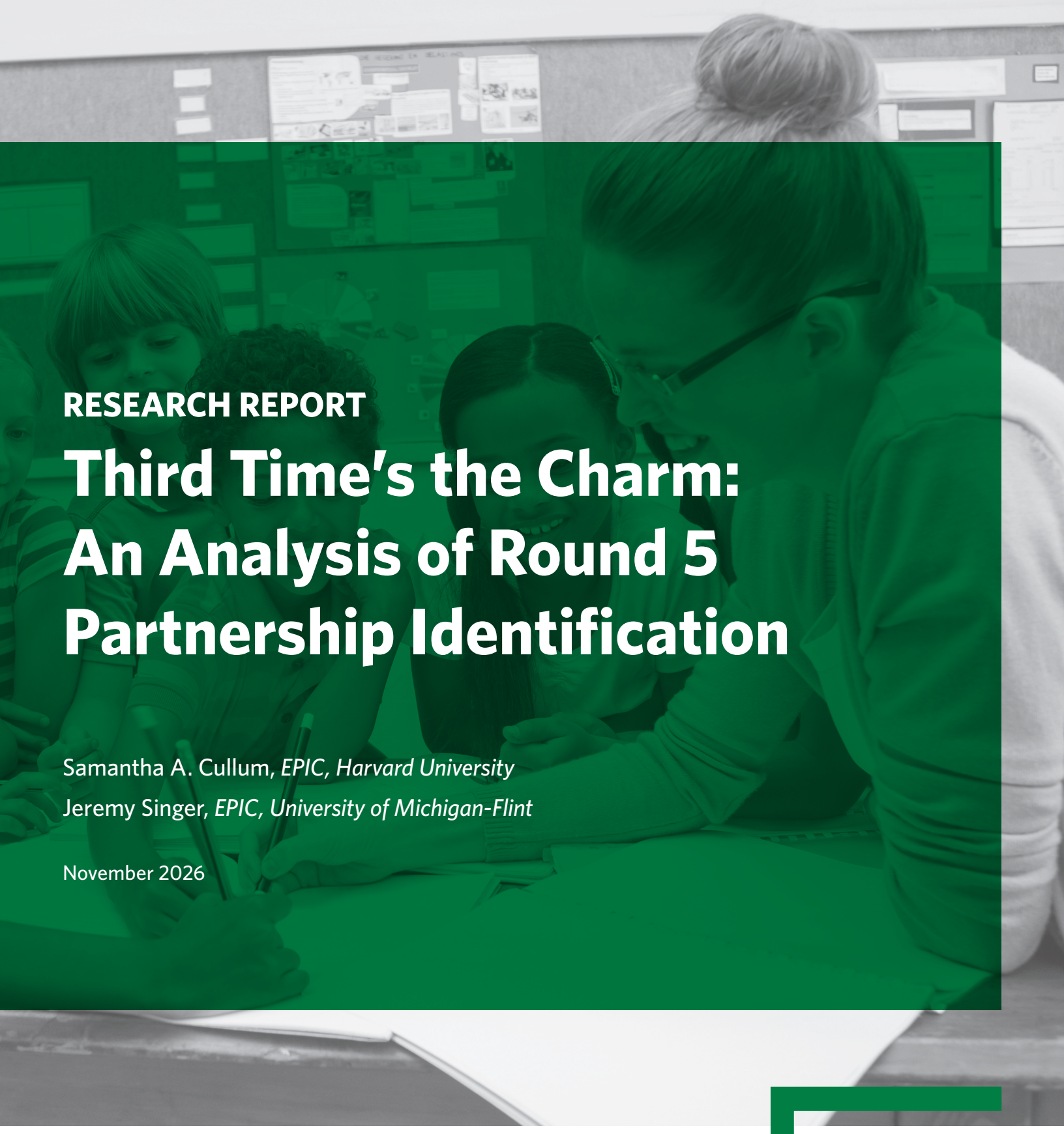


RESEARCH REPORT

Third Time's the Charm: An Analysis of Round 5 Partnership Identification

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November 2026

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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 Yvonne Dixon and Dr. Sue Carnell. At Michigan State University, we thank Emily Mohr and Erin Conley for coordinating and facilitating the project. We also thank Michelle Huhn for her support developing graphics and formatting the report, and Tara Kilbride for her feedback in the initial drafting stages. Finally, we thank Bridgette Redman for her excellent copyediting.

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Third Time's the Charm: An Analysis of Round 5 Partnership Identification

By: Samantha A. Cullum and Jeremy Singer

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership Model of School and District Turnaround fulfills Michigan's requirement to support low-performing schools under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). Schools are identified for Partnership based on the state's School Index System, graduation rates, and, in some cases, schools that were previously identified as low-performing but did not see sufficient improvement in student achievement. Once identified, Partnership schools and the districts in which they are located, called Partnership districts, receive additional support from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and their intermediate school districts (ISDs). They also face additional accountability measures for failing to meet their goals, outlined in a co-created school improvement plan known as a Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Model has been in place since the 2016-17 school year, when the first round of low-performing schools were identified for support and oversight. MDE identified the fifth round of Partnership schools in November 2025, following the completion of Round 4 implementation.

In this report, we provide an overview of schools identified for Round 5 Partnership status and examine how they compare to schools with different experiences under the Partnership Model. First, we describe the characteristics of schools newly identified and reidentified for Partnership in Round 5. We then examine trends over time in the accountability measures used for Partnership identification, including the overall Michigan School Index and its major components. Next, we use educator survey data to examine school climate, teacher-led culture, principal effectiveness, staffing hindrances, student and parent disengagement, and multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) implementation among schools that were reidentified, released, or returned to Partnership status. Finally, we look at schools originally identified in Rounds 1, 2, and 3 to understand how earlier Partnership schools have fared over time.

We find:

1. Of the schools identified for Round 5 Partnership status in November 2025, 31% were newly identified, while 69% of the schools had been identified in at least one prior round. Newly identified Round 5 Partnership schools differ from schools that have been previously identified for Partnership. They serve somewhat lower shares of Black students and higher shares of White students than previously identified Partnership schools, are less concentrated in urban areas, and include a higher share of students attending through Schools of Choice.
2. Schools released from Round 4 Partnership status showed larger improvements in overall Michigan School Index scores than schools that were reidentified. These improvements were especially notable in the "growth" and "school quality" components of the index. Importantly, reidentified and released schools had similarly low overall index scores when they were identified for Round 4 Partnership, meaning the index score alone did not indicate which schools would later improve enough to be released and which would be reidentified. Over time, these groups began to differ in school culture and climate, principal effectiveness, staffing hindrances, student engagement, and MTSS implementation.
3. In the long term, some earlier Partnership schools improved enough to remain released from Partnership, others improved during a second round of Partnership and were released in 2025, and a third group remained persistently identified across multiple rounds. Our findings suggest that Partnership implementation may need to be differentiated based not only on schools' accountability outcomes but also on the organizational conditions that support or constrain improvement.

DATA AND METHODS

We use three data sources to describe schools identified for Partnership in Round 5 and analyze trends for past Partnership schools. First, we use historical state accountability data from 2016-17 through 2024-25, available on the MDE website. These data provide trends on the Michigan School Index composite and component scores. Second, we use student-level administrative data provided by MDE and CEPI to construct school-level demographic data. Third, we use data on educators' perceptions of school climate and culture, leadership effectiveness, parent and student disengagement, staffing hindrances, and their schools' implementation of multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). These data were collected over seven administrations of EPIC's annual survey of Partnership districts from 2018-19 through 2024-25. Table 1 provides a summary of these data sources.

TABLE 1. Data Sources

Data Type	Characteristics of Interest	Data Source	Years	Subgroups
Historical state accountability data	Composite and component index scores	MDE	2016-17 through 2018-19 and 2021-22 through 2024-25	All Michigan schools
Student-level administrative data	School and district demographics	MDE and CEPI	2016-17 through 2024-25	All Michigan schools
Educator surveys	Measures of culture, engagement, staffing hindrances, and MTSS implementation	EPIC-developed survey (see online appendix for more details on the survey)	Fall 2018, Fall 2019, Spring 2021, Spring 2022, Spring 2023, Spring 2024, and Spring 2025	Schools in Round 1, 2, 3, and 4 Partnership districts

While we describe trends from schools identified in all five rounds of Partnership, we focus the main findings on the following five categories of Partnership schools: 1) schools reidentified for Round 5 Partnership, 2) schools newly identified for Partnership, 3) Round 4 schools released from Partnership status, 4) schools returning to Partnership status in Round 5, and 5) schools never identified for Partnership. Table 2 provides a detailed description of each of these categories.

TABLE 2. Definition of Partnership Status Categories

Partnership Status	Definition
Reidentified	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Round 4 and that were reidentified in Round 5.
Newly Identified	Schools that were *not* previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, 3, or 4 and that *were* identified in Round 5.
Released	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Round 4 and that were *not* reidentified in Round 5.
Returning	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3, *not* identified for Round 4, and then *were* identified in Round 5.
Never Identified	Schools that were *not* identified for Partnership status in *any* of the five rounds.

FINDINGS

Characteristics of Round 5 Partnership Schools

A total of 114 schools in 61 districts were identified for Round 5 of Partnership. Table 3 provides a description of these schools.[1] Thirty-five schools (31%) were identified for Partnership for the first time and 79 (69%) were reidentified for or returning to Partnership status from at least one of the previous four rounds. These schools are from 61 districts: 79 schools in 31 traditional public school districts and 35 schools in 30 charter districts. Approximately one-third of Round 5 Partnership districts have not written a Partnership Agreement before.

Thirty-five schools were identified for Partnership for the first time and 79 were reidentified for Partnership status from at least one of the previous four rounds.

The majority of Round 5 Partnership schools were identified for having a Michigan School Index score in the bottom 5% of the state distribution. Seventy schools (61%) were identified for having a low index score and 8 (7%) were identified for having a low index score and a graduation rate below 67%. An additional two schools (2%) were identified for having a low graduation rate. Thirty percent were identified because they did not show proficiency improvement after being identified as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school in November 2022. This differs from the previous round of Partnership identification, which excluded schools without demonstrated improved proficiency from participating in the Partnership Model in the wake of the pandemic (Singer & Cullum, 2023).

TABLE 3. Partnership Schools in Round 5	
Characteristics of Schools	**N (%) of Schools**
New or Reidentified?	
New to Partnership	35 (31%)
Ever Reidentified	79 (69%)
School Type	
Traditional public school (TPS)	79 (69%)
Charter school (PSA)	35 (31%)
Reason for Identification	
Michigan School Index in bottom 5%	70 (61%)
Graduation rate below 67%	2 (2%)
Michigan School Index and graduation rate below thresholds	8 (7%)
Prior CSI school with no proficiency improvement	34 (30%)

Note: This table shows school-level descriptive statistics for schools that were reidentified or newly identified for Partnership status in November 2025. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability data files.

Newly Identified Partnership Schools are Demographically Different From Previously Identified Schools

Table 4 compares the student demographics, school types, urbanicity, grade levels, and previous Partnership rounds of the five Partnership school categories. As with previous Partnership identification rounds (Singer & Cullum, 2023), schools identified for Partnership have a higher proportion of Black students and students who are economically disadvantaged compared to schools never identified for Partnership. The reidentified, released, and returning Partnership schools are similar in student demographics and urbanicity. In contrast, newly identified schools have a lower proportion of Black students, higher proportion of White students, and equal proportions of urban and suburban schools. This suggests newly identified schools serve different students and communities than previously identified Partnership schools.

Newly identified schools have a lower proportion of Black students, higher proportion of White students, equal proportions of urban and suburban schools.

Another notable difference is that returning Partnership schools include a smaller proportion of charter schools than other Partnership categories and are more similar to the never-identified schools. There were more high schools (serving students in grades 9-12) reidentified and newly identified for Partnership in 2024-25. The proportions of reidentified and newly identified schools serving high school grades were approximately twice that of released schools and approximately four times that of returning Partnership schools. There was a similar difference in Round 4 Partnership schools (Singer & Cullum, 2023). The higher representation of high schools may be because high schools have an added criterion under which they can be identified for Partnership, low graduation rate, or because graduation rate has a higher weight on the overall Michigan School Index score, a component of the index that does not affect non-high schools.

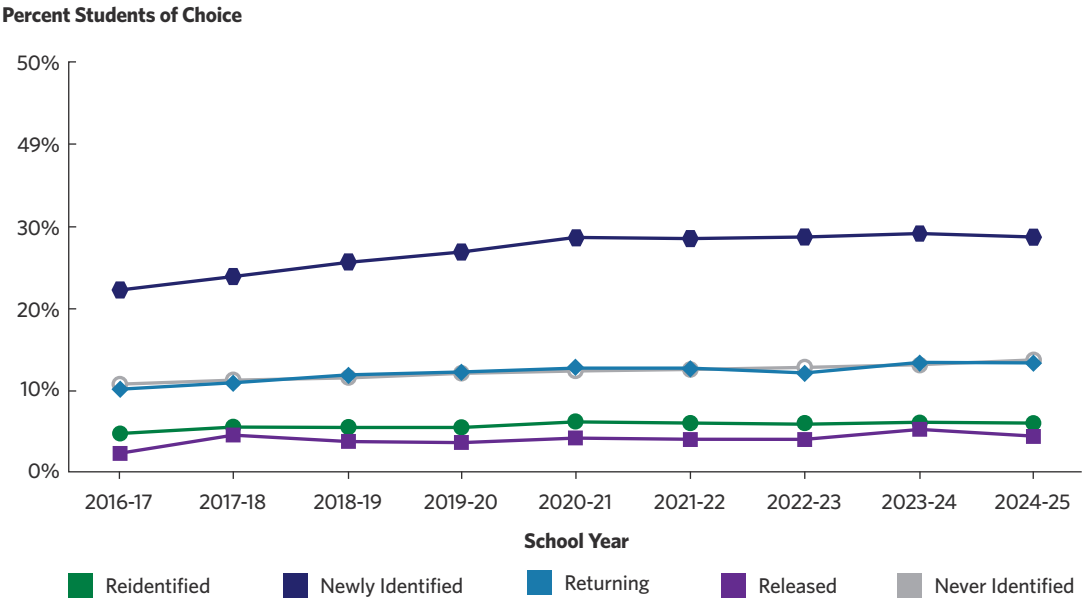
TABLE 4. Characteristics of Schools by Partnership Status					
	Reidentified	**Newly Identified**	**Released**	**Returning**	**Never Identified**
Number of schools	62	35	34	17	2,759
Round 5 of Partnership?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Avg. 2024-25 Michigan School Index score	34.28	36.29	42.43	35.7	71
Student Demographics in 2024-25					
Economically disadvantaged	90.4%	86.5%	91.9%	91.4%	53.8%
English learner	5.1%	7.0%	7.1%	6.2%	7.3%
Special education	18.5%	14%	16.6%	16.7%	20.4%
Black	78.1%	68.6%	75.7%	81.4%	14.3%
Hispanic	7.5%	8.4%	5.3%	9.1%	9.3%
White	9.0%	16.8%	12.9%	5.1%	66.8%
Other race/ethnicity	5.1%	6.2%	6.1%	4.5%	9.6%
School Type					
Traditional public school (TPS)	69.4%	60.0%	67.6%	88.2%	90.8%
Charter school (PSA)	30.6%	40.0%	32.4%	11.8%	9.2%
Urbanicity					
Urban	66.1%	45.7%	64.7%	76.5%	18.1%
Suburban	32.3%	45.7%	35.3%	23.5%	38.4%
Town	0%	2.9%	0%	0%	13.1%
Rural	1.6%	2.9%	0%	0%	29.5%
Grade Levels					
Elementary school (grades K-5)	51.6%	42.9%	79.4%	70.6%	66.6%
Middle school (grades 6-8)	46.8%	34.3%	58.8%	76.5%	42.1%
High school (grades 9-12)	45.2%	51.4%	23.5%	11.8%	28.7%
Previous Partnership Identification Round					
Round 1	17.7%	-	14.7%	29.4%	-
Round 2	16.1%	-	14.7%	17.6%	-
Round 3	14.5%	-	5.9%	52.9%	-
Round 4	100%	-	100%	-	-

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding. This table shows school-level descriptive statistics from 2024-25 for schools that were reidentified for Partnership status, newly identified for Partnership status, released from Partnership status, returning to Partnership status from Round 1, 2, or 3, and never identified for Partnership status. The data excludes schools that were not eligible for Partnership identification in November 2025. Data came from student-level administrative data and Michigan's historical accountability data files. Other race/ethnicity includes students identified as Asian, American Indian or Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or two or more races. The school-level categories (elementary, middle, and high school) are not a mutually exclusive category because schools can serve students across the defined levels (e.g., K-8, 7-9, or K-12 schools). In previous reports, we have combined Round 2 and 3 schools into a single cohort (Cohort 2) because they began implementation in the same year.

A final demographic difference among Partnership categoriesis is the proportion of students of choice in traditional public schools. Students of choice participate in the state's Schools of Choice program, which allows local school districts to enroll nonresident students (MDE, 2022).

Figure 1 shows the trend from 2016-17 to 2024-25 for the five categories of Partnership schools. The proportion of students of choice in reidentified and released Partnership schools is relative low, approximtely 4% to 5%, compared with 10% to 12% in returning and never-identified schools over time. In contrast, the proportion of students of choice in newly identified Partnership schools ranged from 22% in 2016-17 to a high of 29% in 2023-24. In other words, almost three in every ten students in newly identified Partnership schools are not from the local school district and applied to attend those schools. This enrollment pattern distinguishes newly identified Partnership schools from previously identified schools and may warrant different considerations in implementation planning.

FIGURE 1. Historical Proportion of Students of Choice in Traditional Public Schools by Partnership Status, 2016-17 to 2024-25



Notes: This figure shows the proportion of students of choice for five categories of traditional public schools: reidentified, newly identified, released, returning, and never identified. Students are categorized as students of choice if they attend a school outside their district of residence. Data came from Michigan's student-level administrative data. Schools are categorized according to their Partnership status following Round 5 identification in November 2025. Historical data reflect these same groups of schools in earlier years, regardless of their Partnership status at that time.

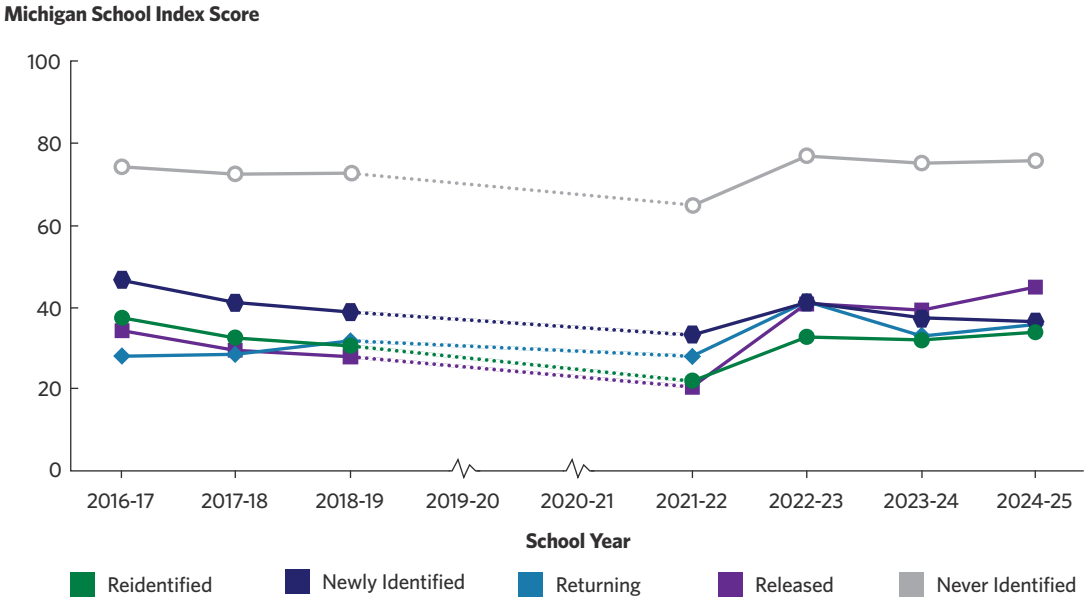
Schools Released from Partnership Status Showed Improvement in Growth and School Quality

Figure 2 shows the trend over time in the overall Michigan Index Score for the five Partnership categories. The overall Index Score is one of the metrics used to identify schools for Partnership and the reason 68% of the Round 5 Partnership schools were identified (Table 3). On average, the overall Michigan Index Score for reidentified, released, and newly identified schools slowly declined from 2016-17 to 2018-19 and during the pandemic disruption in testing (2019-20 to 2021-22). During this same period, the returning Partnership schools had an increasing index score, suggesting they were positively responding to the Partnership intervention. At the point of Round 4 Partnership identification in 2021-22, released and reidentified schools had similarly low index scores compared to returning schools (which were released from Partnership at this point) and newly identified schools.

All school categories had an increase in overall index score between 2021-22 and 2022-23; however, the increase was particularly large for released schools. Schools released from Round 4 of Partnership had a 20.4-point increase in their average overall index score compared to 10.9 points for reidentified schools, 7.6 points for newly identified schools, 13.4 points for returning schools, and 11.8 points for never identified schools. The released schools continued to improve their average overall index score from 2022-23 to 2024-25. Reidentified schools, which were also participating in the Partnership Model at the time, had a small improvement in their index score, while the index scores for newly identified and returning schools decreased preceding Round 5 Partnership identification. When Partnership schools were identified in 2025, the average overall index scores for the reidentified, newly identified, and returning schools were between 34.2 and 36.3 and the overall index score for released schools had improved to 42.4.

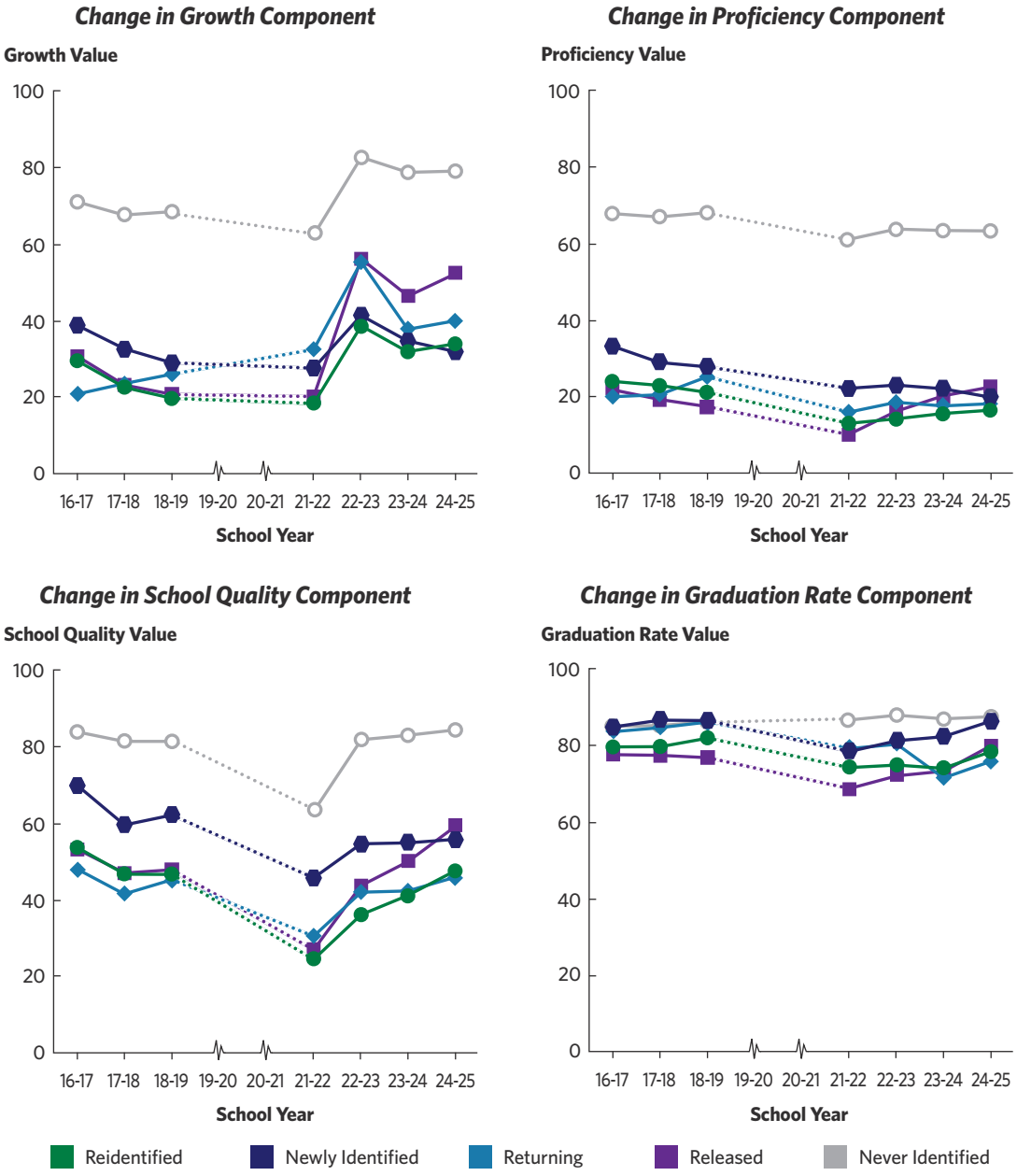
Importantly, reidentified and released schools had similar average overall index scores when they were identified in 2021-22. In other words, their initial index scores alone did not indicate which schools would subsequently be released from Partnership in 2024-2025. Examining the individual components of the Michigan School Index may help identify where the schools' trajectories began to diverge and which measures contributed to their subsequent improvements.

FIGURE 2. Overall Historical Michigan School Index Score by Partnership Status, 2016-17 to 2024-25



Notes: This figure shows the Michigan School Index scores over time for five categories of schools: reidentified, newly identified, released, returning, and never identified. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability master results files. The overall index score is calculated using the following component weights: proficiency (29%), growth (34%), school quality (14%), graduation rate (10%), English learner progress (10%), test participation (2%), and English learner exam participation (1%). Michigan School Index scores are missing for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to accountability modifications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are categorized according to their Partnership status following Round 5 identification in November 2025. Historical data reflect these same groups of schools in earlier years, regardless of their Partnership status at that time.

FIGURE 3. Michigan School Index Components by Partnership Status, 2016-17 to 2024-25



Note: This figure shows the Michigan School Index score components over time for five categories of schools: reidentified, newly identified, released, returning, and never identified. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability master results files. The growth component is measured as the percentage of students in a school who meet their Student Growth Percentile on the Michigan state exam. The proficiency component is measured as the percentage of students in a school who score proficient or above on the Michigan state exam. The school quality component includes student attendance, access to advanced coursework, availability of physical education and art classes, and the presence of a school librarian. The graduation rate component is calculated as the percentage of high school students graduating on time. Michigan School Index score components are missing for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to accountability modifications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are categorized according to their Partnership status following Round 5 identification in November 2025. Historical data reflect these same groups of schools in earlier years, regardless of their Partnership status at that time.

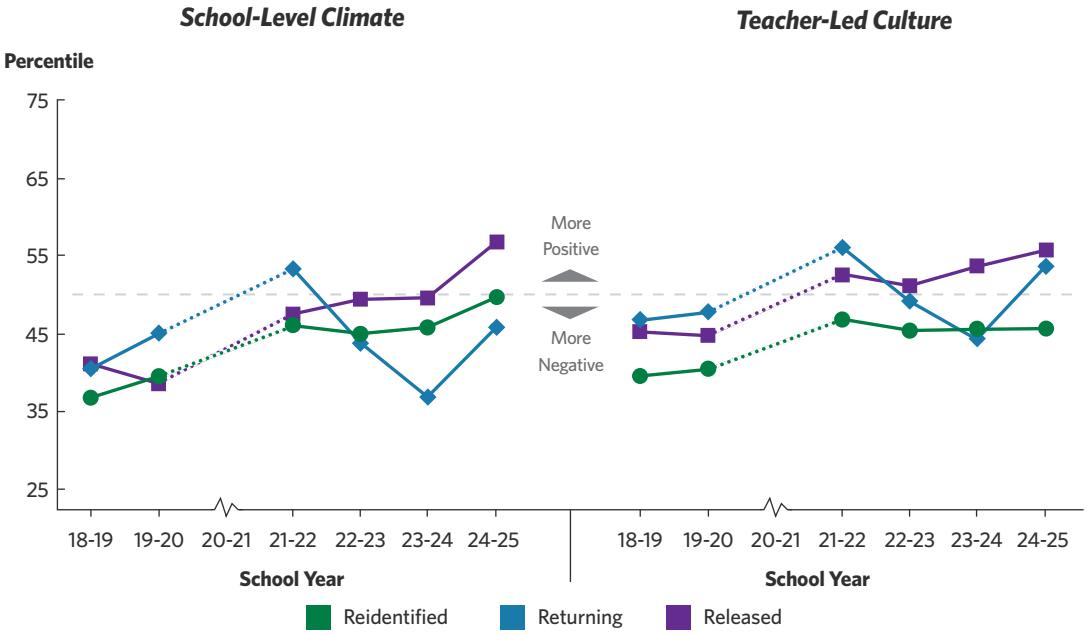
We show in Figure 3 the four largest components of the Michigan School Index Score over time by Partnership category. One notable difference among Partnership school groups is in the growth component (top left panel). The average growth score for released schools increased by 36.5 points from 2021-22 to 2022-23, 13 points more than the next-largest increase of 23 points among returning schools. The growth component score in these schools dipped slightly the following year but remained high for all three years of the Partnership intervention. The growth component score in returning schools decreased from 2022-23 to 2023-24, reaching a similar level to those of reidentified and newly identified schools. The average growth component score in these three Partnership categories slightly decreased and remained low from 2023-24 to 2024-25.

Released Schools Showed Stronger Improvements in Climate, Culture, and Leadership

Survey-based measures of school-level culture, climate and principal effectiveness over time differentiate reidentified, released, and returning schools. (These survey measures are described in detail in Appendix B.) Released schools showed stronger improvement in climate, teacher-led culture, and principal effectiveness than reidentified schools, while returning schools showed signs that earlier gains in climate and leadership had eroded after release from Partnership.

Figure 4 shows school-level climate and teacher-led culture construct scores over time for reidentified, released, and returning schools. The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across teachers and principals in all available survey years. A mean response above this line indicates a more positive culture or climate than the average. A mean response below this line indicates a more negative culture or climate than the average. These school-level climate and teacher-led culture items were not asked on the 2020-21 Partnership survey.

FIGURE 4. Culture and Climate Factors by Partnership Status

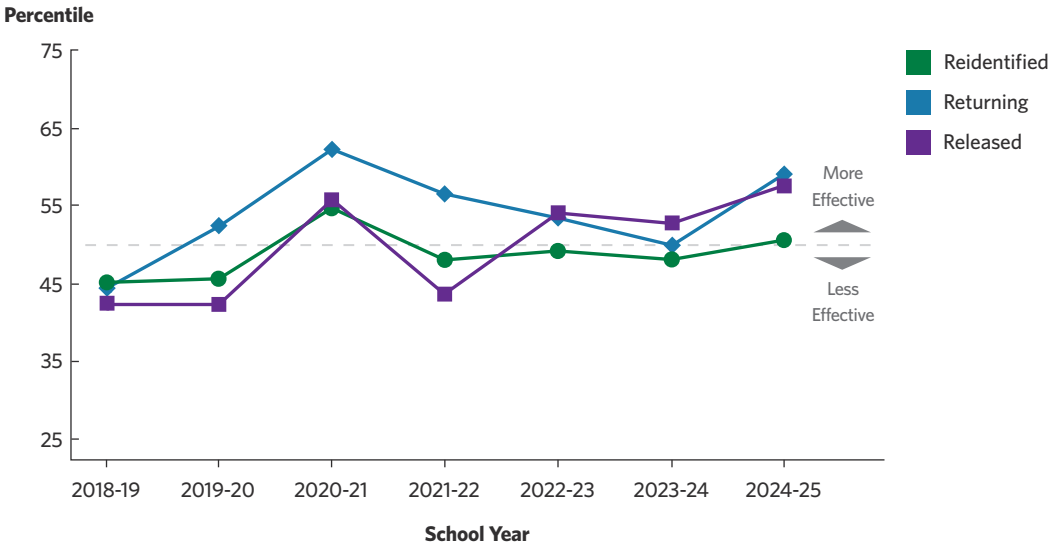


Notes: This figure shows constructs of school-level climate and teacher-led culture for reidentified, released, and returning schools. The Data came from teacher and principal responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix B for more details on the items that comprise each construct. These questions were not asked on the 2020-21 Partnership survey.

The first key takeaway from this figure is that returning schools had more positive culture and climate when they were released from Partnership in 2021-22 than did reidentified schools or those released from Round 4 in that year. They experienced a subsequent drop in both constructs when they were not participating in the Partnership intervention and entered the Round 5 intervention with below-average school-level climate. A second key takeaway from the culture and climate constructs is that reidentified and released schools had similarly negative school-level climate measures when they were identified for Round 4 of Partnership. Both groups of schools improved over the course of the intervention; however, released schools ended their intervention with a more positive school-level climate than reidentified or returning schools. The third and final key takeaway from Figure 4 is that teacher-led culture in released schools was consistently more positive than the reidentified schools and improved with the Partnership intervention while reidentified schools stagnated with a below-average teacher-led culture. This suggests that having a positive environment led by teachers and staff, while not protective against Partnership identification, may help implementation and long-term improvement of student outcomes.

Figure 5 shows the principal effectiveness construct scores for the reidentified, released, and returning schools over time. The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across teachers in all seven survey years. A mean response above this line indicates more effective leadership than the average. A mean response below this line indicates less effective leadership than the average.

FIGURE 5. Perceptions of Principal Effectiveness Factor by Partnership Status



Notes: This figure shows the construct of principal effectiveness for reidentified, released, and returning schools. The Data came from teacher responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix B for more details on the items that comprise this construct.

As with the culture and climate constructs, returning schools had a more effective school leader when they were released from Partnership the first time compared to reidentified and released schools, but saw a decline in effectiveness when they were originally released. The returning schools were identified for Round 5 Partnership with similarly positive leadership effectiveness as released schools and had the same effectiveness as when they were released before Round 4. At the time of Round 4 identification (2021-22), released and reidentified schools had less effective leaders than the average respondent and released schools had descriptively less effective

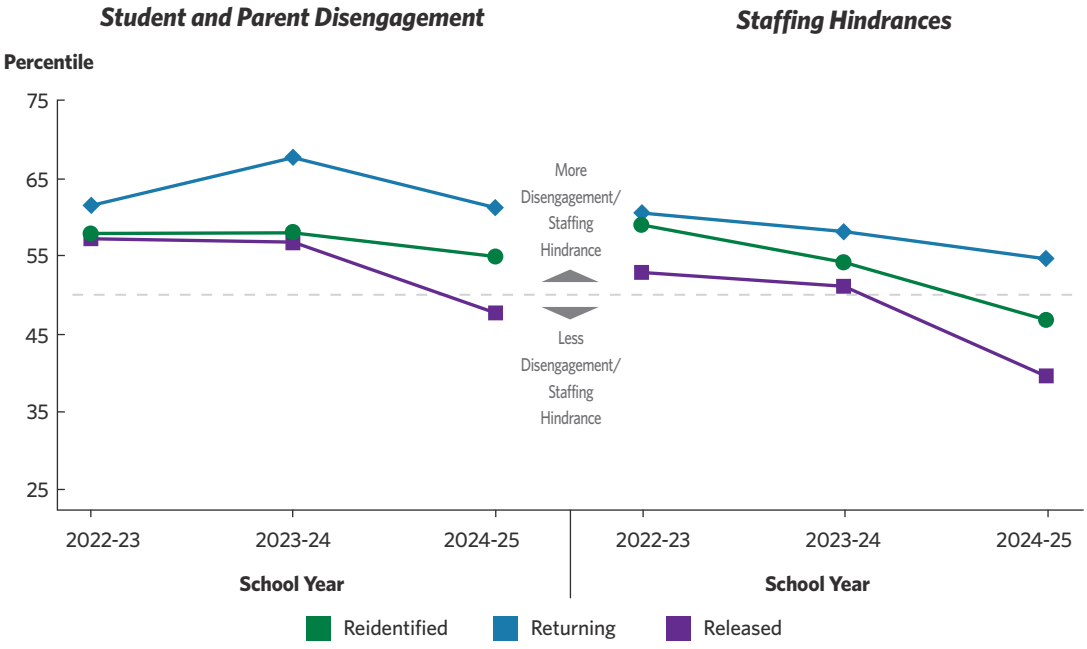
school leaders than the reidentified schools. Released schools had an improvement in perceived leadership effectiveness in the first year of the Partnership intervention and continued to improve over the following years, while reidentified schools showed only modest improvement. These findings suggest that released schools experienced greater improvements in perceived principal effectiveness between identification and release than schools that were reidentified.

Engagement, Staffing, and MTSS Reveal Differences Between Released, Reidentified, and Returning Schools

While survey-based measures of culture and climate and principal effectiveness can suggest changes over time at a school level, measures of disengagement, staffing hindrances, and MTSS implementation can describe some implementation factors within these schools. Appendix B provides detailed descriptions of these survey measures. Released schools ended Round 4 with lower levels of student and parent disengagement and fewer staffing hindrances than reidentified schools. In addition, reidentified schools had consistently lower levels of MTSS implementation than released and returning schools, and returning schools entered Round 5 with elevated disengagement and staffing challenges despite relatively strong MTSS implementation.

Figure 6 shows the student and parent disengagement and staffing hindrances construct scores for the reidentified, released, and returning schools over time. The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across teachers and principals in all three survey years. A mean response above this line indicates more disengagement and hindrances than the average survey response. A mean response below this line indicates less disengagement and hindrances than the average.

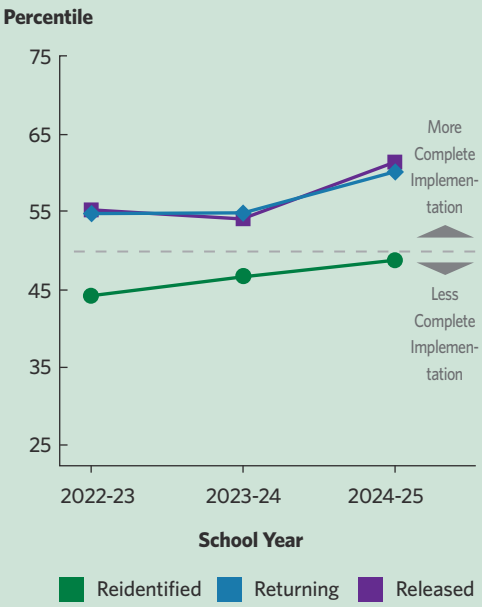
FIGURE 6. Hindrance Factors by Partnership Status



Notes: This figure shows constructs of student and parent disengagement and staffing hindrances for reidentified, released, and returning schools. The Data came from teacher and principal responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix B for more details on the items that comprise each construct.

Schools that were released from Partnership at the end of Round 4 had lower levels of student and parent disengagement than reidentified or returning schools by the 2024-25 school year. Starting in the first year of Partnership implementation, reidentified and released schools had similar, above-average levels of student and parent disengagement. These groups of schools remained similar for the next year and then diverged in the last year of Partnership implementation (2024-25). Respondents in schools returning to Partnership in Round 5 reported consistently higher levels of student and parent disengagement in all three survey years. Disengagement increased in the second year before returning to 2022-23 levels. Taken together, these findings may suggest that participating in the Partnership intervention improved student and parent engagement over time, and schools that saw an improvement were not reidentified.

FIGURE 7. MTSS Implementation by Partnership Status



Notes: This figure shows the construct of MTSS implementation for reidentified, released, and returning schools. The Data came from teacher and principal responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix B for more details on the items that comprise each construct.

Although staffing hindrances decreased across all three groups over the three survey years, respondents in released schools reported fewer staffing hindrances than respondents in reidentified or returning schools. We reported a similar finding when analyzing schools identified and released from the prior round of Partnership (Singer & Cullum, 2023). Schools released from Round 4 of Partnership started the intervention with fewer staffing hindrances compared to reidentified schools and had a similar decrease in hindrances over time compared to that reported by reidentified schools. The key contrast in Figure 6 is between schools reidentified for Partnership in 2025 and schools returning to Partnership after being released in Rounds 1, 2, or 3. These two groups of schools had similarly above-average staffing hindrances in 2022-23 but the gap grew over the course of the Partnership intervention. As with the student and parent disengagement findings, this suggests that the Partnership intervention decreased staffing hindrances among schools participating in Round 4, including those that were reidentified in Round 5.

Figure 7 shows the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) implementation construct scores for the reidentified, released, and returning schools over time. The implementation of MTSS practices was a large part of these districts' plans to improve student academic outcomes over the course of the Partnership intervention (Cullum et al., 2024). The 50th percentile line denotes the average response across teachers and principals in all three survey years. A mean response above this line indicates a higher level of MTSS implementation than the average survey response. A mean response below this line indicates a lower level of MTSS implementation than the average.

Reidentified schools had lower levels of MTSS implementation compared to released and returning schools. Schools reidentified for Partnership in 2025 not only had lower levels of MTSS implementation when they were identified for Round 5, but they began Round 4 with lower

levels of implementation compared to schools released before Round 4. The small amount of improvement in MTSS practices over the course of the Partnership intervention is consistent with findings on MTSS implementation for all Partnership schools (Singer et al., 2026). These findings suggest that schools with a higher level of MTSS implementation fared better over the course of the Partnership intervention. Unlike the findings from the disengagement and staffing hindrances constructs, returning schools were not worse off than released schools and had higher levels of MTSS implementation than the reidentified schools. This is a factor that differentiates the returning schools from the reidentified schools starting Round 5 of Partnership.

Long-Term Trajectories of Earlier Partnership Schools

While the majority of this report focuses on schools identified for Round 5 Partnership, this section examines schools originally identified for Rounds 1, 2, and 3 in 2016-17 and 2017-18. These schools[2], though demographically similar (Appendix Table A1), have had different improvement trajectories over the past 9-10 years. Table 5 describes how we categorized these schools. Just over one-third (37) of the schools originally identified for Partnership have continued to improve after being released from Partnership in 2022. Another 13 schools participated in the past two rounds of Partnership that were released from Partnership in 2025. Two groups of schools were identified for Round 5 Partnership: 30 that participated in all three waves of Partnership implementation and 17 returning to Partnership after participating in one earlier wave.

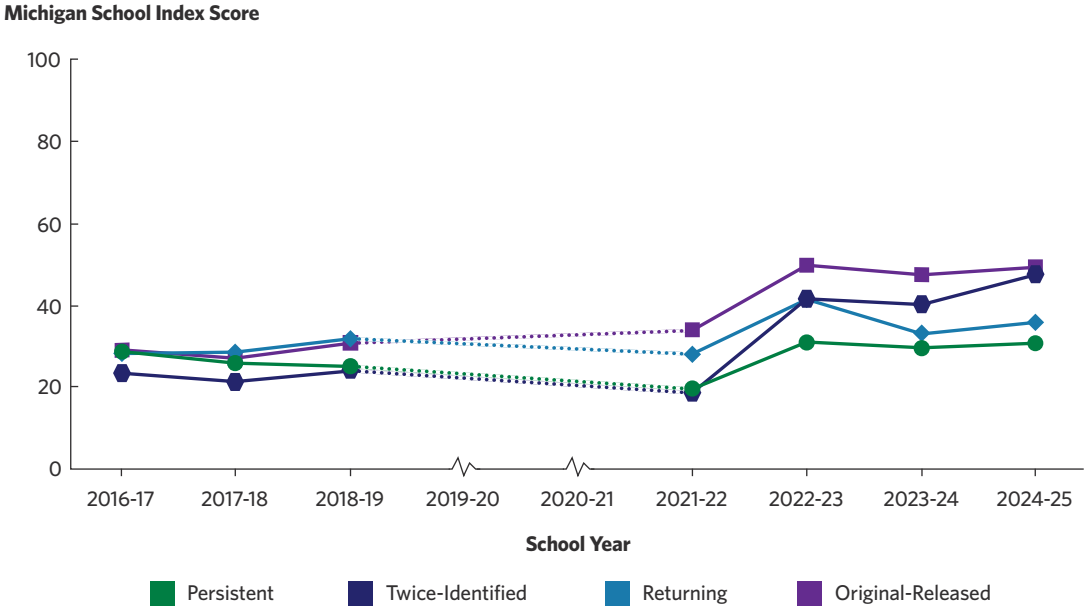
These categories overlap with the Partnership status groups discussed earlier in the report. Persistent schools are a subset of reidentified schools, while twice-identified schools are a subset of the released schools. We discussed the schools returning to Partnership in Round 5 as a group and are placing them here as well. The only new group is the original-released schools which are excluded from any of the groups above.

TABLE 5. Definitions of Partnership Status Categories for Round 1/2/3 Schools

Partnership Status	Definition
Persistent	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and were reidentified in both Rounds 4 and 5.
Twice-Identified	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and Round 4 and that were not identified in Round 5.
Returning	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3, were not identified for Round 4, and then were identified in Round 5.
Original-Released	Schools that were previously identified for Partnership status in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 but not identified in either Round 4 or 5.

Figure 8 shows the trend over time in the overall Michigan School Index score for the four categories of Partnership schools from Rounds 1, 2, and 3. On average, the overall Michigan School Index score for persistent schools slowly declined from 2016-17 to 2018-19. Twice-identified, returning, and original-released schools had a small improvement in their overall index score in this same time period. All groups aside from the original-released schools had a decrease in their overall index scores over the pandemic disruption in testing. At the point of Round 4 Partnership identification in 2021-22, persistent and twice-identified schools had similarly low overall index scores compared to returning and original-released schools.

FIGURE 8. Overall Michigan School Index Score by Partnership Status, 2016-17 to 2024-25 for Rounds 1, 2, and 3 Partnership Schools



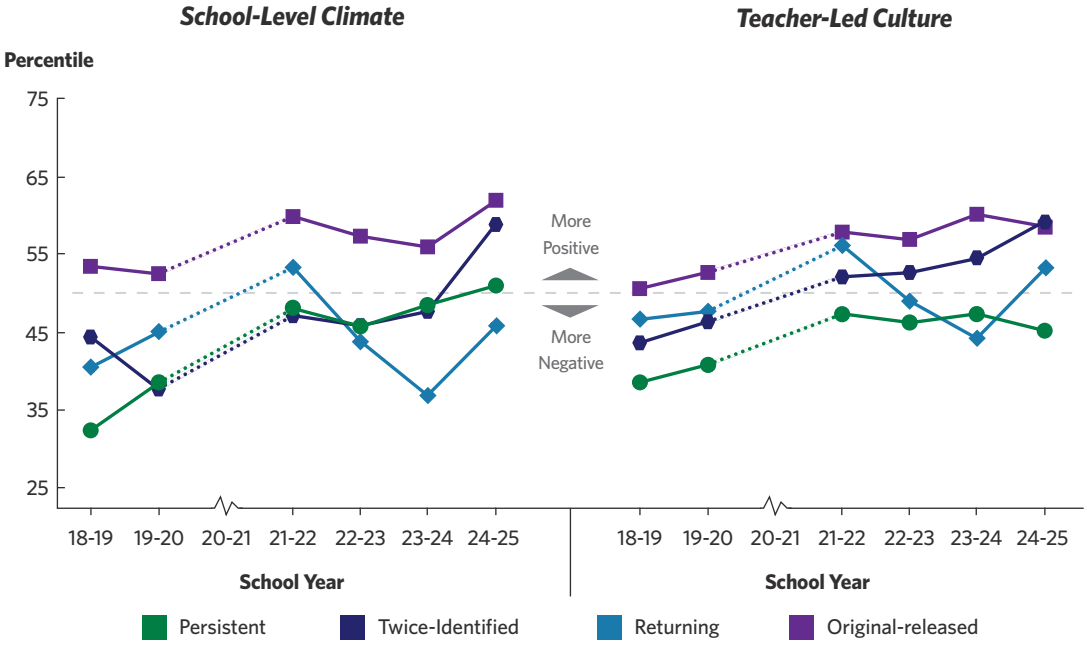
Note: This figure shows the Michigan School Index scores over time for four categories of schools: persistent, twice-identified, returning, and original-released. Data came from Michigan's historical accountability master results files. The overall index score is calculated using the following component weights: proficiency (29%), growth (34%), school quality (14%), graduation rate (10%), English learner progress (10%), test participation (2%), and English learner exam participation (1%). Michigan School Index scores are missing for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to accountability modifications during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools are categorized according to their identification history across all five Partnership rounds.

All school categories had an increase in overall index score between 2021-22 and 2022-23, however, the 22-point increase was striking for twice-identified schools. The twice-identified and original-released schools continued to improve from 2022-23 to 2024-25 and had similar overall index scores when Round 5 Partnership was identified. The overall index score dropped for returning schools in this time as described earlier and the improvement of persistent schools stalled by 2024-25.

These trends paint a picture of four different types of schools. Persistent schools did not respond well to their first round of Partnership intervention and did not respond to their second round either. Twice-identified schools showed a small improvement pre-pandemic from the Partnership intervention, were set back after the onset of the pandemic, and thrived during their second round of Partnership. Returning schools improved enough to be released from Partnership in 2022, however, they did not retain this level of growth and declined after the 2022-23 school year while they were not participating in the intervention. The original-released schools had the highest overall index score and the most improvement of all four groups in 2021-22 and continued to maintain a higher index score from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

To contextualize the findings from the overall Michigan School Index score, we examined the school-level climate and teacher-led culture construct scores for persistent, twice-identified, returning, and original-released schools. Figure 9 shows these scores. Similar to Figure 4 earlier, a mean response above the line indicates a more positive culture and climate than the average and a mean response below the line indicates a more negative culture and climate than the average.

FIGURE 9. Culture and Climate Factors by Partnership Status for Rounds 1, 2, and 3 Partnership Schools



Notes: This figure shows constructs of school-level climate and teacher-led culture for persistent, twice-identified, returning, and original-released schools. The Data came from teacher and principal responses to the annual EPIC Partnership Model survey. See Appendix B for more details on the items that comprise each construct. These questions were not asked on the 2020-21 Partnership survey.

During the first wave of Partnership, from 2018-19 to 2021-22, school-level climate and teacher-led culture improved across all four groups of earlier Partnership schools. However, the groups differed in both their starting points and their trajectories after release. Original-released schools reported the most positive climate and teacher-led culture throughout the period, while persistent and twice-identified schools began with lower scores. Persistent schools remained especially low on teacher-led culture even after multiple rounds of Partnership. Twice-identified schools showed more sustained improvement after their second Partnership identification, eventually approaching original-released schools by 2024-25. In contrast, returning schools had relatively positive climate and culture when they were released after the first wave of Partnership, but those conditions declined after release before rebounding somewhat in 2024-25. These patterns suggest that long-term improvement may depend not only on initial gains during Partnership, but also on whether schools are able to sustain positive organizational conditions after formal Partnership supports end.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this report point to three broad implications for the next round of Partnership implementation. First, newly identified schools differ in important ways from previously identified schools, and returning schools differ from schools that were persistently identified. Second, the factors that appear to distinguish schools' trajectories are not limited to the Michigan School Index score. One of the clearest findings from this report is that released and reidentified schools had similarly low overall index scores when they were identified for Round 4 Partnership, meaning

the index score alone did not indicate which schools would later improve enough to be released and which would be reidentified. Measures of school climate, teacher-led culture, leadership, staffing conditions, family and student engagement, and MTSS implementation provide additional information about where improvement may be taking hold and where implementation may be stalling. Third, these findings suggest that state and district leaders may need earlier and more differentiated ways to assess whether Partnership supports are taking hold.

Newly Identified Schools May Need a Different Approach to Improvement Planning to Fit Their Local Contexts

The first implication is that newly identified schools may need a different approach to Partnership Agreement development and implementation planning than schools with previous Partnership participation. Newly identified schools have a different demographic and geographic profile than previously identified schools, including a less urban profile and a notably higher share of students attending through Schools of Choice. These patterns suggest that schools may arrive at similar accountability outcomes through different local dynamics. For newly identified schools, low index scores may be shaped not only by the instructional and organizational conditions typically associated with Partnership identification, but also by enrollment dynamics, competition across districts, and the particular needs of schools serving large numbers of nonresident students. As a result, Partnership Agreements for these schools should begin with a careful diagnosis of the local context rather than assuming that the same strategies used in other Partnership districts will fit the circumstances of Round 5 schools.

The State Should Monitor Other Measures of Improvement as Index Scores Alone Do Not Indicate Which Schools Will Improve

A second implication is that the state should look beneath the overall index score when determining how to target supports. The contrast between released and reidentified schools shows why this matters: when these schools were identified for Partnership, their overall index scores alone did not distinguish which schools would improve enough to be released and which would be reidentified. Over time, however, these groups began to differ in school climate, teacher-led culture, principal effectiveness, staffing issues, student and family engagement, and MTSS implementation. These measures could help distinguish schools that need different kinds of support even when their accountability scores look similar. This does not necessarily mean that these measures need to be incorporated into the formal accountability index. Rather, the state could collect and use school climate and implementation data as part of needs assessment, progress monitoring, and support differentiation (Kostyo et al., 2018). Indeed, many states around the country require schools to participate in such data collection (Wilkins, 2024). Doing so could allow Partnership schools to be grouped into more meaningful "levels" or types of need, based not only on whether they have been identified multiple times, but on the specific conditions that appear to be enabling or constraining improvement.

The Policy Should Include Earlier Formal Check-Ins to Address Implementation with Enough Time Left to Improve

A third implication is that early implementation progress should be used as a meaningful signal for subsequent support and engagement. If schools with similar index scores can have substantially different organizational conditions, then waiting for later accountability outcomes may delay the

supports schools need. The differences between schools that were released, reidentified, and later returned to Partnership suggest that organizational change during the first year of implementation may provide useful information about whether a school is on a productive improvement trajectory. The Office of Partnership Districts already uses an 18-month benchmark review that includes implementation goals, rather than waiting for later outcomes that depend heavily on test score changes (Office of Partnership Districts, 2025). Still, earlier formal check-ins, such as annual reviews, could assess whether key implementation conditions are improving and could be used not as punitive benchmarks but as opportunities to adjust supports, deepen engagement, and identify schools that may need more intensive assistance before outcome measures confirm that improvement has stalled. This would be consistent with the continuous-improvement orientation of the Partnership Model and with prior findings that Partnership plans often focused on building systems and organizational capacity (Cullum et al., 2024).

ENDNOTES

1. While our analysis focuses on all schools initially identified, several schools were subsequently exempted either due to ineligibility for Partnership status or through an appeals process. Some schools were closed before the 2026-27 school year.

2. There were 123 schools originally identified for Partnership in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 (Strunk et al., 2019). Of these schools, 109 were still participating in Partnership at the time of Round 4 identification (Singer & Cullum, 2023). The loss of schools between identification rounds was because of closure and early release from the Partnership Model. An additional 12 schools closed or were reconfigured between Round 4 and Round 5 Partnership identification.

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APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS BY ROUND 1, 2, OR 3 STATUS

TABLE A1. Characteristics of Schools by Round 1, 2, or 3 Partnership Status				
	Persistent	**Twice-Identified**	**Returning**	**Original-released**
Number of schools	30	13	17	37
Round 5 of Partnership Model	Yes	No	Yes	No
Average 2024-25 Michigan School Index score	30.74	45.53	35.70	47.03
Student Demographics, 2024-25				
Economically disadvantaged	92.6%	92.4%	91.4%	91.9%
English learner	5.3%	7.4%	6.2%	10.1%
Special education	19.8%	18.1%	16.7%	17.1%
Black	84.3%	84.2%	81.4%	80.0%
Hispanic	6.4%	4.9%	9.1%	9.6%
White	4.9%	6.6%	5.1%	5.8%
Other race/ethnicity	4.4%	4.3%	4.5%	4.6%
School Type				
Traditional public school (TPS)	80.0%	92.3%	88.2%	89.2%
Charter school (PSA)	20.0%	7.7%	11.8%	10.8%
Urbanicity				
Urban	83.3%	84.6%	76.5%	91.9%
Suburban	16.7%	15.4%	23.5%	5.4%
Town	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rural	0%	0%	0%	2.7%
Grade Levels				
Elementary school (grades K-5)	46.7%	92.3%	70.6%	89.2%
Middle school (grades 6-8)	36.7%	69.2%	76.5%	73.0%
High school (grades 9-12)	50.0%	7.7%	11.8%	10.8%
Previous Partnership Identification Round				
Round 1	36.7%	38.5%	29.4%	27%
Round 2	33.3%	38.5%	17.6%	45.9%
Round 3	30%	15.4%	52.9%	27%
Round 4	100%	100%	-	-

Note: This table shows school-level descriptive statistics from 2024-25 for schools that have had a persistent Partnership status, schools identified for Partnership twice, schools returning to Partnership status from Rounds 1, 2, or 3, and schools that were released from Partnership status after Rounds 1, 2, or 3 and did not return. The data exclude schools that were not eligible for Partnership identification in November 2025. Data came from student-level administrative records and Michigan's historical accountability data files. Other race/ethnicity includes students identified as Asian, American Indian or Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and two or more races. School level categories—elementary, middle school, and high school—are not mutually exclusive because schools can serve students across the defined levels (e.g., K-8, 7-9, or K-12 schools). In previous reports, we have combined Rounds 2 and 3 into a single cohort (Cohort 2) because they began implementation in the same year.

APPENDIX B: PARTNERSHIP SURVEY INFORMATION

This appendix provides context for the data collected as part of the annual Partnership survey used in this report. Table B1 displays the number of schools represented in the educator responses from each survey wave (school year), organized by the Partnership statuses defined in Tables 2 and 5. The Partnership survey was only administered in schools in Partnership districts during the school year. Survey waves 1, 2, 3, and 4 (2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22) were administered in Rounds 1, 2, and 3 Partnership districts and survey waves 5, 6, and 7 (2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25) were administered in Round 4 Partnership districts. Consequently, schools that were neither identified for Partnership nor located in a Partnership district in a given year are not represented in that year's survey. For example, returning schools were not identified for Partnership in Round 4, so fewer returning schools were represented in the 2022-23 through 2024-25 surveys than in the first four survey waves.

TABLE B1. Number of Schools in Partnership Survey Responses by Partnership Status and Year

	Reidentified	Released	Returning	Persistent	Twice-Identified	Original-Released
2018-19	41 (66.1%)	22 (64.7%)	17 (100%)	30 (100%)	13 (100%)	36 (97.3%)
2019-20	34 (54.8%)	17 (50%)	17 (100%)	25 (83.3%)	11 (84.6%)	36 (97.3%)
2020-21	33 (53.2%)	16 (47.1%)	16 (94.1%)	25 (83.3%)	11 (84.6%)	34 (91.9%)
2021-22	33 (53.2%)	16 (47.1%)	16 (94.1%)	25 (83.3%)	11 (84.6%)	34 (91.9%)
2022-23	61 (98.4%)	34 (100%)	14 (82.4%)	30 (100%)	13 (100%)	28 (75.7%)
2023-24	61 (98.4%)	34 (100%)	14 (82.4%)	30 (100%)	13 (100%)	26 (70.3%)
2024-25	59 (95.2%)	33 (97.1%)	12 (70.6%)	30 (100%)	13 (100%)	28 (75.7%)
Total	62	34	17	30	13	37

Notes: Table displays the number of schools represented in the Partnership survey responses in each given survey year. Each cell displays the represented schools as a count and as a percentage of total schools identified in 2025 in that group. The 2018-19 and 2019-20 Partnership surveys were administered in the fall of the school year and the 2020-21 through 2024-25 surveys were administered in the spring of the school year. The data exclude schools that were not eligible for Partnership identification in November 2025.

We provide tables of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) loadings and Chronbach's alphas for all constructs described in the report. In each table, we summarize the survey item in the first column, the factor loading for each item in the second column, and the ψ (psi) in the third column. The factor loading, ranging from 0–1, represents the extent to which the item loads onto the factor. A value closer to one indicates that the item is more highly correlated with the factor and a value closer to zero indicates that the item is less highly correlated. The ψ, which can range from 0–1, provides the portion of the item that is not correlated with the factor. A value closer to one indicates that a greater share of the variation in the item is not captured by the factor and a value closer to zero indicates that a lesser share of the variation in the item is not captured by the factor. In other words, a ψ (psi) of 0 would mean that all of the variation in the item is explained by the factor and a ψ of 1 would mean that none of the variation in the item is explained by the factor.

The Cronbach's α (alpha) at the bottom of each table represents the internal consistency of the items in the factor and ranges from 0-1. A value of one represents perfect correlation across items and a value of zero represents no correlation. The N provides the number of responses that contributed to the factor. Ns vary for two reasons. First, the listed constructs can draw on different samples of survey years and types of educators (i.e., principals, teachers, or both). Second, response rates vary by item and we only use complete cases in the factor analysis.

APPENDIX B *(continued)*

The table note provides the full survey item text and the response choices. While the rows provide only a summary of the item text, the full text is provided in the online appendix with the full survey instruments.

TABLE B2. School-Level Climate

	Loadings	Psi
Our school has a safe and orderly environment.	0.811	0.342
This school does a great job of meeting students' socio-emotional needs (e.g., personal guidance, counseling, enrichment activities).	0.760	0.422
This school does a great job of meeting students' academic needs.	0.779	0.394
Administrators consistently enforce school-wide behavioral standards.	0.776	0.398
Students pay attention and listen to teachers and staff.	0.725	0.474
N	16,911	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.828	

Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school." Response options were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," "agree," or "strongly agree." Questions were asked to teachers and principals in six of the seven survey waves (2018-19, 2019-20, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25).

TABLE B3. Teacher-Led Culture

	Loadings	Psi
Teachers have a strong rapport with students.	0.783	0.386
Teachers have high expectations for students.	0.800	0.360
Teachers consistently enforce school-wide behavioral standards.	0.740	0.452
Staff at this school work hard to build trusting relationships with parents.	0.784	0.386
N	16,920	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.775	

Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school." Response options were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," "agree," or "strongly agree." Questions were asked to teachers and principals in six of the seven survey waves (2018-19, 2019-20, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25).

TABLE B4. Principal Effectiveness

	Loadings	Psi
Works with staff to meet curriculum standards	0.900	0.190
Communicates the central mission of the school	0.898	0.194
Uses evidence to make data-driven decisions	0.897	0.195
Works with community partners to provide support or resources for the school	0.854	0.271
Facilitates teacher participation in professional development activities	0.880	0.225
Supports parental engagement	0.863	0.256
N	17,780	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.943	

Note: Teachers were asked, "Please indicate how effectively your principal or school leader performs each of the following." Response options were "not at all effectively," "slightly effectively," "somewhat effectively," "very effectively," or "extremely effectively." Questions were asked to teachers in all seven survey waves.

TABLE B5. Student and Parent Disengagement

	Loadings	Psi
Lack of student motivation to learn	0.851	0.277
Lack of parent engagement	0.830	0.311
Student behavior	0.811	0.342
Student attendance	0.817	0.332
N	10,441	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.845	

Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "To what extent is each of the following a hindrance to achieving your school's improvement goals?" Response options were "not a hindrance," "a slight hindrance," "a moderate hindrance," "a great hindrance," or "the greatest hindrance." Questions were asked to teachers and principals in the last three survey waves (2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25).

APPENDIX B *(continued)*

TABLE B6. Staffing Hindrances

	Loadings	Psi
Low teacher retention	0.753	0.433
Lack of availability of substitute teachers	0.776	0.397
Insufficient supply of certified teachers	0.814	0.338
Insufficient supply of non-instructional personnel	0.754	0.431
N	10,395	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.777	

Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "To what extent is each of the following a hindrance to achieving your school's improvement goals?" Response options were "not a hindrance," "a slight hindrance," "a moderate hindrance," "a great hindrance," or "the greatest hindrance." Questions were asked to teachers and principals in the last three survey waves (2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25).

TABLE B7. MTSS Implementation

	Loadings	Psi
Universal screening to identify students who need targeted or intensive math interventions	0.761	0.421
Universal screening to identify students who need targeted or intensive ELA/ literacy interventions	0.781	0.389
Using data to classify students into tiers	0.808	0.347
Using data to select instructional interventions for students	0.828	0.314
Systems to monitor progress for students receiving instructional interventions	0.843	0.290
Targeted instructional interventions for Tier 2 students	0.831	0.310
Intensive instructional interventions for Tier 3 students	0.813	0.340
Professional development related to MTSS	0.796	0.367
Schoolwide schedule that provides enough time for MTSS instructional interventions	0.810	0.344
Adequate resources to implement MTSS	0.789	0.377
A leadership team that guides the implementation of MTSS with established plans, routines, and processes	0.795	0.367
N	5,898	
Chronbach's Alpha	0.945	

Note: Teachers and principals were asked, "Please indicate the extent to which your school implements the following elements of an instructional MTSS (e.g., to provide students with additional instructional support)." Response options were "not at all implemented," "partially implemented," "fully implemented," or "I don't know." Responses indicating "I don't know" were not included in the confirmatory factor analysis. Questions were asked to teachers and principals in the last three survey waves (2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25).



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