A Descriptive Study of the IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research Program

Final Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

This report presents results from the second phase of a descriptive study of the Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research program. This two-year grant program, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education, supports exploratory research within a partnership context. In each funded partnership, researchers collaborate with practitioners from state or local education agencies on a research project that investigates a problem of practice and identifies strategies to address the key issues. The National Center for Research in Policy and Practice (NCRPP), which is funded by IES, conducted the study. As a descriptive study, no inferences about the partnerships' success or the program's overall impact can be made.

Research Design and Methods

We studied the first three cohorts of researcher–practitioner partnerships (RPPs), funded in 2013–2015, using a mixed-methods, cross-case design. A summary of Phase I findings can be found in NCRPP Technical Report No. 2, A Descriptive Study of the IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships Program. For Phase II, we developed two survey instruments, one for researchers and one for practitioners. The surveys included five previously-tested scales of items from NCRPP's national survey of educational leaders' research use as well as new items related to partnership goals, prior relationships, and future work together. New items were tested and revised through a cognitive piloting process. We also developed, pilot-tested, and implemented an interview protocol for each group, and we conducted a systematic document review of grant applications.

A total of 114 participants completed the Phase II survey (response rate = 78%), including 62 researchers (25 of whom were principal investigators) and 52 practitioners (28 of whom were co-principal investigators). Ninety-five of these individuals also participated in an interview (response rate = 65%) including 53 researchers (21 of whom were principal investigators) and 42 practitioners (24 of whom were co-principal investigators).

Context

Each RPP in this study focused on a central educational issue, most often related to improving K–12 teaching and learning (12 of 27 RPPs). Three RPPs addressed issues of K–12 teacher quality or evaluation, and two centered on K–12 school improvement. Four RPPs identified early childhood education as their main issue, five pursued postsecondary access and success, and one RPP focused on improving coordination across state service providers and education agencies.

The majority of RPPs focused their work on research questions that were descriptive or exploratory in nature, in accordance with the aims of the broader program. These projects sought to understand a particular education problem or issue, such as why a particular group of students was underperforming, and to identify possible intervention strategies. A few RPPs focused on understanding causal relationships or validating measures or constructs. Most partnerships used mixed-methods approaches that drew on both new and existing data sources.

The partnerships were given only two years of funding, and resources were not provided to set up or test interventions at scale. Rather, the purpose was to lay a foundation for future intervention research grounded in a more thorough understanding of the problem.

Progress on Goals of RPPs

The RPPs pursued a range of goals in their work together, including and extending beyond those emphasized in the program's request for applications (RFA). Partnerships reported that they were closest to accomplishing goals related to building a foundation of work together, followed by developing a deep understanding of the focal problem, researchers' capacity to work in partnership, and a deep understanding of how researchers and practitioners can work together. In terms of growth over time, participants reported making progress on almost all goals, including those related to developing findings that apply to other organizations and improving students' socio-emotional/non-cognitive outcomes.

Perceived Benefits of Participating in a Partnership

Researchers and practitioners alike highly valued their participation in partnership work, with almost all of those surveyed either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would participate in another RPP in the future.

RPP members reported that partnerships provided local policymakers with new ideas or frameworks or supported the design of professional development, programs, or practices. Participants from about one-third of partnerships reported that their work had contributed to a new or revised policy within the educational organization.

Both researchers and practitioners contributed to the research effort and to dissemination. More precisely, both were involved in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data as well as presenting at conferences, including both researcher- and practitioner-oriented events. About half of the partnerships had members who had written for traditional research outlets (i.e., articles, book chapters, or books) or who had contributed to new media platforms.

Shifts in Researchers' and Practitioners' Engagement with Research and Practice

On surveys, the majority of practitioners reported becoming better at using research in their work and were more likely to do so because of their participation in the partnership. Almost all of the researchers agreed that they had become better at conducting research that meets the needs of practitioners. Both researchers and practitioners agreed they would feel confident leading a future partnership.

In interviews, participants further described practitioners' increased appreciation for the value of research, their openness to participating in and using research, and their expanded skills related to developing, conducting, and disseminating findings from a research study. Likewise, researchers reported having developed expanded understandings about practitioners' contexts, the value of their input in the research process, and the skills needed to adapt research methods and timely reports of findings to practitioners' needs. Both groups noted that they had improved their skills in communicating with stakeholders.

Practitioners' Use of Research

The ways that RPP district leaders reported using research are similar to those reported by district and school leaders in a nationally representative sample. In both samples, educational leaders reported using research in multiple ways including to make decisions (instrumental use), to inform how they thought about issues (conceptual use), to persuade others of a particular point of view (symbolic use), or to integrate research processes into their own work (process use). Compared to the national sample, RPP district leaders reported less frequent symbolic use of research and more frequent process use. Within the RPP sample, practitioners in research roles were significantly more likely to report higher levels of process use of research than their peers in non-research roles.

Among the activities research evidence might inform (i.e., instrumental uses of research), RPP practitioners were most likely to be involved in directing resources to a program, scaling up a program, or designing professional development. Although practitioners least frequently reported participating in purchasing an intervention or targeted program, they reported the highest frequency of research use for this activity. On average, RPP practitioners in non-research roles reported being more involved in activities related to purchasing an intervention or targeted program, redesigning a program, and designing professional development than did their colleagues in research roles. When these activities occurred, RPP practitioners reported that, in the past year, about half of their RPP research partners were involved in designing professional development or directing resources to a program.

Useful Pieces of Research

We asked RPP practitioners to name a piece of research that was useful to them, and we compared their reports to those of district leaders from a national survey with the same question. RPP practitioners most often named journal articles, whereas national survey respondents most often named books. Research named by RPP survey respondents focused on particular student subgroups more frequently than did research named by national survey respondents. RPP practitioners most frequently named pieces of research that focused on student learning and school organization but that did not have a disciplinary content focus. Finally, RPP study respondents noted that the piece of research they had named was useful because it helped with the design of programs, policies, and initiatives; national survey respondents, by contrast, frequently named reasons related to supporting leaders' professional learning.

Nature of Relationships Prior to the IES Grant

The partnerships that received IES funding between 2013 and 2015 were not, for the most part, new collaborations. The majority had participants who had worked together before receiving IES RPP funding, and most participants knew at least one person in or had worked on a project with the partner organization before the grant started. Beyond these relationships, many partnerships had some infrastructure in place already. For example, 19 partnerships had established formal data-sharing agreements, 18 had established broader research agendas beyond the focus of the IES grant, 16 had established memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and 11 had established decision-making boards prior to receiving the IES grant.

Conditions for Starting and Maintaining a Partnership

The top two conditions for *launching* an RPP were mutual organizational interest and trust among RPP members. Other conditions that supported starting an RPP included a data-sharing agreement or MOU, individual expertise of RPP members, and organizational leadership. Holding regular meetings, mutual organizational interest, and trust among RPP members were top conditions for *maintaining* a partnership.

Promising Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

RPP practitioners reported three main challenges in their partnerships: (1) turnover of positions for those involved in the partnership as well as leadership turnover within educational organizations more generally; (2) differences in researchers' and practitioners' typical timelines or pace of work; and (3) having the "right people at the table" in terms of active members in the partnership with decision-making authority to act on the partnerships' findings. In interviews, RPP participants shared strategies they felt were useful in navigating these issues. The strategies included building strong, trusting relationships, communicating regularly, and being flexible enough to adjust course based on changing circumstances.

Organizational Conditions in the Practice Organization

Culture of research use. In terms of organizational culture for research use, the majority of RPP practitioners agreed that research was seen as a useful source of information in their organization, but fewer indicated that they were expected to back up claims with research in a meeting. Overall, RPP district leaders reported their organizational culture was less research-oriented than did the national sample subset of district leaders.

Conditions that support learning in a partnership. Prior research suggests that some practice organizations may be better positioned than others to engage productively with their external partners. Specifically, internal communication may be a challenge in some practice organizations. Only half of RPP practitioners reported having enough time and space to make sense of new information from their partners or that new knowledge was regularly communicated across departments. A majority of practitioners reported that it was easy to see the connections between their organizations' initiatives and work with external partners. However, two-thirds of RPP practitioners reported that organizational leadership did not coordinate work effectively enough to limit conflicts or reduce overlap between their organizations' initiatives and partnership work. Finally, having the organizational resources (e.g., time, staff) to support partnering seemed to vary in practice organizations as well.

Plans for Ongoing Work Together

The majority of partnerships had continued working together past the end of the IES RPP grant or planned to continue to do so. Six of the 27 partnerships had successfully applied for and received additional funding; another five applied for additional funding but did not receive it. Ten ongoing partnerships had plans to apply for additional funding, while the remaining six did not have plans to apply for additional funding at the time of the Phase II survey.

Partnerships pursued future funding from the following organizations: IES, the Spencer Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, local and national foundations (e.g., Annie E. Casey Foundation; James S. McDonnell Foundation; William T. Grant Foundation), and state agencies.

Recommendations

We offer some specific recommendations to the IES RPP program regarding the structure of the grant program, the support offered by IES during the application process, and the RFA and proposal guidelines.

The program could consider a differentiated approach to RPP funding so that there are different goals, timelines, and funding amounts for newer partnerships compared to well-established ones. Further, IES may want to consider offering workshops for prospective teams to help them develop key skills related to RPPs. This may broaden the base of applicants and result in more successful new partnerships.

In terms of the RFA and proposal guidelines, the IES RPP program may want to consider naming the range of short- and long-term goals that the partnerships have specified in the past, without limiting the possible goals that might be pursued. Further, many RPPs do integrate design into their plan of activities, but this could be encouraged explicitly in the RFA in order to reach impact on students more quickly. The grant application could ask for additional information related to the conditions that tend to support a partnership's launch or ongoing work, and applicants could be asked to offer initial ideas of how they might navigate common challenges, should they come up in the course of their work together. Finally, proposers could be asked to consider whether their list of participants includes those in the educational agency who have decision-making authority or involvement in implementation related to the problem of practice.

Introduction

This report presents the results of a descriptive study of the Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research Program, a two-year grant program funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education that supports exploratory research within a partnership context. In each of these partnerships, researchers collaborate with practitioners from at least one state or local education agency on a research project to investigate a problem of practice and to identify strategies to address the key issues.

Since 2013, there have been five cohorts of partnerships funded through the grant program, and interest in research–practice partnerships (RPPs) in education has continued to grow more broadly.[1] New funding streams have emerged that support researchers and practitioners working in partnership with each other to address complex problems of practice (e.g., the William T. Grant Foundation's Institutional Challenge Grant;[2] the National Science Foundation's CS4All initiative[3]; the Gates Foundation's support for improvement networks[4]). Advocacy groups like Results for America and the Data Quality Campaign have pointed to RPPs as an important lever for supporting research use at district and state levels.[5]

Resources for those who want to participate in partnerships have grown as well. There are several repositories with tools for starting or continuing partnerships online, including the Research+Practice Collaboratory[6] or the research–practice partnership microsite hosted by the William T. Grant Foundation.[7] New books came out in 2018 that provide guidance for those who want to engage in equity-oriented partnerships.[8] The National Network of Education Research–Practice Partnerships (NNERPP)[9], an organization for RPPs, now has over 25 member partnerships. In addition to their annual forum, NNERPP curates a weekly blog on Education Week's website where RPP leaders share research findings and experiences from their partnership work.[10]

Yet we still do not have a good understanding of the range of ways researchers and practitioners can work together around a problem of practice. We need a better sense of the different ways to structure partnership work, the challenges that emerge, and the organizational and partner contexts that support the hard work of partnering. We also need to know more about the different goals that partnerships identify to orient their work together and the perceived benefits of their partnerships. From here, we can begin to understand when, and under what conditions, RPPs are productive strategies for instructional improvement efforts.

This report presents results of the efforts of the National Center for Research in Policy and Practice (NCRPP) to address this need through a two-year descriptive study of researchers and practitioners engaged in RPPs funded by the Institute of Education Sciences. The NCRPP is an IES-funded center focused on the study of research use among education leaders in the United States. This is the second of two technical reports from the project.[11]

To develop an understanding of these RPPs, we surveyed and interviewed researchers and practitioners who were actively involved in the partnerships and analyzed their original grant applications.

In this report, we present the results of our study with regard to the following topics and questions:

About perceived benefits of partnerships:

- What progress did RPPs make on their identified goals over time?
- What were the perceived benefits of the partnerships?
- How did participation in an RPP contribute to shifts in how practitioners engaged with research?
- How did participation in an RPP contribute to shifts in how researchers did their research?
- How did RPP practitioners use research, and what types of research did RPP practitioners find useful?

About partnership contexts:

- What was the nature of RPP members' relationships prior to their IES grant?
- What were the primary conditions that supported starting and maintaining a partnership?
- What promising strategies for overcoming key challenges were identified by RPPs?
- What organizational conditions that support research use and partnership work were present in the practice organizations?
- What were RPP members' plans for future work together after their IES grant concluded, including their pursuit of funding opportunities?

In this report, we describe our instrument development process, sampling strategy, and key constructs. We then offer analysis for the questions above. It is our hope that findings of this study can not only inform the IES RPP program but also contribute to knowledge on the processes, successes, and challenges of RPPs in education. This work provides information about the reported value of these collaborative efforts for researchers and practitioners interested in developing partnerships.

Conceptual Framework

A set of key interlocking ideas guided the design of this study. We drew on Weiss and Buculavas's typology of research use[12] to address the question of how well grantees are meeting a core goal of the IES RPP program: building educators' capacity for using research. To inform the design of survey and interview questions related to goals, we drew on a recently developed framework developed by Henrick and colleagues[13] for characterizing the outcomes of research–practice partnerships. Finally, to provide insight into organizational dimensions related to research use, we drew on ideas of culture for research use and organizational conditions that may support an organization's ability to productively engage with a partner.

Multifaceted Nature of Research Use

There are different ways that research can be involved in decision making. When policymakers and others encourage school and district leaders to use research, they often imply that leaders should use research directly and centrally to make decisions related to policy or practice. However, research can also influence decision making by focusing attention on issues that were previously unknown to decision makers,[14] identifying opportunities for improving current programs and policies,[15] or providing information about the plausibility of policy theories of action.[16]

In designing queries about leaders' purposes for research use, we followed the categories first identified by Weiss and Buculavas and applied more recently in studies of educational leaders' research use.[17] This typology suggests that leaders' use of research is multifaceted and characterized by at least four main roles for research:[18]

- *Instrumental use:* Research is applied to guide or inform a specific decision.
- *Conceptual use:* Research induces changes in the way a person views either a problem or the possible solution space for a problem.
- *Symbolic/political use:* Research is used to validate a decision or legitimate a decision already made.
- *Process use:* Leaders incorporate the processes of research into their own work, for instance, launching an evaluation study, participating in a grant proposal that includes an evaluation component, or collaborating with others to analyze data.

Research–practice partnerships are hypothesized to promote use of all types because they provide opportunities for sustained interactions between researchers and practitioners around evidence.[19] Sustained interaction is important to fostering research use because it involves the interactive processes of deliberation, persuasion, negotiation, and sensemaking.[20] RPPs frequently involve structured activities to develop research and evaluation questions together and to make sense of results of studies of policies and programs.[21] Such processes may not only help practitioners to make sense of evidence, they may also be occasions for researchers to "give sense"[22] to the meaning of the evidence in light of how particular findings fit in with other research studies.

Characterizing the Goals of IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships

Promoting research use is not the only goal of RPPs, nor is it the only goal of the IES researcher–practitioner partnerships grant program. For example, many RPPs work together to design and test interventions that can improve learning outcomes and be implemented at scale.[23] To characterize the goals of RPPs in this study, we draw on a recent effort by Henrick and colleagues (funded by the William T. Grant Foundation) to characterize the different goals pursued by RPPs.[24] This effort, which used an iterative, participatory process of soliciting input and feedback from multiple RPPs across the country, yielded a typology of five categories of outcomes that the RPPs in the sample agreed were important to them to varying degrees. Though this framework encompasses some aims that might go beyond those explicitly promoted in the IES RPP program, we employed it here in order to capture the various purposes of the participating partnerships. We describe below the five categories of outcomes from the framework.

Support improvements to teaching and learning. RPPs support educational partner organizations to achieve their local improvement goals. That is, the research they do is in service of larger aims for improving teaching and learning outcomes rather than just to develop an understanding of problems. Sometimes, partnerships work together to identify and test strategies for addressing a focal problem. Partnerships may also engage in continuous improvement research in which they develop, test, and refine particular strategies and use research evidence to refine or adjust those strategies.[25] Researchers in partnerships may develop indicators or indicator systems to help partners track progress toward their own program goals.[26]

Conduct and use rigorous research. Just as researchers who engage in other forms of research and development do, researchers in RPPs aim to conduct research that meets the highest standards of quality. When evaluating programs, for example, they seek to use the most appropriate designs for estimating the causal impact of programs available, including (but not limited to) experimental design.[27] What distinguishes RPPs from other forms of research is that they are focused sharply on their local partners' identified problems of practice. To that end, partnerships often produce descriptive studies that explore the relationships among malleable factors in educational environments,[28] as is one aim of the IES RPP program. Partnerships are also consumers of research. Sometimes, education leaders take up findings and use them to adjust policies and programs.[29] On other occasions, design teams composed of both researchers and practitioners make use of research analyses to refine their solutions to educational problems.[30] As part of this goal, practitioners' organizational capacity to conduct or use research may be further developed.

Inform the work of others. Although RPPs attend to local problems of practice, most also seek to inform the work of others outside the partnership. Researchers can contribute to new knowledge and theory that furthers our understanding of what it takes to support educational improvement across different educational settings.[31] When given the opportunity, educators readily share knowledge, tools, and practices they have developed with other educators outside their own organization.[32] There is evidence, too, that such tools and practices can be taken up by educators in other partnerships.[33]

Cultivate partnership relationships. RPPs aim to cultivate partnership relationships and build trust among researchers and practitioners. Productive working relationships are both the foundation for joint work and a consequence of working successfully together. Similarly, trust is a necessary ingredient in all partnerships,[34] and it develops as people make commitments to one another and follow through on those commitments.

Increase capacity of researchers and practitioners to conduct partnership work. Another goal that RPPs pursue in order to sustain future work is to develop members' skills and dispositions to conduct work in partnerships. For researchers, this includes identifying problems of practice to study that could also address gaps in foundational knowledge about learning or education. Likewise, it includes cultivating dispositions to listen to practitioners and seek out their expertise in diagnosing problems and designing solutions to them. For educators, it means cultivating an appetite for research evidence and developing skills necessary to participate in different aspects of the research process, from defining questions to providing feedback on instruments to making judgments about how best to apply findings in particular decision-making contexts.

Organizational Conditions that Support Research Use and Partnership Work

Research suggests that certain organizational conditions may be related to patterns of research use.[35] Here we describe these key conditions.

Culture of research use. One condition that may matter is the culture of research use within the educational organization. A culture of research use is one in which organization members value research as a resource for decision making,[36] remain open to change in light of evidence,[37] and enact multiple social supports and norms promoting evidence use.[38] NCRPP's nationally representative survey of district and school leaders found that higher reported levels of organizational culture for research use were positively associated with greater reports of all types of research use.[39] Further, structured opportunities to engage with others around research within a partnership can be associated with greater research use within decision making.[40]

Organizational conditions to engage productively with an external partner. Not all educational organizations are equally positioned to act on the knowledge they gain by working with research partners. Past research suggests that an organization's capacity to do so is related to its "absorptive capacity"—that is, its ability to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it in novel ways as part of organizational routines, policies, and practices.[41] There are three conditions that can support an organization's absorptive capacity: communication within and between departments; resources to support partnering work; and leadership activities to connect partnership work to organizational goals or to manage the activities of multiple partners.[42] When present, these conditions may make it more likely that the organization is able to apply new knowledge and ideas gained from working with an external partner in productive ways.

Study Design

This report summarizes a two-year, two-phase study. This descriptive study focused on the IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research Program grantees' prior relationships and future work, reported goals and progress, challenges and strategies, conditions that supported and fostered partnership work, attitudes toward working in partnerships, and RPP practitioners' reports of research use and organizational conditions in their agencies. As a descriptive study, no inferences about the program's impact can be made, nor was that the intent. Below, we describe our study population and sample, study methods, instruments, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Study Population and Sample

We studied the first three cohorts of the IES RPP program, with two-year funding beginning in 2013, 2014, or 2015. (For more information about the RPPs in these cohorts, see the next section, "Descriptions of the IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships.") The population included a total of 28 RPPs and the most active researchers and practitioners in those partnerships. By "most active" members, we mean those with some responsibility for carrying out the work of the partnership, as identified by each RPP's principal investigator (PI).

"RPP researchers" or "researchers" refers to the PIs and other RPP members from universities and research organizations; this group does not include practitioners who were in research positions located in practice organizations (e.g., a director of research in a school district). "RPP practitioners" or "practitioners" refers to co-principal investigators (co-PIs) and other RPP members from educational organizations such as school districts, departments of education, and social services agencies (including individuals in research-related roles in these organizations). Each partnership had one researcher PI and either one or two practitioner co-PIs.

This project unfolded over two years: Phase I (summer 2016) and Phase II (summer 2017). Below we describe the rostering and sampling for both phases.[43]

Phase I

Original roster. In order to identify the population of participants for the study, we began with the publicly available abstracts of the 28 RPPs. We aimed to include three to four active participants per RPP, with roughly equal researcher and practitioner representation, including the PI and a co-PI.

In May 2016, we emailed the PIs of all 28 RPPs to invite participation, to confirm the names and email addresses of the active members we had identified through publicly available abstracts, to request the names and email addresses of active members we had not identified, and to request a copy of their grant application. Of the 28 PIs, 27 responded to our requests.

The PIs confirmed or named 82 active researchers (including the 27 PIs) and 78 active practitioners (including 25 lead co-PIs), for an overall total of 160 individuals rostered for Phase I. In the case of four RPPs where the PI named more than one co-PI, we asked them to identify a lead practitioner co-PI.

For each of the responding 27 RPPs, our roster included the PI, the lead co-PI, an average of two other researchers, and an average of two other practitioners.

Participation and response rates. In Phase I, rostered individuals received up to six email invitations and reminders to participate, as well as a telephone call as a second-to-last reminder. Individuals were asked to first complete a 15- to 20-minute survey, after which they were automatically prompted to schedule a 45- to 60-minute interview with a member of the research team.

As shown in Table 1, a total of 104 participants representing 27 RPPs completed the survey, the interview, or both, for an overall response rate of 66% and an average of four participants per RPP. Participation for 25 of the 27 RPPs included at least one researcher and one practitioner. We received survey responses from 104 participants (response rate = 65%) and conducted interviews with 98 participants (response rate = 61%). Eight participants completed the survey but not the interview. Two participants completed the interview but not the survey. (These two individuals started but did not fully complete the survey items, yet still received an automatic invitation to schedule an interview.)

Response rates in Phase I were higher for researchers than for practitioners. Of the 82 rostered researchers, 61 (74%) completed the survey, the interview, or both, while 45 (58%) of the 78 rostered practitioners did so. Among researchers and practitioners, participation was high for PIs (26; 93%) and for co-PIs (21; 84%), and lower for other researchers (35; 65%) and other practitioners (24; 45%).

Table 1. *Phase I Roster and Response Rates, by Role in Partnership*

| | Rostered | # of participants (response rate) | | |
		Survey	Interview	Survey, interview, or both
All	160	104 (65%)	98 (61%)	106 (66%)
Researchers	82	61 (74%)	56 (68%)	61 (74%)
PIs	28	26 (93%)	24 (86%)	26 (93%)
Others	54	35 (65%)	32 (59%)	35 (65%)
Practitioners	78	43 (55%)	42 (54%)	45 (58%)
Co-PI Practitioners	25	20 (80%)	19 (76%)	21 (84%)
Others	53	23 (43%)	23 (43%)	24 (45%)

Phase II

Original roster. To begin Phase II of the study, in February of 2017 we confirmed with IES the closing dates of all 28 RPP grants. For the nine grants that had closed in 2016, the Phase II roster included the same RPP members as on the Phase I roster. For the other 19 grants that had not yet closed, we emailed each PI to confirm that Phase I rostered members were still active in the RPP, to ask if there were any changes to active membership, and to request the contact information for any newly active RPP members.

Of the 82 researchers rostered in Phase I, 73 were still active members in Phase II (or were part of grants that had closed) and remained on our Phase II roster. Likewise, of the 78 practitioners rostered in Phase I, 68 remained on our Phase II roster. A total of 141 individuals therefore were included on both Phase I and Phase II rosters.

In addition, two newly active researchers and three newly active practitioners were added to the Phase II roster. This resulted in a roster of 75 researchers (including the same 27 PIs as in Phase I) and 71 practitioners (including 31 co-PIs), for a total of 146 individuals on the Phase II roster. In one of the RPPs, the PI had been replaced by a researcher who was not active in Phase I. In one other RPP, the PI role shifted from the original PI to another researcher on the project, but both were active in both phases of the study.

In an attempt to improve practitioner response rates, in Phase II we mailed to rostered practitioners a $10 gift card with the initial invitation to participate. Otherwise, we proceeded with a similar process of up to six email and telephone invitations and reminders to complete the 15-minute survey, after which participants received an invitation to sign up for a 45- to 60-minute interview.

Participation and response rates. In Phase II, we secured participation from the same 27 of the 28 funded RPPs. As shown in Table 2, of the 141 individuals who were rostered in Phase I and remained on the Phase II roster, 86 participated in Phase II, including 49 researchers and 37 practitioners.

Table 2 details the full Phase II roster, including newly active RPP members who were added and overall participation in Phase II. A total of 114 participants completed the survey, including 62 researchers (25 of whom were PIs) and 52 practitioners (28 of whom were co-PIs). Ninety-five of these same participants also participated in an interview, including 53 researchers (21 of whom were PIs) and 42 practitioners (24 of whom were co-PIs).

Response rates in Phase II were notably higher than in Phase I, with 83% of researchers and 73% of practitioners participating, for an overall response rate of 78% among the 27 rostered RPPs. As in Phase I, there was an average of four participants per RPP in Phase II. At least one researcher and one practitioner participated in the Phase II survey in all 27 RPPs, and at least one from each of the two groups participated in the Phase II interview in 24 of the 27 RPPs.

Table 2. *Response Rates for PIs, Other Researchers, Co-PIs, and Other Practitioners*

| | Both Phase I and Phase II | | | Phase II | |
| | | | | # of participants (response rate) | |
	Rostered	Participated	Total Rostered	Survey	Interview
All	141	86	146	114 (78%)	95 (65%)
Researchers	73	49	75	62 (85%)	53 (71%)
PIs	26	24	27	25 (93%)	21 (78%)
Others	47	25	48	37 (77%)	32 (67%)
Practitioners	68	37	71	52 (73%)	42 (59%)
Co-PI Practitioners	29	28	31	28 (90%)	24 (77%)
Others	39	9	40	24 (60%)	19 (48%)

Participant characteristics. Table 3 below details characteristics and demographic information for the 114 participants in Phase II. About two-thirds of researchers worked at universities, with the remaining at other research organizations; most were either professors or researchers in these settings. Almost two-thirds of practitioners worked in school districts, with the remaining in departments of education, higher education organizations, or other educational or social services agencies. The largest number (22 of 52; 42%) were in research-related roles across P–20 educational organizations, with others in a variety of roles within early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary organizations.

Researchers and practitioners were experienced in their positions and typically held advanced degrees. On average, PIs had served 14 years in their positions, compared to about nine years served by other researchers and co-PI practitioners. Other practitioners averaged five years in their positions. Almost all PIs (96%) and other researchers (81%) held doctoral degrees. Notably, over half of co-PIs (57%) and 42% of other practitioners also held doctoral degrees. Across all groups, participants largely identified as female (61%) and White or European American (76%).

Table 3. *Characteristics and Demographic Information of Survey Respondents in Phase II, by Role in Partnership*

			Researchers		Practitioners	
		All	PIs	Others	Co-PIs	Others
	n	114	25	37	28	24
Type of Research Organization						
University		40	16	24	-	-
Research Organization		22	9	13	-	-
Type of Practice Organization						
School District		32	-	-	19	13
Department of Education		9	-	-	6	3
Higher Education Organization		6	-	-	2	4
Other Educational or Social Services Agency		5	-	-	1	4
Researcher Role in Organization						
Professor		32	17	15	-	-
Researcher		25	7	18	-	-
Doctoral Student		3	0	3	-	-
Center Director		2	1	1	-	-
Practitioner Role in Organization						
P-20 Research, Assessment, and Accountability		22	-	-	14	8
Early Childhood Policy and Practice		8	-	-	3	5
Postsecondary Policy and Practice		6	-	-	3	3
K–12 Federal Programs		5	-	-	2	3
K–12 Deputy Superintendents and Chief Officers		3	-	-	2	1
K–12 Special Education		3	-	-	1	2
K–12 Educator Evaluation		2	-	-	2	0
K–12 Curriculum and Instruction		2	-	-	1	1
Average years in current role		9.9	14.4	8.6	9.5	5.0

Table 3. *Characteristics and Demographic Information of Survey Respondents in Phase II, by Role in Partnership (continued)*

		All	Researchers		Practitioners	
			PIs	Others	Co-PIs	Others
	n	*114*	*25*	*37*	*28*	*24*
Highest degree held						
Doctorate		72%	96%	89%	50%	39%
Master's		25%	4%	9%	45%	57%
Bachelor's		3%	0%	3%	5%	4%
Gender identity[a]						
Female		66%	58%	66%	55%	87%
Male		34%	42%	34%	45%	13%
Racial or ethnic identity						
White or European American		83%	81%	89%	85%	74%
Latino(a)/Hispanic		6%	4%	0%	15%	9%
Black, African American, or Afro-Caribbean		5%	4%	9%	0%	0%
Asian American or Pacific Islander		4%	4%	9%	0%	0%
Multiracial		2%	4%	3%	0%	13%
Arab American or Indian American		1%	4%	0%	0%	0%
American Indian or Alaskan Native		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Multiracial		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other		1%	4%	0%	0%	0%

[a]Gender identity was asked as an open-ended question.

Sources of Data

Our analysis in Phase II drew on survey data and interviews. We describe these data sources below.

Survey. We developed two survey instruments, one for researchers and one for practitioners. Surveys included five previously tested scales of items from NCRPP's national survey of educational leaders' research use and attitudes, including instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic uses of research, as well as new items specific to this study. New items were tested and revised through a cognitive piloting process with two practitioners and two researchers. We also solicited expert feedback from advisors. We then made revisions to items on the basis of team discussions that took into account the pilot results and expert feedback. The constructs below are those included in this report, listed in the order of the subsequent findings sections.

Our surveys provided respondents with a definition of research as "an activity in which people employ systematic, empirical methods to answer a specific question." The survey text also provided the following elaboration:

Research bases its conclusions in investigations involving statistical data, interviews, observations, and case studies, or a combination of these. Research can appear in books, academic journal articles, practitioner-oriented journals, and analyses of program implementation developed by researchers external to the district. It can also appear in policy and evaluation reports or presentations developed by researchers within a district.

For this study, we differentiate between research, which involves systematic inquiry to answer a specific question, and the practice of looking at data from the district, school, or classroom, which is more open-ended and seldom addresses specific research questions. For instance, looking at state standardized test results to identify students who need extra support in the classroom would not be research. However, asking the question, "What is the relationship between fourth-grade state standardized test results and high school graduation?" would be research.

Goals. To elicit respondents' reports on partnership goals, we first provided a list of 14 potential goals, based on the RPP goals framework developed by Henrick and colleagues. Goals included plans to identify a specific strategy for improvement, improve students' academic outcomes, or build a foundation or infrastructure for future work together. In the Phase I survey, we asked whether this was a current goal of the partnership, was a goal at the start of the partnership, or was not a goal. If a respondent indicated this was or had been a goal, we subsequently asked what progress the partnership had made towards that goal. Then, in the Phase II survey, we asked participants to report on their progress on the goals they had identified in the first survey. Item response choices were: 1 = no progress; 2 = a little progress; 3 = some progress; 4 = accomplished; or 5 = exceeded. This set of items was included on both researcher and practitioner surveys.

Perceived benefits of partnership: Attitudes. We included items focused on attitudes towards partnerships. These items included statements like, "I would participate in a researcher–practitioner partnership in the future," or negatively phrased statements such as, "I would not recommend to a colleague that they join or form a researcher–practitioner partnership." We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement, using these item responses: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree. This set of items appeared on both researcher and practitioner surveys.

Perceived benefits of partnership: Involvement in research dissemination and local practices. On the Phase II survey, researchers and practitioners were asked to indicate their involvement in a variety of activities related to conducting research and disseminating research findings. One bank of items focused on their involvement in research activities, with statements such as, "I have participated in collecting, organizing, or analyzing data as part of this partnership."

The other bank of items focused on the contributions of the partnership's work, with statements like, "Our IES RPP has contributed or helped lead to the design of professional development (PD) related to the focal problem(s) of the partnership." On each of these items, respondents marked "yes" if the statement was true for them and/or their partnership.

Research use: Instrumental. Instrumental use occurs when research is applied to guide or inform a specific decision. To elicit practitioners' instrumental use of research, we provided a list of six decisions common to educational organizations, including curriculum adoption, scaling up a pilot program, designing PD, and other activities. This scale was adopted from the NCRPP research use survey where it demonstrated excellent reliability (α = .93). Because this study surveyed practitioners in a range of educational organizations (not only school districts), we omitted one item that asked about involvement in adopting curriculum materials. We also condensed two items on designing PD for administrators and teachers to one item on designing PD. We first asked participants if they had been involved in each type of decision. Those who indicated they were involved in an activity were then asked how often they had used research as part of that activity. We also asked practitioners whether the partnership was consulted or involved in the activity. Item response choices were: 1= never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time. This item bank only appeared on the practitioner version of the survey.

Research use: Conceptual. Conceptual use refers to research changing the way a person views a problem or space of possible solutions. In our survey, we sought to elicit the extent to which research informs practitioners' ways of looking at problems or their approaches to solving district problems. The six-item scale included questions such as, "How often have you encountered research that changed the way you look at problems facing your school/district?" and "How often have you encountered research that suggested alternative solutions to a district problem?" This scale was adopted from the NCRPP research use survey, where it demonstrated good reliability (α = .88). As with the instrumental use scale, item response options were: 1= never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time. This item bank only appeared on the practitioner version of the survey.

Research use: Symbolic. Symbolic use, sometimes referred to as political use of research, occurs when research is leveraged to influence a decision or to legitimate a decision that has already been made. The four-item scale asked respondents to report their engagement in activities such as using research to mobilize support for important issues or selectively using research to support decisions. This scale was adopted from the NCRPP research use survey, where it demonstrated good reliability (α = .81). Item response choices were: 1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time. This item bank only appeared on the practitioner version of the survey.

Research use: Process. Process use occurs when leaders incorporate the processes of research into their own work. The four-item scale asked respondents to report their engagement in activities such as launching an evaluation study, participating in a grant proposal that includes an evaluation component, or collaborating with others to analyze data. Item response choices were: 1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time. This item bank only appeared on the practitioner version of the survey.

Prior relationships. Participants were asked to describe the nature of their prior relationships with RPP partners based on a number of indicators. First, they were asked whether they or anyone in their organization had worked with members of their partner organization(s) in any capacity before the IES RPP grant started, either formally or informally. Those who indicated that a prior relationship existed between partner organizations were asked: (1) to indicate whether they personally had any relationships with anyone from the partner organization(s); (2) how many projects the partner organization(s) had worked on together prior to the start of the IES RPP grant; and (3) how many years the partner organization(s) had worked together prior to the start of the IES RPP grant. Respondents who had established a relationship were also asked to indicate whether any of the following structures were in place prior to the start of the IES grant: (1) a memorandum of understanding (MOU); (2) a data-sharing agreement; (3) a research agenda that was broader than their IES RPP grant's focus; or (4) a formal body that makes decisions (e.g., an advisory board). These items appeared on both researcher and practitioner surveys.

Conditions for launching or supporting a partnership. During Phase I of our study, interview participants talked about conditions that supported the launch and maintenance of their RPP. Based on the main patterns in interviews, we generated a list of nine supportive conditions (plus an "other/please specify" option) that we included on our Phase II survey. These conditions included holding regular meetings, mutual organizational interest, and support from organizational leadership, among others. We asked all survey respondents to rank order the top three conditions that supported the launch or maintenance of their partnership.

Organizational culture of research use. During both phases of survey administration, practitioners were asked to respond to a set of four items related to the culture of research use within their educational organization. This scale was adopted from the NCRPP research use survey, where it demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .87$). These items included statements like, "In my organization/district, research is seen as a useful source of information" and "In my organization/district, it is expected that if you make a claim at a meeting, you will be able to cite research evidence to back it up." We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement, using the following item responses: 1 = never; 2 = occasionally; 3 = often; 4 = all of the time. These items were only asked of practitioners.

Absorptive capacity: Communication, strategic knowledge leadership, and resources. During both phases of survey administration, practitioners were asked to respond to three sets of items related to their organizational capacity to learn from their work with partners. One of these item banks included statements related to *intra-organizational communication*. These statements included, "In my organization/district, ideas, information, and new knowledge are regularly communicated across departments," as well as negatively phrased statements such as, "It's difficult for me to find out what's going on in other departments in my organization/district." Practitioners were asked to respond to a set of items related to *resources* needed for partnership activities, with statements like, "My organization/district has the discretionary funding needed to devote to the planning and implementation of partnership activities." Finally, practitioners responded to a set of items related to the *leadership* of partnership work, with statements like, "My organization/district has the capacity to coordinate efforts with all of our external partners." We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement, using the following

item responses: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree. These items were only asked of practitioners.

Future plans. In order to determine the future plans of each participating partnership, we first asked survey participants to indicate whether or not their IES RPP grant was still in progress. If their grant had already ended, respondents were asked whether or not the partnership had continued working together, and if they had applied for or received additional funding in order to continue this work. If the grant was still in progress, respondents were asked whether or not the partners had made plans to continue the work once the grant ended, and whether they had applied for or planned to apply for additional funding. In both cases (i.e., grant completed or still in progress), if respondents indicated that additional funding had been or would be sought, we asked them to identify the names of the grant-funding institutions. If survey respondents indicated that their partnership's work did not or would not continue beyond the life of the grant, we asked them to choose all the applicable reasons why from a list of options that included differences in priorities among RPP organizations, changes to the agendas of RPP organizations, and insufficient broader institutional support for the work, among others. Items related to partnerships' future plans appeared on both researcher and practitioner surveys.

Demographic information. Finally, we asked participants to report their own demographic characteristics related to years of experience, educational degrees earned, gender, and race or ethnicity.

Interview protocols for researchers and practitioners. We developed two semi-structured interview protocols, one for researchers and one for practitioners, both of which we piloted before beginning the interviews. Each protocol included questions related to the partnership's goals and progress made toward those goals, how the partnership compared to previous experiences of interacting with researchers or practitioners, challenges to sustaining the partnership and strategies, and perceived benefits of the partnerships.

Data Collection Procedures

We administered the survey via Qualtrics, an online survey administration platform, with an eight-week completion window for each respondent. We sent an email to each contact on the Phase II roster with an invitation to participate in the study and a link to the appropriate survey on Qualtrics. We sent three reminder emails over three weeks and followed up with one to two phone calls to survey non-respondents. In some cases, we delayed the reminder if we learned that the respondent was unavailable for periods of time over the summer.

Surveys took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. If a participant started the survey, they automatically received an email with a link to schedule a phone interview. Interview scheduling involved the same pattern of three emails at weekly intervals and one to two phone call reminders. Therefore, unless a person directly declined to participate, he or she could receive up to eight emails and four phone calls over the 10-week period to invite participation in the survey and interview. After that point, we determined that no response was a signal for non-participation. Ninety-five of the 114 survey respondents scheduled an interview with one of the members of the research team. Interviews lasted 45 minutes, on average.

We aimed to have both researcher and practitioner perspectives represented in as many RPPs as possible. For 24 of the 27 participating RPPs, we secured a minimum desired response of at least one researcher and one practitioner for each RPP for both the survey and interviews. In the three remaining RPPs, we secured the minimum desired response for survey participation but not for interviews. In these cases, only practitioners from the RPPs participated in an interview.

Issues of Confidentiality and Anonymity

Our reporting here focuses on broad themes and patterns that emerged across partnerships, not on individual partnerships. As such, in this report we do not identify any individual partnerships. We have likewise avoided using any identifiable language related to the individuals or the partnerships.

Approach to Analysis

To answer our research questions, we first looked at each source of data separately, producing descriptive statistics from our analysis of surveys and coding summaries of interview data. We considered carefully which data source was best suited to help us describe different aspects of the partnerships. Below, we describe the analyses of proposals, surveys, and interview transcripts.

Closed-ended survey analysis. After survey data cleaning of closed-ended items, one research team member calculated descriptive statistics for reported survey constructs. In order to investigate agreement between groups within partnerships, we compared responses among PIs, co-PIs, other researchers, other practitioners, all researchers, and all practitioners. To investigate similarities and differences across RPPs, we determined whether at least 50% of each RPP's participants gave consistent responses for items or banks of items. There were some instances where we reported other groups (e.g., PI/co-PI; practitioners only) when we felt that a particular group was in a better position to report on a topic. We note this throughout the report when appropriate.

Open-ended survey analysis. In the survey we asked practitioners to "Think about a time when a piece of research you encountered changed your thinking or opinions about possible solutions to your organization's/district's problems. What was that piece of research?" We asked respondents to provide as much detail as possible, including title, author, year published, publisher (if known), topic, and how it had been useful to their work. The following definition of research appeared above the item:

> *For the purposes of this study, "research" is an activity in which people employ systematic methods to answer a specific question. Research, as we define it, is different than the practice of looking at data from the district, school, or classroom, which is more open-ended and seldom addresses specific research questions.*

Two members of our team located the research named by respondents and coded each piece for APA citation, author, summary/abstract, format, type of review, topic (up to two), subtopic (up to two), content area focus (up to two), student subgroup focus (up to three), and how it was useful. The research team then summarized counts for each category for all respondents. We considered patterns for practitioners who worked in school district roles in order to compare them to the results of a national survey of school and district leaders.

We also analyzed patterns for those who worked in research roles, since a substantial proportion of IES RPP practitioners worked in research departments or had research roles in the practice organization.

Interview analysis. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and research team members reviewed the transcripts for accuracy, replaced individuals' names with pseudonyms, and uploaded cleaned transcripts to Dedoose, a qualitative research software program. Team members tagged each transcript with descriptors for the data collection time period (summer 2017); participant type (practitioner, researcher, PI, or co-PI); and RPP (by number) in order to track individuals and partnerships.

We proceeded in an iterative fashion to analyze the interview data. First, we engaged in low-inference coding. The goal of this initial stage of coding was to index interviews by key constructs like "challenges." Lead researchers created a coding guide with major constructs, definitions, relevant interview questions, examples, and non-examples for each code. This coding guide was revised as the team coded transcripts, first together and then independently once they had reached a shared understanding of codes. A subset of four team members engaged in this initial coding. Lead team members periodically checked coding to ensure integrity to the coding guide, and the team met regularly to discuss any issues that arose.

Next, for each specific line of analysis, lead team members conducted a more refined analysis of coded data to identify themes. Starting with the relevant coded excerpts, team members began with an a priori, deductive coding list based on the current literature base summarized in our conceptual framework above. They added codes inductively based on themes that emerged from the data. Team members reconciled coding for the same interviews until they reached at least 70% agreement, then proceeded to meet weekly to review and discuss questions about their individual coding. We analyzed patterns from interview coding by summarizing counts that showed predominant patterns and variations and used memos and matrices to consider patterns by individual, role group, and partnership.

Study Limitations

One limitation to both phases of this study is that we have relied on retrospective self-reports from surveys and interviews. Self-reports of socially desirable behaviors, like research use, are always subject to bias. Further, the fact that these self-reports are retrospective means that respondents may have glossed over challenges, dilemmas, and uncertainties in decision making. Research use and the role for partnerships are interactive phenomena that are best understood using multiple methods, including observations of partners' work together and the role of research therein.

Second, only a year elapsed between our two data collection points. It is possible that partnerships were able to accomplish a number of their short-term goals in this year, but it may have been too short of a time frame to see major changes. Further, a cohort of 11 partnerships had already completed their IES grants in the summer of 2016. In these cases, there was no new partnership activity sponsored by IES between 2016 and 2017, although many of these RPPs continued their work together. Their reports of progress towards goals, therefore, reflect progress not directly

supported by IES funding. Where it made sense, we compared patterns by cohort, and we report any differences in the sections that follow.

Further, as a descriptive rather than evaluative study, we cannot make inferences about the impact of the IES RPP partnerships. The data we gathered provide us with self-reports of different constructs, but different study designs would be needed to track other questions (e.g., long-term impact on student outcomes). Finally, the original IES request for applications (RFA) emphasized the research equally to the development of the partnership. This report does not address the research itself or the quality of the research.

Description of IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships

In Table 4 below, we provide an overview of the 28 partnerships that were funded through the IES RPP program and began in 2013–2015. All information presented here was gathered from publicly available sources.

The 27 RPPs that participated in our study had been awarded two-year grants in the first three years of the IES RPP program, with six RPPs beginning in 2013, 13 in 2014, and eight in 2015. Due to no-cost extensions granted to some RPPs, 11 of the partnerships ended in 2016, and the remaining were scheduled to complete their grants in 2017 or 2018.

Table 4. *Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs*

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
Study of Effects of Accelerated Basic Skills Instruction on Adults' GED Attainment and Enrollment in Post-secondary Education	Abt Associates, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development	Adult education	Postsecondary	This partnership focused on expanding the research-based knowledge on the effects of education services for low-skilled adult learners' education and employment outcomes. Over the course of this grant, the partnership planned to conduct analyses of administrative data and collect new data in order to inform promising programs.
Boston Public Schools Expanded Learning Time Research Collaborative	American Institutes for Research and Boston Public Schools	Extended learning time (ELT)	K–12	This partnership sought to track and categorize how much ELT was added to BPS schools, how that time was used, and the impact and cost analysis for implementation.

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
What Works for Title I Schools: Understanding the Contributors and Barriers to School Improvement	Arizona State University and the Arizona Department of Education	School improvement strategies	K-12	The partnership proposed to identify measures in existing data in order to assess the effectiveness of school improvement strategies and factors that predict student achievement within priority secondary Arizona schools. The results of the partnership were intended to inform future research proposals to properly assess the effectiveness of promising school improvement strategies.
Applicants at the Doorstep: Improving Hiring Practices through a Better Understanding of the Link Between Applicant Information and Teacher Quality	Center for Education Data and Research at University of Washington and Spokane Public Schools	Teacher hiring	K-12	This researcher-practitioner partnership aimed to study the relationship between teacher performance and data collected during the teacher hiring process, including observations by local hiring officials. The partnership hoped to better understand the relationship between applicant data and teacher performance in order to create a foundation from which to develop a future research proposal which would develop and analyze the effectiveness of new teacher applicant assessment tools.
Career Pathways Programming for Lower-Skilled Adults and Immigrants: A Comparative Analysis of Adult Education Providers in High-Need Cities	Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition, Houston Center for Literacy, Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy at the Pennsylvania State University, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools	Adult education, career pathways	Postsecondary	The goal of this partnership was to assess how adult education providers in each city integrated career pathway components into their services. They sought to understand commonly used student outcome measures, the short- and long-term outcomes of adult education providers, and how providers design and implement career pathways.

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
Foundation for Alliance for Education	Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Judicial Branch Court Supported Youth Services Division, and Yale University's Child Study Center	Educational services for court-involved youth	K-12	This partnership aimed to collect data on court-involved youth, develop a blueprint for a cross-agency partnership, and use the research findings to inform policy and practice regarding the delivery of appropriate educational services for approximately 1,500 juveniles in detention and 10,000 other court-involved youth.
Providence Public Schools District and Education Development Center: Developing a Researcher-Practitioner Partnership to Improve Achievement among Minority Students	Education Development Center and Providence Public Schools District	English language learners	K-12	This partnership aimed to foccus on collaborative research to inform policies and programs designed to improve English Language Learner learning. This included developing a database that would catalog available data elements related to ELL students including demo-graphic characteristics, English language aquisi-tion, achievement on state assessments, and ELL program enrollment.
Improving Paraprofessionals Instructional and Behavioral Support In Urban Elementary School Settings: A Research Practitioner Partnership	Juniper Gardens Children's Project, University of Kansas, Kansas City, and Kansas Public Schools	Paraprofession-al practices, training, and evaluation	K-12	The goal of the partnership was to eval-uate the knowledge, responsibilities, implementation of effective instructional practices and better under-stand the training needs of para-professionals and the teachers who work with them. The partnership aimed to collect observational data for the purpose of creating, imple-menting, and evaluating a training system for para-professionals and their supervising teachers.

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
New York City Partnership for College Readiness and Success	New York City Department of Education, the City University of NY, and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools at New York University	College readiness	K-12, Postsecondary	This researcher-practitioner partnership aimed to build capacity for improving postsecondary education opportunities for New York City students by shedding light on the high school to college transition and creating conditions for developing new interventions that aim to improve student preparation. The partnership proposed to conduct exploratory studies to develop college-readiness indicators that incorporate individual, community, and organizational factors that enhance or inhibit college preparation and then develop systematic interventions that enhance these factors.
Exploring Early Childhood Education Experiences and School Adjustment in Rural Elementary School Students	Oregon Social Learning Center, United Way of Lane County, and South Lane School District	Early childhood education	Early education	The partnership aimed to help the district collect information about early childhood education and child care experiences of incoming kindergarteners in order to examine associations between these experiences and school readiness, and academic and social-emotional adjustment for the general population and high-risk sub-populations (ELLs, SES, rural).

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
The Oregon English Learner Alliance: A Partnership to Explore Factors Associated with Variation in Outcomes for Current and Former English Learners in Oregon	Oregon State University and Oregon Department of Education	English language learners	K-12	The purpose of the partnership was to determine the best practices to support academic achievement among current and former ELLs. The partnership aimed to enhance existing databases to include information on ELL status, build a model for characterizing instructional programs, and examine the relationship between instructional program and educational outcomes of both current and former ELLs.
A Researcher-Practitioner Partnership to Promote English Language Learners' Science Learning in the Elementary Grades	SRI International and Clark County School District	English language learners, science education	K-12	The partnership aimed to further develop and design a theory of action to promote the academic success of ELLs in science by organizing evidence of research-based strategies and interventions. The partnership sought to study patterns of variations in ELLs' performance and explore the relationships between ELL's science scores and other factors.
Raising GPA: Partnering to Increase Grit, Perseverance, and Achievement in Baltimore City Middle Schools	Strategic Education Research Partnership (SERP), Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS)	Socio-emotional learning	K-12	The partnership aimed to measure persistence and self-efficacy in school climate assessment. Then, the partnership planned to investigate school-based processes that might contribute to social-emotional learning skills and develop effective strategies for improving student perserverence in sixth grade classrooms within the Baltimore City public schools.

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
Creating a Monitoring System for School Districts to Promote Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning: A Researcher-Practitioner Partnership	The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Washoe County School District	Socio-emotional learning	K-12	The partnership aimed to collect socio-emotional learning data from students and teachers to develop reliable and valid teacher and student self-report measures of SEL skills. The partnership would study how different SEL dimensions were associated with academic outcomes and conduct analyses to determine if SEL skills served as protective factors that could moderate student risk.
Designing a RCT Experiment to Test the Impact of Innovative Interventions and Policies for Postsecondary Developmental Education: A RAND—TX Higher Education Coordinating Board Research Partnership	The RAND Corporation and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	Community college preparation	Postsecondary	The partnerships sought to conduct preliminary research to determine the effectiveness of 15 developmental education programs instituted in eight higher public education institutions across Texas. They aimed to investigate whether developmental education programs for first-time students enrolling in the state's public community college system were effective for students and cost-effective for the state.
Academic Trajectories and Policies to Narrow Achievement Gaps in San Diego	The San Diego Education Research Alliance at the University of California San Diego and the San Diego Unified School District	On-track indicators for student performance	K-12	This RPP sought to enhance to the district's access to higher quality student data thereby producing ideal student trajectories as well as accurate on-track indicators of individual students that can be shared with school staff, parents, and researchers. This work could then inform the district's plans for interventions for students most in need of assistance.

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
The School District of Philadelphia-Penn Graduate School of Education Researcher-Practitioner Partnership in Education Research	The University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and the School District of Philadelphia	School/district improvement strategies	K-12	The goal of this partnership was to build a structured, formalized relationship between the partners to build the capacity of both organizations, improve research-to-practice links, study the district's approaches to school reform, and establish foundations for future, larger-scale collaborative research.
California Community Colleges and Career Technical Education: A Research-Practitioner Partnership	University of California Davis and California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO)	Community college and career technical education	Postsecondary	The goals of the partnership were to identify students that enter community colleges with clear career technical education aims and CTE programs that lead to financially rewarding employment, as well as policies and practices that promote student success in CTE programs.
Implementing Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-tiered Models to Meet Students' Academic, Behavior, and Social Needs: A Researcher-Practitioner Partnership	University of Kansas, Arizona State University, and Lawrence Public Schools	Implementation of behavioral prevention	K-12	This RPP aimed to evaluate the newly installed district-and school-level implementation of the comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered (CI3T) model of behavioral prevention. The partnership sought to evaluate the CI3T model with four studies focusing on treatment integrity, social validity, screening, teacher efficacy, and future professional development needs.

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
Blended Learning at Scale– Implementation and Analysis of Student Achievement in District of Columbia Public Schools	University of Maryland at College Park and District of Columbia Public Schools	Blended learning	K-12	The goals of this partnership were to examine the relationship(s) between blended learning implementation and students' ELA achievement on the DC Comprehensive Assessment System exam as well as identify key conditions and practices related to blended learning implementation that may be associated with improved student achievement. The partnership findings will directly inform the district's strategic decisions concerning blended learning.
Miami-Dade County Partnership for School Readiness and Early School Success	University of Miami, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the Children's Trust, and the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/ Monroe	Early childhood education	Early education	This partnership aimed to examine the school readiness skills and early school success of children who transition from a range of early care and education settings into the Miami-Dade County public schools. It would involved a needs assessment and descriptive analyses of school readiness data.
Students in Foster Care: The Relationship between Mobility and Educational Outcomes	University of Northern Colorado, Colorado Department of Education, and Colorado Department of Human Services	Foster care placement and school outcomes	K-12	The partnership aimed to track the residential and educational stability and academic outcomes of Colorado students in foster care as well as identify how changes in foster care placement and school stability were related to each other through analysis of a joint human-services/ education database.

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
META Researchers and Practitioners in Partnership (RPP) to Enhance Data Use Practice that Improves Student Learning	University of Virginia and Chesterfield County, Hanover County, Henrico County, and Richmond City Public Schools	Teachers' data use	K-12	This partnership aimed to collect data concerning K-12 teachers' current data use to inform a pilot professional development model which will be examined in year 2 to assess its influence on teachers' data use and associations with improved student learning.
Examining the Effects of IMPACT on Students Achievement: DCPS-UVA Research Partnership	University of Virginia and District of Columbia Public Schools	Teacher effectiveness	K-12	The goal of this partnership was to understand the effects of IMPACT, the DCPS Effectiveness Assessment System for School-based Personnel, on student achievement, and with this information, guide part of its ongoing design refinement. The partnership also sought to investigate the differences across time in teacher applicant characteristics, teacher mobility, and aspects of teaching that were most malleable in context of strong incentives.
The Seattle Minority Engagement and Discipline Reduction Research Collaborative	University of Washington and Seattle Public Schools	School discipline	K-12	The purpose of the the partnership was to build district capacity to assess and address disproportionality in school discipline practices among minority student bodies as well as negative student outcomes as a result of disciplinary actions.

Table 4. Descriptions of the First Three Cohorts of IES RPPs (continued)

RPP Grant Title	Partners	Topic	Level	Description
A Partnership to Improve the Use of a Developmental Assessment Framework in Kindergarten	Washington State University and Washington State Education Services District 105	Literacy outcomes	K-12	The purpose of this RPP was to conduct preliminary research on the adequacy of TSGold for assessing literacy skills and the potential of WaKIDS in improving literacy outcomes.
Exploring Longitudinal Outcomes and Trajectories for English Language Learners (ELOTE)	WestEd and Fort Worth Independent School District	English language learners	K-12	The purpose of this partnership was to study the academic trajectories and outcomes of secondary immigrant English Language Learners in order to inform district policies, improve instructional and extracurricular programs, and refine classroom practices to better meet the needs of ELLs. The partnership sought to understand the academic trajectories of ELLs based on several factors which include ELL status, English language proficiency, test scores, and attendance to inform the implementation of promising programs and practices for secondary immigrant ELLs.
Creating a Connecticut Early Childhood Education Research Alliance	Yale University School of Medicine, Education Development Center, and Cooperative Education Services	Early childhood education	Early education	The goals of this partnership were to understand how children perform on state-developed preschool measures, how preschool child outcomes predict kindergarten out-comes, and what teacher and school-level factors contribute to preschool and kindergarten performance. These findings would then inform interventions and adjustments to school cli-mate and teaching practices that impact preschool performance.

Progress on Identified Goals

In Phase I, we found that the RPPs were pursuing a range of goals in their work. These goals fit within the stated goals of the IES RPP program, as they focused on developing practitioners' capabilities to conduct or use research and explore a problem through rigorous research activities. Other goals surfaced as well, including goals to cultivate partnership relationships, support improvements to teaching and learning, and inform the work of others. Here, we share the progress that the RPPs reported making on these goals in Phase II.

Key Findings:

- RPP participants reported making progress on almost all goals they had identified.

- RPP participants were asked to report progress along five dimensions. They made the most overall progress on goals related to building a foundation of work together, followed by developing a deep understanding of their focal problem, improving researchers' capacity to work in partnership, and developing an understanding of how researchers and practitioners can work together.

- Participants also reported progress on goals related to supporting improvements in teaching and learning and developing findings that apply to other organizations. The progress on these goals is noteworthy, given that these are likely lagging indicators and are thus expected to take more time to accomplish.

In Phase I of data collection, we drew on survey and interview responses to identify the partnerships' main goals. We found evidence that the IES RPPs pursued multiple goals that reflected Henrick and colleagues' RPP outcomes framework described in an earlier section. In Phase II, we gathered information on the RPPs' self-reported progress toward meeting these same goals. Specifically, we asked each participant what progress the partnership had made toward each type of goal they had indicated on the Phase I survey that they were pursuing. Similarly, we asked each participant in the Phase II interviews to tell us about the partnership's progress on the goals they had named in Phase I.

Here, we summarize participants' progress on their goals—as they reported on surveys—in line with the five dimensions of Henrick et al.'s framework: (1) supporting improvements to teaching and learning; (2) conducting and using rigorous research; (3) informing the work of others; (4) cultivating partnership relationships; and (5) increasing capacity to conduct partnership work. For each dimension, we draw on interview data to offer more detail on the progress of partnerships toward their goals.

As in other sections in this report, these are self-reports. As such, these findings should not be interpreted as indicators of success for a particular partnership or the RPP program as a whole.

Progress on Goals between Phase I and Phase II
Figure 1 shows progress reported by participants in both phases of the survey on the five dimensions named above. Overall, there were small positive increases for almost all goals.

There was relatively more progress made for goals related to supporting improvements to teaching and learning and informing the work of others. However, these goals lagged behind other foundational goals that showed more overall progress.[44]
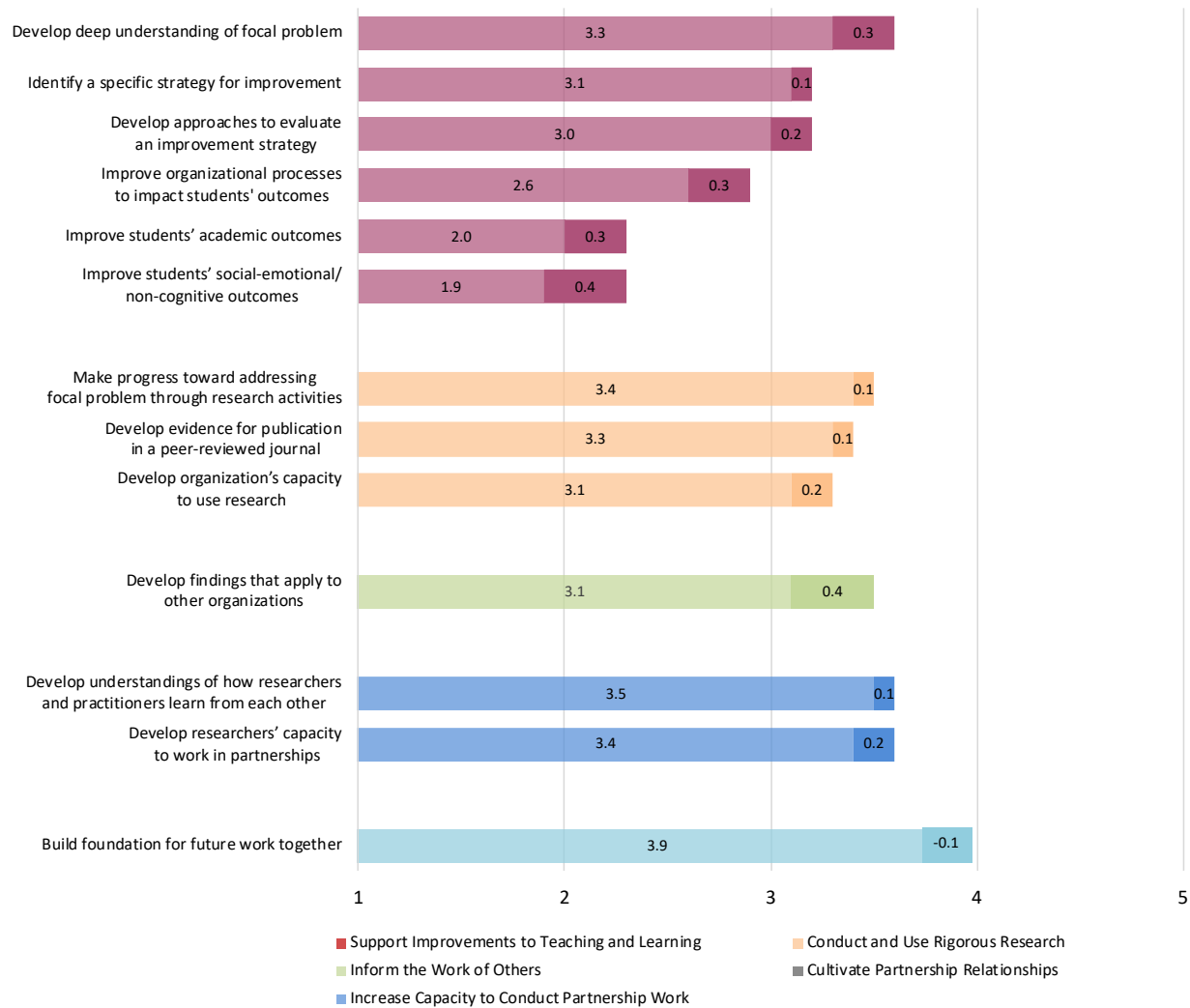

Figure 1. Self-reported Phase I to Phase II progress on specific goals, clustered by dimension. Across both surveys, n = 87 (50 RPP researchers, 37 RPP practitioners). 1 = no progress; 2 = a little progress; 3 = some progress; 4 = accomplished; 5 = exceeded. Lighter shading in each bar represents reported progress in Phase I; darker shading at end of bar represents the shift in Phase II. For instance, on "Improve students' academic outcomes," Phase I average was 2.0 and Phase II showed a 0.3 increase, for an overall average of 2.3 across the two phases.

Supporting Improvements to Teaching and Learning

All 27 RPPs had a member who, in Phase I, identified supporting improvements to teaching and learning as an important goal of the partnership. Again, there were high levels of agreement within partnerships, as 21 partnerships had at least one researcher and practitioner who discussed their improvement efforts in Phase I.

Relative to the other dimensions, less overall progress was reported for goals related to improving teaching and learning outcomes, such as improving PD or improving student outcomes. This is not surprising, as these important outcomes likely follow from the foundational development of relationships and trust necessary for joint work. Even so, there was reported growth in progress toward meeting this goal despite the relatively short time period of the IES RPP grant. Participants reported the greatest shift for the goal of improving students' academic outcomes, which shifted from 1.9 at Phase I to 2.3 at Phase II (2 = a little progress, 3 = some progress).

We see the most reported progress for developing a deep understanding of the focal problem (an average of 3.6, where 3 = some progress, 4 = accomplished). Initial progress here makes sense for two reasons. First, this goal was highlighted in the original IES RFA, and it was present in all of the original RPP applications. Second, any additional work together to design or implement new tools or practices would likely be predicated upon a deeper understanding of the problem.

Next, partnerships might iteratively identify strategies for addressing the problem and then implement and study them. It is at this point that we might begin to expect to see improvements in teaching and learning. Some RPPs reported progress in these areas, and they attributed this progress to their co-design of successful tools or supports for teachers to change their practice.

One partnership exemplified this underlying development progression towards local improvement goals:

> Year 1 was learning what we didn't know, getting familiar with the context, and working with the district partners to understand what problems we were actually going to try and solve. We took a year doing it. We did a bunch of different data collection techniques and approaches, drawing on improvement science to guide some of that work.

> Then, Year 2 was our first effort to take what we learned in Year 1, and have teachers take that up and do some improvement work across five different elementary schools.

> This year, in our no-cost extension year, we have sat back and figured out what worked and what didn't on two levels. One, did we accomplish our process goals in terms of getting teachers to try out and iteratively refine new strategies over time? Second, what about the focal practice, the content of what teachers did with students—what was useful and not from Year 2? What can we do going into Year 3 that we can learn from and apply?

From there, we learned, it's positive evidence. Is it conclusive in any way? It's not enough to write a paper about, but it's enough to try something out for another school in our local context. We're not trying to say that these strategies are good for all kids in all time zones yet.

Over their three-year grant period, this RPP was able to make progress on short-term and long-term goals in interconnected ways. It started with a deeper understanding of the problem informed by ideas of improvement science but soon transitioned into supporting changes in teachers' practice through PD, coaching, and tool development. The partnership was careful not to jump ahead to causal claims about impacting student outcomes, focusing instead on replicating their model within the local context. However, both practitioners and researchers were hopeful about the positive shifts they were seeing in student dialogue, the focus area of the project.

In another case, the partnership developed a longitudinal dataset of indicators relevant to kindergarten readiness, connecting early childhood and K–12 data systems for the first time in their local context. This enabled them to identify specific areas for improvement and plan for professional learning to those ends. A practitioner in the RPP explained:

> We have a good three-year dataset of knowing what preschool kids know and what they don't know coming into kindergarten. We have a good sense of where we want to go in terms of professional development, essentially outlining what are the expectations of a kindergartener, so preschools know that. Then the third big goal that we've been working on is providing professional development to preschool providers around early literacy and early math skills to get kids ready more quickly.

This partnership first developed the foundation needed to gather information about and understand the focal problem and then used these data to plan for implementation to address identified needs. In this way, progress on supporting improvements to teaching and learning may have involved more foundational dimensions of other partnership outcomes described below.

Conducting and Using Research

Participants from all 27 RPPs described goals related to conducting and using research to address their focal problems and reported progress towards these goals between Phase I and II. On the Phase II survey, respondents reported, on average, a response of 3.5 (where 3= some progress and 4= accomplished) towards addressing their focal problem through research activities.

In terms of conducting research, partnerships made progress on their research goals by creating multi-sector datasets, conducting secondary analyses of student-, teacher-, and school-level data, creating case study reports, conducting interviews and focus groups, and more. One practitioner described how qualitative data collection in the first year then shaped the quantitative approach in the second year:

> In the first year of our partnership, it was qualitative. We were doing a lot of interviews, and ... we asked a question: What does successful extended learning

time look like in your school? From that question, that's what we used to create our quantitative portion. … This year, we've been looking at what data the district has that could fit those categories [that emerged from the interview responses].

We also saw evidence of RPPs' progress towards building practitioners' capacity to engage with research in ongoing ways. For instance, one practitioner reported on how the district's culture had shifted in terms of school leaders and board members asking more often for data or research when making decisions. The practitioner attributed this shift to the influence of the RPP. He explained:

> It's more common for the school board to ask, "Well, what does the data say?" [and] for the schools to ask, "What's the data say?" That kind of mentality around data has changed in our district and in our community.

In another case, a researcher told us that he thought experiences with the partnership would help his practice partners ask researchable questions in the future. He offered:

> There was capacity building through all the conversations we had about why we use particular methods. [The practice partners] had not been able to do a matching study before. We really walked them through what that entailed and what that meant. … That way of thinking about it was a useful exercise for them, and that will probably lead them to ask some good questions in the future when they're setting up studies.

Based on comments like these, it appears that practitioners' participation in research activities in turn increased their own capacity to conduct and use research in the future.

Informing the Work of Others

The RPPs were not just concerned with solving local problems or in sharing research findings with their local partners. In 25 RPPs, at least half of the participants agreed that developing findings that applied to other organizations was a goal of their partnership in Phase I. On average, the RPPs that had this goal reported making progress here as well (an average of 3.5, where 3 = some progress, 4 = accomplished).

Many of the participants reported sharing findings in a variety of formats. These included traditional outlets for sharing findings, like peer-reviewed journal articles, research briefs, book chapters, or books. Partnerships also engaged in non-traditional dissemination strategies, like launching a publicly available website, facilitating webinars, and writing blogs, as well as attending and presenting at both practitioner-oriented and researcher-oriented conferences. (For more, see the next section, "Perceived Benefits of Participating in a Partnership.")

For example, one practitioner described developing a video based on the partnership's experiences:

> We tried to be deliberate about using our funds in a way that would allow us to share what was learned because we were only working with a few schools at

that time, and it wasn't clear how much we might want to scale the learning or the implementation. We took the opportunity to create some videos to document the resources that were developed, how teachers from our district were involved, the identification of the intervention, the implementation, and some of the adjustments that were made. The video also highlighted our students' perspectives on the intervention and its effectiveness.

Finally, many partnership participants noted that they would continue to work with their data even after the grant was over, as it provided a rich data source.

Cultivating Partnership Relationships

All 27 partnerships named cultivating partnership relationships as a goal for their work together over the life of the grant, and the RPPs seemed to make the most progress in this area. Survey respondents reported an average of 3.8 (where 4 = goal was accomplished) for building a foundation for future work together.

Initially, partnerships tended to foundational needs such as identifying individuals to play key roles in the partnerships and dedicating staff to RPP efforts. However, establishing deep, trusting relationships was not something that could be achieved at a single point in time, early on, nor could it be taken for granted in all future work together. Instead, relationship building required ongoing, continuous attention.

Often, relationships needed to be cultivated when a partnership brought new stakeholder groups into the fold of the work. For example, one researcher described how their partnership brought new participants on board over the two-year period of the grant:

> The first year of the project, we worked on establishing relationships with teachers and the administrators at the school, getting into classrooms, and making people comfortable with the notion that a coach would be in and out of classrooms. This year, we've gone a bit deeper. This year, [the coach] was working at all of the schools and attended the learning community meetings, helped with assessments, did co-teaching and team teaching. … So, one of the big changes was the deepening relationship between [the coach] and the teachers in the schools and their increased ability to use data to determine student needs and then work with her to craft lessons to meet those needs.

Relationship building was not only a goal in and of itself. Often, cultivating and managing trusting partnerships was necessary to advance other goals of the partnership work. In the case above, developing these deep connections at the school site enabled the partnership to support improvements to teaching and learning at the school sites. Likewise, a foundation of trust helped partners to navigate issues they faced as they pursued their goals together.

Increasing Researchers' and Practitioners' Capacity to Conduct Partnership Work

Across the two years of our study, participants reported high levels of overall progress in developing researchers' and practitioners' capacity to work in partnership as well as in developing a deep understanding of how researchers and practitioners can work together. The average rating was 3.6 in Phase 2 (where 3 = some progress on goal, 4 = accomplished goal).

In many partnerships, participants discussed how their work with their RPP partners was more collaborative than it was in other research engagements. For instance, one researcher described how the researchers and practice partners worked together through all phases of their project:

> We've finalized our data collection, we've analyzed data, and we have put together presentations—all of those pieces we did in collaboration with our partners who are on the ground. For example, when we're talking about data collection, they would help us organize. They really have been key in helping us establish ourselves, our credibility, why people would want to work with us. … In the data analysis, we will put together our findings and they would review them and give them feedback or ask questions, to make us think a little more deeply about what we've been doing —so, from a different perspective. … In presenting, we would put a report together and then send that out and get feedback, clarification, interpretation of our findings, as well as insights or telling us, "You know, this is not gonna fly when we present it to the field. You might want to clarify this."

This example demonstrates how the partnership engaged in data collection, analysis, synthesis, and dissemination in a collaborative and iterative way. The insights from all parties were viewed as central and important to the research process and enhanced the quality and utility of the products that emerged as a result of this work. In addition to stating how much they valued these collaborative efforts for this project, participants expressed the hope that they would be able to work in these new ways in the future.

Implications

Consistent with the purpose of the IES RPP program, nearly all partnerships hoped to develop practitioners' capabilities to conduct or use research or to explore problems through rigorous research activities. These were not the only goals that partnerships pursued, however. The RPPs also had explicit goals to cultivate partnership relationships, to increase capacity to conduct partnership work, to support teaching and learning, and to inform the work of others. This pattern of results indicates that the IES RPP program supports its stated goals of building partnerships and developing deeper understandings of pressing problems in the practice in education.

In line with Henrick et al.'s framework, the reported progress presented here provides evidence that there are likely "leading" and "lagging" indicators for partnerships' progress on their goals. Initially, partnerships need to focus on building relationships of trust and develop an understanding of what researchers and practitioners bring. Not surprisingly, partnerships reported the most progress in the two areas of building a foundation for future work and developing the capacity for joint work. Building a foundation for work together may be a leading indicator that we might

expect to be accomplished sooner than other goals. Lagging indicators—e.g., shifts in student outcomes—may be expected to take more time to accomplish.

Further, in our analysis of Phase I and II data, we saw increases in the reports of progress for almost all goals identified, despite the relatively short one-year time frame between survey administrations. The greatest shifts between Phase I and II occurred for the "lagging" goals—for example, improving students' socio-emotional outcomes. So, even though these lagging goals were not fully accomplished by the end of this study, it is noteworthy that participants reported incremental progress here. We suspect there may be a general developmental trajectory for partnerships' progress on their goals, where developing a strong foundation lays the groundwork for subsequent progress on new policies or practices that contribute to improvements in student outcomes.

It may also be the case that these goals are interdependent in partnership work. That is, while building a foundation for work together may be a goal that demonstrates progress earlier in the partnership, it may be pursued jointly with and through other goals related to increasing capacity, conducting and using research, supporting teaching and learning, and informing the work of others. Those looking to track the progress of RPPs may want to consider how and when these goals are independent and when they may be related. For example, one research participant summarized the three equally-weighted goals of their partnership this way: "The first basket would be that the research is completed, the second would be the nurturing of the relationship through the collaboration structures, the third is the capacity building for our partner through our interactions." A future study could try to understand how these three disparate but clearly connected goals advance the overall progress of the partnership.

It is important when considering the progress of these partnerships to recall that their grants provided only two years of funding, with an amount much less than the typical funding for design and development grants whose focus is to test interventions designed to improve student learning. Few of the RPPs in this study had the resources to test new interventions at scale, nor were they set up to do so. Instead, they laid valuable foundations for future intervention research. These foundations are essential for intervention work to be grounded in a more thorough understanding of the problem and to secure the mutual commitment of researchers and practitioners to pursue and test strategies for improving teaching and learning outcomes.

Perceived Benefits of Participating in a Partnership

As a descriptive rather than evaluative study, we cannot make inferences about the impact of the partnerships in the RPP program. It is nevertheless useful to explore participants' self-reported attitudes towards RPP work and their perceptions of the benefits of working in these partnerships. We share these findings in this section.

Key Findings:

- Participants highly valued working in their partnerships, with almost all survey participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that RPPs are worth the investment from IES, and that they would participate in another RPP in the future.

- In the majority of partnerships, both practitioners and researchers were involved in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data as well as presenting at both research- and practice-oriented conferences.

- About half of the partnerships had members who had written for traditional research outlets (i.e., articles, book chapters, or books). In addition, participants in half of the partnerships had contributed to new media platforms such as websites, blogs, webinars, or videos.

- RPP members reported that partnerships provided a new framework or set of ideas and that they supported the design of PD or new programs or practices.

- Participants from about one-third of partnerships reported contributing to a new or revised policy within the educational organization.

Attitudes Towards Partnerships

Consistent with patterns from our Phase I survey reports, both practitioner and researcher survey respondents in Phase II had very positive attitudes toward their partnership experiences. As shown in Figure 2, every participant (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that the opportunity to work collaboratively in an RPP was valuable to their work. Likewise, almost all respondents (96%–99%) agreed or strongly agreed that RPPs are worth the investment from IES, that they would participate in an RPP in the future, and that the research conducted by their RPP was meaningful to their own work.

In addition, almost all respondents claimed that they trusted members of their partner organizations (97%), and that members of their partner organizations trusted them (99%). Notably, these high self-reported levels of trust parallel the high level of reported progress on partnership goals related to building relationships as a foundation for partnership work, as presented in the "Progress on Identified Goals" section above.
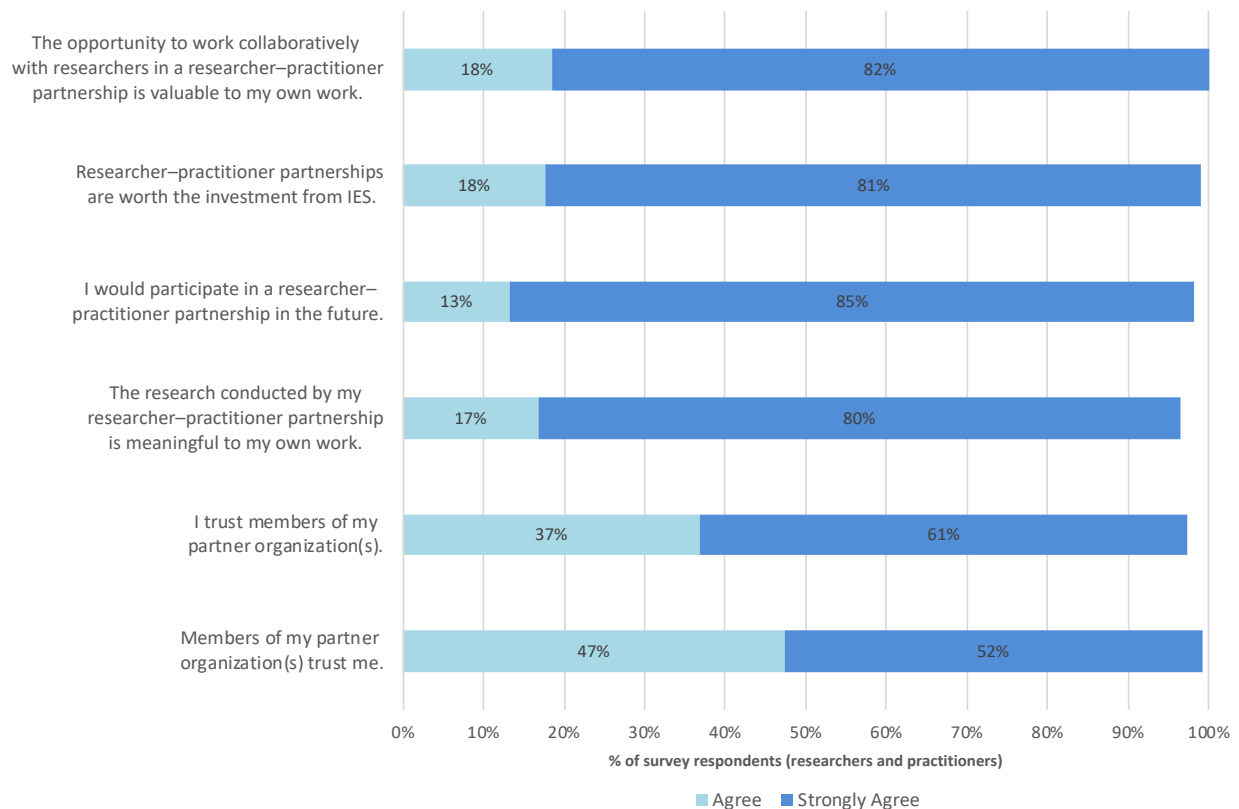
Figure 2. Participants' attitudes toward working in researcher–practitioner partnerships, from survey (113 ≤ *n* ≤ 114 RPP researchers and practitioners).

Contributing to Research and Dissemination Efforts

RPP members have engaged in a variety of research activities, including data collection, data analysis, and dissemination of research findings to scholarly audiences, practitioner audiences, and the broader public (Table 5, below). In 22 partnerships, both researchers and practitioners reported presenting at conferences. They not only attended events hosted for their own groups (e.g., RPP researchers at the American Educational Research Association) but also conferences hosted for their partners' communities (e.g., RPP researchers at the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics). In addition, nearly half of all survey respondents reported sharing research findings via multimedia platforms. As such, we suspect that the work of RPPs speaks to audiences within and beyond traditional research circles.

Table 5. *Participation in Research and Dissemination Activities, by Role in Partnership*

		Researchers		Practitioners	
	RPPs[a]	PIs	Others	Co-PIs	Others
n	*27*	*25*	*37*	*28*	*24*
Collecting, organizing, or analyzing data	24	25	36	25	18
Presenting at a conference	22	24	30	18	13
Contributing to a website, video, webinar, or blog	13	14	12	7	8
Writing articles, book chapters, or books	12	17	23	8	7

[a]Indicates the activity was endorsed by at least one practitioner in the partnership.

Survey respondents also reported on the contributions of their partnerships' work, particularly in terms of shaping policy and practice (Figure 3; see Appendix D for more). In 21 RPPs, at least one practitioner reported that their partnership provided a new framework or set of ideas to think about or address a focal problem. Partnerships were also involved in design work, including designing PD (19 RPPs) or integrating practices from the partnership into the routines of the educational agency (15 RPPs).
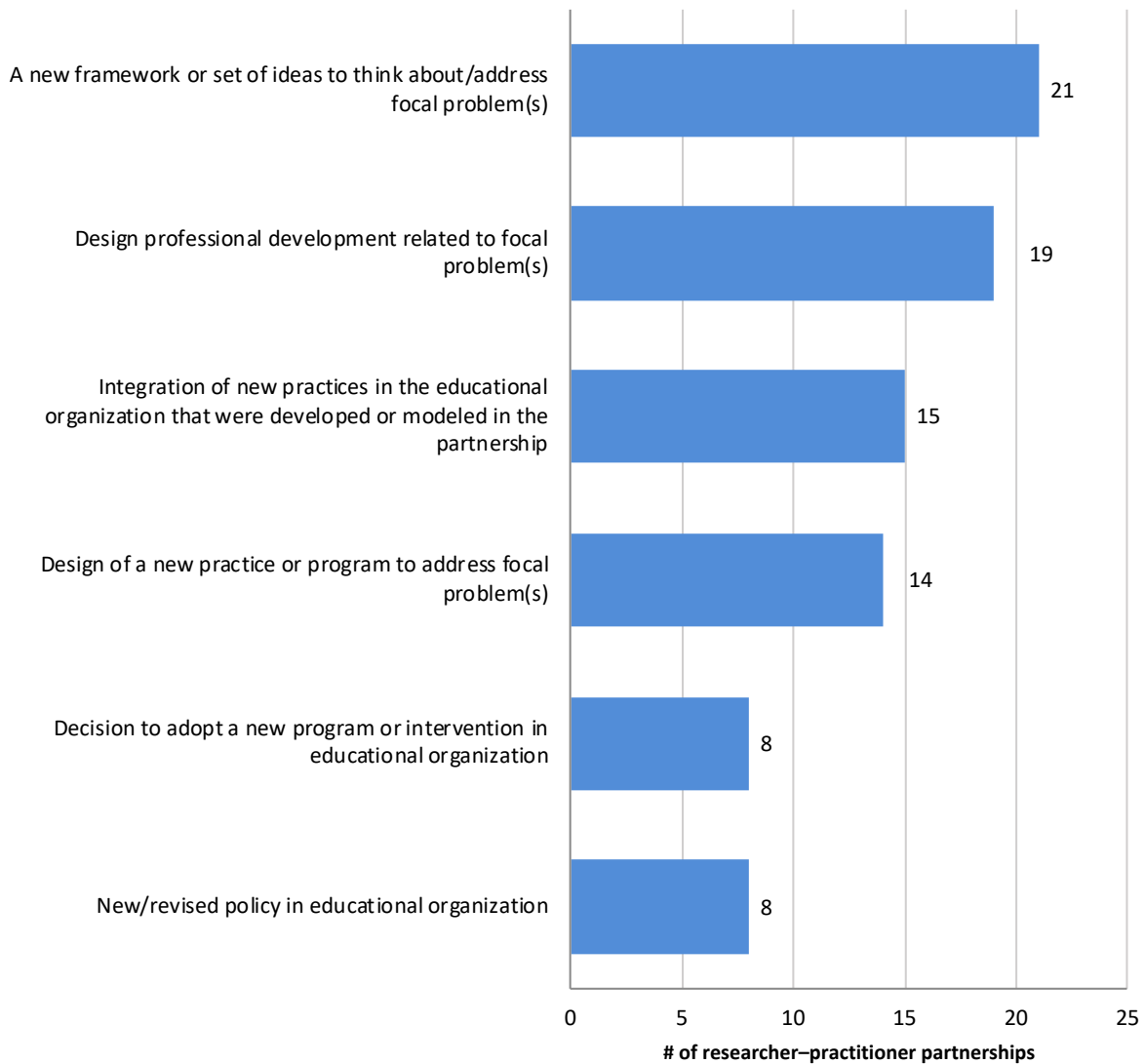
Figure 3. RPP contributions to local policy and practice, from survey (*n* = 27 partnerships). An RPP was included in each count if at least one practitioner from the partnership answered "yes."

Implications

As in Phase I, we found in Phase II that there was a broad range of contributions made by RPPs that went beyond conducting and using research. In addition to traditional dissemination efforts (e.g., publishing scholarly articles), RPP members contributed to broader engagement strategies like presenting at conferences and sharing on multimedia platforms. Practitioners were heavily involved in conference presentations but were less involved in writing articles. Practitioners in a majority of RPPs reported that the partnership had offered new frameworks or ideas for thinking about their focal problem of practice and had contributed to design efforts for program implementation as well. Given these findings, IES should continue to encourage a wide range of dissemination, communication, and engagement activities in addition to traditional peer-reviewed journal articles. Likewise, RPP partners should be encouraged to attend or co-present at each other's conferences. Specific encouragement and resources to include practitioners as co-presenters might be valuable as well.

Research Use by RPP Practitioners

In this section we turn to reports of research use among practitioners in the partnerships.

> **Key Findings:**
>
> - The RPP district leaders' reports of research use look relatively similar to the patterns from a nationally representative sample of district and school leaders. Instrumental and conceptual uses of research were similar in both samples. Compared to the national sample, however, RPP district leaders reported less frequent symbolic use of research and more frequent reports of process use.
>
> - For all RPP practitioners, instrumental use of research was the most frequently reported type, followed by process, conceptual, and symbolic uses. Those in research roles were significantly more likely than those not in research roles to report higher levels of process use of research.
>
> - Among activities research evidence might inform, RPP practitioners were most likely to be involved in those related to directing resources to a program, scaling up a program, and designing PD. Although practitioners least frequently reported participating in purchasing an intervention or targeted program, they reported the highest frequency of research use for this activity. Instrumental use of research was also frequent in directing resources to a program or scaling up a pilot program.
>
> - Participation in key education decision-making activities varied by role group. RPP practitioners in non-research roles reported being more involved in activities related to purchasing an intervention or targeted program, redesigning a program, or designing PD than their colleagues in research roles.
>
> - RPP practitioners reported that the majority of their research partners were involved in central organizational decisions like directing resources to a program or designing PD.

The Phase II survey asked how frequently RPP practitioners used research for different purposes. For the *instrumental* use scale, we first presented RPP practitioners with a list of activities common to educational decision making. We asked if their organization/district had engaged in each activity and, if so, whether they themselves had been involved in that activity and how frequently research had informed it. The items from the *conceptual* use scale asked participants how frequently they had encountered research that expanded their understanding of an issue, provided a new framework, or brought attention to a new issue. The *symbolic* use scale had items that asked practitioners to report how often they used research to convince others or to mobilize support. The process use items focused on when participants incorporated the processes of research into their own work—for instance, launching an evaluation study, participating in a grant proposal, or collaborating with others to analyze data.

We first compared research use patterns for RPP leaders working in school districts ($n = 31$) against a nationally representative sample of school and district leaders ($n = 733$). We then considered patterns within the RPP sample ($n = 51$), attending to differences between RPP practitioners in research roles ($n = 22$) and non-research roles ($n = 29$). Finally, we examined who participated in key educational activities, looking at individuals in research roles versus non-research roles and involvement for IES RPPs in the past year.

Comparison Between Research Use of RPP District Leaders and a Nationally Representative Sample

In 2015, NCRPP conducted a survey with a nationally representative sample of district and school leaders (*n* = 733).[45] For this effort, we developed scales for instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process uses of research as described above. We used these same item banks for the surveys of RPP practitioners, allowing us to compare the different samples.

Practitioners in IES RPPs worked in a variety of educational organizations (i.e., school districts, early childhood education organizations, departments of education and higher education, and social services agencies). Here, we compare only RPP participants who worked in school districts (*n* = 31) to the national sample. Although there were no school leaders in the RPP sample, school leaders' reports of use did not differ significantly from those of central office leaders in the national sample, so we do not differentiate them here.

As Figure 4 shows, instrumental use of research was the most frequent type of use among both RPP district leaders and respondents to the national survey, as compared to the other three uses of research. When we compare the two groups, the two biggest differences emerge for symbolic and process uses of research. First, RPP district leaders reported less frequent symbolic use of research (*M* = 1.97) than did the national sample (*M* = 2.49). Second, RPP district leaders reported more frequent process use (*M* = 2.53) then the national sample (*M* = 2.26). RPP district leaders reported slightly less frequent instrumental and conceptual use of research than the national sample.
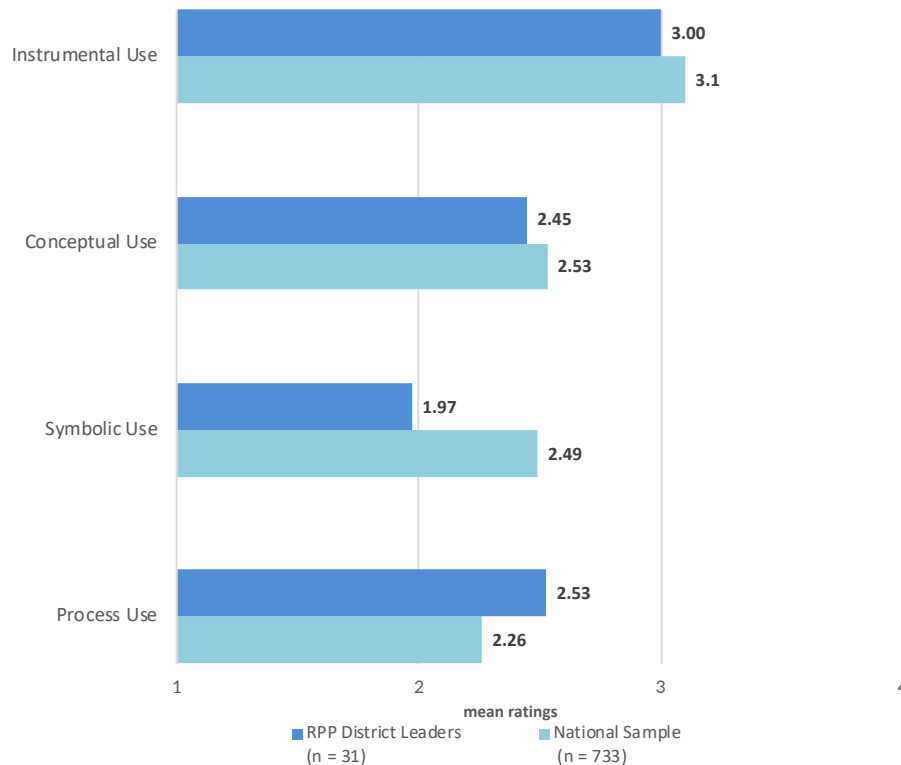

Figure 4. Practitioners' instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process use of research, from RPP survey and national survey (*n* = 31 RPP district leaders; *n*= 733 district and school leaders in national sample). 1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time.

RPP Practitioners' Use of Research, by Research Role

When we return to the broader sample of RPP participants, we see that almost half (43%) of the 51 practitioners who participated in Phase II were in research-related roles in their organizations. Since practitioners' use of research can differ based on their roles,[46] we wondered if the RPP participant patterns would look different when we considered whether they were in researcher versus non-researcher roles.

To address this question, we disaggregated the reports of research use for RPP practitioners who were in research-related roles (n = 22) and those who were not in research-related roles (n = 29). Figure 5 shows the mean scale scores for all four types of use in Phase II for all practitioners, as well as by research role.
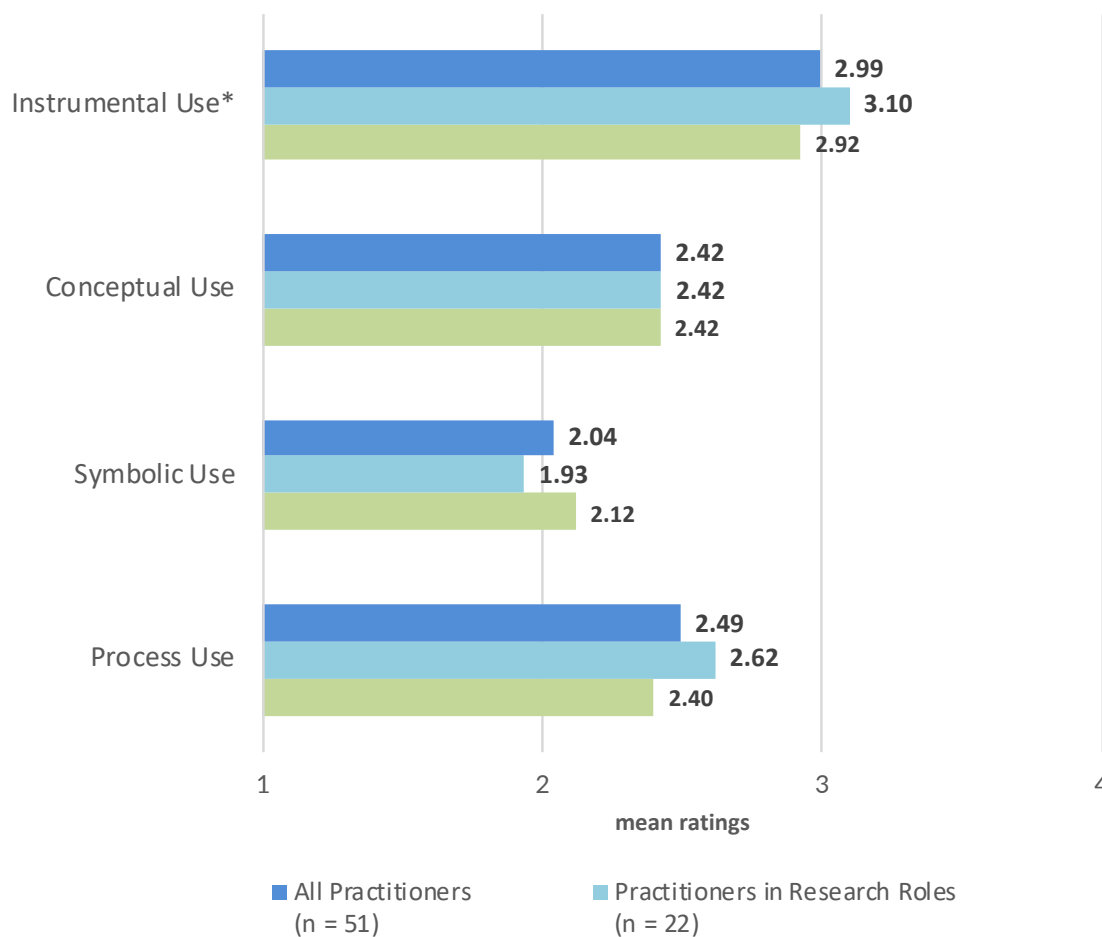

Figure 5. Practitioners' mean reported use of research, by type of use and role in organization, from Phase II survey. For instrumental use, only those who reported involvement in an instrumental use activity are included (20 ≤ n ≤ 32 RPP practitioners). For all other use reports, n = 51 RPP practitioners.
1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = all of the time.

RPP Practitioners' Participation in Activities and Instrumental Uses of Research

Next, we looked more closely at reports of instrumental use among RPP practitioners.

Overall, across all RPP practitioners (n = 51), involvement in instrumental use activities ranged from a high of almost two-thirds of practitioners (31 to 32, or 61% to 63%) involved in directing resources to a program, scaling up a program, and designing PD, to a low of just under two-fifths (20, or 39%) participating in purchasing an intervention/targeted program or redesigning a program (Table 6). The majority of practitioners who were engaged in these decision-making activities reported using research "frequently" or "all of the time" for all of them. Notably, although only 39% of practitioners said they were involved in purchasing an intervention or targeted program, they reported the highest frequency of research use for this category (91% said "frequently" or "all of the time"), which is consistent with federal policy guidelines that require the use of research evidence in selecting and purchasing interventions.

Table 6. *Percentage of Participating Practitioners and Co-PIs Reporting Involvement in Educational Decisions*

	# of RPP Practitioners engaged in activity (*n = 51*)	For those who indicated that they were involved in an activity, how frequently was researched used?			
		Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All of the time
Directing resources to program	63%	0%	26%	55%	19%
Scaling up pilot program	61%	0%	32%	42%	26%
Designing professional development	61%	3%	33%	40%	23%
Eliminating program or policy	47%	4%	30%	48%	17%
Purchasing intervention or targeted program	39%	0%	11%	58%	32%
Redesigning program	39%	0%	40%	40%	20%

In our Phase I analysis, we noticed less involvement by those in research roles in the key activities of the instrumental use items as compared to all RPP practitioners. We wondered if this pattern would be replicated in our Phase II survey reports. We hypothesized that participants in research roles within a practice organization might not always be centrally involved in key decisions within the organization, and that these decisions might be within the purview of other leaders.

Consistent with this hypothesis, we saw in Phase II that RPP practitioners in different roles were not equally involved across all activities (Figure 6; see Appendix E for more). Practitioners in research roles were less likely than their colleagues in non-research roles to be involved in activities related to purchasing an intervention or targeted program (32% vs. 45%, respectively), redesigning a program (27% vs. 48%), or designing PD (45% vs. 72%). There were only slight differences between these two groups in reported participation in the other activities listed.
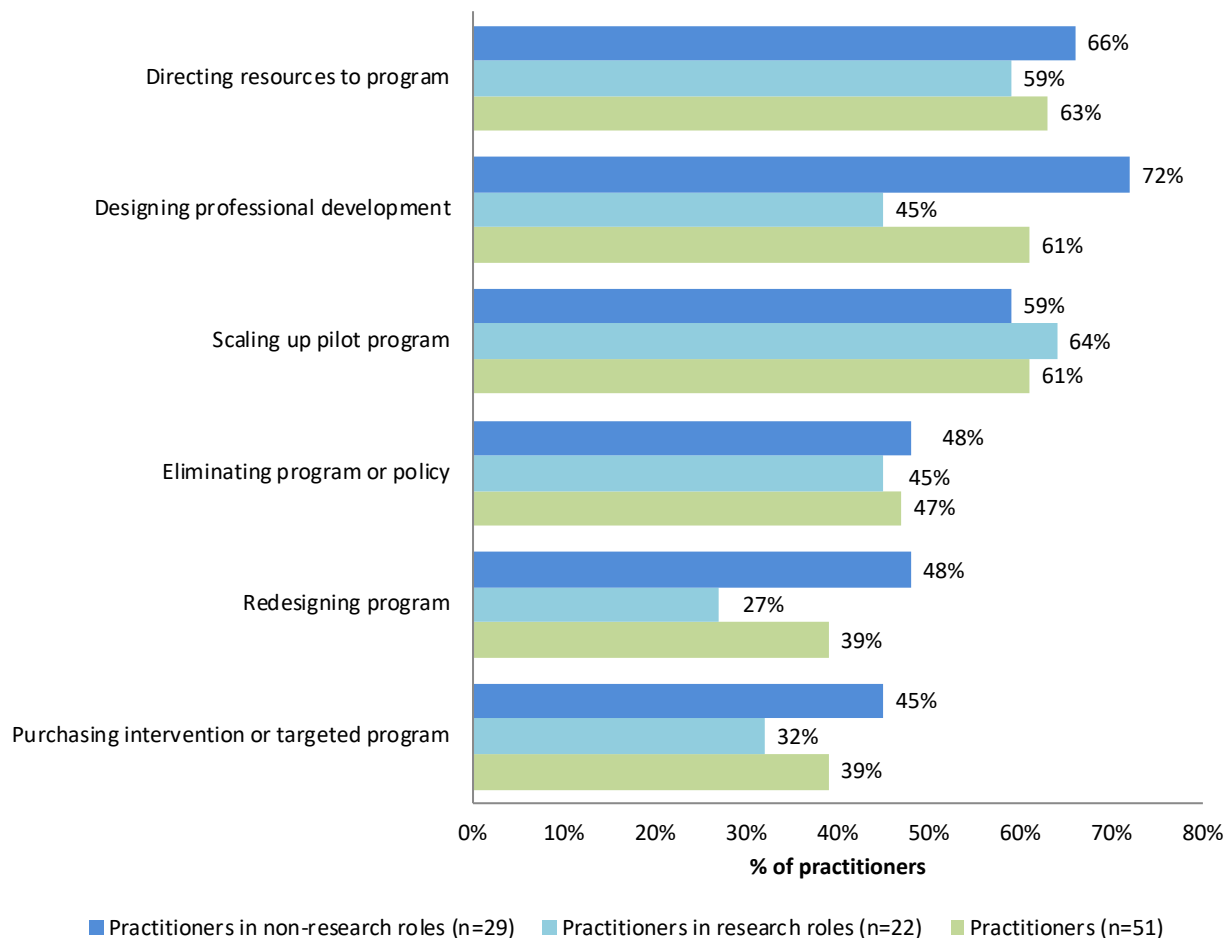
Figure 6. Practitioners' involvement in educational decision-making activities, by role in organization, from Phase II survey (*n* = 51 RPP practitioners [29 RPP practitioners in non-research roles and 22 RPP practitioners in research roles]).

RPP Involvement in Decision-Making Activities

Finally, we analyzed whether the research partners in the RPP had been involved in key activities for educational decision making during Phases I and II. In both phases of the survey, RPP practitioners who indicated that they had been involved in the decision-making activities listed above were further asked whether their IES RPP partners had been "consulted or involved" in the activity. Such involvement would be evidence of a different, more direct form of use of research to support decision making, and we found such evidence in many of the RPPs.

Table 7. *Involvement of RPPs in Central Organizational Decisions*

	# of RPPs with at Least One Practitioner Involved in Activity in Phase I or II (*n* = 27)	**# (%) of RPPs with Research Partner Involved in Phase I or II**
Directing resources to program	25	23 (92%)
Designing professional development	24	20 (83%)
Scaling up a pilot program	24	19 (79%)
Eliminating program or policy	24	19 (75%)
Purchasing intervention or targeted program	19	16 (84%)
Redesigning program	21	14 (67%)

Practitioners in a majority of RPPs reported that their research partners had been involved in all of the common decision-making activities listed here. Practitioners who had been involved reported that their research partners were most frequently involved in directing resources to a program (92%, or 23 of the 25 RPPs where at least one practitioner had been involved in the activity in their organization). Around three-quarters of RPP partners were reported to be involved in scaling up a pilot program (79%) or designing PD (75%) when that activity occurred in a practice organization. Over half of RPP partners were reported to be involved in redesigning a program (67%) or purchasing an intervention or targeted program (84%) when practice organizations engaged in that activity.

Implications

When policymakers encourage district leaders to use research to inform their decision making, there is either an explicit or implicit theory of action that posits research findings can and should directly shape decisions related to policy or practice, particularly related to program or intervention adoption. Findings here suggest that the purposes for which RPP practitioners reported using research were broader than just instrumental use, which is consistent with findings from our nationally representative survey and past research on evidence use. We found evidence not only of leaders' instrumental use of research emphasized by policies but also of conceptual, symbolic, and process uses of research.

Looking within the RPP participants, we see an interesting pattern related to practitioners and whether they are in research or non-research roles. On one hand, individuals in research roles may be well positioned to engage in process use of research, perhaps by designing and helping conduct an evaluation study or by analyzing data with others within their organization. On the other hand, these individuals may not be as likely to be involved in key educational decisions such as those related to purchasing programs, re-designing programs, or designing PD. Future research could identify the alternative organizational decisions that involve individuals in research roles or

perhaps consider how those in research roles can support research use with colleagues in other roles.

Finally, RPP research partners were involved in some central decisions such as designing PD, as reported here and in other sections. Given that these are key decision areas for educational agencies, this is a significant contribution for RPPs.

Research That RPP Practitioners Found Useful

In this section we report on an open-ended item included on the Phase I survey that asked practitioners to name a piece of research that "changed your thinking or opinions about possible solutions to your organization's/district's problems." We located the sources named and coded each one for format (e.g., book, journal article, research/policy report), topic, disciplinary content area, student subgroup focus, and the reason that the practitioner found the research useful. RPP practitioners' responses are compared to responses on the nationally representative survey.

Key Findings:

- RPP practitioners most often named journal articles as the pieces of research they found most useful in the past year, and the research most often focused on student learning or school organization. National survey respondents typically named books, and the work most often focused on teachers and instruction.

- Most of the research named by RPP practitioners as well as national survey respondents did not focus on particular disciplinary content areas.

- RPP practitioners named research focused on student subgroups more frequently than national survey respondents did.

- The reasons that RPP practitioners found their research sources useful typically related to designing programs, policies, and initiatives; national survey respondents frequently named reasons related to supporting their own professional learning.

Of the 43 practitioners who responded to the Phase I survey, 26 (60%) completed this item with enough information to identify the source. These 26 respondents represented 17 of the 25 RPPs (68%) for which at least one practitioner responded to the survey.[47] Similarly, of the 733 school and district leaders who responded to the national survey, 377 (51%) completed the open-ended item. Comparisons of district leaders in the RPP sample to those in the national sample, as well as comparisons of those in research roles in both samples, resulted in negligible differences from the patterns found by comparing the full RPP and national samples. Therefore, we report the patterns below for all RPP and national sample respondents. (See Appendices G–I for additional information.)

Format of Research Named

Figure 7 compares the formats of the pieces of research named by RPP practitioners and national survey respondents (see Appendix F for more). Overall, RPP practitioners most frequently named journal articles (46%), whereas national survey respondents most often named books (58%). In fact, a striking 84% of RPP practitioners who answered this question named either journal articles or research/policy reports, compared to only 31% of national survey respondents naming either one of these two formats.
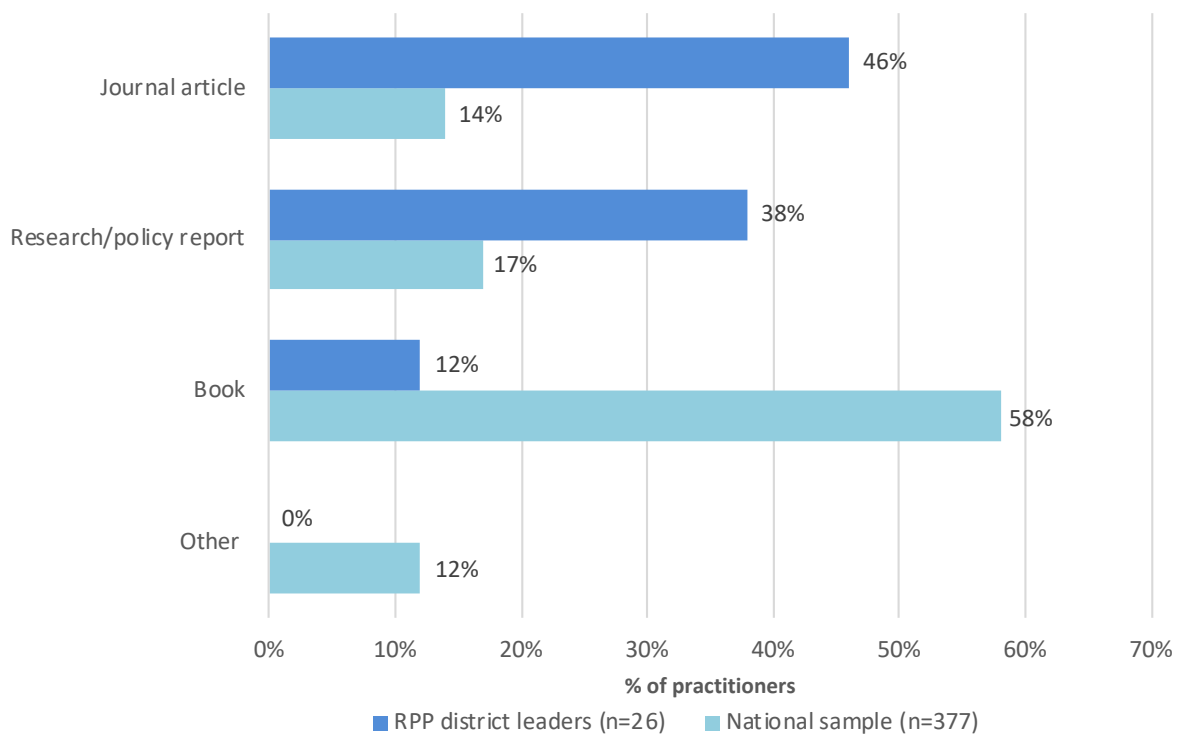
Figure 7. Format of research named as useful by RPP practitioner survey respondents (*n* = 26 RPP practitioners) and national survey respondents (*n* = 377 district and school leaders).

Topics of Research

Figure 8 presents the most frequent topics of the pieces of research named by RPP participants and national survey respondents. (See Appendix G for more information on topics and subtopics.) RPP study respondents most frequently named sources focused on students and learning (33%) or school organization and improvement (31%). In contrast, national survey respondents most frequently named pieces focused on teachers and instruction (36%), especially pedagogical strategies. On the national survey, research that focused on students and learning (28%) was most often related to academic achievement.

We compared the topics named by RPP practitioners to the focus areas of their RPPs, as they responded to the survey in the context of being RPP leaders. Indeed, RPP practitioners often named pieces of research connected to the focus areas of their RPPs. For example, all of the RPP practitioners who named research on the subtopic of postsecondary readiness and learning (including K–12 leaders) represented RPPs focused on higher education or adult learning. Likewise, RPP practitioners named research related to school-level interventions more frequently than did national survey respondents, which tended to reflect the responses of practitioners whose RPPs focused on identifying or implementing interventions to support kindergarten readiness or K–12 students with special needs.
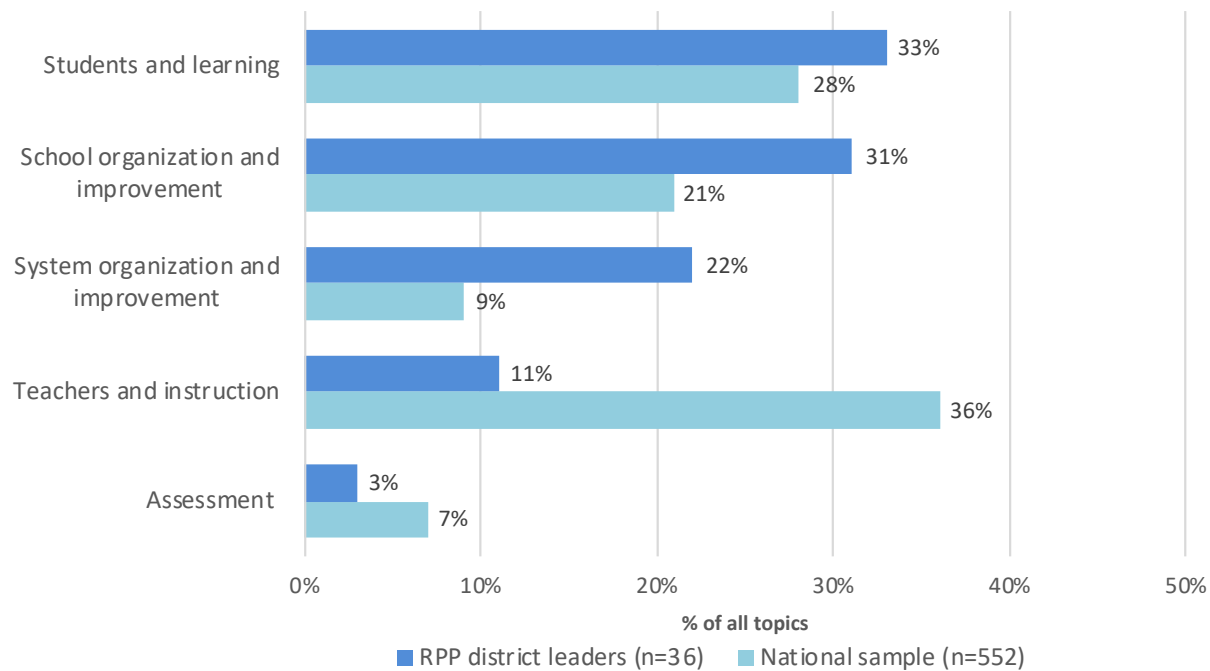
Figure 8. Topics of research named as useful, from RPP survey and national survey (*n* = 36 topics named by RPP practitioners; *n* = 552 topics named by national sample). The *n* may exceed the number of respondents because some pieces of research addressed multiple topics.

Disciplinary Content Areas of Research

For both RPP study respondents and national survey respondents, 81% of the research that was named did not focus on a particular disciplinary content area. The research that did focus on a content area reflected either literacy (8% of RPP survey responses; 10% of national survey responses) or STEM-related topics (11% of RPP survey responses; 9% of national survey responses).

Student Subgroups in Research

As shown in Figure 9, when naming research that was useful to them, RPP practitioners more frequently named research that focused on different specific student subgroups (58%) than did national survey respondents (31%; for more, see Appendix H). This difference was especially related to a larger proportion of RPP practitioners naming research that focused on education for students with special needs, such as tiered interventions (23%), which was often named by those in partnerships focused on special education. The higher proportion of RPP practitioners naming research focused on students' socioeconomic status was not as directly related to RPP focus areas but may have informed RPP goals related to school improvement and academic outcomes.
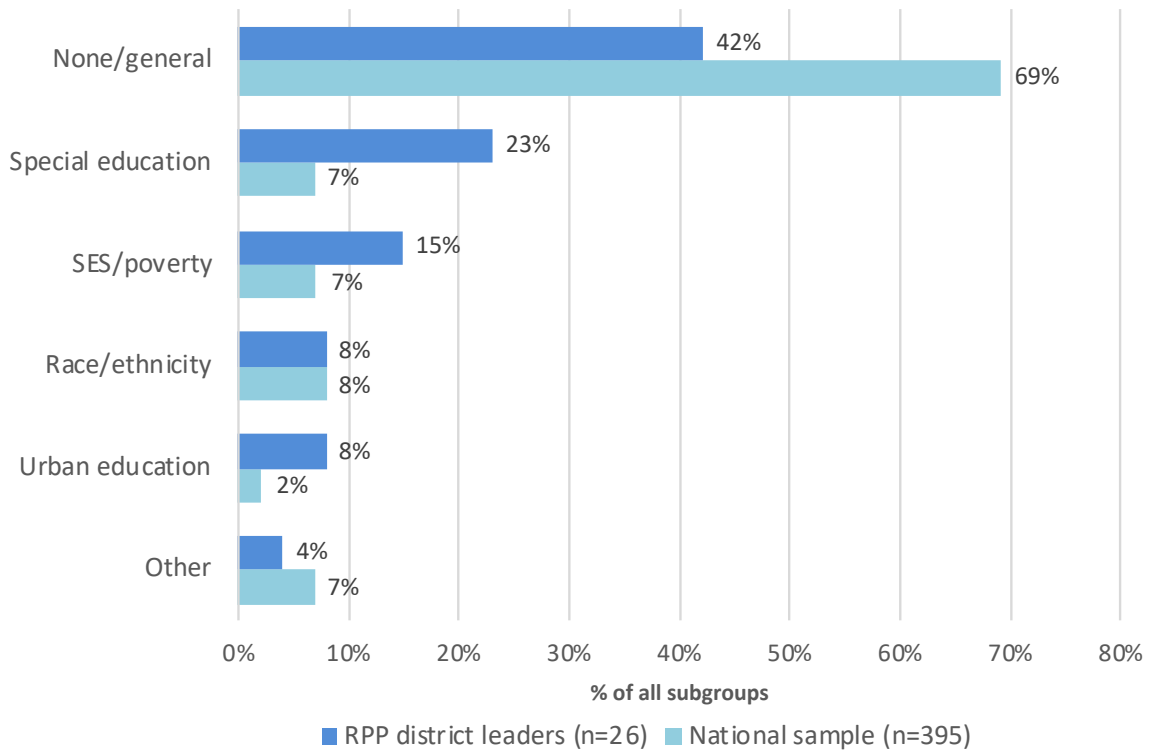
Figure 9. Subgroups reflected in pieces of research named as useful, from RPP survey and national survey (*n* = 26 subgroups named by RPP practitioners; *n* = 395 subgroups named by national sample). The *n* may exceed the number of respondents because some pieces of research were coded for multiple subgroups.

Reasons Leaders Found Research Useful

For each piece of research a respondent named, we also asked them to respond to this prompt: "Please describe how this piece of research was useful to your work." Similar to patterns of responses on the national survey, 81% (21 of 26) of RPP practitioners who responded to the full open-ended item gave enough information for our team to code.

As shown in Figure 10, of those responding to this part of the item, RPP study respondents more frequently named reasons for usefulness that were related to designing programs, policies, and initiatives (48%). National survey respondents, on the other hand, most frequently named reasons related to supporting leaders' own professional learning (29%), closely followed by designing policies (27%) and providing instructional leadership (25%).
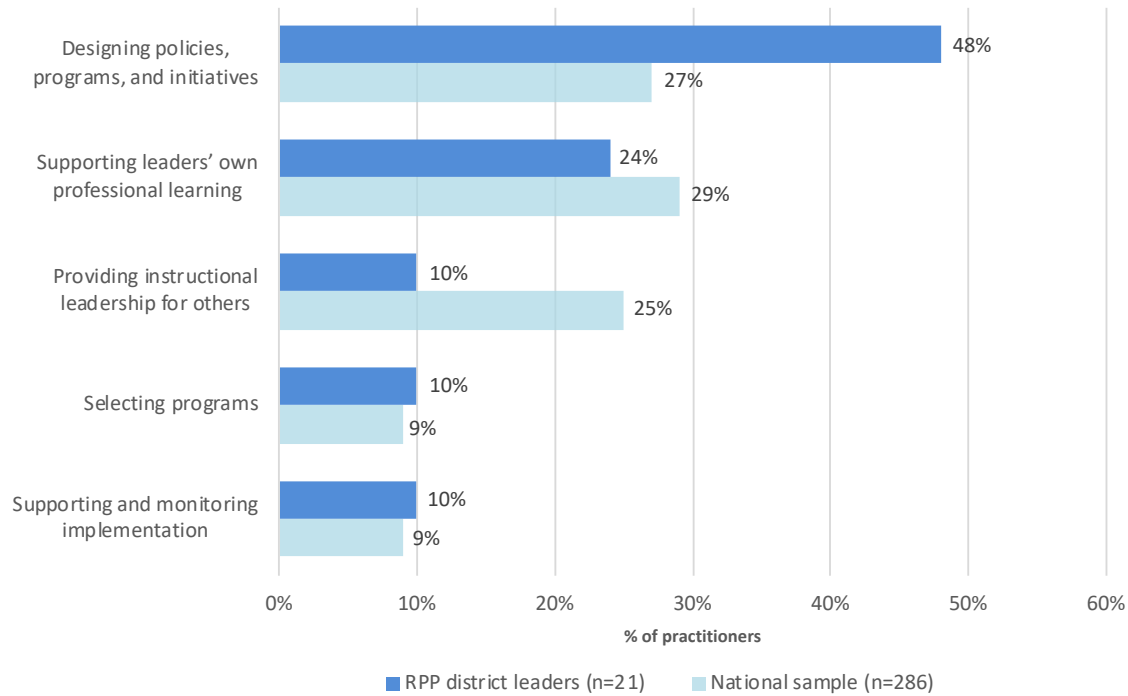
Figure 10. Reasons that practitioners found a piece of research useful, from RPP survey and national survey (*n* = 21 RPP practitioners; *n* = 286 district and school leaders from national sample).

Implications

This analysis provides insight into the types of evidence that practitioners have in mind when they claim to use research for a variety of purposes. Across both samples, we see a broad range of sources for research that goes beyond traditional journal articles.

It is noteworthy that RPP study practitioners answered this item differently than did respondents in the nationally representative sample. One striking trend is that RPP practitioners most often named journal articles, whereas national survey respondents most often named books. Further, for almost three-quarters (73%) of RPP practitioners, the topic of the research matched the focal topic of their RPP. It is possible that the research they cited aligned to the focus of their RPPs' work because they were asked to participate in the survey as RPP leaders. Alternatively, it could speak to the type of research that is read by educational leaders who choose to work in RPPs focused on those problems of practice. Or, it may be that the RPP created opportunities for practitioners to engage with peer-reviewed journal articles around those topic areas. Without an experimental design and with such a small RPP sample (n = 26), however, it is important not to attribute these differences to the efforts of RPPs.

In order to gauge how RPP practitioners came to use research related to their RPPs' focal areas, future survey items might ask practitioners to specify where they first learned of and accessed the research. Of course, such items are subject to problems of remembering, but it would be valuable to more precisely trace where research is being accessed. Given the IES RPP program's goal of influencing practitioners' research use, initial and exit surveys that include this and other key aims could be worthwhile.

Reported Shifts in Partners' Engagement with Research

RPPs may create conditions that support shifts in how practitioners and researchers engage with or use research in their work. Below, we report on self-reported shifts in both groups' practices.

Key Findings:

- The majority of surveyed RPP practitioners said that they had become better at using research in their work and were more likely to do so because of the partnership. Likewise, almost all of surveyed RPP researchers agreed that they had become better at conducting research that meets the needs of practitioners.

- Both RPP practitioners and researchers reported that they had gained new skills for working in partnerships and for conducting research relevant to their organizations' needs and contexts.

- A majority of RPP practitioners described gaining an appreciation for the value of research and becoming more open to participating in and using research in the future. Likewise, a majority of researchers reported gaining an appreciation for practitioners' contexts and the value of their input in the research process.

- Practitioners and researchers both discussed new skills they had developed in communicating research to a variety of stakeholders.

- Almost all of those surveyed from both groups agreed they would be confident leading a future partnership.

The Phase II survey asked practitioners (*n* = 52) and researchers (*n* = 62) about the extent to which their own skills in using research and leading an RPP had shifted due to working in their partnership. Likewise, in both Phase I and Phase II interviews, we asked practitioners, "How, if at all, has your own use of research changed since you began participating in this partnership?" We asked researchers, "How, if at all, have you seen changes in the extent to which your partners use research?" and "Have you noticed any changes in the way that you've done research as a result of working in this partnership?"

We posed these questions to a total of 54 practitioners and 70 researchers in one or both phases of the study. In order to capture patterns of reported shifts, we counted the occurrence of each theme for individual participants, whether that theme was mentioned by that participant in one or both phases. For example, if an interviewee participated in Phase I and Phase II of the study and mentioned the same theme in both interviews, that theme was counted only once. On the other hand, if the interviewee mentioned different themes in each phase, we attributed each theme to that individual's reports.

In the pages that follow, we first describe survey and interview findings related to shifts in engagement with research among practitioners, followed by shifts among researchers.

Shifts in Practitioners' Engagement with Research and Partnership Skills

Survey findings. The Phase II survey for RPP practitioners included four items about changes in research use and partnership skills. As shown in Figure 11, over three-quarters (77%) of surveyed practitioners (*n* = 52) agreed or strongly agreed that they had become better at using research to inform their work because of the partnership, while over two-thirds (68%) said they were more likely to use research in their work.

Further, practitioners reported positive shifts in their abilities to engage in or lead a partnership. Almost all (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident they could lead a partnership in the future, while four-fifths (81%) reported they had developed new skills in working in a partnership through this project.
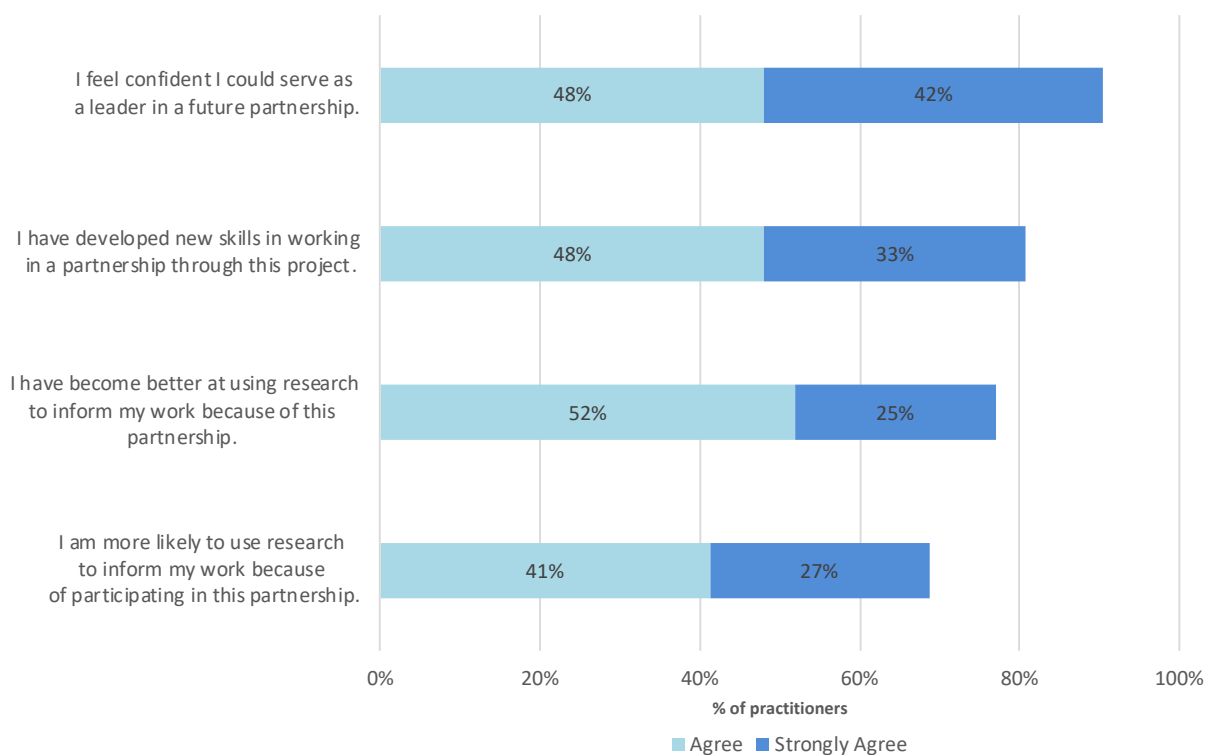
Figure 11. Practitioners' reports of shifts in engagement with research due to working in RPPs, from Phase II survey (51 ≤ *n* ≤ 52 RPP practitioners).

Interview findings. Over three-quarters (79%) of the 54 practitioners and over two-thirds (69%) of the 70 researchers who were interviewed reported changes in how practitioners and others in their practice organizations engaged with research. For example, some practitioners noted that their colleagues were more receptive to participating in and using research because their experience with the partnership's study had been relevant and useful for their work.

Among the remaining 21% of practitioners and 31% of researchers who claimed that practitioners' use of research had not changed, participants frequently explained that they were already deeply engaged in using research through their roles in their organization (i.e., they were in

research-related roles), and/or they had worked in partnerships before the IES RPP grant, such that they could not attribute any changes solely to this particular project. Still others pointed out that it was too short of a time to see a notable shift.

As shown in Figure 12, participants described three primary types of changes in RPP practitioners' engagement with research. Practitioners most often described a change in their orientation toward using and participating in research (57% of the 54 interviewed), and this was the second most frequently named shift among researchers (40% of the 70 interviewed). About half of practitioners (49%) and researchers (56%) described changes related to practitioners' development of knowledge and skills to use and conduct research. And a minority of both practitioners (26%) and researchers (10%) explained how practitioners' communication with stakeholders about research had shifted due to working in the partnership. We describe each of these themes in more detail below.
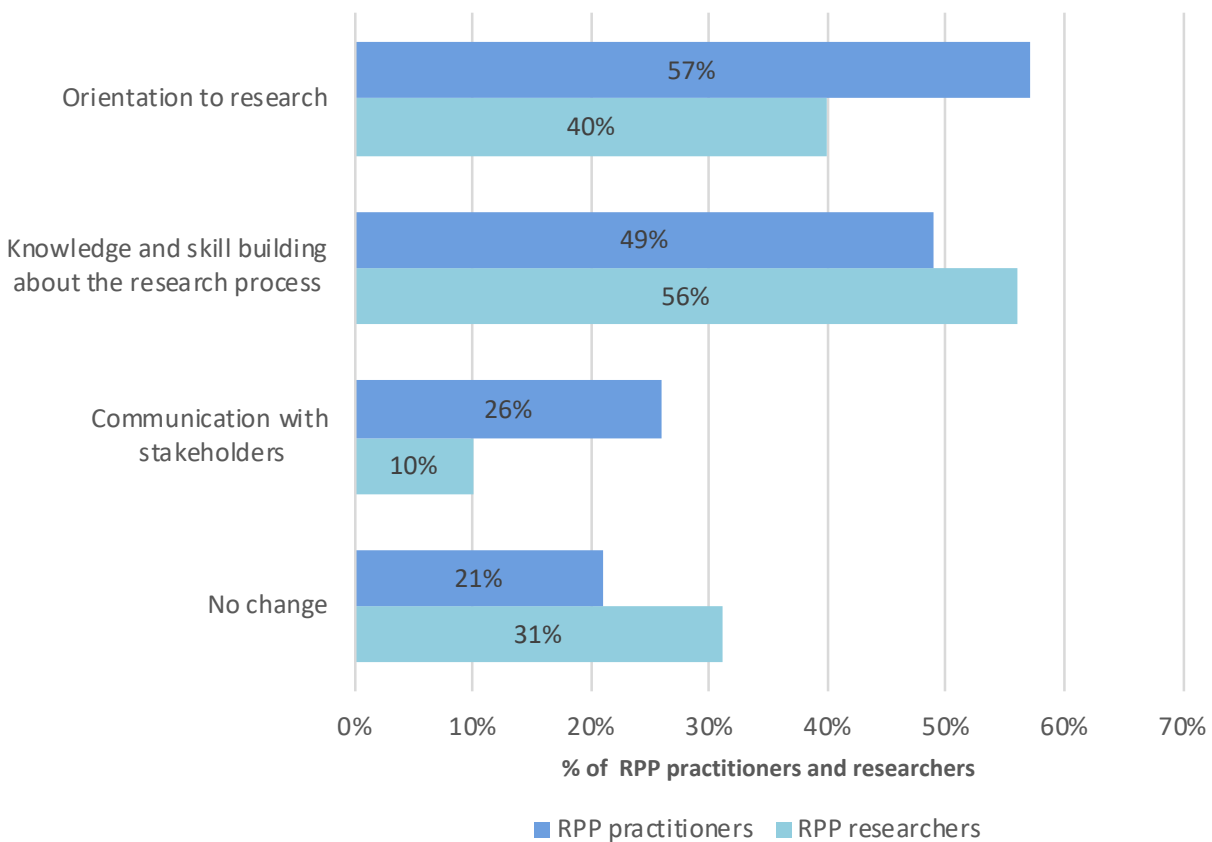

Figure 12. Practitioners' and researchers' reports in Phase I and Phase II interviews of shifts in how practitioners use research due to working in RPPs (*n* = 124 RPP participants [54 practitioners, 70 researchers]).

Practitioners shifted their orientation to research. Participants who described changes in practitioners' orientation to research frequently noted an improved understanding of the value of research to shed light on problems of practice and make evidence-informed decisions in their organization. Some practitioners expressed that both they and their colleagues had gained an appreciation of how research could improve their work and had come to view research and researchers as a reliable source of information. One practitioner shared, for example, "For me, it definitely has reinforced the value of research, because we wouldn't be aware of the successes or the challenges or even the capacity to roll something out to a scale like this without the information from our partnership."

Other practitioners added that their increased awareness about the value of research had "elevated the importance of accurate data for us and for our local programs" in the organization more broadly. In this way, developing an understanding about the value of research affected not only practitioners who participated in the RPP but their colleagues as well. One practitioner explained this shift in her colleagues' use of research in decision making:

> Because of their exposure [to research from the partnership], they are more open, and it's natural now to say, "Well, what does the research say?" For them to [be] thoughtful about doing research on their own, and actually being open to using research for instructional methods or for curriculum design.

Another practitioner noted a shift in colleagues' openness to participating in research and working with external researchers due to their positive experience in working in the IES RPP:

> We now seek out the opportunities to work with others in the same kind of capacity. In my [research and evaluation] office, we have the people that could do the work, but timewise, we just can't. There's not the time to really dig into these kinds of things, so leveraging researchers and others to come in as part of that kind of mutual benefit thing …. [W]e're more open to it or seek it out a little bit more than maybe we did in the past.

Researchers likewise noted shifts in practitioners' attitudes toward using and participating in research. A researcher in one partnership noted that his practitioner partners have "definitely become more open to research." He elaborated:

> They basically said, because of the success of this RPP, they really didn't need to be persuaded to work with [researchers] or to take on research. Folks in the district office have been really impressed by the kinds of information that's been coming out this work, and they're actually actively looking for other research projects because of that. So that was really encouraging to hear.

Practitioners developed knowledge and skills about the research process. Practitioners and researchers alike noted shifts that resulted from practitioners conducting research as part of their participation in the RPP. Through participation in the research process and sustained engagement with both qualitative and quantitative data, practitioners reported gaining a better understanding

of their focal problems of practice.

As part of this process, practitioners gained new technical skills related to collecting, managing, analyzing, and interpreting data. Some partnerships hosted data management workshops and other forms of support that helped practitioners gain technical skills to conduct research in their own organizations. One practitioner emphasized the importance of this shift in his work:

> One of the huge benefits of the researcher–practitioner partnership is they [the research team] were so willing to do one-on-one tutorials with [us] to build our analytic capacity. … Now, we can do it on other surveys that we administer, and ... share [our] expertise with other districts who are interested in replicating some of the analyses we've done. … Because they built so much analytic capacity on our side, we were able to translate, understand, and interpret the research much better so that we can think of more creative and user-friendly ways to display that data.

As practitioners gained research experience, they became more critical consumers of research. Researchers especially noticed that practitioners began to better evaluate the quality of research studies and validity of findings. One researcher observed that instead of turning to "Dr. Google," her practitioner partners began to find more reliable sources of evidence, including researchers, to inform their practice. A practitioner from a different RPP made a similar observation:

> I'm less likely to just go with the headline on something. I want to know more, I want to go deeper, and I want to make sure that the direction that we're going in is based on research, it's got a deeper foundation. It's not what's the latest sales pitch. … I'm more thoughtful in my purchases. I'm more thoughtful in the practices that we adopt. … I really think that we're making a difference, and I know I couldn't have done it without the partnership. Just having access to world-class researchers and the guidance, even though they didn't tell us one thing to do. Just the thoughtful questioning and looking at what we were doing—I really think that's been big.

Researchers further explained that it was important that practitioners developed understandings about the generalizability of findings and became aware of the limitations of research. Similarly, with increased knowledge and skills about the research process, practitioners and researchers alike noticed how practitioners asked new questions about the partnership's study and about their own focal problems of practice. One practitioner reflected that this new experience gave him a sense of ownership in the research:

> I was seeing, well—What are we looking at? Why are we doing this? What's the purpose? ... Then all [of a] sudden, it becomes very personal because then you have a vested interest in it. My going out and gathering the data gave me that vested interest in it. You have buy-in. You have ownership. … I think that would be the biggest shift. People are questioning.

Taken together, these shifts suggest increased sophistication in practitioners' understandings of developing and implementing research studies, as well as of interpreting and implementing research findings.

> Practitioners shifted their communication practices with stakeholders. Practitioners noted that the partnership helped them gain the skills necessary to communicate complex research findings to various stakeholders. In doing so, they worked to strike a balance between what they called "technical" and "friendly" communication. Similarly, practitioners described efforts to balance their production of publications and presentations across venues that met the needs of various stakeholders. For example, one practitioner mentioned creating a short "two-pager" to summarize their work, while another described a video created with participants from the partnership's study, which was posted to the district's website.

One practitioner explained both the importance of and effort involved in communicating research well:

> [It] has been a tremendous learning curve. I've had to develop more skills in that regard than what I've had to use in the past. My experience has afforded me to be a messenger or an interlocutor to those other communities, like superintendents of schools, legislature, and others. Having been involved in this research community has made that a whole lot easier for me and for them relative to their own sense of how research serves their interest.

Practitioners' leadership in the dissemination of findings to a wide variety of audiences—including administrators, educators, students, families, policymakers, legislators, researchers, and more—requires skills in both interpreting and communicating research findings through a variety of formats and styles.

Shifts in Researchers' Approach to Research and Partnership Skills
The reported shifts in practices or skills were not one-sided and limited to practitioners. Indeed, the researchers involved in the RPPs also reported notable changes in their approaches to research and the development of a broader set of partnership skills.

Survey findings. The Phase II survey for RPP researchers (n = 52) included three items about changes in researchers' research and partnership skills. As shown in Figure 13, the great majority (88%) of researcher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had become better at conducting research that meets the needs of practitioners. As in practitioners' reports described above, almost all researchers reported feeling confident that they could serve as a leader in a future partnership (95%) and that they had developed new skills from working in a partnership (94%).
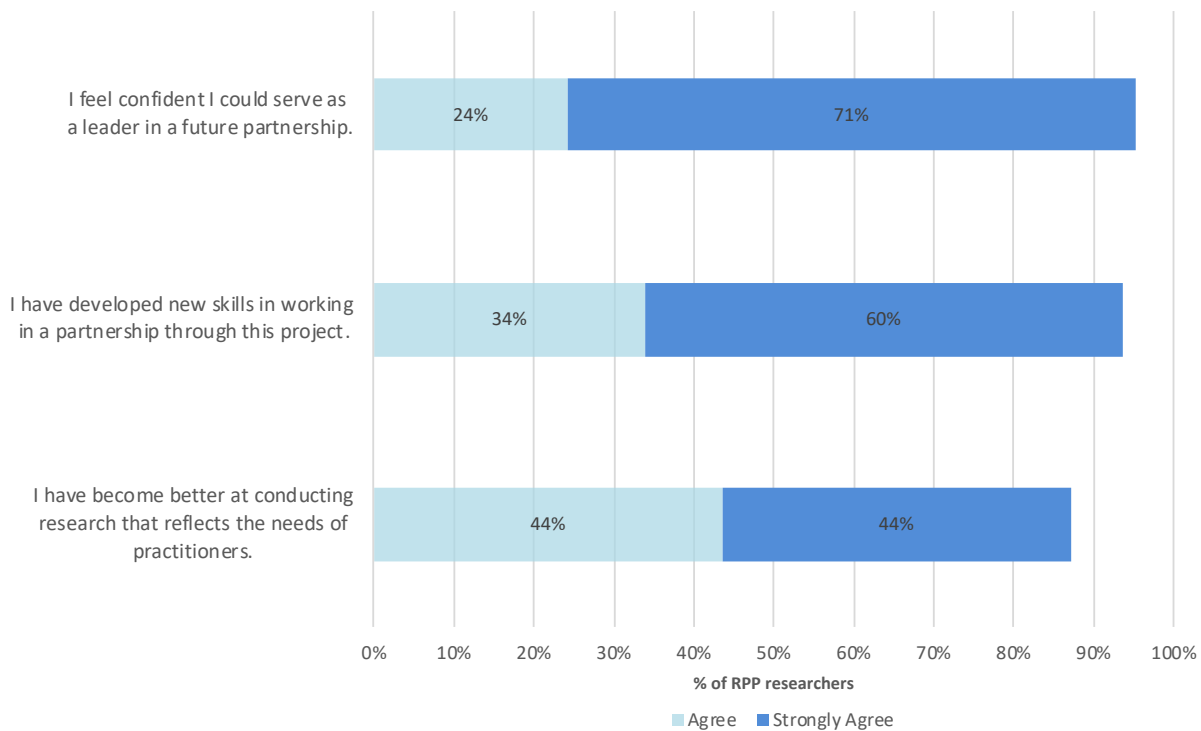
Figure 13. Researchers' reports of shifts in approach to research due to working in RPPs, from Phase II survey (*n* = 62 RPP researchers).

Interview findings. Of the 70 researchers who participated in an interview in one or both phases of the study, 55 (79%) described ways in which their approach to conducting research had changed due to working in the partnership. The remaining 15 (21%) said that they had not noticed much change in their research. Almost all attributed this to having worked in partnerships for a long time or being predisposed to doing research in this manner.

Figure 14 shows the three primary themes regarding changes to researchers that emerged from our interviews. Parallel to participants' descriptions of the changes they noticed in practitioners, researchers discussed shifts in their orientation to working with practitioners (54%); their development of knowledge and skills related to doing research with practitioners (41%); and changes in their communication with stakeholders about research (36%). In addition, although we did not ask practitioners directly about changes to researchers' approaches, about one-quarter (28%) of them mentioned changes along the same lines that they had noticed in their research partners during the course of their interviews. We describe each of these themes in more detail below.
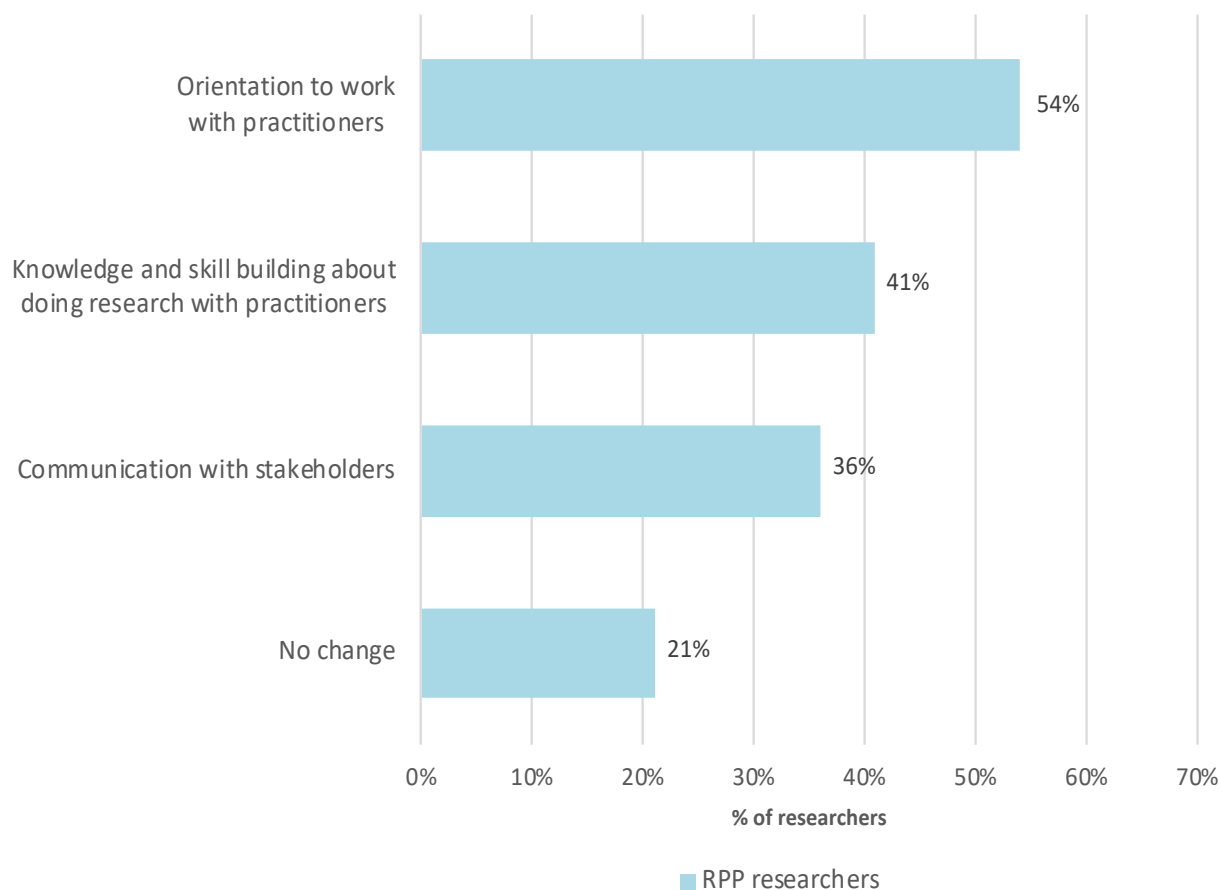
Figure 14. Researchers' reports of shifts in how they do research due to working in RPPs, from Phase I and Phase II interviews (*n* = 70 RPP researchers).

Researchers shifted their orientation to working with practitioners. Researchers who noticed changes often mentioned ways in which their orientation toward working with practitioners had shifted. Partnerships created opportunities for researchers to engage in educational settings, contributing to an improved understanding of practitioners' contexts. Here, researchers described learning about both the policy contexts and organizational conditions that shape practitioners' work. They often described this deepened understanding as a precursor to adapting research aims and methods to accommodate practitioners' needs and to improving their ability to interpret data and produce actionable findings for both practitioners and policymakers. As one researcher put it:

> I've become more aware of the policy context and the political context. I think more critically about what role research can play in informing public debates, and how people access research, how to set up research studies, so that they result in actionable findings that policymakers and practitioners can use.

Some practitioners echoed the importance of researchers gaining awareness of the policy climate in their partnerships' areas of focus, making observations such as, "The research team has really learned a lot about how early childhood policy is being set in our state and all the politics around it."

Further, researchers often discussed shifts in how they considered practitioners' input in determining the aims and central questions of a research project. They described this as a shift away from what they called "traditional" approaches of entering an educational setting to conduct a study without practitioner input. Instead, their approach to research in the partnership involved asking questions and listening to practitioners' perspectives and expertise in order to align researchers' and practitioners' goals:

> The other thing that I learned from this ... is that what we think is needed based on where we sit ... may not actually reflect the reality in the schools, even if it's our job to know what they need. It's important to get into the buildings and walk around and listen and ask questions. … I've learned a lot from them on how you approach things, how you be respectful to people and listen to them and work with them in a way where you can continue to work with—rather than parachuting in as some sort of national expert on something on your way to the next location.

Researchers developed knowledge and skills about conducting research with practitioners. Another key shift that researchers described in their work related to changes to their research methods to better align with practitioners' needs and contexts. For example, one researcher claimed that he previously focused on randomized controlled trials but realized that to answer the partnership's focal questions within a school district context, they needed to pursue a mixed-methods study. Another researcher experienced a similar shift:

> One thing that has changed for me as part of being in this partnership ... is the value that I see in qualitative approaches. I've quantitatively trained, but I really am starting to think [that] practitioners really need to understand the mechanisms underlying why things are happening.

In this way, researchers talked about becoming more flexible in deciding on the most appropriate research methods to use. Some researchers also noted that they developed new technical skills as they worked with new data systems in educational organizations and learned how to create and work with data sharing agreements.

Just as researchers developed flexibility in the research process, they learned how to develop more timely and relevant findings with their practitioner partners. As one researcher claimed, "We're much more reactive to the current needs of people here, in terms of what they need, so we're [doing] much faster-paced, simpler analyses." Some researchers noted that this shift was challenging, as they had to become comfortable with "quick and dirty" analyses that required them to carefully communicate limitations and nuances to stakeholders.

Sharing findings, however, did not signal the end of the partnership's collaboration. Several researchers noted the importance of continuing to work with their partners in planning for the implementation of research findings. As one researcher explained, "It's an entirely different frame than most research that I've done. I've always done research in the schools. But I think, most of the time, we have our research questions, and we go in, and we answer them, and then we leave." Instead, this researcher explained, their partnership's collaborative research process began with the initial joint development of research questions and aims, continued through the study itself, and persisted through the application of findings to the design of policies and programs.

Researchers shifted their communication practices with stakeholders. As with practitioners above, researchers talked about changes in communication with stakeholders as a result of working in their partnerships. They described how they had learned to communicate research findings in an accessible and understandable way for educators. This involved not only shifting from academic to "friendlier" language but also constructively interpreting and communicating findings in ways that were both respectful of practitioners' contexts and actionable for their needs. As one researcher explained, doing so sometimes meant involving practitioner partners in communication strategies:

> I think we … are constantly growing and learning how to be better partners in terms of writing, communicating our findings in ways that are appropriate for practitioners and policymakers—not writing journal articles or long reports [but] communicating our findings in a variety of more acceptable ways. We're always trying to negotiate and figure out what's the right time to get them involved in different aspects of either the research or sharing of the findings.

In addition to ensuring clear and accessible communication, researchers emphasized the importance of stating both possibilities and limitations related to the findings so that they would not be taken out of context or used to make erroneous inferences. Clarification about the interpretation of findings was especially important because both researchers and practitioners communicated their findings to multiple stakeholders in various settings including conferences, presentations, and trainings.

Implications

In survey and interview data alike, we found evidence that both practitioners' and researchers' experiences in their partnerships may have contributed to an increase in practitioners' capacity to engage with research and researchers' capacity to conduct research that is relevant to practitioners' needs. Many of the researchers and practitioners involved in the IES RPPs shared very positive reports on the ways in which the RPP had contributed to their work and knowledge base. While these themes are all based on self-reports, the findings are notable.

In both the survey and interview reports, most practitioners said that they had become better at using research in their work and were more likely to do so because of their participation in the partnership. They described shifts in their own and their colleagues' orientation toward research in terms of their understanding of its value and their openness to participate in studies and use the findings. In addition, their experience in conducting research in their partnerships expanded

their knowledge and skills about how to ask research questions, choose and implement appropriate research methods, and interpret and communicate findings. These perceived shifts in practitioners' engagement with research suggest that their involvement in RPPs can influence not only their own research use, but also use within their organization more broadly.

Similarly, many of the RPP researchers reported that they had become better at conducting research that meets the needs of practitioners. Their orientation toward working with practitioners likewise shifted as they learned about practitioners' contexts, included their input in the research process, and developed collaborative relationships with them. As researchers adapted to practitioners' needs and contexts, they became more flexible in their research methods, in producing timely and relevant reports of findings, and in communicating findings in an accessible way for a variety of stakeholders.

It is important to consider that there were subsets of both researchers and practitioners who, in their interviews, shared that they had not shifted their practices or knowledge base in notable ways. These individuals included practitioners who were in research roles in their respective educational organizations, many of whom had traditional research preparation through doctoral programs and felt confident in their research or partnership skills. This group also included researchers who had long histories of conducting collaborative research with practitioners. In other words, these participants' experiences in the RPP were "business as usual." In such cases, the IES RPP grant supported their work together, but did not, in their eyes, help them to bring entirely new skills to bear on it. This suggests that the IES RPP program might consider the range of experiences of the researchers and practitioners involved in each RPP. The program might benefit from including researchers with prior experience in partnership work as well as practitioners with experience in research in order to provide a foundation for a successful partnership, while also including members with less experience in these areas in order to offer new experiences that build capacity.

Nature of Prior Relationships of the RPPs

In our Phase I interim report, we reported that there were few truly new RPPs funded through the IES grant program—that is, partnerships where individuals or organizations had never worked together before. In Phase II, we obtained more specific information about how the partners had worked together prior to the grant.

Key Findings:

- The majority of partnerships had participants who worked together before receiving IES RPP funding, and most participants knew at least one person in their partner organization before the grant started.

- The majority of participants had worked on at least one project with their RPP partner for several years prior to securing IES funding.

- Before the IES grant began, 19 partnerships had established a formal data-sharing agreement, 18 had established a broader research agenda beyond the focus of the IES grant, 16 had established an MOU, and 11 had established a decision-making board.

In our Phase II survey, participants from all 27 partnerships indicated that members of organizations in the partnership had worked together in some capacity prior to securing IES RPP funding. Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents, including 22 of 25 PIs and 26 of 28 co-PIs, noted that they or members of their organization had worked with their partners before the IES RPP grant began (see Appendix A for more).

We asked how long the partners had worked together before the IES grant began (see Figure 15). Slightly over half (51%) of respondents reported that they had worked with their RPP partners between one and three years prior to receiving the IES grant; over one-third (36%) reported that they had worked together more than three years before receiving funding. The remaining individuals (13%) reported working together less than a year before the IES grant.
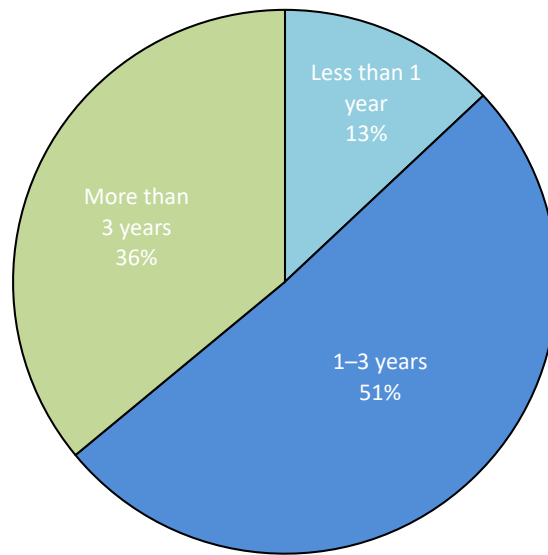
Figure 15. Length of time RPP partners had worked together before IES Grant, from Phase II survey (*n* = 97 RPP researchers and practitioners).

We asked survey respondents whether their partnership had any formalized structures in place prior to securing IES funding. Most of the RPPs (26 of the 27) had developed at least one of these pieces of infrastructure prior to securing the grant funding. As seen in Figure 16, 19 RPPs had established a formal data sharing agreement, 18 had established a broader research agenda beyond the focus of the IES grant, 16 had established an MOU, and 11 had established a decision-making board prior to receiving the IES grant. Only one RPP indicated their team had worked together prior to receiving IES funding without engaging in any of these four types of formalized partnership activities.
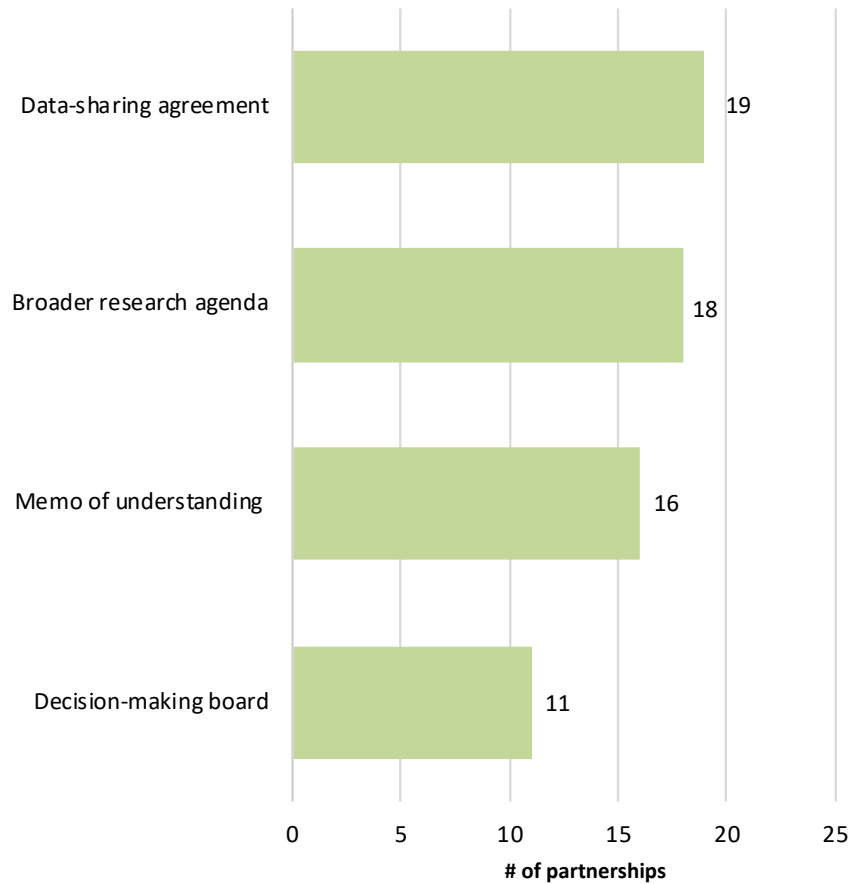
Figure 16. Number of RPPs with key structures in place before IES grant, from Phase II survey (*n* = 27 RPPs).

Implications

Together, these findings support our previous conclusion that the RPP program's RFA and review process has attracted partnerships with a history of working together. While the RFA notes that the program supports both new and established partnerships, we see a tendency toward partnerships with prior relationships and structures to support partnership work—such as MOUs—receiving funding. We do not yet know, however, how funded proposals compare to non-funded proposals with respect to prior collaborations. As such, the program may want to consider the following questions:

Are partnerships with a prior history more likely to be funded? If so, does that suggest new guidance for the program regarding the potential benefit of applicants first developing a relationship through a small project before applying?

Might there be different expectations for goals or timelines for newer partnerships compared to well-established partnerships that already have infrastructure in place, including data-sharing agreements, MOUs, or research agendas?

Conditions for Launching and Maintaining Partnerships

In Phase I interviews, we asked participants to describe the conditions that had supported the development or maintenance of their partnerships. We used their open-ended responses to create a list of the most-frequently named conditions and then included these in our Phase II survey.

Key Findings:

- The top two conditions for launching an RPP were mutual organizational interest and trust among RPP members. Other conditions that supported starting an RPP included a data-sharing agreement or MOU, the individual expertise of RPP members, and organizational leadership.

- Holding regular meetings, having mutual organizational interest, and establishing trust among RPP members were top conditions for maintaining a partnership.

We asked survey respondents to indicate the top three conditions that supported the launch of their RPPs (Figure 17). Participants across role groups most often noted that having mutual organizational interest in a particular focus area was an important condition for launching a partnership (29% of respondents). Having trust among RPP members was the second most named condition (15%), followed by the individual expertise of RPP members or the presence of a data-sharing agreement or MOU (11% each; see Appendix B for more).
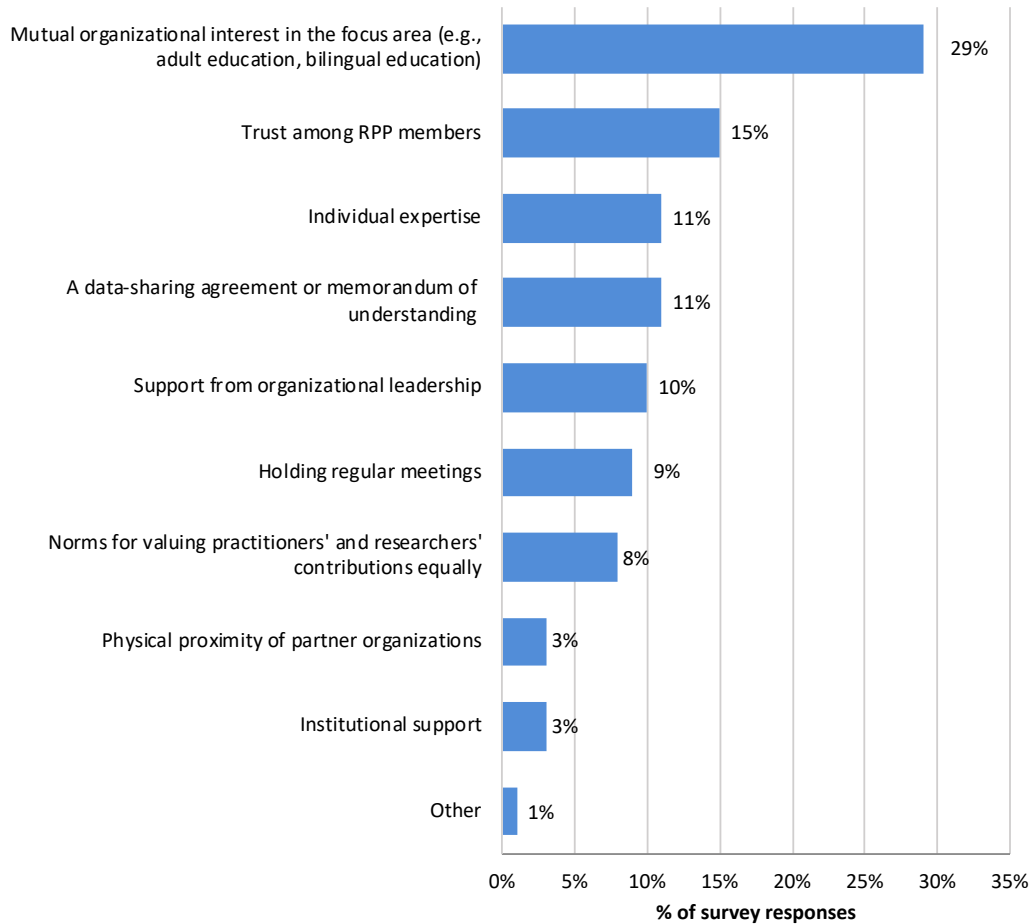
Figure 17. Most important conditions for launching an RPP, from Phase II survey. Respondents selected up to three conditions from a list of 10 options (*n* = 332 selections).

In terms of maintaining the partnership, 25% of survey respondents noted the importance of holding regular meetings (Figure 18; see the interim report for additional information on frequency and type of meetings). Respondents agreed that having mutual organizational interest in a particular focal area (24%) and mutual trust across RPP members (20%) were also important for maintaining the work of the partnership.
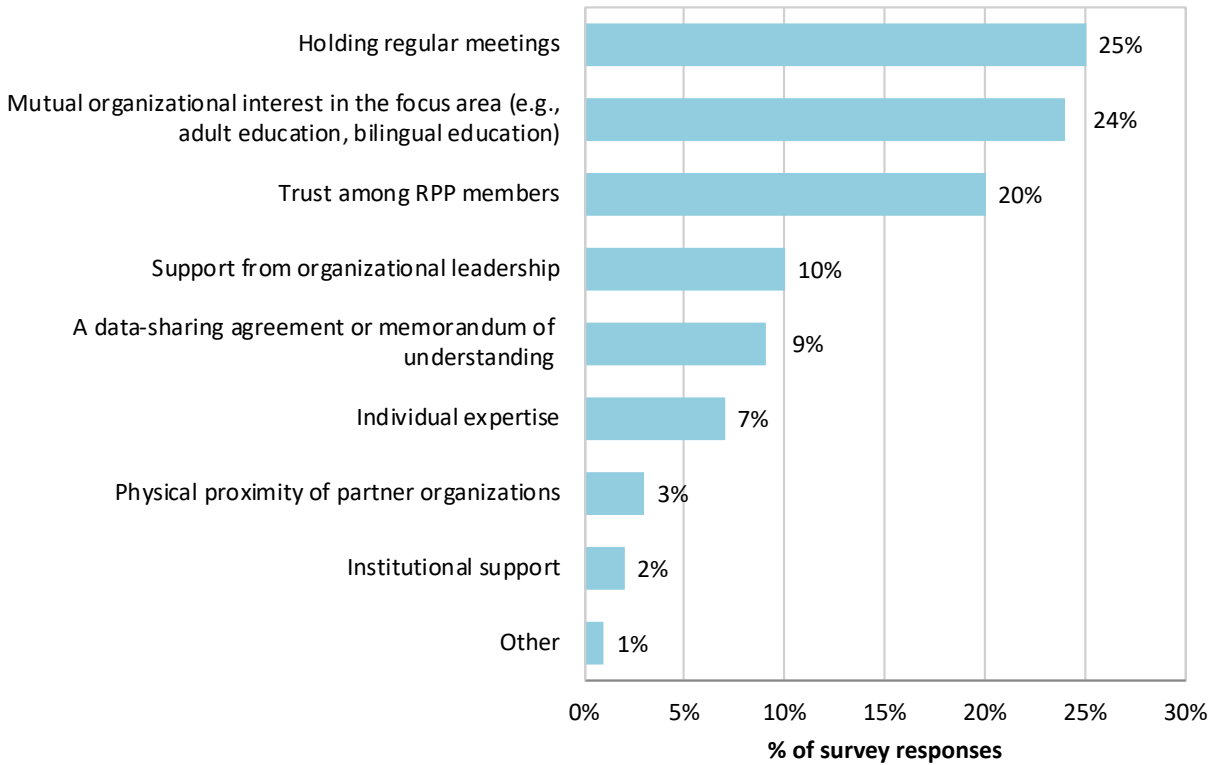
Figure 18. Most important conditions for maintaining an RPP, from Phase II survey. Respondents selected up to three conditions from a list of 10 options (*n* = 306 selections).

Implications

RPP participants identified mutual organizational interest and trust among partners as key ingredients for both launching and maintaining partnerships. Data-sharing agreements, individual expertise, and support from organizational leaders were important during the launch of a partnership, while regular meetings supported the ongoing work.

IES may want to consider some of these factors as part of the RFA process, though some are easier to discern in an application than others. Providing evidence of mutual organizational interest could be documented in a proposal, for instance, as could the planned frequency of meetings. IES might request evidence in proposals that the problems identified are important to key stakeholders on all sides, and that these stakeholders would be eager to help solve them. Such evidence could come from a range of sources, like letters of support that testify to involvement in shaping the proposal, reports from focus groups, or even local needs assessments.

Promising Strategies for Addressing Key Challenges

In Phase I, we surfaced central challenges faced by RPPs. In Phase II interviews, we asked participants to name strategies they had found effective for overcoming these difficulties.

> **Key Findings:**
>
> - Phase I participants described challenges related to three areas: (1) turnover of positions for those involved in the partnership, as well as leadership turnover within educational organizations more generally; (2) differences in researchers' and practitioners' typical timelines and/or pace of work; and (3) having active members in the partnership with authority to act on the RPP's findings.
> - To overcome these challenges, participants in Phase II recommended investing in strong, trusting relationships, communicating regularly, and adjusting course based on changing circumstances.

In Phase I of the study, participants identified key challenges that they faced related to (1) turnover of positions for those involved in the partnership or in the organizations more generally; (2) differences in researchers' and practitioners' typical timelines and/or pace of work; and (3) having the "right people at the table" in terms of active members in the partnership with decision-making authority to act on the RPP's findings.

In Phase II of the study, we asked participants if they had experienced each of these challenges in their partnerships. RPP members then shared strategies for addressing them. Here, we present the most prominent strategies identified from 95 interviews with RPP researchers and practitioners. It is important to keep in mind that members' descriptions of the strategies that helped them address challenges are retrospective accounts and not contemporaneous observations, which might be more useful for understanding how RPPs navigate challenges successfully.

Turnover in Partnerships and Organizations

There were 24 RPPs where at least one respondent reported that turnover was a challenge for their partnership. Here, turnover often meant people changing positions or leaving the practice organization, but it sometimes applied to turnover within the researchers' organizations as well.

In times of turnover, open, regular communication with remaining partners was critical (17 RPPs). Staying in contact through a turnover can help to ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of any shifts in partnership goals, roles, and responsibilities as the team adjusts. When new members enter into the work, these open lines of communication are important as well. Pausing the work to introduce new members and hear their interest and perspective is helpful. Explained one researcher:

> What we have found to be effective is that we meet with those people right away, and we share with them the goals of the partnership or the implementation.

> We then spend time listening to that person to find out how those
> partnership goals fit for them, and how they see themselves fitting in.

The second most prominent strategy for anticipating and coping with turnover was starting with multiple partners at various levels within the partner organizations (18 RPPs). Having a range of people distributed across levels or departments can allow the project to move forward when faced with turnover and help create some stability for partnership work. With several people well-informed of the goals of the RPP, turnover will be less disruptive because those people can keep the work moving forward when someone leaves.

Another common strategy that respondents discussed was building strong relationships within the organizations in order to maintain stability within the partnership. Recommended one researcher:

> You'll be surprised who ends up leaving for any number of reasons.
> Build those good relationships with as many people as possible. It feels
> like a shotgun approach, but try and get deep and trusting relationships
> with as many folks as possible because the team is not gonna look the
> same, even after two years.

The trust that emerged from these strong relationships helped create smoother transitions when people left the partnership and new people joined. The informal relationships across organizations were also valuable when it became necessary to replace partners who had left.

Difficulty Synchronizing the Timing and Pace of Work

A second challenge centered on different timelines and paces of work of researchers and practitioners. Often, this issue presented itself when researchers needed more time to run analyses and/or write reports, while practitioners would have liked to receive this information more quickly. However, this was not the only way that asynchronicity emerged. One practitioner noted:

> It's not always that the academic is the slow and steady, and that
> the practitioners want to run, run, run. It's also the reverse sometimes,
> when the researchers have their work and need that input, and sometimes
> it's a bad time for the practitioners to get to weigh in.

The most frequently named strategy to help with issues related to timing was regular communication about timelines and deadlines (17 RPPs). Here, participants recommended that researchers and practitioners check in on a regular basis to stay abreast of short- and long-term work goals, upcoming deadlines, and any emerging challenges that required adjustments.

Further, partnerships can plan their work together in advance, with an eye to each other's calendars, timelines, and rhythms to their work (13 RPPs). Understanding the pacing of their partners' work can help ensure that partnerships' findings are available at appropriate decision-making points, or that partnership work does not become a distraction when there are other pressing issues.

Participants recommended planning with timelines in mind, early in the grant writing process; revisiting and revising the timeline and goals once funding comes in; and checking in about timelines on an ongoing basis once the work together begins.

A third strategy named by participants was to offer quick feedback reports, turned around on a more frequent basis. Such feedback involves shorter pieces of analysis, draft versions of reports, or tables/charts, without the accompanying text of a finalized journal article. Noted one researcher, "Building in quick turnaround kind of analysis into the work can satisfy … a number of questions that [the practice partners] had." A related strategy here is to consider a multi-phased approach to analysis, where researchers provide descriptive findings on a shorter timeline, while setting up longer-term goals for more time-intensive analysis.

Other strategies for navigating timeline issues include:

- Stay flexible with timelines when possible. Sometimes, issues emerged that were outside of anyone's control, and participants reported that flexibility was key to navigating these changes. (12 RPPs)
- When time crunches happen or there are misalignments in calendars, directly and immediately consult key partners for advice and insight on how to proceed. (9 RPPs)
- Fund a project manager or coordinator to keep an eye on deadlines and timing issues. Since there was often a lot going on within the educational agencies, some partnerships recommended funding the project manager on the researcher team. (8 RPPs)
- Accommodate the needs of practitioners when possible. Even though "asks" from practitioner partners were not always aligned to their calendars, several researchers noted the value of saying "yes" when last minute requests come in. (5 RPPs)

Having the Right People at the Table

Overall, there was no standardized list of individuals or groups who *should* be involved in a partnership in order to act upon the partnerships' findings or strategies for involving them in the work. Instead, having the "right people at the table" was dependent on the nature of the problem that the partnership was tackling and the individuals, departments, organizations, or levels of systems necessary to respond to the partnerships' findings. As such, it was important, as one researcher said, to "read the context" of the work together to figure out who needed to be involved.

One of the most popular strategies was to include people who have the decision-making authority to act on the findings in partnership work early (16 RPPs). For example, in several of the partnerships, the co-PI position was held by a leader in the research, assessment, and evaluation department of the educational organization—a role that is not always involved in programmatic decisions outside of that department. A researcher in one partnership explained how this arrangement had constrained the district's ability to respond to partnership recommendations:

The co-PI of the grant on the district side is the head of research and evaluation. They do program evaluation. They do assessments. They collect data. … He really feels that he's not in a position, and he's right, to take lessons from our work and turn them into practice changes for the district. The people who would be the right people to implement any practice changes in the district that result from our work have not always regularly attended the meetings. … They're not named per se as key players in the grant and, in a way, they're not being held accountable for the progress of the project on the district side. The person who is being held accountable is feeling like he's not able to implement.

To avoid a similar situation, partners recommended identifying and reaching out to other departments or organizations that have the decision-making authority to make changes aligned with partnership findings. It may be best to do this early on in the project (i.e., during grant development). A subset of participants recommended considering not only who has the authority to make decisions but also who has control over relevant budget, staffing, or resource decisions to act upon the decisions; these were not necessarily the same individuals or departments.

A second strategy was to expand participation and engage a broad range of groups that are implicated in the problem of practice (16 RPPs). Building a broader coalition was not only helpful during the decision-making process but also during implementation of the decision. Insights from across stakeholders helped inform and improve the partnerships' recommendations. A broader group also had the added benefit, as noted earlier, of maintaining partnership continuity, even during periods of turnover. Depending on the problem of practice, this broader group might involve teachers, parents, school leaders, district leaders, school boards, other higher education organizations, or state-level policymakers. To identify relevant stakeholders, one participant recommended asking practitioners who are knowledgeable about the educational system and problem at hand for help in mapping out different stakeholder groups and identifying specific people who could be involved.

A third strategy was to develop relationships with key individuals in the educational agency who are well-connected to other stakeholders in the organization (14 RPPs). Identified by one researcher as "boundary spanners," these individuals helped support partnerships' ability to move on findings. Participants noted that their introductions to others in the educational agency helped spread the work, and their support of the project supported the credibility of the findings, making them likely to be acted upon. These individuals provided important insight into the priorities of the educational agency, helping to make sure that the project was aligned with the other work of the agency. Finally, these boundary spanners assisted in translating findings and offered suggestions on how and when to share findings, which may have made it more likely they would resonate with key decision makers.

Finally, there was particular value to *i*nvolving top leadership from the educational organization, if possible (10 RPPs). Beyond the fact that these individuals may have had key decision-making authority, their involvement in the partnership supported the likelihood of findings being acted upon for other reasons. Involving these top leaders—even peripherally—demonstrated that the project was a priority for the organization. Top leaders did not always need to be involved in the

day-to-day work of the partnership but played an important role as project champions. Their involvement may have increased the likelihood for others in the organization to mobilize behind it.

Other strategies named by RPP members included:

- Consider the range of ways for participants to be involved and/or the possible roles that participants may assume. Not everyone needs to be centrally engaged in every stage of the work together. (5 RPPs)

- Be patient and respectful and wait for an opportune time to engage. When practice partners were focusing on other, more pressing issues, it was difficult to get the "right" decision makers at the table. (3 RPPs)

- From the beginning of the partnership, hold collaboration and mutual decision making as a key value to the partnership. It may be easier to engage relevant decision makers if the values of mutualism and joint work are clear from the beginning. (2 RPPs)

- Design the project to be the work of the educational organization or to align with other initiatives, rather than as something "on top of" other initiatives. Explained one practitioner, "[The partnership] really focused on what we want to do and how we want to solve problems, and [the researchers are] just helping us do it. We're able to say this is not just a [university] thing. This is a district thing that we are going to do." (2 RPPs)

- Embed or co-locate a member of the research team within the practice organization. Although this was not possible for all RPPs, it helped connect the work of the partnership to the day-to-day work of the practice organization, and assisted researchers to understand the decision-making process and to learn about key decision makers in the practice organization. (2 RPPs)

Implications

Many of the challenges named by the IES RPPs are ones that prior research has identified as typical of partnerships.[48] In other words, these challenges are not specific to RPPs in education, and they can occur in even the healthiest of partnerships. Consistent with prior research, sometimes the challenges impacted the longer-term viability of the partnerships. When the challenges were managed successfully, it was because partners engaged in ongoing work to build and maintain strong, trusting relationships, they communicated regularly, and they adjusted course to adapt to new circumstances.

In the grant writing process, partnerships could be encouraged to offer initial ideas of how they might navigate common challenges, should they arise. For instance, a partnership could lay out a set of regular meetings for checking in and reflecting with partners. This early planning would provide a foundation for regular communication between partners and help build infrastructure that would deepen relationships, support ongoing engagement in the work, and help partners navigate future challenges.

Conditions that Support Research Use and Partnership Work in Practice Organizations

The current RFA for the IES grant program proposes that partnerships use the two years of grant funding to plan for future work together. In this section, we share information regarding the reported plans of the participating RPPs for their future partnership work.

> **Key Findings:**
>
> - In terms of organizational culture for research use, the majority of RPP practitioners agreed that research was seen as a useful source of information in their organizations, but fewer indicated that they were expected to back up claims with research in meetings.
>
> - When compared to a national sample of district leaders, RPP district leaders on average reported a less research-oriented organizational culture than did their peers nationwide.
>
> - Communication may be a challenge in some practice organizations. Only half of respondents reported that there were times and places to make sense of new information from partners, or that new knowledge was regularly communicated across departments.
>
> - A majority of practitioners reported that it was easy to see the connections between their organizations' initiatives and their work with external partners. However, two-thirds of RPP practitioners reported that organizational leadership did not coordinate work effectively to limit conflicts or reduce overlap between organization initiatives and partnership work.
>
> - Only about half of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that their organizations had the staff and the time needed to plan and implement partnership activities.

In the Phase II survey, 51 practitioners representing all 27 participating RPPs responded to items related to their organization's culture of research use or the conditions associated with the organization's capacity to engage productively with an external partner.

Before exploring these findings, we must first caution about drawing too strong a conclusion about the organizational context of the RPP practice agencies based on this analysis alone. We had, on average, two to four practitioners from each RPP complete the Phase II survey. They were reporting on complex, multi-layered organizations with many departments and dozens or hundreds of people working within. These findings help us think about the issues of research use or RPP work in organizational terms, but additional work would be needed to more fully understand the organizational context of each agency.

Organizational Culture of Research Use

A number of scholars have posited that a "culture of research use" is an important condition for research use and evidence-based policymaking at the local level. Such a culture is one in which an organization's members value research as a resource for decision making, select strategies using evidence, remain open to change in light of evidence, and enact multiple social supports and norms promoting evidence use. Further, stronger organizational cultures of research use have been found to be associated with greater reports of research use by district and school leaders.[49]

As Figure 19 shows, the majority of RPP practitioners (n = 51) reported that research was seen as a useful source of information in their organization often or all of the time (74%). The majority of practitioners also responded that they were encouraged to use research often or all of the time in their work (64%). However, far fewer indicated that they often or all of the time conducted evaluations of their programs (38%) or were expected to back up claims with research (29%).
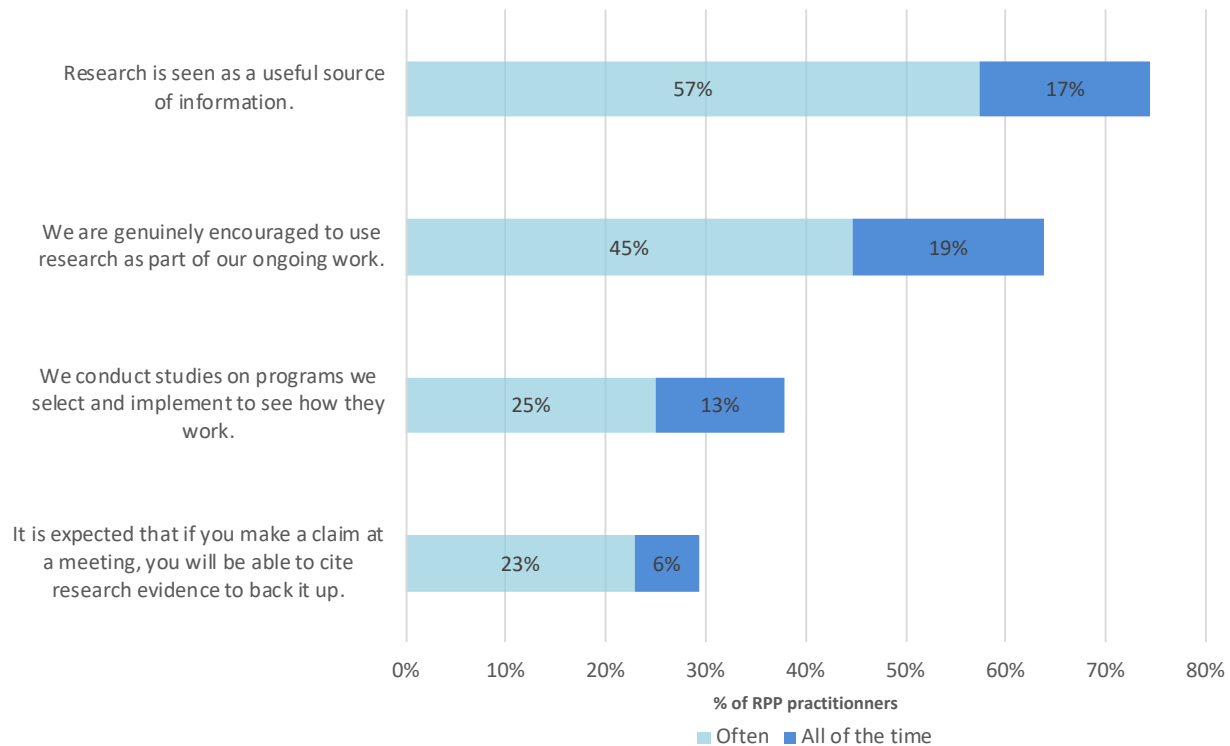
Figure 19. Practitioners' reports about their organizational culture for research use, from survey (*n* = 51 RPP practitioners).

We also asked about the organizational culture of research use in school districts in the NCRPP national survey of a random subset of subset of school and district leaders (*n* = 372). Figure 20 compares the percentage of national survey participants who responded "often" or "all of the time" to the percentage of RPP district leaders who responded the same. Because practitioners in RPPs held roles in a variety of educational organizations, the comparison sample here is narrowed to only those practitioners who held district leadership roles (*n* = 31).
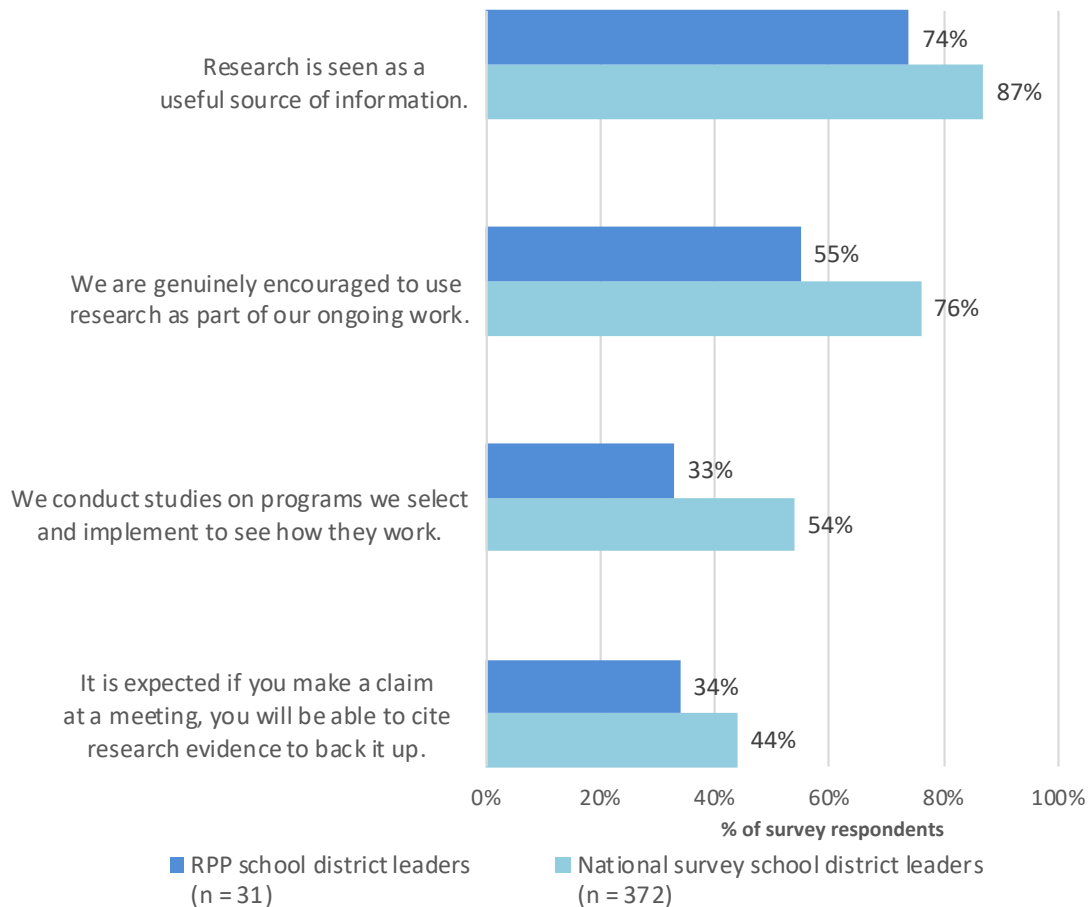
Figure 20. School and district leaders' perceptions of their organizational culture for research use, from RPP survey and national survey (*n* = 31 RPP district leaders; *n* = 372 national survey school and district leaders).

A majority of both samples responded favorably to research being seen as useful and encouraged in their organization. Across all items, however, the RPP district leaders had less positive reports than did the national sample subset. For instance, over half of national survey respondents (54%) indicated that their districts conducted their own studies of their programs "often" or "all of the time," compared to only one-third (33%) of RPP district leaders.

Conditions that Support an Organization's Capacity to Engage Productively with a Partner

Some organizations may be better positioned to engage with external partners than other organizations. The degree to which an organization can engage productively with an external partner is related to the organization's "absorptive capacity."[50] Absorptive capacity refers to an organization's ability to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it in novel ways.[51] Research has identified several organizational conditions that support absorptive capacity: communication pathways, strategic knowledge leadership, and resources for partnering.[52] Below we describe each condition further and report on results from the Phase II survey of RPP practitioners (*n* = 51).

Communication pathways in the organization. An organization's capacity to act on the knowledge gained by working with an external partner may partially depend on the presence of internal communication pathways. These are the formal and informal structures within and between departments that enable people to share, make meaning of, and use knowledge to problem solve.

Many large, multi-layered organizations face challenges with supporting knowledge-sharing within and across departments. We see a similar portrait emerge from the reports of the RPP practitioners about their organizations. As seen in Figure 21, about two-thirds of RPP practitioners (64%) agreed or strongly agreed that their organization emphasized cross-department work to solve problems that arose from partnership work. Only about half of the respondents, however, reported that there were times and places to make sense of new information from the partners (55%), or that new knowledge was regularly communicated across departments (51%).
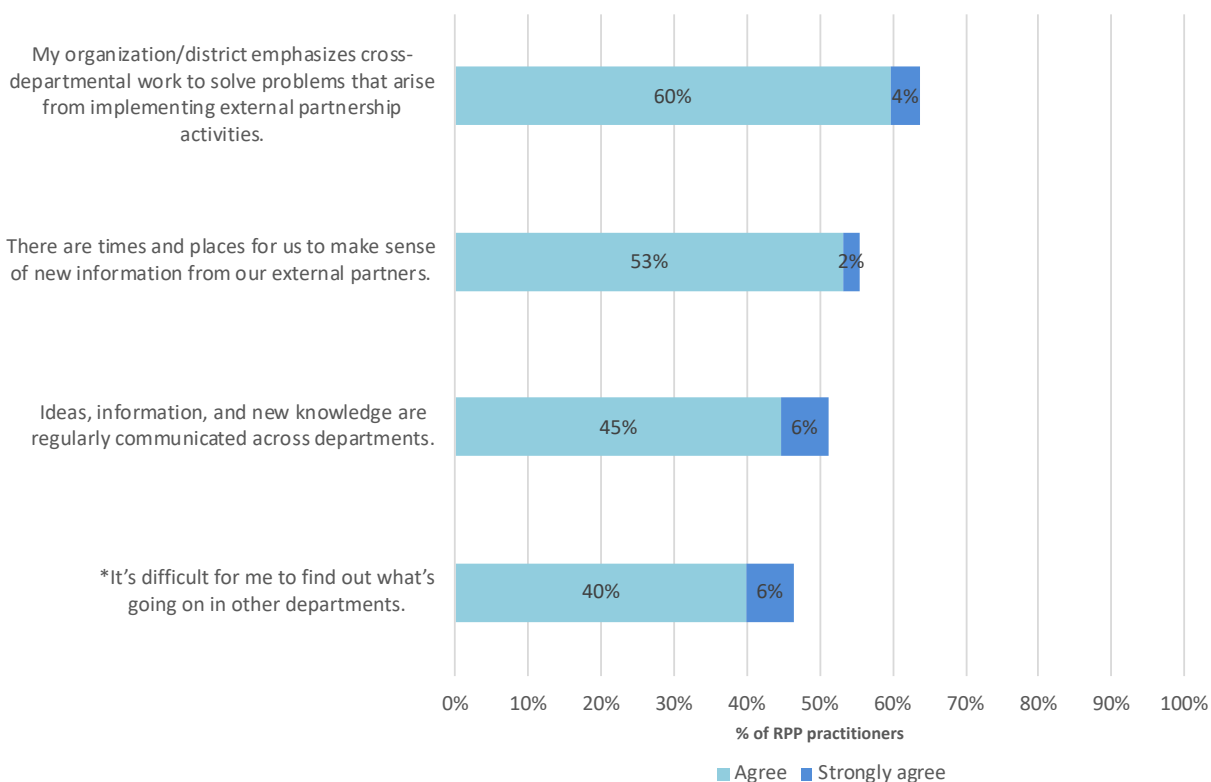
Figure 21. Practitioner perceptions of their organizational communication pathways, from survey (*n* = 51 RPP practitioners). Asterisk (*) indicates item is negatively worded.

Strategic knowledge leadership. Leaders can play an important role in the degree to which engagement with an external partner connects to ongoing initiatives. Specifically, "strategic knowledge leadership" refers to the ability to identify and assess current sources of knowledge within the department, scan the broader field for available sources of knowledge, and synthesize acquired knowledge by linking it with current practices or routines. Applied to school districts, strategic knowledge leadership could involve efforts to link knowledge from external partners to existing improvement efforts.

As seen in Figure 22, a large majority (83%) of practitioners reported that it was easy to see connections between their organizations' initiatives and their work with external partners. But reports also indicate that this could be difficult to do. Practitioners were split as to whether their organizations had the capacity to coordinate work across multiple partners (49%), and only one-third (34%) suggested that leaders in their organizations coordinated partnership work to reduce conflicts or overlap.
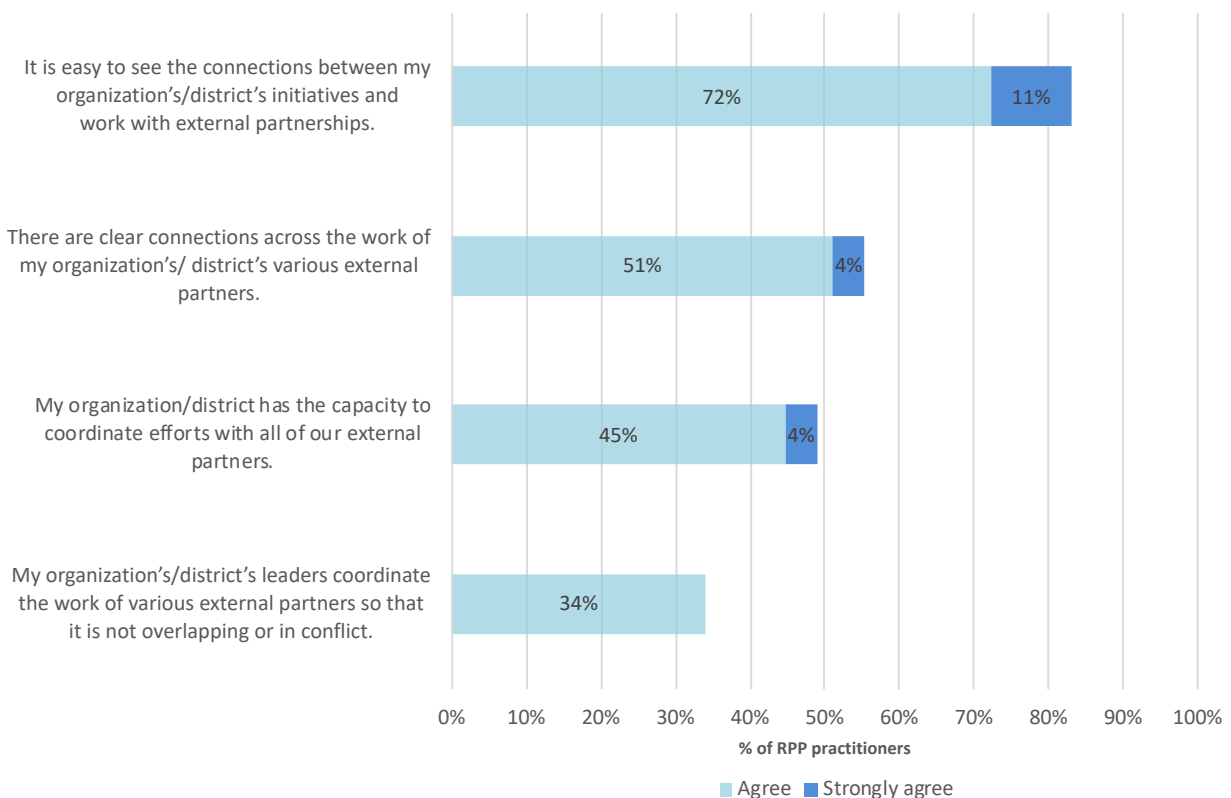
Figure 22. Practitioner perceptions of strategic knowledge leadership efforts to connect partnership work to ongoing initiatives, from survey (*n* = 51 RPP practitioners).

Resources to support partnership activities. Coordinating with external partners can involve a great deal of "invisible work."[53] It requires resources to support district leaders' ability to productively engage and benefit from working in partnerships. The work of developing and maintaining partnerships requires resources that support the time of key stakeholders dedicated to engaging with the partners; staff dedicated to partnership coordination; and the purchase of services and materials integral to the work.

Indeed, having the organizational resources to support partnering was limited in the practice organizations, based on survey results. Only about half of practitioners (47% to 53%) agreed or strongly agreed that their organization had the staff and time needed to plan for and implement partnership activities. Further, only one-third (34%) agreed that they had the funding needed to plan and implement partnership activities (see Figure 23).
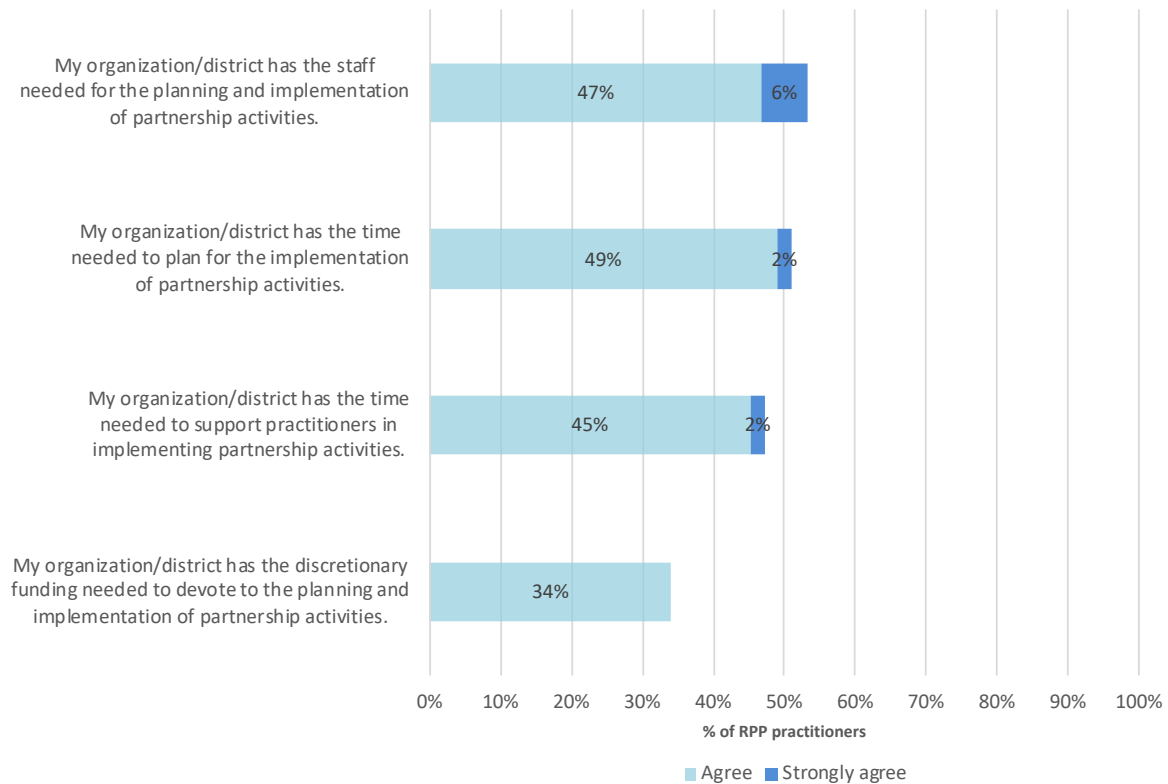
Figure 23. Practitioner perceptions of organizational resources to support partnership activities, from survey (*n* = 51 RPP practitioners).

Implications

Most RPP practitioners agreed that research was seen as a useful source of information in their organizations. Fewer indicated that they were encouraged to conduct evaluations of their programs or were expected to back up claims with research in meetings. Somewhat surprisingly, across all items, RPP district leaders had less positive reports for organizational culture of research use than did the national sample subset. It may be that—as co-leaders in RPPs—these respondents were strongly oriented to research and perceived their colleagues to be less so. They may have been more critical of an organizational culture that supported research use than their peers from a more representative sample of leaders. Or, it may be that organizational leaders who perceived a relatively weaker culture of research use found it valuable to partner with external researchers. It would be worthwhile for future studies to explore how interest or participation in RPPs relates to a culture of research use.

There were also mixed reports about the conditions that support practice organizations' capacities to engage productively with external partners. While most RPP practitioners felt their organizations' work with external partners supported their goals, they were split as to whether their organizations could coordinate the work of various partners or whether they had the resources and staffing needed to plan and implement partnership work. In the future, these organizational conditions in educational agencies might serve as key points of leverage for practitioners and policymakers seeking to increase organizations' capacities to benefit from research or ideas gained through a partnership.

RPPs' Plans for Future Work Together

In our Phase I report, we noted that sustainability for the partnerships past the two-year time frame was a concern for many participants. In Phase II, we obtained additional information about RPPs' plans to continue working together and to secure additional funding.

Key Findings:

- In Phase II, 16 of the partnerships were still actively working under their IES RPP grants, while 11 projects had recently completed their IES RPP grants.

- The majority of partnerships had continued working together past the end of their IES RPP grants or planned to continue to do so.

- Based on survey reports of PIs and co-PIs, six of the 27 partnerships had successfully applied for and received additional funding; another five had applied for additional funding but did not receive it.

- Ten ongoing partnerships had plans to apply for additional funding. The remaining six partnerships did not have plans to apply for additional funding at the time of the survey.

- Partnerships pursued funding from IES, the Spencer Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, local and national foundations (e.g., Annie Casey Foundation; James McDonnell Foundation; William T. Grant Foundation), and state agencies.

Plans for Future Joint Work

As reported by project PIs (and by co-PIs in the two cases where the PI for the partnership did not complete a survey), IES funding for 16 RPPs was still in progress, whereas funding for 11 RPPs had recently ended. The majority of PIs/co-PIs indicated that their partnerships had continued to work together or planned to continue working together beyond the end of the IES RPP grant (see Table 8). Only two PIs whose grants were still in progress were uncertain whether their partnerships would continue once the grant ended.

Table 8. *RPPs' Plans for Future Joint Work**

	All	Grant Ended	Grant in Progress
n	*27*	*11*	*16*
Yes	25	11	14
No	0	0	0
Undecided	2	-	2

* *Not a survey option for this category of respondents.*

Note. These data were reported by PIs (or co-PIs if PI did not report).

Funding to Continue the Partnership

We asked participants to report whether they had sought additional funding to continue their work together beyond the IES RPP grant (Table 9). Those respondents who indicated that their partnership had plans to do so or who had already applied for additional funding were asked to name the grant-funding institutions to which they had applied or were planning to apply. Across all 27 partnerships, six—approximately one-quarter of RPPs—had successfully applied for and received additional funding.

Table 9. *Partnerships' Funding Plans Beyond IES RPP Grant**

	All	Grant Ended	Grant in Progress
n	*27*	*11*	*16*
Planning to apply for funding, but have not yet done so.	10	-	10
Submitted an application for additional funding, but have not yet heard back	2	-	2
We applied for additional funding, and we did receive it.	6	3	3
We applied for additional funding, and we did not receive it.	5	5	-
We did not apply for additional funding.	3	3	0
PI or Co–PI did not report	1	0	1

*Not a survey option for this category of respondents.
Note. These data were reported by PIs (or co-PIs if PI did not report).

Among the partnerships whose grants had already ended (*n* = 11), three RPPs had applied for additional funding and received it; the remaining RPPs had unsuccessfully applied or had not applied at all. Among the partnerships whose grants were still in progress (*n* = 16), three had successfully secured additional funding; 10 had plans to apply for funding but had not yet done so, and two others had applied but had not yet heard back. One ongoing partnership did not report on plans for future funding, as the PI and co-PI indicated it was uncertain whether the partnership would continue.

Often, partnerships submitted grant applications to multiple funding sources. The majority of partnerships had pursued or were currently pursuing additional funding from IES (27 RPPs) or the Spencer Foundation (17 RPPs) in order to continue their partnership work. Six partnerships applied for funding from the National Science Foundation, and three partnerships applied to the National Institutes of Health. A total of 14 partnerships applied to other funding institutions, including local and national foundations (e.g., Annie Casey Foundation; James S. McDonnell Foundation; William T. Grant Foundation), as well as government agencies at the local, state, and federal level.

Implications
These results suggest that most of the IES-funded partnerships are interested in continuing their work together, and that securing funding to continue partnership work is important to RPP members. Though it is evident that securing additional funding can be challenging, it is remarkable that more than half of the partnerships (6 of 11) that applied for funding were successful in their efforts. This suggests that partnership grants may indeed be a good "on ramp" for teams to establish a strong foundation for securing funding for more expansive work.

Participants reported that IES was the most popular potential source for additional funding. It might be helpful, then, for IES to provide guidance to RPP participants on how their work fits within the IES goal structure as they look towards future funding.

Recommendations and Open Questions

RPP participants were quite positive about the IES Researcher–Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research Program and their experiences with their partners. Their feedback indicates that this grant program helped many partnerships build on prior relationships to advance ongoing joint work. Participants reported making progress across a range of partnership goals, from building a strong relationship to improving student outcomes. At the same time, the RPPs faced challenges familiar to partnerships in other sectors, including turnover and differing timelines of researchers and practitioners. To overcome these challenges and conditions, partners said they fostered more lines of communication, developed multiple relationships with partners to mitigate the effects of turnover, and carefully calibrated expectations regarding schedules and timetables for completing work. Nearly all individuals who responded to the survey hoped to continue their partnership work in the future and, at the time of our data collection, six partnerships had secured new funding to do so. The evidence presented here suggests that participants found the IES RPP program a valuable means to fostering partnership work focused on collaborative research, provided that partners stay nimble in responding to challenges.

As with our Phase I interim report—and in any study that relies heavily on self-reports—there is the potential for bias in these positive evaluations. Two sources of potential bias are noteworthy because they relate directly to characteristics of the partnerships and the program itself. First, participants may have been overwhelmingly positive about their joint work because these were relatively established relationships between researchers and practitioners. All of the partnerships had at least some history of working together, and a decision to apply to the RPP program in the first place likely signaled a joint commitment to working together. Second, many of the partnerships were actively looking for additional funding to continue to support their work together at the time of data collection. It makes sense that partners would be positive in their reports here, not only because IES provided funding but also because IES is a possible funding source in the future. Even so, confidentiality protections helped to ensure that participants felt they could be candid in their feedback, and—as evidenced by the willingness of some to share negative experiences—we believe they were. Likewise, those who shared positive reports gave detailed reasons for doing so in their interviews, which further bolsters the credibility of the findings. In sum, our overall findings are warranted through both quantitative and qualitative data.

Below, we offer some specific recommendations to the IES RPP program regarding the structure of the grant program, the support offered by IES during the application process, and the RFA and resulting proposals.

Consider a different approach to funding RPPs

Given the more detailed portrait of prior relationships reported here, we suspect that established RPPs were better positioned than new partnerships to secure funding. Reviewing the applications of groups that were not funded would help further investigate this hypothesis. If true, the RPP program might offer guidance to new applicants to recommend they develop a good working relationship via a small project before applying.

Similarly, the program could consider a differentiated approach to RPP funding, with different goals, timelines, and funding amounts for newer partnerships compared to well-established ones. Other grant programs offer differentiated funding structures that may be useful to consider for the IES RPP program. For example, IES might consider a structure that supports small, medium, and large grants, similar to the NSF's competition for the Computer Science for All: Research+Practice Partnership program (CS4All) held in 2018:[54]

- **Small** proposals (e.g., maximum of $250,000 for up to two years) are designed to support the initial steps in establishing a strong and well-integrated RPP team that could successfully compete for a medium or large grant in the near future;
- **Medium** proposals (e.g., maximum of $600,000 for up to three years) are designed to support the modest scaling of a promising approach by a well-defined RPP team; and
- **Large** proposals (e.g., maximum of $1,000,000 for up to four years) are designed to support the widespread scaling of an evidence-based approach by an RPP team that builds on prior collaboration.

Support-capacity building workshops for prospective grantees

As with the IES RPP program, the NSF CS4All program aims to support relatively new as well as established partnerships. In 2017, it held and funded attendance at two-day workshops for prospective teams to help them develop key skills related to RPPs. Of the 21 that were initially funded, 19 attended one of the workshops, and attendees reported these to be helpful in their preparation for partnership work. IES might consider this approach to help broaden the base of applicants to include more successful new partnerships.

Name the range of goals set by RPPs that have been funded

We found that participants made progress on a range of goals that extended beyond those clearly articulated in the current RFA. The partnerships had ambitious goals to impact local policies and practices as well as student outcomes, and they sought to inform the work of others beyond their partnerships, including contributing to the knowledge base in education. Further, their reported progress provides additional evidence that there are likely "leading" and "lagging" indicators for RPPs' progress on their goals, and it is possible that progress on some goals may be interdependent with progress on others. As such, the RPP program may want to consider naming in the RFA the range of short- and long-term goals that partnerships have specified in the past, without limiting the possible goals that might be pursued by partnerships.

Broaden the aim of "building capacity to use research"

Recognizing the multiple ways in which research informs the work of education leaders, the RPP program could support evidence use across leaders' various activities, not just those related to adoption decisions but also those that are more common, such as the design of PD. Ultimately, RPPs aim to impact student outcomes, but the most direct routes to doing so often involve design and testing of innovations. Many RPPs do integrate design into their plan of activities, but this could be encouraged explicitly in the RFA in order to impact students more quickly.

Ask proposers to present evidence related to conditions that support partnership work

The RFA could ask for additional information related to the conditions that tend to support a partnership's launch or ongoing work, such as mutual organizational interest, evidence of support from organizational leaders, the existence of or plans for data-sharing agreements, and plans for a regular meeting schedule. For example, IES could request evidence in proposals that the problems identified are ones that key stakeholders on all sides agree are important and would be eager to help solve. Such evidence could come from a range of sources such as focus groups, local needs assessments, or letters of support that testify to involvement in shaping the proposal.

Invite proposers to consider how they will address anticipated challenges

The challenges named by RPPs are fairly common ones. In grant proposals or in questions submitted to competitive applicants, partnerships could offer initial ideas of how they might navigate common challenges, should they come up in the course of their work together. For instance, a team could indicate how it is prepared to handle turnover. Or, a partnership could share a plan for a set of regular meetings for checking in and reflecting with partners. This early planning would provide a foundation for regular communication between partners and help build the infrastructure necessary for partners to develop relationships and address challenges they may face.

Further, RPP practitioners offered self-reported strategies for overcoming challenges. It is not clear yet, however, when and under what conditions these strategies help mitigate challenges. IES may want to further investigate which strategies are associated with more productive and successful RPPs.

Encourage applicants to include a range of professional roles among their members

It is valuable for practitioners in research roles in their organizations to be included in RPPs. At the same time, however, it may also be necessary to involve leaders in other roles in order to design policies that can address the partnership's focal problem and influence teaching and learning outcomes. In particular, it may be beneficial for RPPs to include individuals with decision-making authority related to the problem of practice at hand. For instance, if a partnership is working on a problem of practice related to middle school mathematics, the partnership may want to involve directors from the mathematics department as well as assistant superintendents who oversee middle schools. The RFA might encourage prospective grantees to consider this proactively, so that practitioners involved in the RPP represent different areas of the organization that not only bring different perspectives and expertise but also are involved in implementation.

Appendices

Appendix A

Length of time RPP Partners Had Worked Together Before IES Grant

		Researchers		Practitioners	
	All	PIs	Others	Co–PIs	Others
n	*97*	*22*	*31*	*25*	*19*
1–3 years	49 (51%)	14	17	10	8
More than 3 years	35 (36%)	7	12	11	5
Less than 1 year	13 (13%)	1	2	4	6

Appendix B

Most Important Supportive Conditions for Launching the RPP*

	All	**Researchers**		**Practitioners**	
		PIs	**Others**	**Co–PIs**	**Others**
n	*332*	*65*	*111*	*84*	*64*
Mutual organizational interest in the focus area (e.g., adult education, bilingual education)	29%	29%	31%	26%	31%
Trust among RPP members	15%	20%	14%	17%	14%
A data-sharing agreement or memorandum of understanding	11%	8%	12%	12%	11%
Individual expertise	11%	11%	7%	17%	14%
Support from organizational leadership	10%	15%	8%	8%	11%
Holding regular meetings	9%	0%	10%	10%	6%
Norms for valuing practitioners' and researchers' contribution equally	8%	9%	10%	8%	3%
Institution support	3%	6%	3%	1%	5%
Physical proximity of partner organizations	3%	2%	5%	1%	2%
Other	1%	0%	1%	0%	3%

*Respondents selected the top three conditions from a list of 10 options.

Appendix C

Most Important Supportive Conditions for Maintaining the RPP*

		Researchers		Practitioners	
	All	**PIs**	**Others**	**Co-PIs**	**Others**
n	*306*	*65*	*98*	*77*	*66*
Holding regular meetings	25%	20%	29%	26%	23%
Mutual organizational interest in the focus area (e.g., adult education, bilingual education)	24%	23%	23%	23%	27%
Trust among RPP members	20%	29%	19%	17%	15%
Support from organizational leadership	10%	14%	11%	6%	8%
A data-sharing agreement or memorandum of understanding	9%	8%	6%	10%	12%
Individual expertise	7%	5%	5%	10%	6%
Physical proximity of partner organizations	3%	0%	3%	5%	2%
Institution support	2%	2%	1%	1%	5%
Norms for valuing practitioners' and researchers' contribution equally	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	0%	2%	0%	3%

*Respondents selected the top three conditions from a list of 10 options.

Appendix D

IES RPP Contributions to Local Policies or Practices

		Researchers		Practitioners	
	RPP*	PIs	Others	Co-PIs	Others
n	*27*	*25*	*37*	*28*	*24*
A new framework or set of ideas to think about/address focal problem(s)	21	16	27	15	16
Design professional development related to focal problem(s)	19	12	21	14	13
Integration of new practices in the educational organization that were developed or modeled in the partnership	15	12	10	10	10
Design of a new practice or program to address focal problem(s)	14	13	17	12	9
New/revised policy in an educational organization	8	12	14	7	4
Decision to adopt a new program or intervention in an educational organization	8	10	13	5	5

*An RPP was included in each count if at least one practitioner from the partnership answered "yes."

Appendix E

Practitioners' Involvement in Educational Decision-Making Activities, by Percentage of Role-specific Group*

	All Practitioners	Practitioners in Research Roles	Practitioners not in Research Roles
n	*51*	22	29
Purchasing intervention or targeted program	20 (39%)	7 (32%)	13 (45%)
Directing resources to program	32 (63%)	13 (59%)	19 (66%)
Scaling up pilot program	31 (61%)	14 (64%)	17 (59%)
Eliminating program or policy	24 (47%)	10 (45%)	14 (48%)
Designing professional development	31 (61%)	10 (45%)	21 (48%)
Redesigning program	20 (39%)	6 (27%)	14 (48%)

*Percentages reflect the proportion of each sub-group.

Appendix F

Format of Research Named in Open-Ended Survey Item

	RPP Study			National Sample		
	All	District Leaders	Research Roles	All	District Leaders	Research Roles
n	*26*	*15*	*8*	*377*	*307*	*43*
Journal article	46%	53%	63%	14%	14%	19%
Research/policy report	38%	27%	13%	17%	20%	26%
Book	12%	13%	13%	58%	54%	42%
Research-based tool or program	4%	7%	13%	5%	5%	5%
Practitioner-oriented magazine article	0%	0%	0%	4%	5%	7%
Media (e.g., webinar, blog, news)	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Dissertation	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%

Appendix G

Topics and Subtopics of Research Named in Open-Ended Item

	RPP Study			National Sample		
	All	**District Leaders**	**Research Roles**	**All**	**District Leaders**	**Research Roles**
n	*36*	*19*	*12*	*552*	*447*	*61*
Students and Learning	33%	16%	25%	28%	29%	33%
Postsecondary readiness & learning	50%	67%	33%	3%	4%	5%
Academic/achievement outcomes	25%	33%	67%	61%	63%	42%
Graduation rates	17%	0%	0%	6%	8%	37%
Social-emotional outcomes	8%	0%	0%	8%	8%	0%
Learning & identity development	0%	0%	0%	16%	15%	16%
Mindset	0%	0%	0%	5%	2%	0%
School organization & improvement	31%	58%	25%	21%	21%	30%
School-level policies & interventions (e.g. RTI, scheduling, course offerings)	64%	64%	100%	47%	48%	72%
Bilingual education/English Language Development (ELD)	18%	18%	0%	8%	7%	0%
Parent/community engagement	9%	9%	0%	5%	6%	6%
Discipline	9%	9%	0%	7%	8%	6%
School-level leadership practices	0%	0%	0%	25%	24%	11%
School climate	0%	0%	0%	8%	6%	6%
System organization & improvement	22%	11%	25%	9%	9%	10%
System-level policies & improvement (e.g., financial aid, accountability, school choice, organizational change)	50%	0%	67%	43%	40%	67%

Appendix G

Topics and Subtopics of Research Named in Open-Ended Item (continued)

	RPP Study			National Sample		
	All	District Leaders	Research Roles	All	District Leaders	Research Roles
n	*36*	*19*	*12*	*552*	*447*	*61*
Early childhood education	38%	50%	0%	9%	11%	0%
District/organization-level leadership practices	0%	0%	0%	48%	50%	33%
Teachers and instruction	11%	16%	17%	36%	34%	18%
Pedagogical strategies	75%	67%	50%	76%	76%	58%
Curriculum	25%	33%	50%	5%	6%	8%
Teacher learning (e.g. PLCs, professional development)	0%	0%	0%	17%	16%	25%
Teacher prep/effectivness/evaluation	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	8%
Assessment	3%	0%	8%	7%	7%	10%
Placement	100%	NA	100%	32%	33%	17%
Standardized testing	0%	NA	0%	14%	15%	17%
Classroom assessment	0%	NA	0%	41%	36%	67%
Grading	0%	NA	0%	14%	15%	0%

Note. The *n* may exceed the number of respondents because some pieces of research addressed multiple topics.

Appendix H

Student Subgroups Reflected by Research Named in Open-ended Item

	RPP Study			National Sample		
	All	District Leaders	Research Roles	All	District Leaders	Research Roles
n	*26*	*15*	*8*	*395*	*325*	*45*
None/general	42%	47%	63%	69%	66%	71%
Special education	23%	40%	13%	7%	7%	4%
SES/poverty	15%	0%	0%	7%	7%	4%
Race/ethnicity	8%	7%	13%	8%	9%	9%
Urban education	8%	7%	13%	2%	2%	11%
Foster care	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bilingual students	0%	0%	0%	6%	7%	0%
Gender or sexual diversity	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%

Appendix I

How Research Named was Useful in Open–Ended items

	RPP Study			National Sample		
	All	**District Leaders**	**Research Roles**	**All**	**District Leaders**	**Research Roles**
n	*21*	*13*	*8*	*286*	*236*	*33*
Designing policies, programs, and initiatives	48%	46%	25%	27%	29%	30%
Supporting leaders' own professional learning	24%	23%	13%	29%	29%	33%
Providing instructional leadership for others	10%	15%	13%	25%	24%	21%
Selecting programs	10%	8%	25%	9%	8%	3%
Supporting and monitoring implementation	10%	8%	25%	9%	10%	12%

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Endnotes

[1]Note that in this report we use the RPP acronym to refer both to what the IES program calls "researcher–practitioner partnerships" and to research–practice partnerships more broadly.

[2]http://wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/institutional-challenge-grant

[3]https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18537/nsf18537.pdf

[4]http://k12education.gatesfoundation.org/school-network-rfp/

[5]Results for America (2018); Data Quality Campaign (2017)

[6]http://researchandpractice.org

[7]http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org

[8]Bevan and Penuel (2018); Penuel and Gallagher (2017)

[9]http://nnerpp.rice.edu

[10]http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/urban_education_reform/

[11]Farrell et al. (2017)

[12]Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980)

[13]Henrick, Cobb, Penuel, Jackson, and Clark (2017)

[14]Penuel and Means (2011)

[15]Dwyer and Makin (1997)

[16]Johnson et al. (2009); Sharkey and Murnane (2006); Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980)

[17]Penuel et al. (2017); Penuel, Farrell, Allen, Toyama, and Coburn (2016)

[18]Weiss (1980)

[19]Contandriopoulos, Lemire, Denis, and Tremblay (2010); National Research Council, (2012)

[20]Amara, Ouimet, and Landry (2004)

[21]Cobb, Jackson, Smith, Sorum, and Henrick (2013); Roderick, Easton, and Sebring (2009)

[22]Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991)

[23]Donovan (2013)

[24]Henrick et al. (2017)

[25]Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015)

[26]Allensworth (2015)

[27]Booth, Cooper, Donovan, Huyghe, Koedinger, and Pare-Blagoev (2015)

[28]Castrechini (2009)

[29]Allensworth (2015)

[30]Penuel et al. (2016)

[31]Cobb and Jackson (2011)

[32]Allen and Davidson (2015)

[33]Coburn, Penuel, and Geil (2013)

[34]Coburn, Penuel, and Geil (2013)

[35]Coburn (2010), Contandriopoulos et al. (2010); Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, and Newton (2010); Ikemoto and Honig (2010)

[36]Helmsley-Brown and Sharp (2003)

[37]Gerrish and Clayton (2004)

[38]Fitzsimmons and Cooper (2012)

[39]Penuel et al. (2017)

[40]Coburn and Penuel (2016)

[41]Cohen and Levinthal (1990)

[42]Farrell and Coburn (2017)

[43]For more information about the characteristics of the Phase I sample, please see the interim report (Farrell et al., 2017).

[43]To analyze the shifts between Phases I and II, we compared the mean averages of the Phase I and II progress reports for those individuals who participated during both rounds of survey administration. We show overall averages for all cohorts because more recent partnerships did not differ from the first cohort with respect to reported progress. We also investigated differences in reports among progress of goals among PIs, co-PIs, and other members, but we found few differences among them with respect to their reports, overall.

[44]For more information on the sample or findings, please see Penuel et al. (2017).

[45]Penuel et al. (2017)

[46]A comparison of the professional roles of individuals who responded to the open-ended item and the professional roles of those who responded to the full survey showed similar proportions of respondents. As such, the open-ended item did not disproportionately reflect particular roles.

[47]Coburn and Penuel (2016); Penuel and Gallagher (2017)

[48]Penuel et al. (2017)

[49]Farrell and Coburn (2016); Farrell, Coburn, and Chong (2018)

[50]Farrell and Coburn (2016)

[51]There is a fourth organizational condition that can support absorptive capacity: the prior or existing expertise within the practice organization related to the partnership. Because of data collection constraints, we were unable to investigate this construct here.

[52]Farrell and Coburn (2016)

[53]https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18537/nsf18537.pdf