)

Figure 1 shows Michigan School Index scores by Partnership status over time. Released schools performed better overall coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, even experiencing some slight improvements in Michigan School Index scores between 2018-19 and 2021-22. Newly identified schools' scores on the Michigan School Index began to decline pre-pandemic and declined more steeply than other schools through the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall Index scores also declined for never identified schools and for reidentified schools over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that, compared to other lower-performing Michigan schools, released schools maintained better outcomes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic or recovered faster in 2021-22.
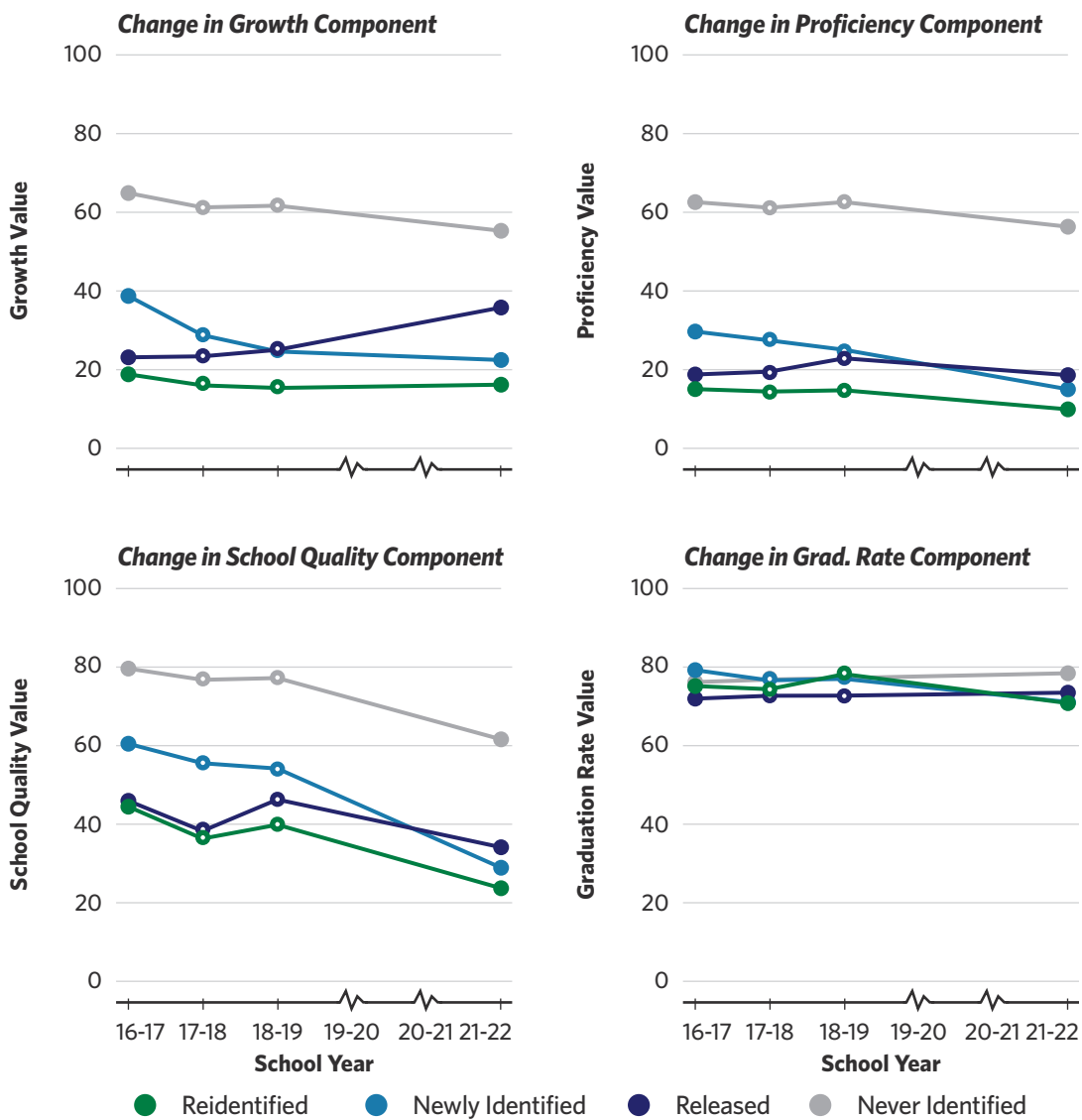
FIGURE 1. Michigan School Index Score by Partnership Status
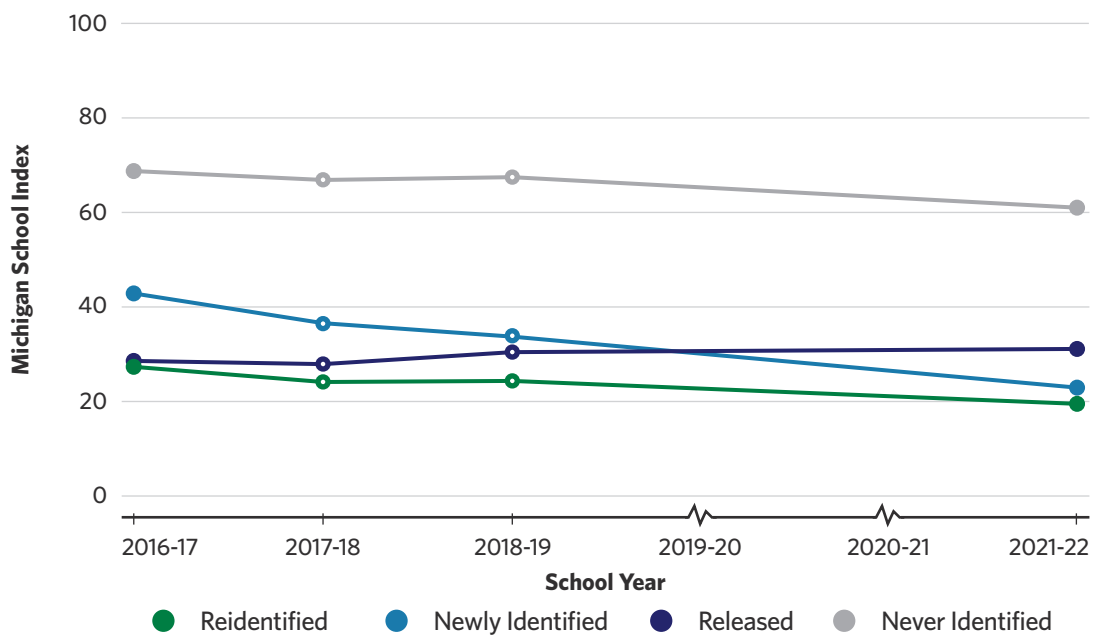
Note: This figure shows the Michigan School Index scores over time for four categories of schools. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability master results files. Michigan School Index scores are missing for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to accountability modifications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When we examine major components of the Michigan School Index score, released schools stand out in terms of growth and proficiency. Figure 2 shows that released schools sharply improved in student growth in 2021-22 relative to 2018-19, whereas reidentified schools scored at similar levels in both years. From 2018-19 to 2021-22, released schools declined in student proficiency more modestly compared to reidentified schools. Newly identified schools declined in growth and proficiency both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and never identified schools saw decreases in both growth and proficiency between 2018-19 and 2021-22. These trends highlight the relative success of released schools on these M-STEP-based components of the Index score. While less stark, the school quality and graduation rate components show a similar trend; on average, released schools trended slightly better than other schools over time.

FIGURE 2. Michigan School Index Components by Partnership Status

Note: This figure shows the Michigan School Index scores over time for four categories of schools. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability master results files. Michigan School Index scores are missing for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to accountability modifications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Importantly, released schools already had higher baseline growth and proficiency levels than reidentified schools at the time MDE identified them for Partnership status. This suggests that released schools were already better poised to exit Partnership status from the outset compared to other Partnership schools.

Released Schools Had Stronger School Culture, Leadership, and Human Capital Than Reidentified Schools

Survey-based measures of school culture, leadership, and human capital set released schools apart from reidentified schools. (See Appendix A for more details on EPIC's survey measures.) In particular, released schools are distinct from reidentified schools in two ways. First, teachers in released schools consistently reported more positive levels of culture, leadership, and human capital. Second, measures of released schools' culture, leadership, and human capital remained higher even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Released Schools Had More Positive Culture and Climate and More Effective School Leadership

Figure 3 shows culture and climate and school leadership construct scores for released and reidentified schools over time. The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across teachers in all four survey years. A mean response above this line indicates a more positive culture and climate or more effective leadership than the average. A mean response below this line indicates a more negative culture and climate or less effective leadership than the average.

FIGURE 3. School Leadership and Culture/Climate by Partnership Status
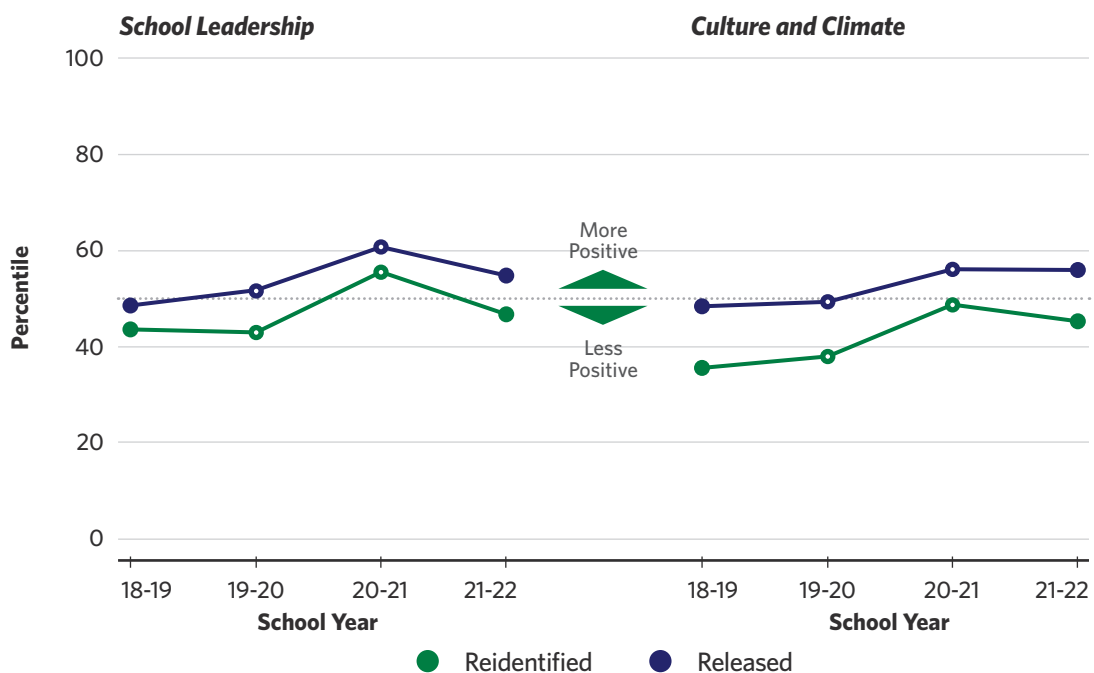
Note: This figure shows constructs of school leader effectiveness and culture/climate for reidentified and released schools. The data come from teacher responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix A for more details on the items that comprise each construct.

In each year EPIC surveyed teachers in Partnership schools, schools that would be released for Round 4 scored more positively than schools that would eventually be reidentified. All Partnership schools showed improvement in these measures between 2018-19 and 2020-21, with gaps between released and reidentified schools diminishing by 2020-21. However, in 2021-22, as Partnership schools continued to grapple with and sought to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gap between released and reidentified schools grew even larger (Strunk et al., 2022).

Released Schools Had Fewer Human Capital Challenges

Figure 4 shows scores for a teacher-reported measure of the extent of human capital challenges during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years (i.e., during the COVID-19 pandemic). The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across all teachers in both 2020-21 and 2021-22. A mean response above the line indicates greater human resource hindrances to improvement and a mean response below the line indicates fewer than average human resource hindrances. So, in Figure 4, a lower score indicates *better* human capital conditions, and a higher score indicates *worse* human capital conditions.

In 2021-22, schools in Michigan and across the country faced increased challenges with human capital relative to before the COVID-19 pandemic (Strunk et al., 2022). In Michigan, teachers in reidentified and released schools alike reported an increase in human resource hindrances to improvement, such as higher levels of teacher absenteeism and greater difficulty finding qualified substitute teachers. Yet, teachers in reidentified schools reported a much sharper increase in these human capital challenges, suggesting that released schools experienced a relatively lower level of strain on their capacity.

Figure 5 shows teachers' reported professional intentions to remain in their same school, leave their school or district, or leave the profession entirely—either to retire or for another reason. We examine teachers' average responses prior to (2019-20) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21 and 2021-22). Because teachers' stated intentions may not accurately reflect their actual attrition (Nguyen et al., 2022), intentions to leave are indicators both of potential human capital challenges and more generally teacher dissatisfaction with factors such as culture and climate, leadership, or workload. While the intentions of teachers in released and reidentified schools follow a similar pattern, a slightly larger share of teachers in reidentified schools consistently report intending to leave their school or district while remaining in the profession. This difference in teacher intentions is further evidence that reidentified schools faced greater culture, leadership, and human capital challenges.

FIGURE 4. Human Resources Hindrances by Partnership Status
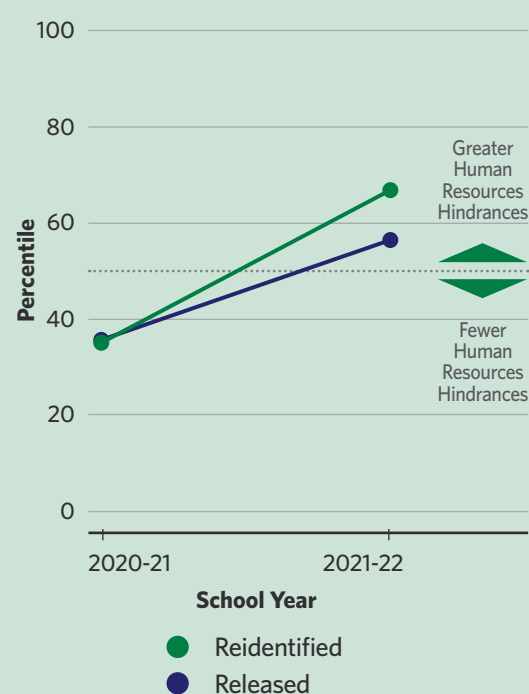
Note: This figure shows the teacher survey responses during the COVID-19 pandemic on a measure of human resource hindrances for reidentified and released schools. The data came from teacher responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix A for more details on the items that comprise each construct. Questions for this construct were not asked in the first two survey waves.

FIGURE 5. Teachers' Professional Intentions by Partnership Status

Remain in Same School

Leave School or District

Leave Profession or Retire

● Reidentified
● Released
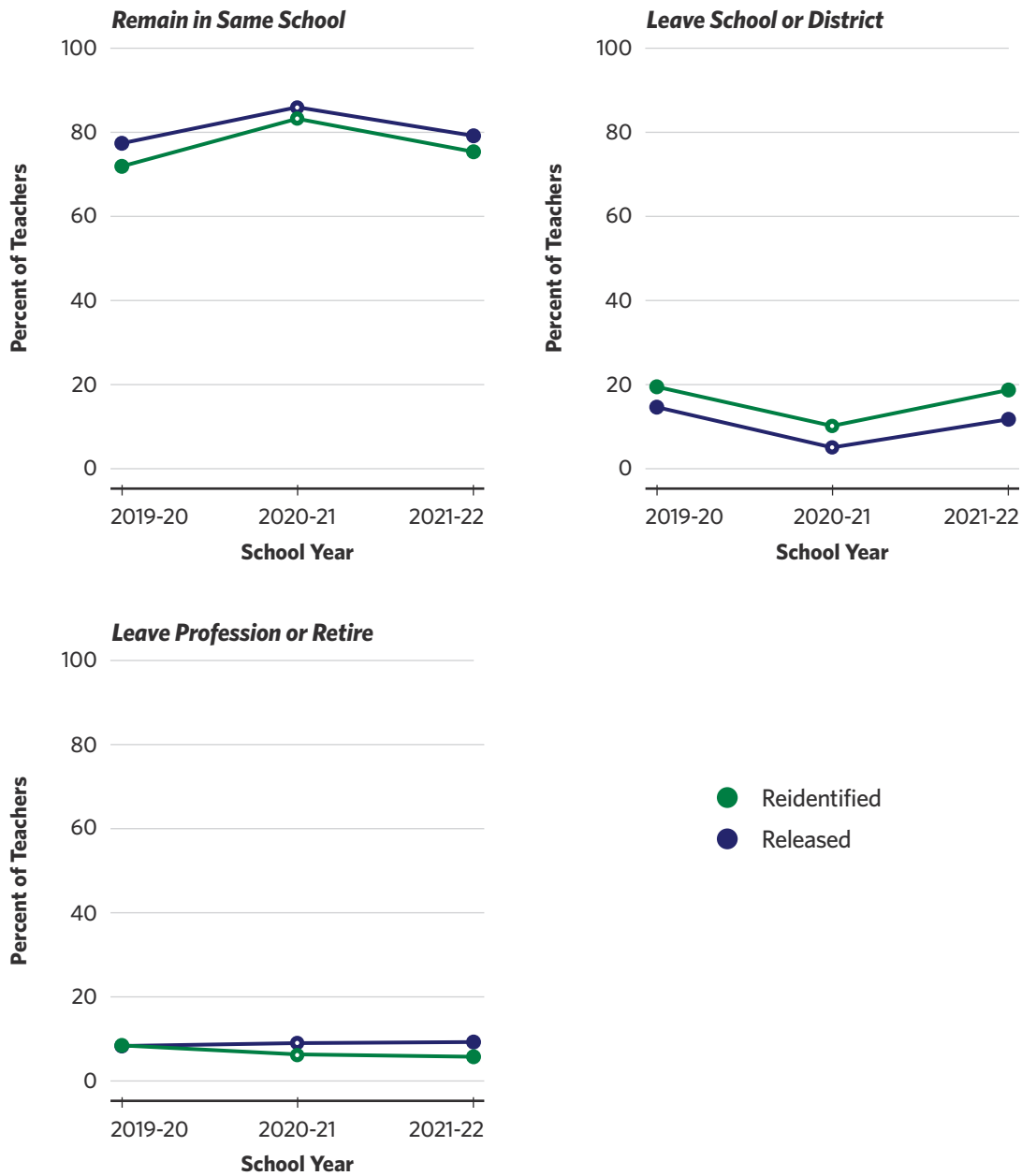
Note: This figure shows the teacher survey responses about their professional intentions for the subsequent school year. The data source is the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. Teachers were asked, "Which of the following best describes your plans for next school year?" The response options were: Same Position, Same School; Different Position, Same School; Different School, Same District; Different District/Charter Network; Leave Education; or Retire.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Existing educational inequalities and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and schools loom large for Round 4 Partnership schools. Our analysis provides a clearer understanding of why some schools were identified or reidentified while others were not, with implications for the kinds

of supports that Partnership schools may need and the ways in which Partnership districts and schools might focus their improvement efforts.

Partnership Districts Will Need to Provide Even Greater Supports to Assist High Schools and Schools With Culture, Leadership, and Human Capital Challenges

Schools released from Partnership status in Round 4 had higher academic performance and stronger school culture, leadership, and human capital when they were originally identified, showed greater improvement over time, and had a sharper recovery coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact is a reminder that even among those schools in the bottom 5% of performance, schools differ from one another in several ways that can bolster or hinder their school improvement efforts. It is therefore important that Michigan's Partnership Model accounts for these differences and targets resources and interventions in such a way that differentiates supports and acknowledges disparities when districts plan for improvement. Some schools will need even more attention and resources to spur improvement, including their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We highlight a few areas for improvement and indicators for differentiated support. Since fewer high schools than elementary and middle schools were released from Partnership status, Partnership districts, ISDs, and MDE may want to pay particular attention to high schools. In addition, schools with greater challenges related to culture and climate, leadership, and human capital may require even greater levels of support and resources. Improving school culture, leadership, and human capital may be important intermediate steps for improving academic outcomes.

Michigan Policymakers Should Complement Improvement Efforts With Other Policies to Reduce Out-of-School Inequalities

There is evidence that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Partnership schools on average improved relative to comparison schools on English language arts and mathematics test scores (Strunk et al., 2020). Yet, the "bottom 5%" of schools in the state remain those facing the highest levels of concentrated poverty and racial segregation. These inequalities are at the root of many challenges facing low-performing schools, from high levels of student academic need to high levels of stress and instability for educators (Kraft et al., 2015; Reardon et al., 2022; Spillane et al., 2022). Moreover, these were the same communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, both in terms of health and economic hardships. It is therefore critical that we understand school improvement in the context of these other, compounding stressors in the same communities as those in which Partnership schools and districts are located.

Michigan policymakers can best support school improvement in Partnership districts by coordinating and targeting resources and social services in other policy areas (e.g., housing, health, employment). Policies that reduce persistent out-of-school inequalities in Partnership communities can help improve the overall conditions for students and educators.

ENDNOTES

1   For example, we considered learning modality during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to Partnership identification, but the data are difficult to interpret for this purpose. We have no school performance data for the 2019-20 school year and unreliable school performance data for the 2020-21 school year; and available learning modality data are at the district-level rather than school level. For additional information on district performance and learning modality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Michigan, see EPIC research on the subject at https://epicedpolicy.org/category/covid19-reports.

2   Originally, 112 schools were identified in Round 4, but three schools were removed from identification after the districts corrected data issues. We describe schools as reidentified if they were ever included in a previous Partnership Agreement. Eight schools were included in a Partnership Agreement in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 but later removed from Partnership status before the end of those rounds. We conducted our analysis with and without those eight schools included in the reidentification category and found no substantive differences.

3   Michigan students are identified as "economically disadvantaged" if they are eligible for free- or reduced-price meals; if they live in a household receiving supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP), temporary assistance for needy families (TANF), or Medicaid; or if they are homeless, migrant, or in foster care.

4   The growth component of the index in 2022 was calculated slightly differently than in previous years, due to the interruption to testing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Growth is calculated from 2018-19 test scores to 2021-22 scores. The growth component is thus only available for schools in 6th grade and up for M-STEP, PSAT 8/9, SAT, and MI-ACCESS, and 3rd grade and up for WIDA-ACCESS. For more details on the School Index, see: Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability. *2022 Michigan School Index System Guide.* Michigan Department of Education. https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/OEAA/Accountability/Index/MI_School_Index_System_Guide.pdf?rev=5ab1624c61864c39aca979872c1f911d.

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APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF SURVEY CONSTRUCTS

This appendix provides an overview of the survey constructs this report uses. Table A1 below summarizes the individual survey items used to create each construct and the years of data available to measure each construct. While principals and teachers answered questions about school culture and climate and human resource hindrances, only teachers answered questions about school leadership. For consistency in this report, we use only teacher responses for each construct. More details on the confirmatory factor analysis used to identify and create these constructs can be found in EPIC's Year 4 report on the Partnership Model.

TABLE A1. Survey Constructs		
Construct Name	**Component Items**	**Years Available**
School Culture and Climate	School meets students' academic needs Teachers have high expectations for students Teachers have strong rapport with students School meets students' socioemotional needs Students are enthusiastic to come to school/learn	2018-19 through 2021-22
School Leadership	Works with staff to meet curriculum standards Communicates central mission of school Uses evidence to make data-driven decisions Works with community partners Facilitates professional development Encourages parent engagement Communicates improvement goals and strategies with teachers	2018-19 through 2021-22
Human Resource Hindrances	Low teacher retention Insufficient supply of certified teachers Low teacher attendance Lack of availability of substitute teachers	2020-21 and 2021-22

APPENDIX B: PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS BY IDENTIFICATION LEVEL

Michigan school districts were reidentified or newly identified for Partnership Agreements if they had at least one school identified for Partnership status in 2022-23. These districts were placed into three different identification levels:

- **Intensive districts** are those districts that previously had a Partnership Agreement (i.e., as part of Rounds 1, 2, or 3 of Partnership identification) and have one or more schools reidentified for Partnership status.

- **Essential districts** are those districts without a previous Partnership Agreement who have at least one newly identified Partnership school identified based on a low School Index score (bottom 5%); or districts with a previous Partnership Agreement who have only a single newly identified Partnership school based on low School Index score.

- **Fundamental districts** are those districts whose Partnership schools were only identified based on a low graduation rate (below 67%) and not based on a low School Index score.

Table B1 presents the demographics of Partnership schools based on their district's identification level—intensive, essential, and fundamental—as well as whether the school is reidentified or newly identified. The table shows that the fact that newly identified Partnership schools enroll a lower share of economically disadvantaged and Black students is primarily driven by the fundamental schools—those identified on the basis of low graduation rate only.

TABLE B1. Characteristics of Schools by Partnership Status					
	Reidentified		**Newly Identified**		
Level of District Identification	**Intensive**	**Essential**	**Intensive**	**Essential**	**Fundamental**
Number of schools	46	4	12	42	5
Economically disadvantaged	93.0%	82.4%	92.6%	91.2%	65.6%
English learner	2.2%	24.4%	8.5%	4.1%	0.8%
Special education	17.4%	20.6%	15.8%	14.4%	18.7%
Black	88.4%	45.3%	81.1%	74.8%	40.3%
Latino	4.5%	14.1%	11.2%	5.6%	1.9%
White	4.4%	20.0%	4.4%	11.7%	52.0%
Other race/ethnicity	3.1%	20.5%	3.3%	7.9%	5.7%

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