



RESEARCH REPORT

# Round 4 of the Partnership Model: 2024-25 Implementation Report

*Jeremy Singer, University of Michigan-Flint*

*Sarah L. Woulfin, University of Texas at Austin*

*Daniel I. Dawer, University of Texas at Austin*

*Lizeth Lizárraga, University of Texas at Austin*

*Katharine O. Strunk, University of Pennsylvania*

*Erica Harbatkin, Florida State University*

*Wei-Chu Chen, EPIC*

January 2026

**EPIC**

Education Policy  
Innovation Collaborative  
RESEARCH WITH CONSEQUENCE

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge the many people who graciously gave of their time in support of this effort. We are especially grateful to our partners for their collaboration and thoughtful feedback. In particular, we would like to thank Gloria Chapman, Dr. Delsa Chapman, Dr. Sue Carnell, and Dr. Michael Rice at the Michigan Department of Education; Tom Howell, Mike McGroarty, and Lauren Paluta from the Center for Educational Performance and Information; Kyle Kwaiser and Nicole Wagner from the Michigan Education Data Center at the University of Michigan; and Don Dailey and Kevin Bullard from the Michigan Data Hub.

At Michigan State University, we thank Erin Conley and Bailey Padgett for their assistance with the annual survey. We also thank Emily Mohr and Tara Kilbride for their support. Finally, we thank Michelle Huhn for her assistance with graphic design, and Bridgette Redman for her excellent copy-editing.

## DISCLAIMER

The Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) at Michigan State University is an independent, non-partisan research center that operates as the strategic research partner to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI). EPIC conducts original research using a variety of methods that include advanced statistical modeling, representative surveys, interviews, and case study approaches. This research used data structured and maintained by the MERI-Michigan Education Data Center (MEDC). MEDC data are modified for analysis purposes using rules governed by MEDC and are not identical to those data collected and maintained by the MDE or CEPI.

Results, information, and opinions solely represent the authors and are not endorsed by, nor reflect the views or positions of, grantors, MDE and CEPI, or any employee thereof. All errors are our own.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

- 2 ▪ Section One Notes

## SECTION TWO: DATA AND METHODS

- 3 ▪ Survey Data
- 5 ▪ Case Study Data
- 6 ▪ Overview of Case Study Districts

## SECTION THREE: HUMAN CAPITAL

- 9 ▪ Hiring Difficulties Have Continued to Ease, but Staffing Remains a Challenge
- 13 ▪ Teacher Retention Indicators Improved, but Turnover Remains a Concern
- 16 ▪ Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies Remain Similar to Prior Years

## SECTION FOUR: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- 19 ▪ Despite Modest Improvements Over Time, Partnership Schools Continue To Struggle With Instructional Quality
- 21 ▪ Districts Focused on High-Quality Instruction “With Fidelity”
- 23 ▪ Partnership Schools Showed Some Improvement in MTSS Implementation
- 27 ▪ Districts Continued Efforts to Improve Their Instructional Infrastructure
- 28 ▪ Teacher Perceptions of Climate and Leadership Show Modest Improvements

**SECTION FIVE: STUDENT ATTENDANCE  
AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

- 30** ▪ Attendance Remains a Major Challenge, Despite Some Modest Improvements
- 31** ▪ While Attendance Strategies Remain Similar, Implementation has Progressed

**SECTION SIX: THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL  
AND SUPPORT FROM OPD**

- 34** ▪ The Accumulating Influence of Partnership Status: Both a Blessing and a Curse
- 36** ▪ Relationships With and Support From OPD and ISDs

**SECTION SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**REFERENCES AND APPENDICES**

References	<b>42</b>
Appendix A: Survey Response Rates	<b>44</b>
Appendix B: Survey Measures and Analysis	<b>45</b>
Appendix C: Interview Protocols	<b>47</b>





# Section One: Introduction

Jeremy Singer, Sarah L. Woulfin, Daniel I. Dawer, Lizeth Lizárraga,  
Katharine O. Strunk, Erica Harbatkin, and Wei-Chu Chen

In November 2022, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) identified its fourth round of Partnership schools—schools ranked in the “bottom 5%” of the Michigan School Index System—for the state’s Partnership Model for district and school turnaround (Singer & Cullum, 2023). Over the course of the 2022-23 school year, districts with at least one Partnership school (i.e., Partnership districts) worked with the Office of Partnership Districts (OPD) and their Intermediate School Districts<sup>1</sup> (ISDs) to develop Partnership Agreements and school improvement plans (Cullum et al., 2024).

In 2023-24, these districts and schools began to implement their improvement strategies. The 2023-24 school year was the first year of implementation for Round 4 Partnership districts and schools, and their plans placed an emphasis on establishing and initially implementing new systems and strategies to improve instruction, increase teacher retention, and reduce chronic absenteeism (Cullum et al., 2024). Indeed, our survey and case study data highlighted a focus among Partnership districts and schools on developing resources and systems to improve instruction and attendance (Singer, et al., 2024b). Our analysis of student outcomes through 2023-24 found some limited improvements in math test scores and attendance for newly identified schools (Harbatkin et al., 2025b). The 2024-25 school year thus marked a critical juncture for these schools and districts, as they sought to build on the foundation laid during their initial implementation year.

In this report, we describe the school improvement efforts of Partnership districts and schools during the 2024-25 school year. We bring together quantitative and qualitative data to describe the implementation of improvement strategies, focusing in particular on human capital, curriculum and instruction, and student attendance. We also discuss Partnership district and school leader views of the Partnership Model and their interactions with the Office of Partnership Districts (OPD) and ISDs.

---

**Key findings include:**

- Hiring difficulties continued to ease relative to the start of their Partnership status, but staffing challenges remain. Principals reported fewer struggles filling vacancies and less reliance on substitute teachers, yet shortages of certified teachers—especially in high-need subject areas and in charter schools—persist. Teachers’ intentions to stay and job satisfaction rose modestly, though turnover continues to disrupt instructional continuity.
- There were incremental improvements in instructional quality, but Partnership schools still lag behind non-Partnership schools. Teachers in Partnership schools believe their literacy and math instruction has improved, along with school climate and leadership quality, though only modestly. District efforts focused on implementing curricula with fidelity, strengthening multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) systems, and expanding tutoring. However, progress was uneven across grade levels and schools, reflecting both capacity gains and persistent challenges.
- Student attendance remains a pressing concern, despite modest signs of progress. Fewer teachers identified absenteeism as the greatest challenge facing their schools compared to prior years, and attendance systems are now being implemented more consistently. Still, overall levels of chronic absenteeism remain high in Partnership schools, and many strategies focus on communication and incentives rather than addressing deeper barriers such as transportation.
- The Partnership Model provided support for districts, but also caused some challenges. Leaders described Partnership Agreements as aligned with their broader goals, and they valued the support from OPD staff, Partnership Agreement liaisons, and ISD consultants. They benefited from additional resources associated with Partnership status (e.g., 21h funding). At the same time, the issue of repeated identification, along with various reporting requirements, created fatigue and stigma. District and school leaders characterized the Partnership Model as a critical driver of improvement, but one that carries with it additional burdens.

## SECTION ONE NOTES

1. In Michigan, intermediate school districts are also called regional educational service agencies (RESA). Hereafter, all references will mention only ISD as this is the more common term used among policymakers.

# 02

## Section Two: Data and Methods



We used quantitative and qualitative methods to examine Partnership school and district improvement efforts in 2024-25 (Hewitt & Mansfield, 2021). We collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data separately, integrating the findings across data sources and methods. Using multiple types of data helps us triangulate our findings and develop a richer understanding of the topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Here, we describe our data sources and methods of analysis (see Table 2.1).

TABLE 2.1. Data Sources				
Data	Outcomes of Interest	Source	Year	Sample size
Teacher and principal surveys	Human capital, curriculum and instruction, student attendance, support from OPD and ISDs	EPIC-developed surveys	Spring 2025	All schools in Round 4 Partnership districts
Partnership district case studies	Human capital, curriculum and instruction, student attendance, support from OPD and ISDs	Interviews with district and school leaders	2024-25 school year	Three case study districts

### SURVEY DATA

We fielded our annual survey of all teachers and principals in Partnership districts from February through April 2025. We asked all teachers and principals a range of questions about their experiences, perspectives, and opinions related to their schools and districts. One of the goals of Partnership is for these districts to direct their resources and efforts towards their lowest-performing schools, which are those identified for Partnership. We surveyed every teacher and principal in the district, regardless of whether they worked in a designated Partnership school. This approach allows us to gain insight into the different experiences and perceptions of educators in Partnership and non-Partnership schools within a given year and over time.

To conduct the survey, we worked with MDE and Partnership district leaders to identify the population of teachers and principals in Partnership districts and to obtain their contact information for survey administration. We administered the survey electronically to 6,986 teachers and 306 principals. The response rate was 44% for teachers and 51% for principals. (See Appendix A for subgroup and historical response rates.)

We analyzed the survey data to understand improvement efforts related to three key areas of focus in Partnership districts and schools: human capital, curriculum and instruction, and student attendance. For each of these topics, we summarized teacher and principal responses across a range of questions. We also analyzed change over time from 2022-23 to 2024-25, using data from all years of our surveys of the current Partnership districts and schools. From these responses, we employed factor analysis to create survey constructs that capture school climate and school leadership. For all analyses, we applied survey weights to adjust for differences in observable characteristics between respondents and non-respondents. (Appendix B provides additional details about survey items, constructs, and weighting.)

In addition to analyzing responses for Partnership districts overall, we compared responses between Partnership schools and non-Partnership schools in Partnership districts. We make some comparisons based on Partnership status: reidentified Partnership schools, newly identified Partnership schools, released schools, and never-identified schools (Table 2.2). We present subgroup results when differences between groups are statistically significant for teachers at minimum (the small number of principals limits our power to detect significant differences across principal groups), or in limited instances, where we want to highlight similarities alongside differences. Otherwise, we present Partnership district-wide responses. When we present item-level subgroup results in which at least one difference is statistically significant, we use stars to denote any statistically significant differences results in item-level subgroups.

TABLE 2.2. Definition of Partnership Status Categories	
Partnership Status	Definition
Reidentified	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and were reidentified in Round 4.
Newly Identified	Schools that were <i>not</i> previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and <i>were</i> identified in Round 4.
Released	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and were <i>not</i> reidentified in Round 4.
Never Identified	Schools that were <i>not</i> identified for Partnership status in <i>any</i> of the four rounds.

Finally, for survey constructs on school climate and school leadership, we used four years of teacher and principal survey data from Partnership districts in Rounds 1, 2, and 3 (from fall 2018, fall 2019, spring 2021, and spring 2022). The historical survey data includes any Partnership school that was originally identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and then reidentified in Round 4. We do not have data in these prior years for newly identified Partnership schools or schools that were never identified for Partnership status. (For additional details on survey methodology and response rates for prior survey waves, see Strunk et al., 2022.) We use historical survey data in some instances for reidentified and released schools to further contextualize our findings.

## CASE STUDY DATA

We draw on qualitative data from case studies of Round 4 Partnership districts. We conducted case studies of two traditional public school districts and one charter management organization with at least one Partnership school. We intentionally sought districts with different governance structures and both reidentified and newly identified districts. We refer to these districts with pseudonyms: Hornets, Blizzard, and Chargers.

During the 2024-25 school year, we conducted a set of interviews with our case districts to collect data related to human capital, curriculum and instruction, student attendance, and support from OPD and ISDs. We recruited system leaders overseeing those key areas of practice (N=6) as well as school leaders in these systems (N=4). We then conducted two rounds of interviews with system leaders: the first in fall 2024 and the second in spring 2025, as well as one round of interviews with school leaders in spring 2025, for a total of 16 interviews.

In the first round of system leader interviews and in our interviews with school leaders, we asked detailed questions about human capital, curriculum and instruction, and student attendance. For each of these areas, we asked system and school leaders to describe the specific strategies they were implementing and to evaluate the successes and challenges of the implementation process. We also asked leaders about their perceptions of alignment or misalignment between Partnership and district-level initiatives, as well as their relationships with and the support they received from OPD and ISDs. In the second round of system leader interviews, we followed up to ask about their progress implementing strategies in the three focus areas and to reflect on their emotional responses to being (re)identified as Partnership districts. We also asked system leaders to explain alignment or misalignment between their perceptions of Partnership and perceptions of Partnership expressed by school leaders within their systems.

We analyzed our case study data in three stages. First, after each interview, we wrote a memo to summarize key points and reflections. Second, we compiled our findings for each case into a matrix, which allowed us to summarize case-specific results and draw comparisons across cases. We organized the matrix by interview round and participant type (i.e., fall 2024 system leaders, spring 2025 school leaders, spring 2025 system leaders) to analyze our findings over time. Finally, we wrote case-specific memos and cross-system reflective memos to summarize our findings and facilitate further cross-case analysis.

## OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY DISTRICTS

### Case Study **Hornets**



**Human Capital:** The district experienced high levels of staff turnover in special education, creating a severe staff shortage in the department at the beginning of the school year. Though district leaders successfully recruited special education teachers through college job fairs, financial constraints continued to limit Hornets' capacity to hire experienced educators in key areas, such as ELA. Moving forward, Hornets leaders intend to center Partnership as a positive selling point in their recruitment narrative. They also reported potential plans to explore creative options for educator recruitment and retention, including an in-house teacher training academy, subsidized teacher housing, and initiatives to address perceived cultural gaps between staff and school communities.



**Curriculum and Instruction:** Hornets adopted a new ELA curriculum this year and continued their third year of implementing a math curriculum. Implementation efforts focused on training and coaching teachers in instructional delivery and involved incorporating professional development and active coaching within the classroom. In the process, district leaders prioritized direct accountability, visibility, and relationship-building as precursors to academic improvement. However, some teachers felt overburdened by the demands of curriculum implementation and test preparation, straining morale and consistency.



**Attendance:** Having set up a comprehensive system for monitoring attendance last year, district leaders this year focused on implementing a tiered attendance intervention system. This system contributed to reduced chronic absenteeism rates, particularly among students previously identified as at-risk. The superintendent meets weekly with a team of attendance liaisons who implement an attendance intervention system that involves use of the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS) to track student attendance, regular meetings with students and families, PBIS integration, and collaboration with the district court. However, district leaders were forced to redirect Title I funds to maintain attendance initiatives, and concerns remain about the viability of the attendance system due to federal funding cuts.

## Case Study **Chargers**



**Human Capital:** Chargers continued to face significant staffing challenges, particularly in high-need subject areas such as math and science. In response, system leaders hired educators through a teacher abroad program piloted this year, which enabled them to recruit 20 teachers for three-year placements in system schools. Leaders continued to rely on grant-funded Grow Your Own (GYO) programs, which have helped encourage paraprofessionals to earn their degrees and certification. Chargers' high turnover and large numbers of inexperienced educators have strained resources for support and professional development, as teachers have required more assistance from campus instructional coaches.



**Curriculum and Instruction:** As Chargers continued implementing their recently adopted curriculum, system leaders noted that unclear expectations for teachers' use of literacy strategies learned through professional development have resulted in inconsistent instruction. Leaders identified an ongoing need to align district-level planning with school leaders' implementation and monitoring of curriculum and instruction initiatives. While leaders appreciate ISD support for teacher professional development, there continues to be a need for training to ensure teachers are drawing on curriculum materials as a resource rather than simply trying to "cover" the curriculum at a surface level.



**Attendance:** Chargers continued implementing a systematic approach to addressing chronic absenteeism, which included identifying chronically absent students early, meeting regularly with parents, and addressing the root causes of absenteeism. While this system was established last year, having staff to fill roles of parent liaison, attendance liaison, and community involvement this year enabled schools to be proactive about meeting with students and families to problem-solve.

## Case Study **Blizzard**



**Human Capital:** Blizzard built on prior recruitment and retention strategies this year by negotiating higher teacher salaries, expanding alternative certification pathways, and recruiting teachers internationally. Retention efforts included teacher mentorship and micro-credentialing. Some monetary incentives were phased out due to expiring grants, which left leaders seeking new funding.



**Curriculum and Instruction:** Blizzard has implemented a wide range of instructional initiatives, including expanded STEAM and language immersion programs within their district. Leaders shared that they leveraged grant funding to support professional development, mentoring, and instructional leadership, including hiring principal coaches. Leaders noted that instructional support has improved this year, such as a more organized behavior support team and MTSS team.



**Attendance:** To address attendance issues, Blizzard continued to focus on relationship building and wrap-around services. Within schools, the district created community circles for educators to receive feedback from students on what is working well for them, fostering more supportive and responsive practices. By strengthening relationships and addressing student needs, these circles contributed to a school climate that boosted student attendance.

## 03

## Section Three: Human Capital



This section discusses trends in teacher recruitment and retention and related district strategies. Survey and case study data show progress since Partnership identification in 2022-23—particularly in easing hiring difficulties and reducing reliance on substitutes. Still, persistent shortages of certified teachers and high turnover continue to hinder improvement, especially in charter schools. Teachers’ intentions to remain in their schools have risen alongside modest improvements in job satisfaction. Taken together, these findings highlight both meaningful progress and enduring constraints in staffing Partnership schools.

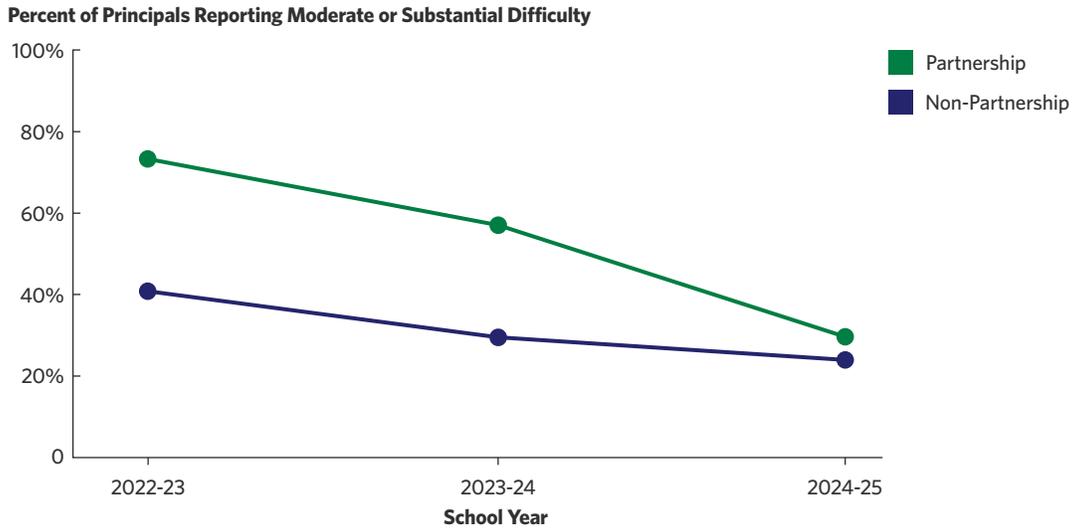
### HIRING DIFFICULTIES HAVE CONTINUED TO EASE, BUT STAFFING REMAINS A CHALLENGE

Hiring teachers has been a persistent challenge for Partnership districts. In 2024-25, survey and case study evidence indicated notable progress: fewer principals reported difficulty filling positions, and reliance on substitute teachers declined. However, persistent shortages of certified teachers continued to hinder improvement efforts.

#### Hiring Difficulties Declined Substantially, Especially for Partnership Schools

In both our survey data and case studies, we found evidence that the conditions for teacher hiring—a defining challenge for Partnership districts and especially Partnership schools in prior years (Singer et al., 2023; Singer, et al., 2024b)—have greatly improved. Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of principals who reported either moderate or substantial difficulty with hiring teachers for their schools over time. While both non-Partnership schools and Partnership schools showed improvement on this measure, the reduced hiring difficulty was especially great for Partnership schools. Just 30% of Partnership school principals reported moderate or substantial hiring difficulties in 2024-25, down from 74% just two years earlier.

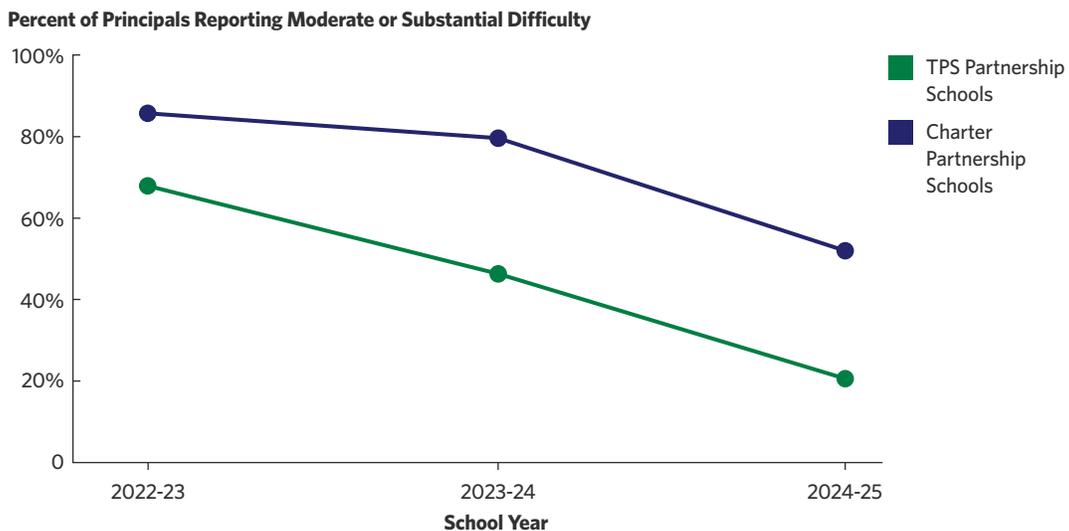
**FIGURE 3.1. Principal-Reported School Hiring Difficulty Over Time, by Partnership Status**



Note: Principals were asked to indicate no difficulties, minimal difficulties, some difficulties, moderate difficulties, or substantial difficulties for the following statement: “My school experienced \_\_\_\_ in recruiting and hiring teachers.”

Principals from both traditional public schools and charter schools reported this improvement in hiring conditions. Figure 3.2 shows reported hiring difficulty figures for Partnership school principals by sector. In 2024-25, among Partnership schools, a much greater share of charter school principals reported hiring difficulties (52%) than traditional public school principals (21%). Still, for both traditional public and charter Partnership schools, hiring difficulty has declined substantially since the beginning of their Partnership status in 2022-23.

**FIGURE 3.2. Principal-Reported School Hiring Difficulty Over Time for Partnership Schools, by Sector**



Note: Principals were asked to indicate no difficulties, minimal difficulties, some difficulties, moderate difficulties, or substantial difficulties for the following statement: “My school experienced \_\_\_\_ in recruiting and hiring teachers.”

Leaders in our case study districts noted that overall hiring challenges declined significantly in 2024-25, especially for schools that had previously struggled to fill open roles. While finding certified candidates in areas like special education, math, and science remained difficult, most leaders reported starting the school year with fewer vacancies and stronger staffing overall. However, several leaders cautioned that this progress felt fragile, noting that staffing stability often depended on temporary grant funding, late hiring timelines, or uncertified candidates placed in hard-to-fill positions. As one Hornets leader explained:

*That's a focus for us this year, as a district, from the superintendent. He likes to classify us as being Humpty Dumpty that fell off the wall, and now Humpty Dumpty's kinda put back together, but we've just gotta make sure that we prop him up so he doesn't fall back off the wall.*

This reflection highlights that hiring progress is occurring, but that unless the underlying structural conditions that affect schools and educators are addressed, hiring challenges could resurface.

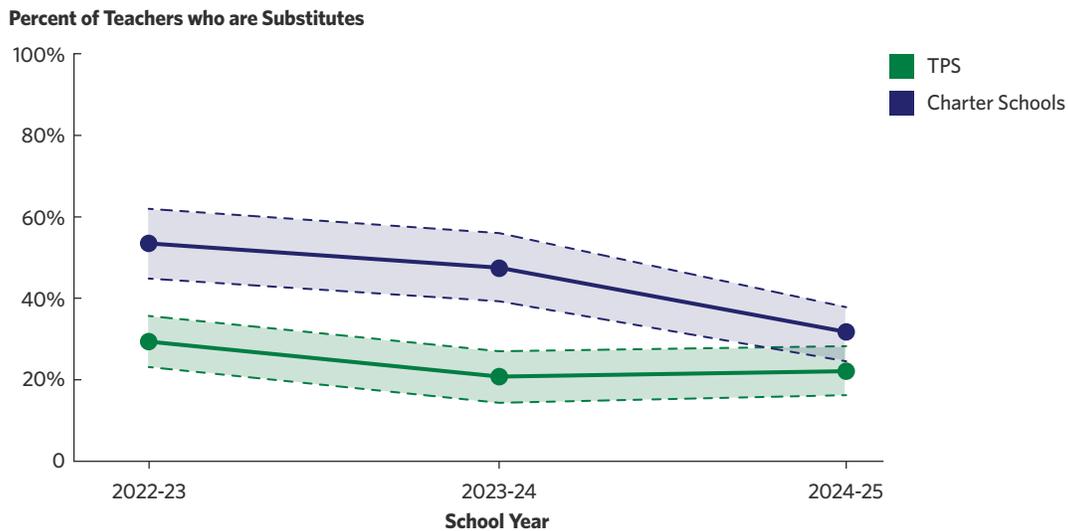
## Difficulty Hiring Credentialed Teachers Continues to Hinder School Improvement, Especially for Partnership Schools

Even though hiring difficulties eased, Partnership districts—and especially their Partnership schools—still struggled to hire certified teachers to fill all vacancies. This problem has remained more acute in charter schools than traditional public schools, even though the number of positions filled by substitute teachers has declined.

In 2024-25, principals reported less reliance on substitute teachers to fill vacancies (Figure 3.3). When this round of Partnership districts was first identified, in a typical week, traditional public schools in Partnership districts relied on substitute teachers to fill about 30% of their teaching positions. The situation was even more dire for Partnership charter schools, which relied on substitute teachers to fill more than half of their teaching positions. Reliance on substitute teachers decreased in 2023-24 (Singer, et al., 2024b), and that trend continued in 2024-25. By 2024-25, this reliance on substitute teachers had declined steeply for charter schools, with substitute teachers filling about 32% of positions in a typical week. The reliance on substitute teachers continued to be lower for traditional public schools than for charter schools, about 22% in 2024-25. These findings coincide with the improved conditions for hiring discussed earlier.

**Partnership districts relied on substitute teachers to fill about 30% of their teaching positions.**

**FIGURE 3.3. Principal-Reported Reliance on Substitute Teachers in Partnership Districts Over Time, by Sector**



Notes: Principals were asked what percentage of teaching positions on a typical day in a typical week are filled by substitute teachers. Options were: less than 10%, 10-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-90%, and greater than 90%. The solid lines represent the average response based on range midpoints (e.g., 17.5% for 10-25%) and the shading shows the average lower and upper bounds (e.g., 10% and 25% for 10-25%). We specified that this could include day-to-day substitute teachers, long-term substitute teachers, and emergency-permitted substitute teachers.

Still, according to principals, a lack of certified teachers has remained an obstacle. Figure 3.4 shows the percentage of principals who reported a lack of certified teachers as a major hindrance to school improvement, for both Partnership and non-Partnership schools. The share of principals indicating that this is a major issue has declined only slightly for Partnership schools over time, from over 60% in 2022-23 to about 55% in 2023-24. In addition, the share of principals selecting a lack of certified teachers as a major hindrance in Partnership schools remains substantially higher than in non-Partnership schools (39%).

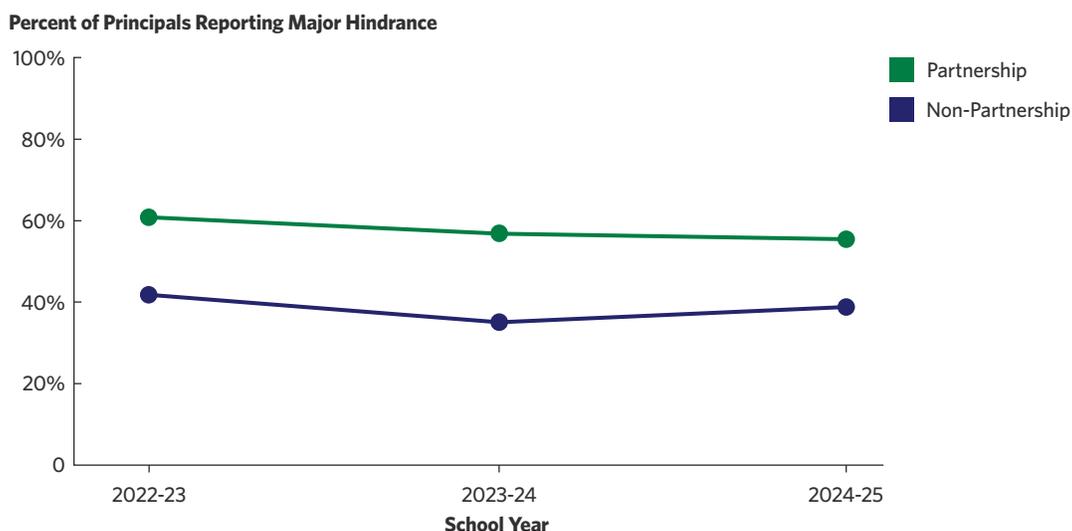
Leaders in our case study districts reported ongoing challenges filling positions with certified candidates, particularly in high-need subject areas. One leader described how their district was becoming more intentional with their hiring decisions and were prioritizing a long-term fit rather than a short-term solution. A Chargers district leader explained:

*If we're going to fill these gaps in these high-need areas, then it might as well be with someone who is working towards who wants to learn, who wants to develop. That goes for anyone, whether in a program or not. That's who we've been leaning towards holding on to, is someone that just wants to be developed and wants to learn.*

In other words, the district was shifting its hiring approach from simply filling vacancies toward investing in cultivating a more stable teaching workforce. Relatedly, a Hornets district leader described moving away from relying on short-term solutions such as hiring agencies and instead committing to having the district directly hire personnel. The district leader explained, “We’ve done a lot of Special Ed hiring in the last few weeks... not that hiring an agency is a bad thing or a bad practice...

but my goal is to not have agency workers in our district. I want district-hired people.” This quote points to the district’s approach to hiring with the longer-term goal of internal organizational stability.

**FIGURE 3.4. Principal-Reported Lack of Certified Teachers as a Hindrance to School Improvement Over Time, by Partnership Status**



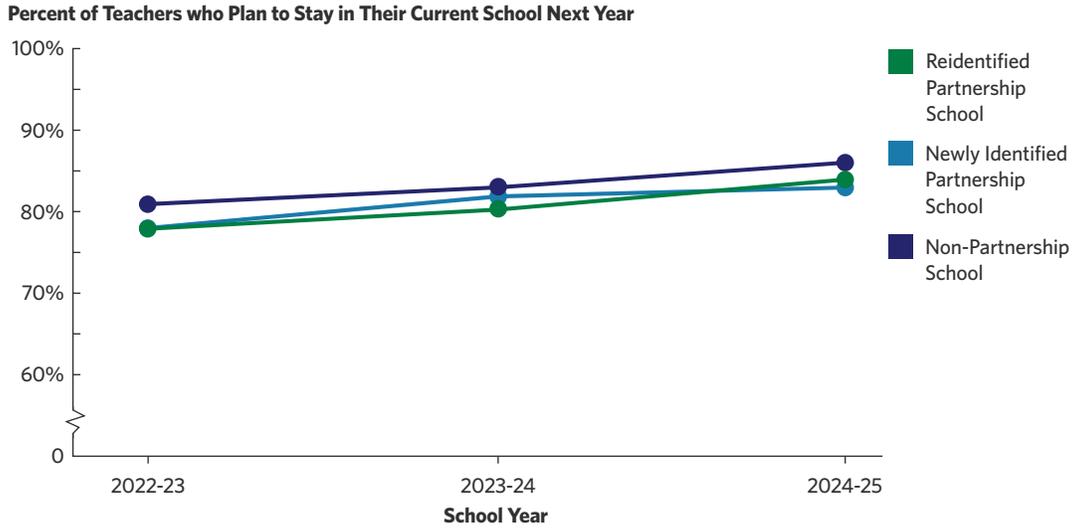
*Note: Principals were asked the extent to which an insufficient supply of certified teachers was a hindrance. Answer options were: “not a hindrance,” “a slight hindrance,” “a moderate hindrance,” “a great hindrance,” and “the greatest hindrance.” The figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected the “great” or “greatest” options.*

To address the need for credentialed teachers, one Chargers district leader shared their efforts to support paraprofessionals in earning their teaching credentials, often called “Grow Your Own” programs. However, this strategy came with a tradeoff. This leader noted that while the initiative was promising, the paraprofessionals required a lot of professional development, “*While they’re [the paraprofessionals] getting certified, they just really need a lot of professional development along the way. It’s a double-edged sword. We’re happy to have people that are committed [but] we’re always looking for certified teachers.*” As this quote shows, providing this level of extra professional development time and resources to help paraprofessionals become more qualified teachers took time away from other instructional goals.

## TEACHER RETENTION INDICATORS IMPROVED, BUT TURNOVER REMAINS A CONCERN

In addition to improving conditions for teacher recruitment, we found some signs of improving conditions for teacher retention. In particular, we found that the share of teachers planning to remain in their schools—a meaningful (though imperfect) signal of actual teacher employment decisions (Harbatkin, et al., 2025c)—has continued to rise. In 2024-25, 83% of teachers in reidentified Partnership schools and 84% of teachers in newly identified Partnership schools reported that they planned to stay in their current school for the next year (Figure 3.5). While these rates remain lower than for non-Partnership school teachers, they reflect sustained increases over the past few school years.

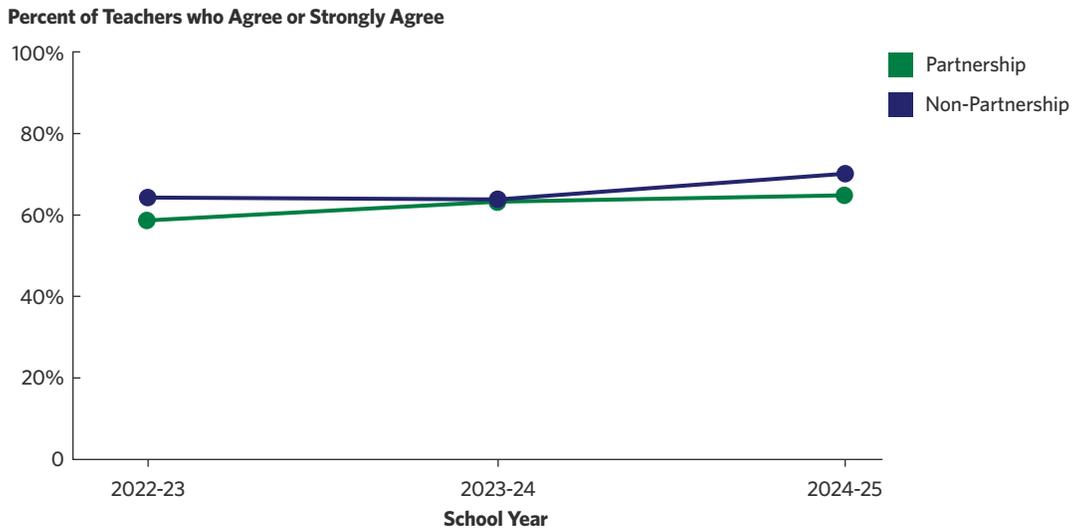
**FIGURE 3.5. Teacher Employment Intentions Over Time, by Partnership Status**



Notes: Teachers were asked, “Which of the following best describes your plans for next school year?” The options were: “continue teaching in this school,” “serve in a different position next year, but in this same school,” “continue teaching in my district, but in a different school,” “leave this district next year to work in a different district or charter network,” “leave next year to pursue a job not in education,” and “retire.” This figure shows the percentage of respondents who selected that they would continue teaching in their school or serve in a different position in the same school.

These increased intentions among teachers to remain in their schools coincide with a measured (though modest) increase in teacher-reported job satisfaction. As shown in Figure 3.6, the percentage of Partnership school teachers who said they agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their jobs increased from 59% in 2022-23 to 65% in 2024-25. These increases are mirrored in non-Partnership schools, where the percentage of teachers who were satisfied with their jobs in 2024-25 (70%) remains slightly higher than for non-Partnership schools.

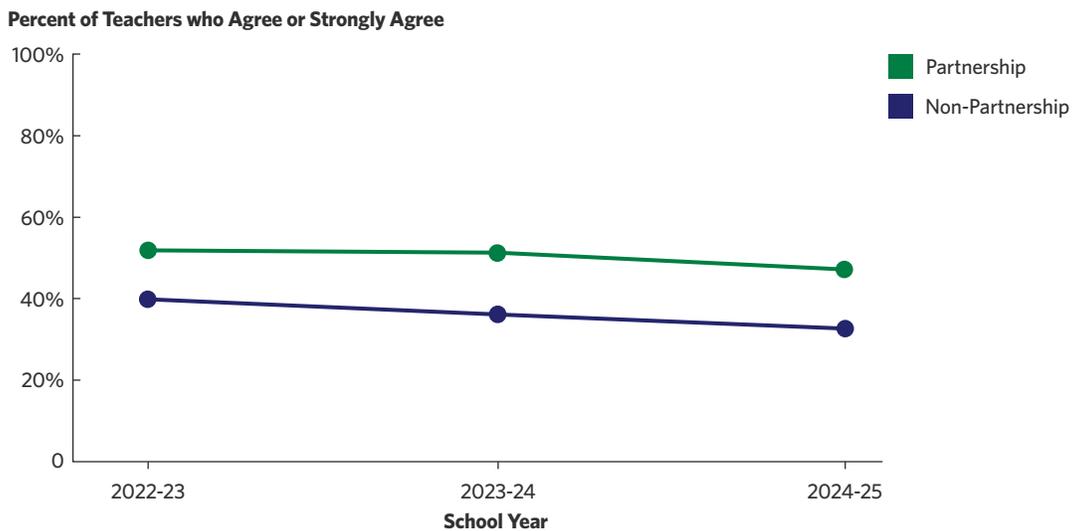
**FIGURE 3.6. Teacher-Reported Job Satisfaction Over Time, by Partnership Status**



Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which they were satisfied with their jobs. Answer options were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” This figure shows the percentage of teachers who selected agree or strongly agree.

Teacher concerns about turnover alleviated slightly, though overall those concerns remain substantial—especially in Partnership schools. Figure 3.7 shows the percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “There is a high degree of staff turnover in this school.” There has been slight improvement in this measure over time among Partnership school teachers and non-Partnership teachers. Still, in 2024-25, nearly half of Partnership school teachers agreed that their schools had high turnover rates, compared to only about one-third of teachers in non-Partnership schools. These results reinforce the persistence of retention challenges, especially in Partnership schools, even as there are some signs of improvement.

**FIGURE 3.7. Teacher Perceptions of High Teacher Turnover Rates Over Time, by Partnership Status**



*Note: Teachers were asked to respond to the item, “There is a high degree of staff turnover in this school.” Answer options were “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” This figure shows the percentage of teachers who selected agree or strongly agree.*

In our case studies, many district and school leaders pointed to teacher turnover as a persistent and disruptive issue, particularly in core subjects (e.g., ELA) as well as in specialized instructional areas (e.g., special education). Notably, at the same time as Hornets’ high school departments were dealing with educator churn, this system adopted a new curriculum. As a high school administrator explained:

*With ELA, most of the staff who had all of that introductory training are no longer here. It kind of set us back...The goal is going into year two that we have some stability both with staffing and consistency in the type of support that we provide.*

It appears teacher turnover contributed to challenges for implementing the new ELA program. For this district, teacher turnover extended beyond core content areas affecting the special education department. A Hornets district leader shared, “We were pretty decimated this past summer in our special ed department, so we’re struggling in that department.” These examples highlight that teacher turnover is not only a staffing challenge but also a barrier to instructional improvement efforts.

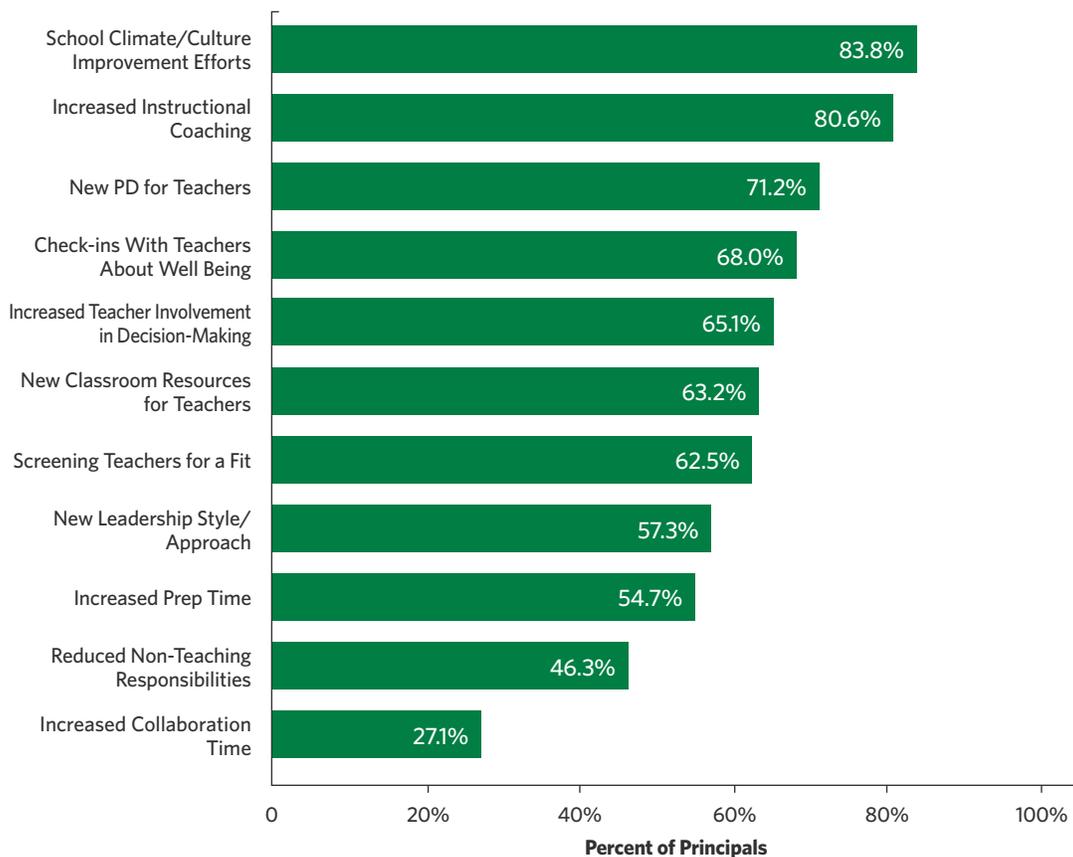
While the costs of teacher turnover are typically quantified in terms of dollars spent to recruit, hire, and retrain candidates to fill classroom vacancies, our findings highlight that Partnership districts and schools experiencing chronic staff churn also incur costs related to curriculum

implementation, loss of institutional knowledge, and disruptions to district and school functions. As we highlight in prior Partnership implementation reports (Singer et al., 2024), teacher turnover complicates efforts to make progress in improving instructional quality, and these costs continue to compound as turnover challenges persist.

## TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES REMAIN SIMILAR TO PRIOR YEARS

According to Partnership district principals, the strategies used to improve teacher recruitment and retention are largely the same as they were in prior school years (Singer et al., 2023; Singer, et al., 2024b). For school-level strategies (Figure 3.8), efforts to improve the school climate remain the most common strategy cited by principals, followed by a few different strategies to provide instructional support to teachers (i.e., coaching, professional development, check-ins, increased decision-making). Other strategies that involve broader organizational changes (e.g., screening, leadership changes, collaboration time) or material commitments (e.g., new resources, increased prep time, reduced non-teaching responsibilities) remained less common.

**FIGURE 3.8. School-Based Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies in Partnership Districts, 2024-25**



*Note: Principals were asked to select all the teacher recruitment and retention initiatives (presented in the graph) that they were currently implementing in their schools. The graph shows the percentage of principals who selected each initiative.*

The only school-based strategy for which we observed meaningful change over time was instructional coaching. In 2022-23, about 60% of principals reported instructional coaching as a strategy for teacher retention. That increased to 70% in 2023-24; and to 80% in 2024-25. These increases over time are likely related to the fact that many districts planned for instructional coaching in their Partnership-related school improvement plans (Cullum et al., 2024).

District-level initiatives, as reported by principals, closely matched the results from prior years (Singer et al., 2023; Singer, et al., 2024b). As shown in Figure 3.9, Partnership districts remained focused on teacher pipeline opportunities for recruitment and financial incentives for recruitment and retention. The most common initiatives included GYO teacher programs (68%), partnering with colleges of education (61%), offering recruitment bonuses (51%), and increasing teacher salaries across the board (50%). Though the percentage of respondents differed slightly in 2024-25 compared to the prior years, none of these changes were statistically significant.

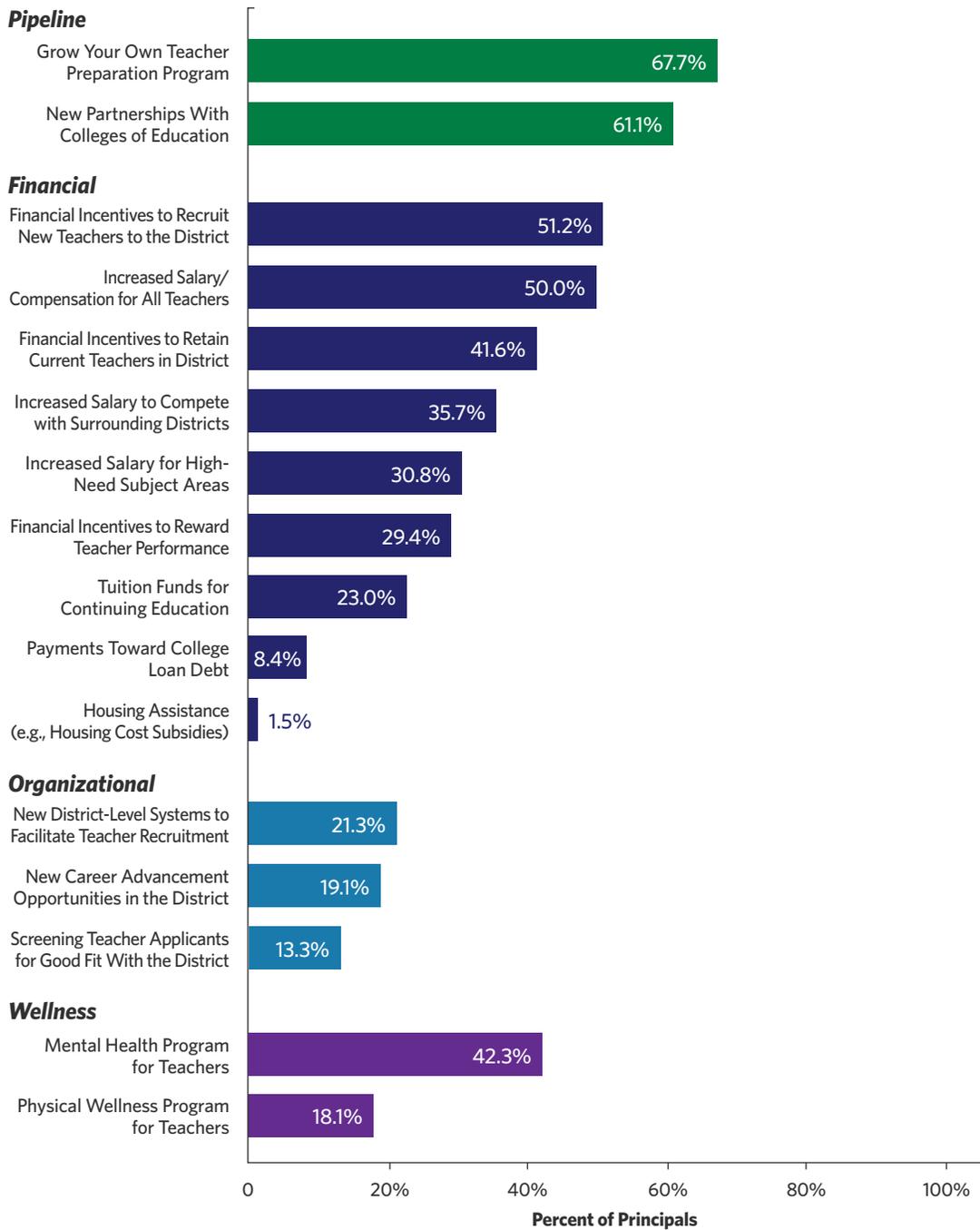
Indeed, we found that our case study districts continued to invest time and resources on an array of retention strategies like GYO programs, professional development, and financial incentives such as bonuses. A Chargers district leader described how their district continued to rely on GYO programs for retention purposes, and how developing teachers was another key retention strategy they used:

*A lot of [GYO] grant funding towards getting teachers certified...we have quite a few teachers that were in that bucket before, that we are holding on to now...we're not actively looking because we're investing in them. While they're teaching with us, they're getting their degrees paid for ... giving them more support, at the school level, with instructional coaching and really looking at tier one instruction and helping to support them, that way.*

This district leader used instructional coaching alongside GYO programs as a means to develop teachers' skills and increase the likelihood of teachers staying in the district—a logical connection given that teachers participating GYO programs often needed additional instructional support (discussed earlier). A Hornets district leader shared similar sentiments and approaches for teacher retention, “We thought about this year, implementing our own new teacher academy for our teachers. Maybe, we'll get more participation that way, if I can just stay after school instead of have to go drive somewhere else.” The leader emphasized how difficult it was to implement strategies to improve instruction in their district due to turnover, but perhaps by making the professional development more accessible, they would be able to retain teachers and build instructional continuity over time. Together, the survey and case study data underscore the range of strategies that districts are actively implementing for retention purposes and their commitment to investing in teacher professional growth.

## Partnership districts remained focused on teacher pipeline opportunities for recruitment and financial incentives for recruitment and retention.

**FIGURE 3.9. District-Based Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategies in Partnership Districts, 2024-25**



*Note: Principals were asked to select all the teacher recruitment and retention initiatives (presented in the graph) that their district was currently implementing. The graph shows the percentage of principals who selected each initiative.*

## 04

## Section Four: Curriculum and Instruction

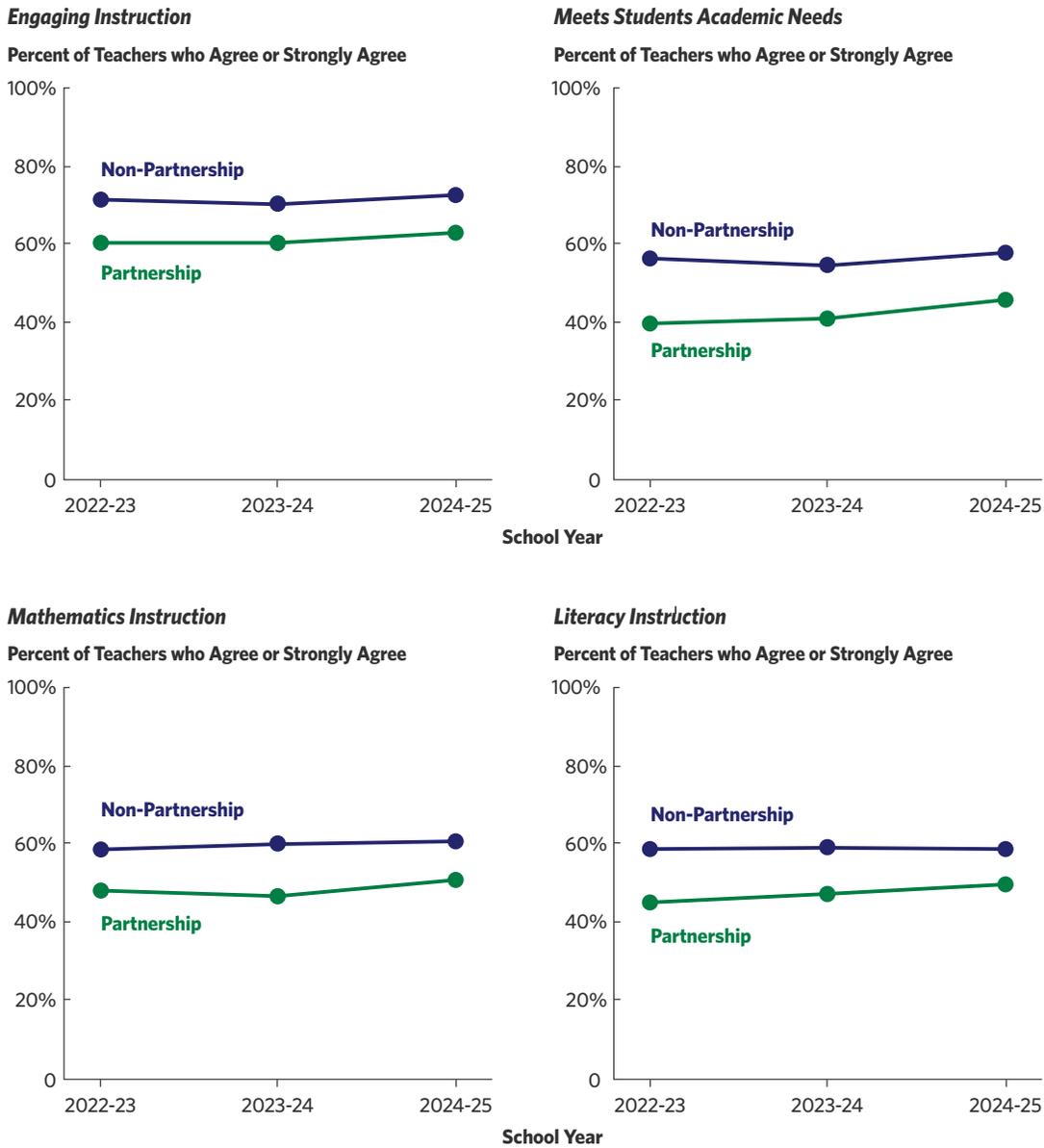


This section focuses on curriculum, instruction, and related supports in Partnership districts and schools. Survey and case study data show modest but uneven improvements in instructional quality, with Partnership schools continuing to lag behind non-Partnership schools despite incremental progress. Districts reported efforts to adopt new curricula and strengthen the fidelity of implementation, alongside an increasing implementation fidelity of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Leaders described initiatives to build instructional infrastructure through teacher buy-in, professional development, and superintendent visibility. Finally, teacher reports of school climate and leadership improved slightly.

### DESPITE MODEST IMPROVEMENTS OVER TIME, PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY

As in previous years, we asked teachers whether they agreed with four items related to instructional quality: meeting students' academic needs, strong literacy instruction, strong mathematics instruction, and effectively engaging students. We observed some modest increases over time in the percentage of teachers who agree or strongly agree (Figure 4.1) with each of these items. In some cases, these increases were slightly greater for Partnership schools than non-Partnership schools. For example, for literacy instruction, the percentage of teachers who agreed that their school "does a great job with literacy practice and instruction" increased in Partnership schools from 44% in 2022-23 to 49% in 2024-25. By contrast, the results for this item remained essentially unchanged for non-Partnership schools (about 58% each year).

**FIGURE 4.1. Teacher-Reported Instructional Quality Over Time in Partnership Districts, by Partnership Status**



*Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: “This school does a great job with literacy practice and instruction,” “this school does a great job with mathematics instruction,” “teachers effectively engage students in learning,” and “this school does a great job meeting students’ academic needs.” Answer options were strongly “disagree,” “disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.”*

While these results suggest greater improvements in Partnership schools, the increases are small, and the overall results remain lower for Partnership schools than non-Partnership schools. In other words, teachers’ responses to these survey items show both incremental progress and persistent challenges with improving instruction in Partnership schools.

In our case studies, district and school leaders acknowledged that while some progress has been made in improving instructional quality, meaningful change remains slow for several reasons. A Blizzard principal emphasized that current efforts were laying the foundation for long-term instructional improvement:

*This is year two of some very big shifts. I would expect that by the end of next year, and certainly by the end of the fourth year, that we've seen some change and some fruits of our labor, and then from there, really see a big up-tick in success that's tangible to the state.*

The principal's reflection underscores how instructional changes often take time to produce measurable gains on state assessments. Relatedly, a Hornets district leader reflected on the district's ongoing struggle to raise student achievement. The Hornets leader explained:

*We saw gains across the board last year. I would say incremental gains. In order to show impactful gains, you must change what takes place in the classroom and it must be high quality. We're looking to see impactful gains in our achievement.*

Together, these reflections illustrate that focusing on high-quality teaching across grade levels is crucial for producing substantive gains in student academic outcomes.

## DISTRICTS FOCUSED ON HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION "WITH FIDELITY"

Across Partnership districts, leaders described both changes in curriculum and efforts to strengthen the implementation of existing materials, highlighting how some districts are selecting curriculum, while others are focused on improving how curricular materials are used in classrooms. Several leaders noted recent changes to curriculum materials, which were often driven by the needs of students. A Blizzard school leader described replacing their district's math curriculum:

*We realized that the programs that we were using had already plateaued. The curriculum was a problem. It was not as challenging as it needed to be, and it was not meeting the needs of the students...I worked with the ISD. The ISD applied for the same grant I applied [for], and they embedded us in there, and then I did. We got coaches. We did all this stuff through the ISD. They're helping us with the PD.*

The district was aware that they would need assistance with the implementation of the new curriculum, so they ensured ISD support with PD and instructional coaching. Similarly, a Chargers school leader emphasized that while some new curriculum materials had been adopted, the district priority was ensuring consistent classroom use, "We've been implementing with fidelity. I'll say that because we started using some of it [the new curriculum materials], but this year, I really believe that we're doing things utilizing our resources with fidelity." This shift suggests an investment in ensuring that instructional materials are available and used consistently in classrooms.

Other leaders emphasized that curriculum materials alone are not enough to drive instructional improvement. A Hornets district leader shared that:

*We need to have more conversation, more discussion and training around Tier 1... It's gotta be something with instruction... and it can't be the curriculum, I wouldn't think it's the curriculum, we are now in year two going into year three with the implementation of a new curriculum.*

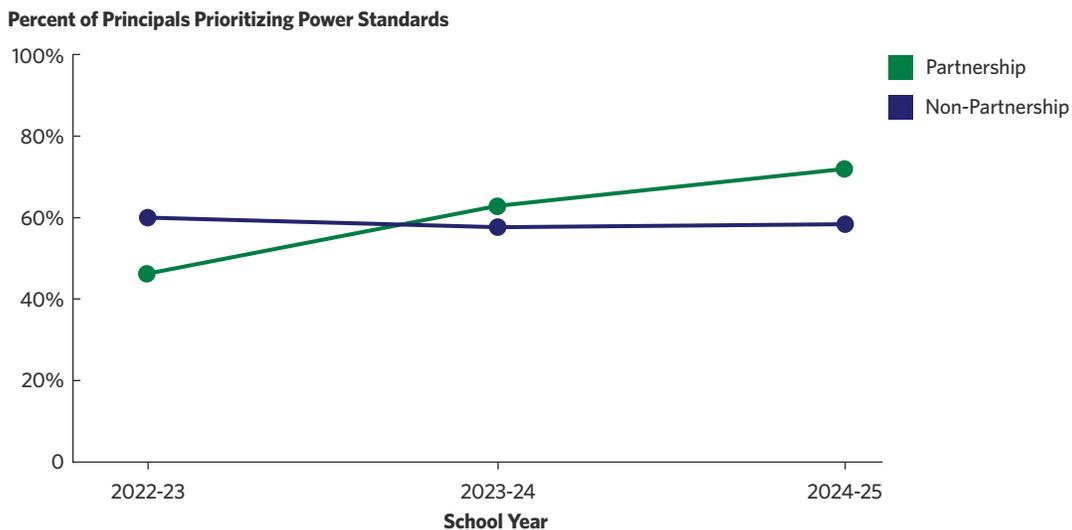
The leader emphasized the importance of strengthening instructional practice in addition to adopting new curricular materials. One way districts attempted to deliver more consistent instruction was by using curriculum platforms. A Chargers leader stated that in this platform:

*[One teacher] can see her daily lesson plans in her lesson planning calendar. It has been really helpful for her to have all of that kind of right there. Then our math teacher, we have a long-term sub in our Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2 class. It's been super helpful for her because, again, she could see all of the lessons and all the resources. She's just able to pull it all from that platform.*

These reflections underscore that selecting curriculum materials is the first step in delivering quality instruction; however, improving instruction requires robust systems and supports to promote implementation.

Related to Partnership schools' focus on improving instruction, our survey data show a large increase in the percentage of Partnership school leaders prioritizing "power standards" as a strategy to accelerate student learning or address students' academic needs. In our survey question, we defined power standards for principals as "key standards/pieces of the curriculum that are necessary building blocks for students' future learning." The percentage of principals who reported prioritizing power standards rose steadily from under half of principals in 2022-23 to over 70% in 2024-25. By contrast, about 60% of non-Partnership school principals consistently reported prioritizing power standards. These results suggest a meaningful shift over time in how Partnership school leaders planned to improve instruction.

**FIGURE 4.2. Principal-Reported Prioritization of Power Standards by Partnership Status, Over Time Status**



*Note: Principals were asked the extent they were prioritizing power standards (i.e., key standards/pieces of the curriculum that are necessary building blocks for students' future learning) as a strategy to accelerate learning or address student needs. Answer options were "not at all," "to a minimal extent," "to a moderate extent," "to a great extent," or "this is a top priority in our school." The figure above shows the percentage of respondents who selected the "great extent" or "top priority" options.*

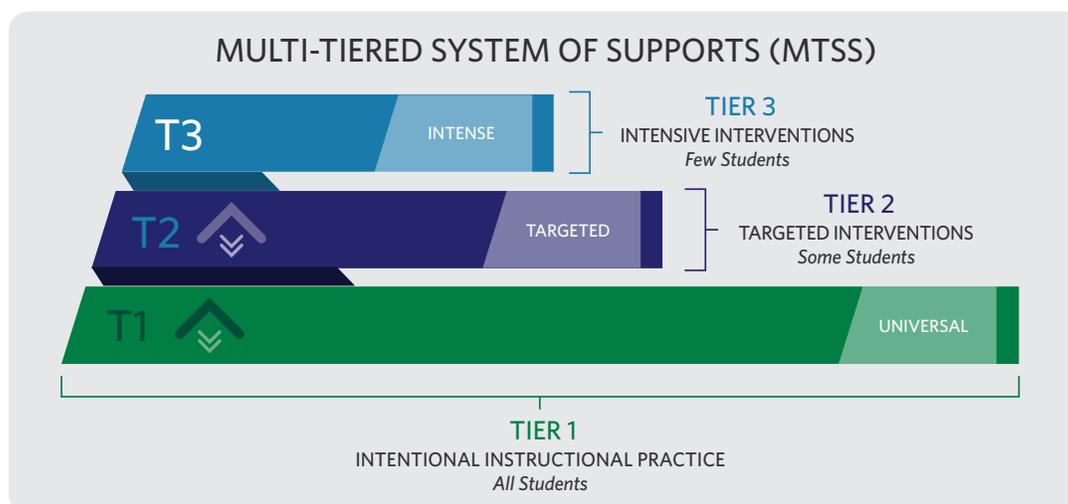
## PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS SHOWED SOME IMPROVEMENT IN MTSS IMPLEMENTATION

Instructional MTSS is one of the most common strategies for academic improvement across the current round of Partnership districts (Cullum et al., 2024). Survey results indicated that more schools made progress toward implementing MTSS, particularly in areas like screening and infrastructure. Partnership schools, however, trailed their non-Partnership counterparts in reaching full implementation, underscoring persistent capacity challenges. In addition, district leaders described a stronger emphasis on system-wide alignment and monitoring, and principals reported increasingly prioritizing in-person tutoring as a way to accelerate student learning.

### MTSS Implementation Progressed, Though Partnership Schools Still Lag Behind Non-Partnership Schools

In 2024-25, we saw evidence of increasing progress on MTSS implementation—a change from the limited progress we found previously (Singer, et al., 2024b). We collected data on three different features of an instructional MTSS: screening and classifying students, implementing instructional interventions, and infrastructure to support the MTSS (Figure 4.3). Screening and classifying practices include using assessments to screen for math or ELA needs and using data to classify students into tiers for intervention. Implementation practices include the use of tier 2 and tier 3 interventions as well as the use of data to select and monitor interventions. Finally, infrastructure to support MTSS includes adequate time, resources, leadership, and related professional development.

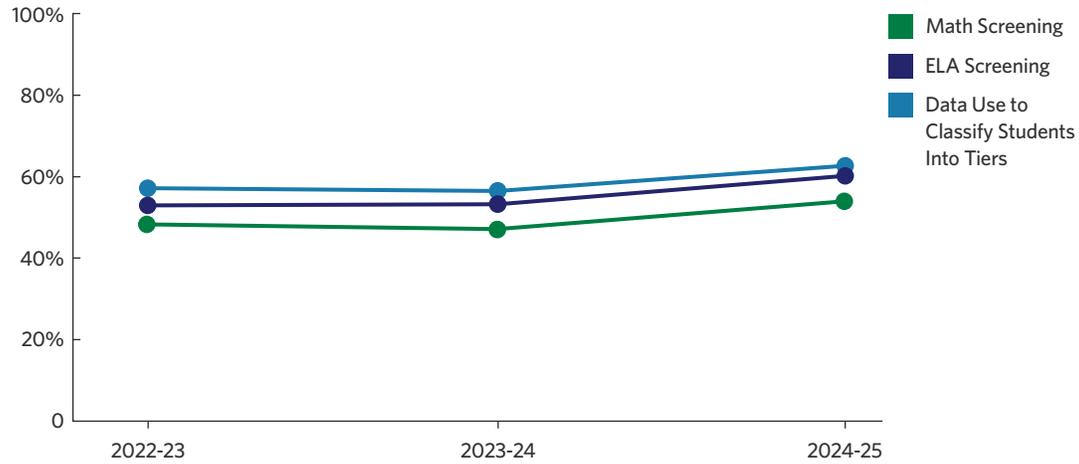
For all three features of MTSS, we observed an increase in the percentage of teachers reporting that elements were fully implemented. Increases were greater for screening and classification practices (6 percentage points [pp] on average) and infrastructure (7pp on average), with slightly less progress on the implementation of interventions. Notably, we did not find an increase in the percentage of schools fully implementing “tier 3” (or intensive) interventions. These results suggest that progress has been slower for those elements most demanding to implement. In addition, it is important to note that across the three features of MTSS, infrastructure remained at the lowest overall levels of full implementation, highlighting a persistent challenge for districts to provide resources, leadership, and support for MTSS.



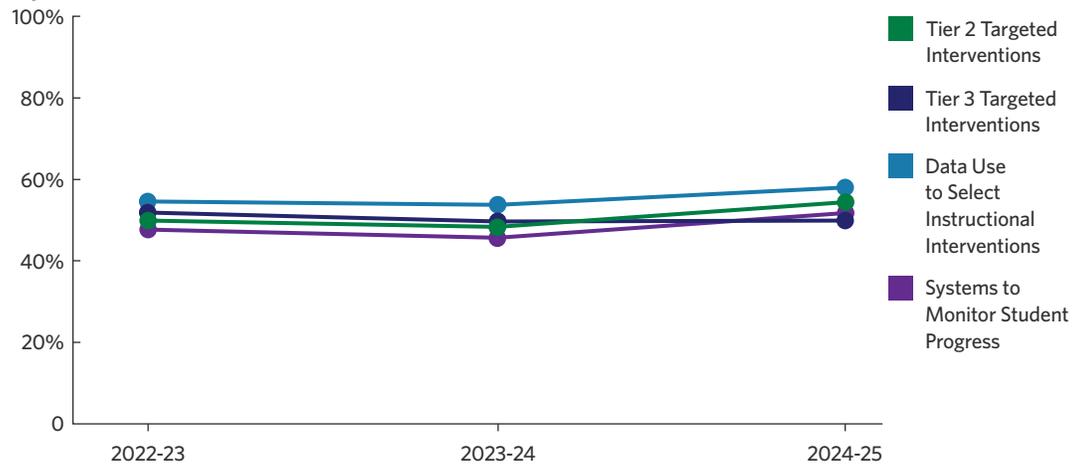
**FIGURE 4.3. Teacher-Reported Instructional MTSS Implementation Over Time**

**Screening and Classification**

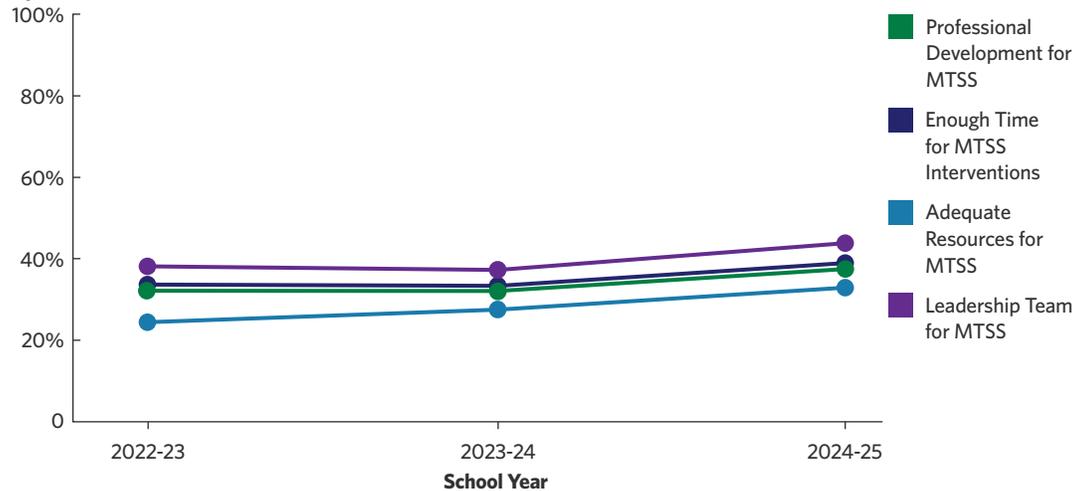
**Percent of Teachers Reporting Full Implementation**



**Implementation**



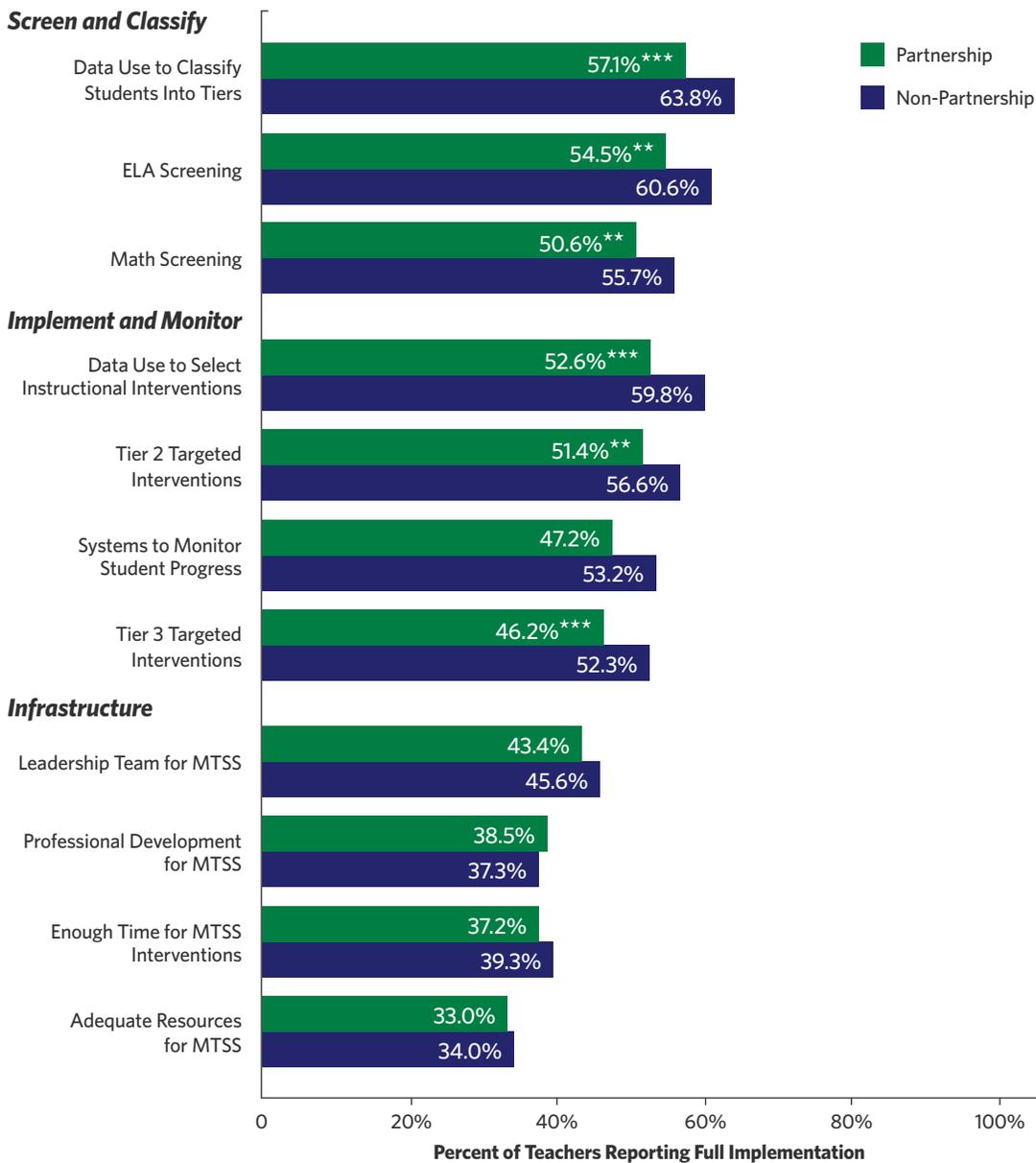
**Infrastructure**



Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which their schools had implemented various elements for their instructional MTSS. Answer options were: "not at all implemented," "partially implemented," or "fully implemented." Teachers could also select "I don't know" and those responses are excluded from the figures.

We also found gaps in implementation by Partnership status. Specifically, as shown in Figure 4.4., Partnership schools lagged slightly behind non-Partnership schools in reaching full implementation for screening and classification strategies as well as for implementing and monitoring interventions. We found around a 5-7pp difference in the percentage of teachers reporting full implementation of these MTSS elements. Notably, the differences related to MTSS infrastructure were minimal and statistically insignificant, reinforcing the district-level influence on MTSS infrastructure.

**FIGURE 4.4. Teacher-Reported Instructional MTSS Implementation by Partnership Status, 2024-25**



Note: Teachers were asked the extent to which their schools had implemented various elements for their instructional MTSS. Answer options were: "not at all implemented," "partially implemented," or "fully implemented." Teachers could also select "I don't know" and those responses are excluded from these figures. . \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

In our case study districts, leaders described MTSS implementation as a growing priority, with efforts increasingly focused on consistency and monitoring. A Blizzard school leader shared:

*For the first year in I don't know how many years, we have a functional MTSS team. We are bringing teachers in and talking through what's happening in a tier one level in your classroom and what interventions could be in place now to help students in your classroom that you can be implementing, or that somebody else can assist with implementation. We have these things now, and they are aligned to MICIP [the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process].*

This leader noted that they had an MTSS team before, but this year the team was more stable, and they were able to focus on implementing and aligning processes with their district initiatives and improvement plans. A Hornets district leader echoed this sentiment by sharing how their district is prioritizing MTSS implementation as a districtwide initiative. The leader stated:

*We are doing a heavy focus on MTSS this year, district-wide... We have a new framework that we're following as well, and so we're being very intentional around MTSS in our district... Last year, we did have MTSS being implemented at individual schools. It just was not a district-wide initiative. I wouldn't say that we didn't have it last year. It was just not led intentionally.*

The leader's comment highlights a shift in focus from school initiatives to district-wide initiatives. A Chargers district leader described a similar focus on ongoing monitoring and refinement in their school district:

*We've had MTSS. We monitor our MTSS systems. It looks a little different in every school, but really streamlining the behavior side of MTSS and the reporting side... We're just looking at really refining our MTSS program... Really start to support our schools in that true MTSS systematic approach to both academics and behavior.*

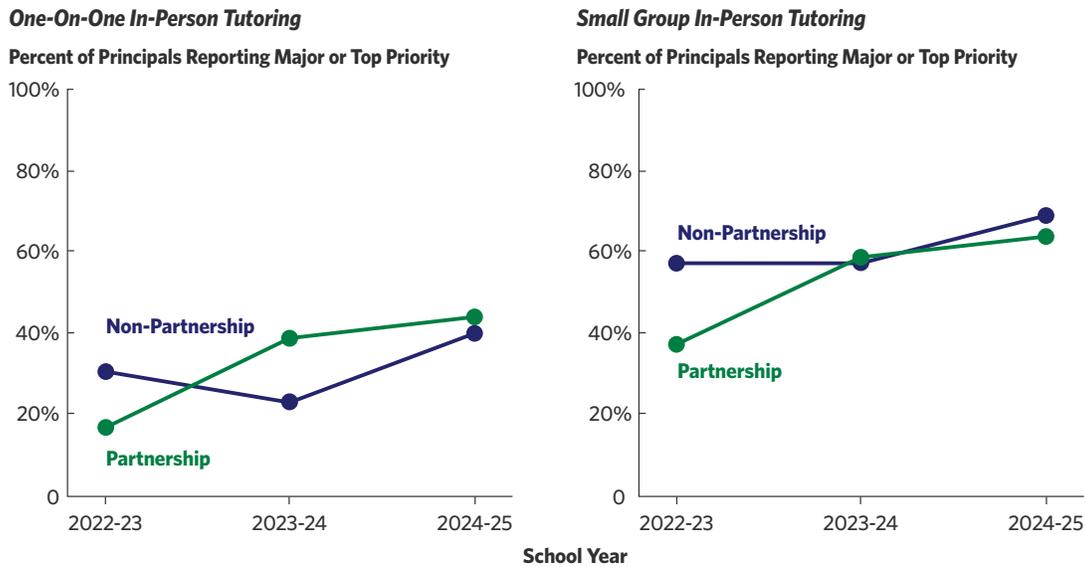
These findings emphasize that Partnership districts are shifting toward more structured and aligned MTSS implementation.

## Principals Further Increased Their Prioritization of Tutoring

In addition to MTSS, we collected data on the use of tutoring. We found that an increasing share of principals reported prioritizing in-person tutoring, continuing a prior trend. Though we found some differences by Partnership status in prior years, by 2024-25, a similar share of principals from Partnership and non-Partnership schools alike reported prioritizing 1-on-1 tutoring (around 40%) and small-group tutoring (around 65%).

We also collected data on virtual tutoring. We found that the share of principals prioritizing virtual tutoring did not increase meaningfully or statistically significantly from the prior year, remaining at a low level overall (Singer, et al., 2024b). Thus, in keeping with the evidence of the limitations of virtual tutoring (Barshay, 2022; Robinson et al., 2025), Partnership districts have been prioritizing in-person tutoring over virtual options.

**FIGURE 4.5. Principal-Reported Prioritization of Tutoring by Partnership Status, Over Time**



Note: Principals were asked the extent to which they were prioritizing one-on-one and small-group in-person tutoring as strategies to accelerate learning and address student needs. Answer options were: "not at all," "to a minimal extent," "to a moderate extent," "to a great extent," or "this is a top priority in our school."

## DISTRICTS CONTINUED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

District and school leaders across Partnership districts described ongoing efforts to strengthen the instructional infrastructure by focusing on leadership visibility, staff buy-in and alignment between professional development and practice. One Chargers school leader emphasized that progress in instruction is rooted in teacher buy-in when trying new instructional approaches and professional development, but also in creating a space where taking instructional risks are encouraged:

*We have buy-in from the teachers, and we're making sure that we tell them that's it okay to take a risk and try and see if things work, and then if things don't work, then to try something different, so it's going well. I think teachers are comfortable as far as delivering instruction. We've also had a couple of professional development days... that has gone really well because that's helped to make the teachers more involved and more confident in their teaching style, so things are going well.*

In contrast, a Blizzard school leader highlighted the challenge of teacher buy-in when implementing new teaching strategies:

*I think that sometimes it's difficult when people are used to doing things a certain way...Having those conversations about why the change is needed and providing the tools that they need to be successful has probably been one of the biggest challenges, the buy-in for everyone.*

To support this work, both Hornets and Blizzard district leaders shared how their superintendent took an active role in instructional leadership. The Blizzard district leader shared:

*The superintendent's taken an instructional leadership role. She's in schools. We go and spend a lot of time in schools. I become principal. I become teacher at times. All of us serve as modeling learning at all parts in time.*

The Blizzard district leader emphasized the importance of modeling instruction for their teachers. Both leaders pointed to superintendent visibility as key, though they described it in different ways. The Blizzard district leader described it as modeling instructional practices and a Hornets distinct leader as cultivating relationships that enable learning. The Hornets superintendent shared how they approach instructional improvement by focusing on relationships, *“We’ve got to help staff have the capacity to build capacity in them, how to develop relationships with students. When you get the relationship, then you get the expectations.”* Both district leaders emphasized how superintendents were actively strengthening their districts’ infrastructure by being present in the schools and fostering the conditions needed for improvement.

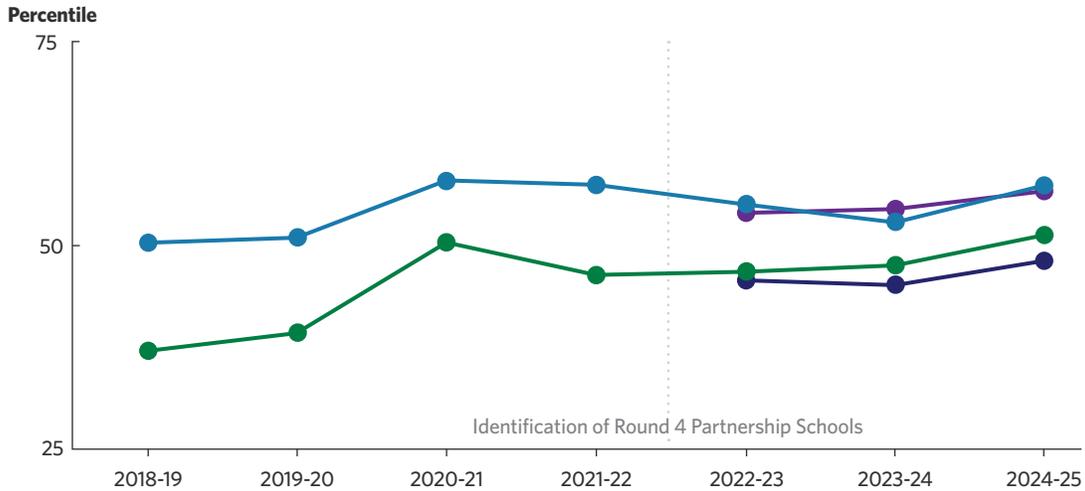
## TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE AND LEADERSHIP SHOW MODEST IMPROVEMENTS

Finally, we found evidence of improvements in school climate and school leadership for Partnership schools. Though modest, these improvements are significant, as they help create the conditions for school improvement (Harbatkin, et al., 2025a; Harbatkin & Henry, 2019), and we found little change in these measures during the prior school year (Singer, et al., 2024b).

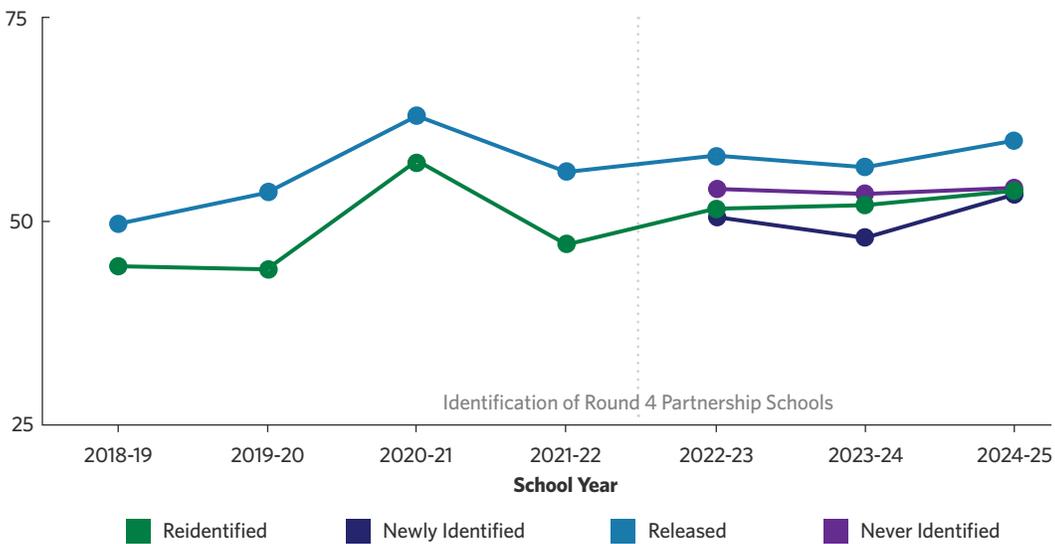
We track school climate and school leadership with constructs created from a set of questions teachers answered (see Appendix B for more details). We have asked these same questions for seven consecutive years, which allows us to track these measures over time (Figure 4.6). Teacher-reported measures of school climate and school leadership in 2024-25 increased in Partnership and non-Partnership schools alike. While reidentified and especially newly identified Partnership schools scored lower than non-Partnership schools on our measure of school climate, they scored about the same (on average) as non-Partnership schools. These increases, however modest, offer additional evidence of improvements for Partnership schools over the past school year.

**FIGURE 4.6. Measures of School Climate and School Leadership Over Time by Partnership Status**

**Culture and Climate**



**School Leadership**



Notes: Marker heights represent mean percentiles of reidentified, newly identified, released, and never identified schools in response to items related to school climate and school leadership, asked in all survey waves. The 50th percentile denotes the average response across teachers and principals in all years. A mean response above this line indicates that a given group reported more positive school climate or school leadership than the average respondent across teachers and principals in the four survey waves. A mean response below this line indicates that a given group reported a more negative climate or school leadership.



## Section Five:

# Student Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism

---

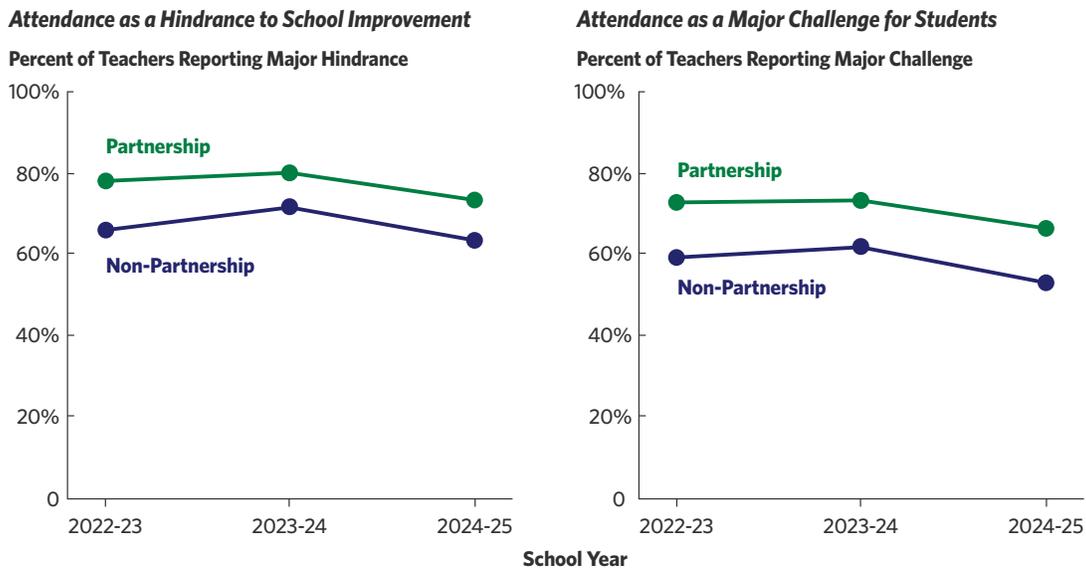
This section covers student attendance and chronic absenteeism in Partnership districts. Survey data suggest modest improvements, with fewer teachers identifying absenteeism as a major hindrance to school improvement or a major challenge for students. Still, overall levels of concern remain high, particularly in Partnership schools. District leaders described incremental progress implementing their attendance strategies, even as underlying attendance challenges remain.

## ATTENDANCE REMAINS A MAJOR CHALLENGE, DESPITE SOME MODEST IMPROVEMENTS

Our survey results suggest some progress on student attendance issues, though they remain a major challenge, especially for Partnership schools. Figure 5.1 shows responses over time for two survey items: the first captures the percentage of teachers who report attendance as a hindrance to school improvement (left) and the second captures the percentage of teachers who report attendance as a major challenge for students in their school (right).

On both measures, the percentage of teachers who agree or strongly agree has decreased since 2022-23. For example, for Partnership schools, the percentage of teachers identifying absenteeism as a major hindrance fell from about 80% to 73%; and the percentage of teachers identifying attendance as a major challenge for students fell from about 73% to 66%. Despite these positive signs, the absolute level of concern about attendance among Partnership school teachers remains high—and even higher than among teachers in non-Partnership schools—reinforcing the persistence of this issue.

**FIGURE 5.1. Teacher-Reported Attendance as a Hindrance to Improvement and a Major Issue Over Time, by Partnership Status**



Notes: On the left, teachers and principals were asked to indicate the extent to which student attendance was a hindrance to school improvement. Options were: "not a hindrance," "a slight hindrance," "a moderate hindrance," "a great hindrance," and "the greatest hindrance." On the right, teachers were asked to what extent student attendance was a challenge for their students. The options were: "not a challenge," "a minimal challenge," "a moderate challenge," "a major challenge," "the greatest challenge," and "not sure." Results displayed in this graph exclude respondents who selected "not sure."

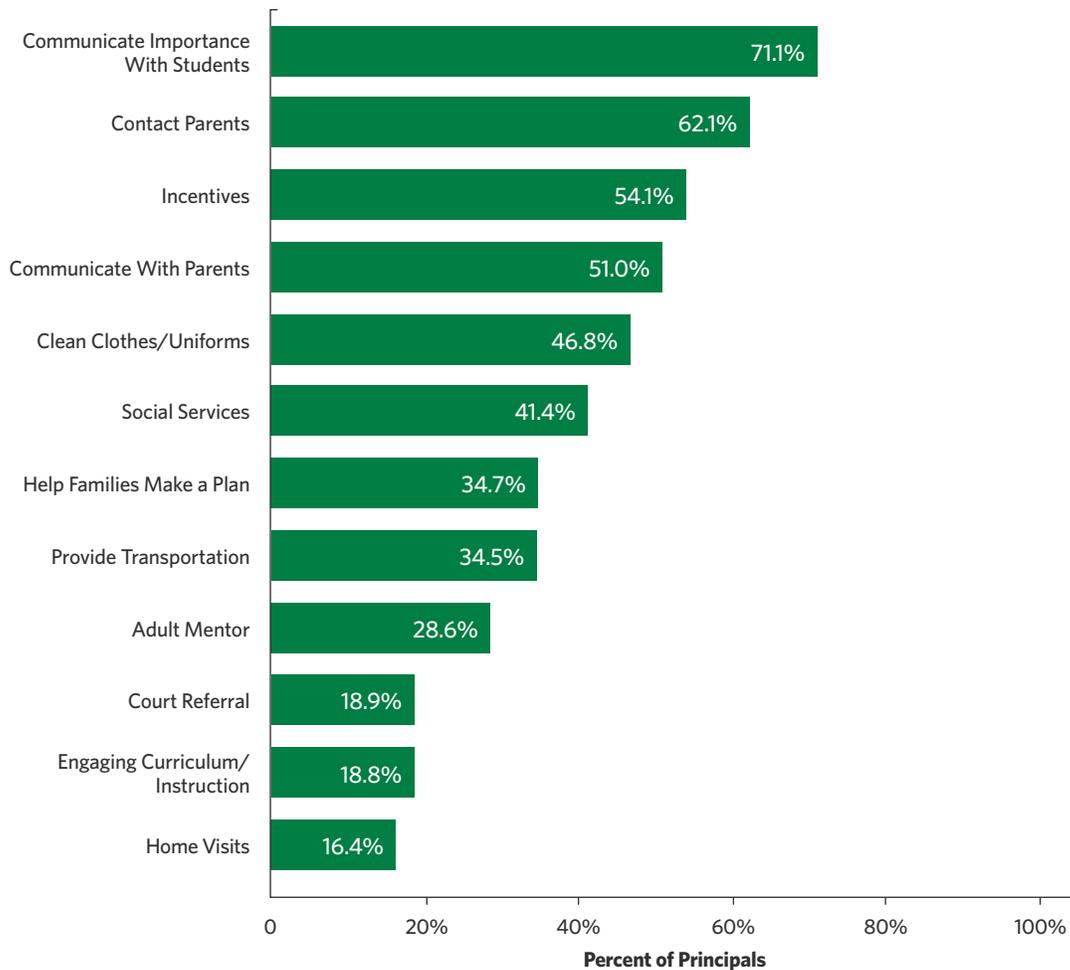
## WHILE ATTENDANCE STRATEGIES REMAIN SIMILAR, IMPLEMENTATION HAS PROGRESSED

Partnership districts continued to rely on familiar strategies to address attendance, such as communication with families and incentive programs, while less frequently implementing practices that tackle deeper barriers like arranging transportation or conducting home visits. What changed in 2024-25 was not the menu of strategies but the consistency with which they were carried out. Leaders reported that, with dedicated staff and systems now in place, they could move from setting up attendance frameworks to fully implementing them. This shift highlights how staffing stability and structured routines enabled districts to apply attendance interventions with greater fidelity across schools.

### Attendance Strategies Remain Similar to Prior Years

Overall, the strategies that principals in Partnership districts report using to improve attendance have not changed meaningfully. As in prior years (Singer, 2024; Singer, et al., 2024a; Singer, et al., 2024b), the most common practices include attendance incentives and communication with students and parents. Strategies that more directly address barriers to attendance—such as arranging transportation, referring resources and social services to families, or conducting home visits to identify and address barriers—remain less frequent. These results are comparable to strategies used by other high-absenteeism districts statewide (Singer & Lenhoff, 2025).

**FIGURE 5.2. Attendance Strategies Reported by Principals in Partnership Districts, 2024-25**



*Notes: Principals were asked, "How often do staff members in your school use the following practices to improve student attendance?" Options were: "never," "once or twice a year," "once or twice a month," "weekly," or "daily." We considered a practice to be implemented frequently if a principal selected weekly or daily. This figure shows the percent of principals reporting the use of each practice frequently.*

### District Leaders Focus on Strengthening the Implementation of Attendance Systems

Several Partnership system leaders described how attendance intervention systems that had been established in previous years achieved consistency in staffing and implementation in 2024-2025, enabling system leaders to redirect time, energy, and resources previously focused on setting up these systems toward the systematized implementation of attendance interventions. For instance, the Hornets superintendent described how consistency in staffing the district’s attendance liaison positions enabled the district to establish a collaborative environment in weekly attendance meetings, contributing to consistency in attendance initiative implementation district-wide:

*That time [in attendance team meetings] is spent connecting as a team and making certain that I connect with them in my role, and talking openly about families in crisis, talking openly about what we're seeing in terms of trends. Is this working? Is this not working?*

Similarly, a Chargers leader described how, despite setting up a systematic approach for identifying and responding to chronic absenteeism in previous years, 2024-25 was the first year when consistent staff were available to implement this system. With parent liaison and attendance liaison positions fully staffed, leaders could ensure consistent monitoring of absenteeism data and meet regularly with students and families to implement attendance interventions:

*I feel like we had a systematic approach before, but when you don't have the human bodies to actually carry out the systematic approach—not that it doesn't become a priority, but there's competing priorities. It just takes away from that function and really doing that system with fidelity. I feel like because of these new positions that are really focused on homelessness and attendance, chronic absenteeism . . . now they have more manpower to be able to do that with fidelity.*

System leaders' experiences demonstrate that while Partnership districts continued to prioritize attendance, addressing chronic absenteeism involved not only the work of designing and setting up monitoring and intervention systems, but also their implementation—a process that required the consistent staffing of attendance liaison positions and regular meetings with attendance teams.



## Section Six:

# The Partnership Model and Support From OPD

---

This section details Partnership district and school leaders' perspectives on the Partnership Model, as well as the support they receive from OPD and ISDs. Case study evidence suggests an accumulating influence of Partnership status over time, both in ways that are beneficial (e.g., providing resources, clarity, and momentum) and burdensome (e.g., reporting requirements, repeated identification creating fatigue and stigma). Partnership school leaders characterized the requirements of their Partnership Agreements — as aligned with their broader improvement goals and relationships with Partnership Agreement liaisons, OPD staff, and ISD consultants — were still widely viewed as collaborative and supportive.

## THE ACCUMULATING INFLUENCE OF PARTNERSHIP STATUS: BOTH A BLESSING AND A CURSE

As systems experienced successive years of reidentification as Partnership districts, system leaders increasingly began to view Partnership less as a set of turnaround strategies which operate alongside other district initiatives and more as the driving force guiding and aligning district improvement efforts. In our case study districts, several leaders in systems that had operated under Partnership for multiple consecutive years described how the designation compelled them to realign district activities according to Partnership expectations. A Blizzard leader went so far as to describe the district's relationship with OPD as *"hand-in-glove,"* as district initiatives related to curriculum, professional development, and routines for data review and monitoring achieved *"total alignment"* with Partnership goals. The Hornets superintendent similarly reported that Partnership *"drove our agenda"* by compelling system leaders to base their decisions on data identified as important in the benchmark review process. *"I don't think what I do drives the Partnership,"* they explained. *"I think the Partnership drives what I do":*

*The Partnership allows you to figure out what your issues are. It helps you prioritize them when you can see them. Honestly, when you're cited for them, it gives you the perfect opportunity to pinpoint what you need to do...I really love the idea of the Partnership because it allows a team to focus on issues, to know what the issues are, to drive your district forward.*

These system leaders' observations demonstrate that, as systems' Partnership status was sustained over multiple years, its influence on the shape and direction of district improvement initiatives accumulated over time.

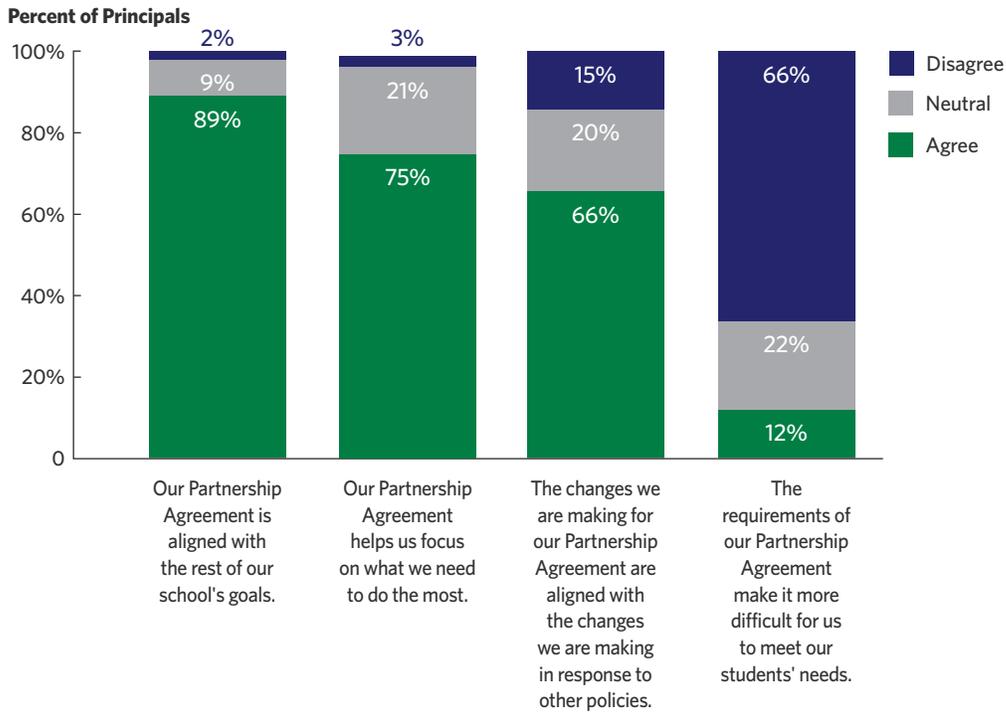
At the same time, some system leaders described how Partnership's accumulating reporting requirements, expectations to demonstrate growth year after year, and looming threats of removal for underperformance induced a form of "Partnership fatigue" that strained system and school leaders' capacities for sustaining improvement efforts. Specifically, system leaders perceived the stigma attached to repeat identification as shifting Partnership from an energizing to a demoralizing force. The Hornets superintendent described this phenomenon in detail:

*When it [Partnership] goes on for so long, it becomes a fatigue. In the beginning, there might be a little bit of energy toward it, but by the end of the year, or year two or year three, you're fatigued...I would think that everybody else has the same fatigue that you get with this, because it's not something that's necessarily energizing. It's a little bit deflating... You're trying the best that you can with the people that you have, and you still get the same thing. Then there's the pressure of, "Uh oh, removal," or in this case, losing the resource.*

Thus, at the same time that system and school leaders perceived Partnership as "giv[ing] muscle" to and providing financial support for efforts to advance Partnership-aligned reforms, they also saw Partnership's substantial data reporting requirements, mandatory meetings, and accumulating sense of stigma as obstacles that strained their improvement efforts. In this way, school and system leaders perceived Partnership as both a benefit and a burden, as its infusion of resources and technical assistance came attached to expectations that leaders would take on significant additional work: for instance, a Hornets superintendent described how he "wanted to be off the list, of course," but "on the flip side, I also want the resources. It's a blessing and a curse."

In our survey data, we found that Partnership school principals largely viewed their Partnership Agreements as aligned with their broader school improvement efforts. Figure 6.1 shows Partnership school principal responses on five survey items related to their Partnership Agreements. A majority of principals agreed that their Partnership Agreements were aligned with the rest of their school's improvement goals; that their Partnership Agreements helped them focus on what they most need to improve; and that the changes they were making for their Partnership Agreements are aligned with changes in response to other policies. In addition, most principals disagreed with the statement that their Partnership Agreements made it more difficult to meet their students' needs. These responses reinforce our case study findings that leaders largely felt that the expectations of the Partnership Model were congruent with their own visions for school improvement.

**FIGURE 6.1. Partnership School Principal Views on Their Partnership Agreements, 2024-25**



Notes: Principals of Partnership schools were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements about their Partnership Agreements. Answer options were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." This figure shows the percent of Partnership school principals who disagreed, agreed, or were neutral.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND SUPPORT FROM OPD AND ISDS

Partnership system and school leaders consistently described their relationships with Partnership Agreement liaisons, OPD staff, and ISD consultants as positive, supportive, and collaborative. Leaders perceived their Partnership Agreement liaisons as advocates who were committed to supporting system improvement efforts. One Blizzard system leader described their Partnership Agreement liaison as a "warrior" who advocated on behalf of their district at the state level and who proved instrumental in coordinating professional development and other resources with their ISD. Hornets system leaders described feeling well-supported by their Partnership Agreement liaison and ISD representative, particularly in monthly meetings where decisions were made about professional development, staff recruitment and retention incentives, and curriculum adoption. Hornets leaders praised their Partnership Agreement liaison for their consistency, accessibility, and strategic advice. Chargers leaders shared a similar sense that their Partnership Agreement liaison and other OPD staff played key roles in orchestrating productive monthly data review meetings and annual benchmark review meetings that brought together key constituents for strategic planning and to make important decisions. As one Chargers leader said of their most recent benchmark review meeting:

*It really was a wonderful experience, getting to that midpoint of the Partnership agreements and celebrating the success and feeling of encouragement, with so many people in a meeting, but then also having those critical conversations about what we still need to do and that razor-sharp focus. It was very encouraging about the overall process in and of itself. We do feel the support.*

Several system leaders described their relationships with OPD and ISD staff as collaborative rather than hierarchical. In Blizzard, a system leader characterized their Partnership Agreement liaison as a “*thought partner*” who regularly collaborated with district leaders to help them design and implement improvement efforts, while a Blizzard school leader described them as a “*consistent figure*” who “*really helped to chunk up what needed to happen related to the Partnership*” and was “*accessible*” throughout the Partnership process. In Hornets, system leaders described their regular meetings with their Partnership Agreement liaison and ISD consultant as opportunities to “*build synergy.*” The Hornets superintendent expressed a sense that, during these meetings, they were granted autonomy to “*be creative and come up with ideas. I don’t need permission.*”

The collaborative nature of system leaders’ relationships with OPD and ISD staff enabled them to retain some agency as implementers of Partnership reform, even as the structures of Partnership played more powerful roles in determining their district’s improvement approach. While Partnership specified a system’s performance goals and made resources and technical assistance available to support leaders’ efforts to achieve them, leaders could still make decisions about how to prioritize those resources and how to communicate about and motivate change.



## Section Seven: Implications and Recommendations

---

Overall, we found that Partnership districts and schools made modest but meaningful progress in their improvement efforts during the 2024–25 school year. Districts reported fewer struggles filling vacancies, and teachers expressed somewhat higher satisfaction and stronger intentions to remain in their schools and districts. Reports of instructional quality showed small improvements, and districts made some progress with MTSS implementation and increased their focus on power standards and tutoring to address student learning needs. Some schools reported early signs of improvement in student attendance systems.

At the same time, progress remained uneven across schools and subject to persistent constraints. Human capital challenges, particularly shortages of certified teachers and heavy reliance on substitutes in charter schools, continued to limit districts' ability to sustain gains. Instructional improvements often remained incremental, with Partnership schools still trailing non-Partnership schools on several key indicators. Chronic absenteeism likewise remains a major challenge for Partnership schools.

District leaders reported that Partnership identification brought needed resources and alignment, though it sometimes added strain through repeated reporting requirements and stigma. District and school leaders valued the practical support from OPD and their ISDs, which helped provide professional development, coaching, and access to resources.

The end of Round 4 of the Partnership Model offers an opportunity to reflect upon the process of school turnaround in Michigan and the experiences of Partnership schools and districts. Our prior recommendations—from increasing the additional funding for Partnership districts and continuing OPD's supports for districts to maintaining a state-level focus on teacher supply and high-quality instructional resources—remain important (Singer, et al., 2024b). Based on the findings in this report, we offer the following additional implications and recommendations for the Partnership Model.

### **Recognize and Adjust to the Incremental Pace of Improvement**

School improvement is rarely immediate. Rather, it takes time for districts and schools to develop, implement, and refine new systems and strategies (Peurach & Neumerski, 2015). In Round 4, most Partnership schools spent the first year or more laying the groundwork—building staffing pipelines, piloting curricula, and setting up attendance systems—before moving toward implementation with fidelity (Singer, et al., 2024b). It may take even longer before these efforts translate into measurable changes in student outcomes. In addition, the progress we have documented may be fragile, and instability (e.g., staff or leadership turnover, loss of resources, or changes in the policy environment) could jeopardize progress.

Our findings have important implications about the timeline for school improvement, as well as how the state and OPD set expectations, monitor progress, and support school turnaround. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, states are required to identify their “bottom 5%” schools every three years (Harbatkin & Wolf, 2023). This limits the state’s ability to extend the timeline for Partnership schools to demonstrate improvement. Still, within these constraints, policymakers still may be able to extend the runway of support for turnaround schools.

For schools that are released from Partnership status, one option would be to extend the timeline for receiving additional funding and support. Partnership districts are able to use their 21h funding to make investments aligned to their improvement goals, such as hiring key personnel, providing new coaching or professional development, or purchasing new curricula or other necessary materials (Burns et al., 2023; Cullum et al., 2024). In addition, Partnership schools are often given priority for other sources of funding, such as discretionary funds that ISDs can provide. There is a similar dynamic for coaching and professional development—Partnership Agreement liaisons and ISD consultants work closely with district and school leaders as they plan for school improvement, and ISDs in particular provide additional support through professional development as they carry out their improvement efforts (Burns et al., 2023; Cullum et al., 2024; Singer, et al., 2024b). Partnership schools and districts are sometimes prioritized for additional professional development and coaching, such as Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) literacy training or support with Michigan’s Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS). Even if the state cannot formally maintain a school’s Partnership status for longer than three years, it could designate a longer time period for additional funding and support—essentially a longer off-ramp to strengthen the conditions for these schools to sustain their progress.

For schools that are reidentified, another option would be to establish new forms of recognition for their progress within the three-year time window. Currently, Partnership Agreements include a mix of targets—some are based on student outcomes (e.g., test score achievement, test score growth, attendance), while others are based on organizational condition outcome (e.g., teacher retention), and some are “process” goals focused on implementation progress (Cullum et al., 2024). The process goals in particular can be seen as leading indicators of school improvement and offer a source of recognition for progress. The benchmark review process offers partial recognition of progress—for example, a school can be designated as “off-track with progress” (rather than just “off-track”) even if it does not meet its interim goals at the halfway point of the Partnership Agreement. Still, process goals and other informal indicators of progress are not incorporated into the accountability measure that determines a school’s ranking in the “bottom 5%,” and meeting those goals alone may not be enough to be released from Partnership status if a school does not

show sufficient improvement in outcomes as well. A system that balances accountability with recognition would direct schools more effectively toward improvement while helping mitigate the reputational costs of continued Partnership status.

Finding additional ways to formally highlight a school's progress on staffing, instructional quality, or attendance systems could both motivate internal stakeholders and improve external perceptions. In lieu of more systematic changes to state accountability policy, OPD could create additional distinctions among reidentified Partnership schools—for example, designating schools that are reidentified with progress versus without progress. Acknowledgment of these prior school improvement efforts, even short of outcome gains, could help improve staff morale and trust, sustain internal commitment to the improvement process, and help mitigate the stigma that often comes along with turnaround status.

### **Continue to Prioritize Strategies to Build Human Capital in Partnership Districts**

Throughout our research on the Partnership Model, and indeed in the broader research literature on school turnaround, one lesson has been clear: the ability of districts to recruit and retain teachers and leaders determines whether new strategies can be implemented effectively (Burns et al., 2023; Harbatkin & Henry, 2019; Singer, et al., 2024b). This year's findings again highlight that staffing stability is a precondition for improvement. While we observed encouraging signs that retention and recruitment may be improving, we still found that Partnership schools face challenging conditions for staffing. Sustaining progress depends on stable staffing, so that schools can focus on improving instructional systems and strategies, rather than starting over to reorient new school leaders and teachers.

OPD and ISDs should continue to prioritize human capital strategies as a focus for Partnership districts and schools. Our findings show a relatively consistent focus on improving the pipeline for recruitment (e.g., education college partnerships, Grow Your Own initiatives) and financial incentives (e.g., salary increases, recruitment and retention bonuses). Partnership Agreement liaisons and ISD consultants can help their Partnership districts and schools monitor and refine the strategies they use for retention and recruitment, including an increased focus on improving teacher working conditions. They should also emphasize setting explicit human capital goals as part of the planning process, since we previously found that districts with explicitly stated goals showed notable progress implementing some human capital strategies (Singer, et al., 2024b).

In addition, state leaders and policymakers should maintain their focus on improving the supply of high-quality teacher candidates overall, with special attention to Partnership districts and schools and other harder-to-staff contexts. These can include: funding for fellowships and scholarships for aspiring teachers, GYO programs, student teaching stipends, and teacher mentoring and induction support (Kilbride et al., 2023; Singer, et al., 2024b; Torres et al., 2023).

### **Facilitate Cross-District Learning and the Sharing of Best Practices**

One final idea to consider is facilitating more peer learning for Partnership districts. While Partnership school and district leaders are working on similar problems and often facing similar challenges, there are limited systematic opportunities for sharing lessons across districts. As one district leader reflected during our case studies:

*One of the things I would ask...would be something where all the schools get together and they can talk about the Partnership, see something different from another school. Like, "Hey, what are they doing over there in such and such? What are they doing?" Instead of feeling isolated—sometimes you feel isolated. There's synergy when you get with others and you find out what they're doing, and exchanging of ideas and collaboration.*

District leaders consistently reported valuing the support of OPD, ISDs, and Partnership agreement liaisons. These supports helped them access funding, professional development, and technical assistance. Building on this foundation, OPD could play a stronger role as a convener—bringing districts together to exchange knowledge about what has worked for them. Cross-system trainings, joint professional development, or communities of practice could help educators and leaders learn from one another's successes and avoid repeating one another's mistakes.

There is an especially strong opportunity for this type of cross-district learning around the reidentification process. When the next round of Partnership schools is identified, OPD could host sessions to spotlight schools and districts that showed great progress. District and school leaders could speak about their experiences and lessons from their success, and Partnership Agreement liaisons can speak to how newly identified and reidentified schools and districts can incorporate these insights into their work together over the next round. This approach could help extend the insights from our research on the Partnership Model, helping strengthen OPD's position as a source of knowledge on school improvement and turnaround for Michigan.

## REFERENCES

- Barshay, J. (2022, February 14). Proof points: Uncertain evidence for online tutoring: It's a booming business in the wake of the pandemic. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-uncertain-evidence-for-online-tutoring/>
- Burns, J., Harbatkin, E., Strunk, K. O., Torres, C., McIlwain, A., & Frost Waldron, S. (2023). The efficacy and implementation of Michigan's Partnership Model of school and district turnaround: Mixed-methods evidence from the first 2 years of reform implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 45(4), 622–654. <https://doi.org/10.3102/O1623737221141415>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/designing-and-conducting-mixed-methods-research/book241842>
- Cullum, S., Singer, J., Strunk, K. O., Watson, C., Bertrand, A., Harbatkin, E., & Woulfin, S. L. (2024). *What are they planning? An analysis of Round 4 Partnership districts' improvement goals and plans*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/what-are-they-planning-an-analysis-of-round-4-partnership-districts-improvement-goals-and-plans/>
- Harbatkin, E., Burns, J., & Cullum, S. (2025a). The role of school climate in school turnaround. *Teachers College Record*, 126(11–12), 126–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681251318876>
- Harbatkin, E., & Henry, G. T. (2019, October 21). The cascading effects of principal turnover on students and schools. *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/10/21/the-cascading-effects-of-principal-turnover-on-students-and-schools/>
- Harbatkin, E., Moran, A. J., Cullum, S., Singer, J., Strunk, K. O., & Woulfin, S. L. (2025b). *Round 4 of the Partnership Model: 2023–24 outcomes report* [Research Report]. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/round-4-of-the-partnership-model-2023-24-outcomes-report/>
- Harbatkin, E., Nguyen, T. D., Strunk, K. O., Burns, J., & Moran, A. J. (2025c). Should I stay or should I go (later)? Teacher intentions and turnover in low-performing schools and districts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education Finance and Policy*, 20(4), 1–61. [https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp\\_a\\_00447](https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_a_00447)
- Harbatkin, E., & Wolf, B. (2023). *State accountability decisions under the Every Student Succeeds Act and the validity, stability, and equity of school ratings* (Working Paper Nos. 23–863). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://doi.org/10.26300/xt8e-0w18>
- Hewitt, K. K., & Mansfield, K. C. (2021). The role of mixed methods in increasing the relevancy of education policy research and evaluation. In A. M. Urick, D. E. DeMatthews, & T. G. Ford (Eds.), *Maximizing the policy relevance of research for school improvement* (p. 41). Information Age Publishing.
- Horn, J. L. (1965). A rationale and test for the number of factors in factor analysis. *Psychometrika*, 30(2), 179–185. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02289447>
- Kilbride, T., Strunk, K. O., Rogers, S., & Wasif, U. (2023). *Tracking progress through Michigan's teacher pipeline*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/tracking-progress-through-mi-teacher-pipeline/>
- Peurach, D. J., & Neumerski, C. M. (2015). Mixing metaphors: Building infrastructure for large scale school turnaround. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(4), 379–420. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9259-z>
- Robinson, C. D., Bisht, B., & Loeb, S. (2025). The inequity of opt-in educational resources and an intervention to increase equitable access. In *EdWorkingPapers.com*. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai22-654>
- Singer, J. (2024). Attendance practices in high-absenteeism districts. *Educational Policy*, 39(6), 1209–1240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048241288504>
- Singer, J., & Cullum, S. (2023). *Michigan's Partnership schools: An analysis of Round 4 identification* [White Paper]. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/mi-partnership-schools-an-analysis-of-round-4-identification/>

## REFERENCES (*continued*)

- Singer, J., & Lenhoff, S. W. (2025). *How are Michigan's schools addressing chronic absenteeism? Evidence from a statewide survey*. Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research, Wayne State University. <https://detroitpeer.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/How-Are-Michigans-Schools-Addressing-Chronic-Absenteeism.pdf>
- Singer, J., Strunk, K. O., Woulfin, S. L., Cullum, S., Lizarraga, L., Watson, C., & Harbatkin, E. (2024a). *Student attendance and well-being in Round 4 Partnership districts*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/student-attendance-and-well-being-in-round-4-partnership-districts/>
- Singer, J., Woulfin, S. L., Lizarraga, L., Strunk, K. O., Harbatkin, E., & Moran, A. (2024b). *Round 4 of the Partnership Model: 2023-24 implementation report*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/round-4-of-the-partnership-model-2023-24-implementation-report/>
- Singer, J., Woulfin, S. L., Strunk, K. O., Watson, C., Bertrand, A., Lizarraga, L., Moran, A., & Harbatkin, E. (2023). *Human capital challenges in Round 4 Partnership districts* [Research Report]. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/human-capital-challenges-in-round-4-partnership-districts/>
- Strunk, K. O., Harbatkin, E., McIlwain, A., Cullum, S., Torres, C., & Watson, C. (2022). *Partnership turnaround: Year four report*. Education Policy Innovation Collaborative. <https://epicedpolicy.org/partnership-turnaround-year-four-report/>
- Torres, C., Burroughs, N., Frausel, R., Gardner, J., Zuschlag, D., & Reichel, C. (2023). *Final report: The state of the educator workforce in Michigan: An in-depth look at k-12 staffing challenges*. Michigan Public Policy Associates. [https://mialliance.com/app/uploads/2023/10/Education-Workforce-Study-Report\\_092823.pdf](https://mialliance.com/app/uploads/2023/10/Education-Workforce-Study-Report_092823.pdf)

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

<b>TABLE A1. Partnership Survey Sample and Response Rates for Round 4</b>					
	<b>By Partnership Status</b>		<b>By School Type</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>Partnership</b>	<b>Non-Partnership</b>	<b>TPS</b>	<b>Charters</b>	
Teachers	46.4% (1,246)	43.3% (2,763)	43.1% (3,487)	53.3% (522)	44.2% (4,009)
Principals	61.5% (67)	42.5% (105)	44.7% (136)	69.2% (36)	48.3% (172)
<i>Total Wave 5</i>	47.0% (1,313)	43.3% (2,868)	43.2% (3,623)	54.1% (558)	44.4% (4,181)
Teachers	48.9% (988)	40.3% (2,216)	42.1% (2,878)	47.3% (326)	42.6% (3,204)
Principals	60.2% (62)	44.5% (101)	47.0% (135)	65.1% (28)	49.4% (163)
<i>Total Wave 6</i>	49.7% (1,058)	40.6% (2,328)	42.5% (3,032)	48.3% (354)	43.0% (3,386)
Teachers	49.4% (939)	42.3% (2,150)	43.3% (2,742)	53.0% (347)	44.2% (3,089)
Principals	64.1% (61)	44.6% (94)	45.8% (120)	79.6% (35)	50.7% (155)
<i>Total Wave 7</i>	50.1% (1,000)	42.4% (2,244)	43.4% (2,862)	54.7% (382)	44.5% (3,244)

We also used survey data for reidentified and released Partnership schools from the first four survey waves (see Strunk et al., 2022 for response rates and other info).

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY MEASURES AND ANALYSIS

### Item-Level Analysis

In all waves of survey administration, the EPIC's survey of Partnership district principals and teachers focused on the following areas of the Partnership Model and related school and district contexts:

- understanding and awareness of the Partnership Model
- understanding and perceptions of school and district improvement goals
- perceptions of support from various organizations
- perceptions of school and district effectiveness and implementation
- perceptions of challenges, with a particular focus on staffing
- school culture and climate

A copy of the 2024-25 surveys can be found [here](#).

In interpreting findings from these survey items, it is important to note that responses to the questions about student challenges are perceptions only and are therefore framed by teacher experiences. Analyses of data from these survey responses should be interpreted as teacher perceptions that necessarily include some degree of uncertainty. Over the past few years, we had one teacher survey and one principal survey, where many, but not all, of the items were aligned across the teacher and principal surveys. For example, we asked only teachers about their school leader effectiveness and school instructional practices, and we asked only principals about district and school strategies for teacher recruitment and retention.

### Construct Analysis

In addition to examining item-level descriptives, we conduct factor analyses to create broader constructs from multiple survey items. To make comparisons across years, we draw from items that were asked over multiple survey waves. For these items, we stack teacher and principal responses for all four (or in some cases, two or three) years and conduct exploratory factor analyses on subsets of items intended to capture broader constructs using principal component factors. We determine the number of factors using parallel analysis (Horn, 1965), and use orthogonal varimax rotation to identify the separate factors. Because we are interested in comparing subgroups, we examine factor loadings and internal consistency across populations (i.e., teachers vs. principals, Partnership vs. non-Partnership schools) and survey waves. Ultimately, we adjust to ensure meaningful and coherent factors that have (a) acceptable internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha, and (b) similar factor loadings across subgroups. Drawing from the exploratory factor analyses, we run confirmatory factor analyses and generate factor scores for each respondent. Table B1 summarizes each construct that was developed in the confirmatory factor analyses.

## APPENDIX B (continued)

Table B1. Summary of Constructs				
Constructs	Items	Population	Wave(s)	Cronbach's Alpha
School Climate	<b>Agree/disagree:</b> 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	Teachers, Principals	Waves 1-7	0.78
School Leadership	<b>Agree/disagree:</b> 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	Teachers	Waves 1-7	0.94

### Weighting

In all analyses (both item and construct level), we weight teacher and principal survey responses separately by year using sampling and nonresponse weights. We calculate the sampling weight using the school-level coverage of our sampling frame and calculate the nonresponse weight as the inverse probability of response within schools (for teachers) or districts (for principals). We do so based on demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender) for both teachers and principals, certification type (i.e., elementary, secondary) for teachers, and Partnership identification round for principals.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

We conducted interviews with district and school leaders in fall 2024, winter 2025, and spring 2025. We used a detailed interview protocol with primary and follow-up questions. We used different parts of the interview protocols, or adjusted them, based on the role and area of expertise of the district and school leader with whom we were speaking. Below, we provide examples of the primary questions we included in our interview protocols.

### Fall 2024/Winter 2025 Interviews — District and School Leaders

1. Thinking first about human capital and the educator labor force, what specific strategies or initiatives are you implementing this year to address? How has the process of implementing these human capital strategies gone so far this year?
2. Turning to core curriculum and instruction in ELA and math, what specific strategies or initiatives are you implementing this year? How has the process of implementing these curriculum and instruction strategies gone so far this year?
3. Focusing next on attendance and absenteeism, what specific strategies or initiatives are you implementing this year? How has the process of implementing these attendance and absenteeism strategies gone so far this year?
4. Besides human capital, core curriculum and instruction, and attendance/absenteeism, are there any other priority areas you are focusing on in your partnership work this school year?
5. We know that for Partnership districts, some leaders feel like their Partnership efforts are well-aligned with their overall improvement plans and other policies they need to follow; and some feel like there is a mismatch or misalignment between Partnership and other goals or directives. For your district, how well do your Partnership efforts match or mismatch with other district initiatives or policy directives?
6. We know you recently had your benchmark review session with OPD. Could you tell us a bit about how that review session went?
7. Tell us about your interactions with district and state leaders about the Partnership Model.

### Spring 2025 Interviews — District Leaders

1. In the fall, you mentioned several strategies to address human capital and the educator labor force. *[Note: reference specific strategies from prior interviews.]* How has the process of implementing these human capital strategies gone so far this year?
2. Turning next to core curriculum and instruction in ELA and math, in the fall, you mentioned using several strategies. *[Note: reference specific strategies from prior interviews.]* How has the process of implementing these curriculum and instruction strategies gone so far this year?
3. Thinking next about attendance and absenteeism, in the fall, you mentioned using several strategies. *[Note: reference specific strategies from prior interviews.]* How has the process of implementing these attendance strategies gone so far this year?
4. What strategies do you plan to continue in the 2025-26 school year?
5. When you reflect on your work under the Partnership Model in your district/system, how has it been different this spring as compared to the fall?
6. Reflecting on the last several years, in what ways has implementing the Partnership Model supported your district's improvement efforts?
7. Do you anticipate being re-identified as a Partnership district at the end of this school year? What benefits do you perceive about continuing to be a Partnership district? Could you share any concerns about continuing to be a Partnership district?



**Education Policy Innovation Collaborative**

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
236 Erickson Hall | 620 Farm Lane  
East Lansing, MI 48824

(517) 884-0377  
[EPICedpolicy@msu.edu](mailto:EPICedpolicy@msu.edu)  
[www.EPICedpolicy.org](http://www.EPICedpolicy.org)