

# **Proposed Design for a STL School Research-Practice Partnership**

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## Overview

This proposal outlines the design for a research-practice partnership<sup>1</sup> (RPP) to benefit students attending schools in St. Louis, called the STL School Research-Practice Collaborative (SRPC). Following traditional RPP design, SRPC is designed to be a long-term collaboration between researchers and practitioners, organized to investigate problems of practice with communities most affected by poverty and racial inequity with rigorous analysis to develop insights for improving schools and school districts<sup>2</sup>. The Collaborative is intended to be piloted, tested, and expanded across the course of 5 years with support from multiple entities, including traditional research institutions (i.e., universities), school districts/private schools, community organizations, and data analytic industries.

### *Vision*

Our vision is to develop impactful research collaborations between researchers and school practitioners so that children attending St. Louis region schools have access to excellent educational support and opportunities.

### *Mission*

Our mission is to conduct rigorous research alongside educators to inform policies and practices that foster systemic improvements in educational, social, and emotional growth for students in STL schools. We do this by creating collaborations between researchers and practitioners and conducting rigorous research for practice.

### *Values*

The St. Louis Research Practice Collaborative adheres to the following values:

#### **Research for practice**

For the SRPC, the purpose of research is to gain insights that will inform or change practices that lead to better learning environments and outcomes for students and educators. Though knowledge is the first step towards transformation, it is not the end goal for this collaboration. Research conducted through the SRPC will focus on what is actionable to improve conditions for students and educators as a result of learning from analyses.

#### **Equitable**

Historically, educational interventions and practices have notoriously fostered inequitable policies and practices that increasingly marginalize, oppress, stereotype or mislabel children of color, in particular Black and Hispanic children. The SRPC will continuously examine its role in fighting bias and oppression by race, gender, special needs, sexuality, and socioeconomic status by examining data and interpretations through a lens for equity. We will strive to dismantle oppressive systems of practice and research and ensure that students who have been historically marginalized are considered and engaged with the utmost respect.

#### **Rigorous**

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<sup>1</sup> RPPs in this document also are built on concepts from Penuel & Gallagher's (2017) book, *Research Practice Partnerships*. <https://www.hepg.org/hep-home/books/creating-research-practice-partnerships-in-educati>

<sup>2</sup> Coburn, C. E., Penuel, W. R., Geil, K. (2013). *Research-practice partnerships at the district level: A new strategy for leveraging research for educational improvement*. New York: William T. Grant Foundation.

The collaborative recognizes the value of rigorous statistical analysis and research methods and will strive to use the most advanced research techniques to understand questions as appropriate to the complexity of the question being answered. In both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry,

### **Collaborative**

Numerous groups already use data to hold schools “accountable” to predetermined outcomes. Though accountability is an important function of a public educational system, the purpose of this research-practice partnership is to work collaboratively alongside school leaders to troubleshoot, ideate, and create potential solutions to challenging issues that vex the system of education in St. Louis--for the purpose of student and educator thriving. In the spirit of collaboration, the RPP will adhere to the “no surprise” rule, initially created by the University of Chicago’s Consortium for School Research. For instance, researchers will never publish anything without notifying practitioners well in advance. Researchers and practitioners will agree to transparent and frequent communication, as needed to conduct meaningful research for practice. Additionally, leaders from all partnered institutions should be invested in the larger mission of the partnership and must be open and willing to learn from one another.

# Background and Significance of Research-Practice Partnerships

## *Defining the Problem*

Urban school systems, like St. Louis, are most likely to serve children of color residing in low-income background families. Over half--68% of students in large cities receive free lunch, a proxy of poverty, (versus 52% of public schools overall) and 80% are students of color (versus 51%) (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020). Urban schools are also challenged by low academic outcomes and career placement trajectories for students. The hardships that urban school districts face are likely intersectional with the challenges children experience in their families while growing up in poverty. Therefore, the imperative to support children in urban school districts, like St. Louis, are issues of social, racial, and economic justice.

Reform in urban schools, however, has been tried for decades. Hundreds of ideas for improvement have churned through systems across the United States. However few have demonstrated wide sweeping citywide success of improving the academic performance and outcomes for children in the most marginalized communities. Additionally, though National Assessment and Educational Performance (NAEP) scores for students in urban schools have generally increased over time, the gap between students who are white and students of color continue to persist. In particular, white and black or Hispanic students have a 20 percent wider than average gap between public schools in large cities and general public schools across the nation (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020). Since 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has tracked the performance of select large urban districts using the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), which measures NAEP growth in fourth- and eighth-grade reading and math. After adjusting for potential improvement due to demographics for TUDA cities, schools that improved their performance from 2005 to 2017 include San Diego, Chicago, Los Angeles, and District of Columbia. It is unclear why these cities improved outcomes for students, but there are many speculations.

For many cities, research-practice partnerships have been suggested as ways to at least understand whether improvements in education are leading to meaningful outcomes. Advocates for RPPs suggest that they enable greater use of data and research in decision-making (Tseng, 2012) as well as address pernicious problems of practice that plague schools (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

## *Gaps in Data and Resources to use Research for Practice*

In an effort to track and understand what practices and interventions are working and what's not, schools have been collecting enormous amounts of data over the past few decades. From federal-level reforms from the Reagan administration to Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools have been asked to test, measure, and rate everything from math, science, and reading scores to chronic absenteeism and teacher performance. The amount of time, energy, and staffing required to collect this data is sizable. And yet, the time, resources and skill sets that schools have on staff to learn from the data that they meticulously collect is limited.

Many districts are constrained with in-house data analytic capabilities--relying on basic statistical descriptives, such as averages to make important decisions that affect student outcomes. St. Louis school districts are already stretched in terms of budget and time to hire trained personnel who are equipped to conduct rigorous

statistical analysis and computational modeling for practical use in operations and school management. Adding one more imperative--to use evidence for data-driven decision-making--represents just another challenge to ensuring children have what they need to thrive in schools.

For researchers, many experts and analysts experience the challenge of working with districts to obtain and/or find data, making it difficult to research topics of interest. Additionally, researchers have noted the difficulty of working with schools or districts whose research capacity and coordination constraints hinder the timeliness of providing support. Moreover, trust between researcher and school practitioner often acts as a barrier to collaboration. This does not even begin to speak to the barriers for collaboration from community organizations, who are limited in their utilization of data to DESE reported metrics with ill-defined variables and fragmented reports. Distrust from communities about the data that is garnered from our kids--without much palpable benefit--is high.

### *The Challenge Extends Beyond Academic Learning and Growth*

School systems and districts are often challenged not only to foster academic learning and growth in students, but also to address the social, emotional, and physical needs of students. In communities where resources are desperately needed, schools take on a great burden of care. Student learning and growth may be stunted by family hardships, such as unemployment, food scarcity, community violence and trauma from abuse and systemic neglect. These social inequities are often racially inequitable--with communities of black and brown families bearing the weight of generational poverty and societal neglect. Schools are tasked to do better for their students. However, doing better requires knowing the problems that surface, how they persist, what works to address them, under what conditions, and why.

In addition to and perhaps as a result of these challenges, school leaders in St. Louis also point to the high mobility rate of students and their families from district to district as a major barrier to comprehensive education. Regional estimates have ranged as high as 30% in some districts. The constant churn of students is often cited as a reason why consistency in improvement is difficult to tackle. In addition to the characteristics of the families they serve, schools also struggle to improve their schools because of inconsistencies in data and the lack of access to skills in robust statistical analysis.

### *The State of Research and Practice for Schools in St. Louis*

Presently, schools collect enormous amounts of data. However, current systems do not have the capacity to share data across their district boundaries--a student's data is bound by the district they are in at the immediate moment. For instance, if a student attends St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) for their first years of elementary school then transfers to Clayton School District for three years, and then comes back to SLPS, there are limits to accessing student data across a student's entire scholarly career, even though the boundary between the district is made by shared streets. Having access to student data across districts can help schools better serve children who experience high mobility and help districts understand how families make schooling decisions.

Additionally, though a large amount of data is collected, districts and educational leaders have limited capacity and resources to conduct rigorous data analysis for learning and practice augmentation. Some districts may have one person tasked to report data for MO Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MO DESE); however, their time and energy is limited to reporting, not necessarily learning from trends and/or using

data to answer research questions that could inform practice. Districts have not been able to move beyond reporting basic descriptives of student's growth and standardized tests, attendance, and/or discipline. Additionally, out of school time and summer connectivity programs are not well-researched.

Thankfully, schools are also starting to collect data on school climate, emotional and social adjustment, as well as teacher wellness. While analytic capacity and support are limited, potential is there. If we could better leverage data and research to inform decisions of practice, the amount of learning we could collectively do as a region is vast.

## *A Potential Solution: Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs)*

These challenges detailed above are not insurmountable. Research-Practice Partnerships were developed to create a win-win situation for researchers, practitioners and the students and families they serve so that schools and children benefit most. Research-practice partnerships (RPPs) are “long term, mutualistic collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are intentionally organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving outcomes.”<sup>3</sup> In traditional forms of research, a researcher may define a research question and seek partners and participants to help conduct and learn from the research. In the RPP model, researchers and practitioners jointly define research agendas and work collaboratively to answer questions that both build knowledge and practice. Practitioners' participation in RPPs ensures that research agendas are relevant to their work, which is critical to ensuring the relevance of research to school improvement practices.

### *The Evidence Behind Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs)*

School districts that have made substantial gains in serving children have had some type of research-practice partnership, whether that be through learning communities that utilize “plan-do-learn-act” continuous learning cycles or those that utilize dashboards for quality improvement. Advocates for RPPs suggest that they enable greater use of data and research in decision-making (Tseng, 2012) as well as address pernicious problems of practice that plague schools (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Admittedly, however, research on the effectiveness of RPPs is scant--focused on a narrow set of outcomes (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Most research on RPP effectiveness has been focused on the impact of interventions that were developed under the umbrella of the partnership, therefore they do not investigate the impact of the partnership itself or other outcomes (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

Though not supported by a randomized control trial, which would be difficult to conduct, anecdotally, the model and proof point for RPPs is best represented by the University of Chicago's Consortium for School Research, amongst others. Their partnership is hailed in education circles as key to the transformation of Chicago Public Schools as the most improved urban public school district in the nation. Dr. Sean Reardon from Stanford University found that [Chicago's students learn and grow](#) at a rate that is 96% faster than other school districts in the country--including wealthier school districts. Additionally, key findings about Chicago's RPP include:

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<sup>3</sup> Tseng, Easton, Supplee (2017). Research practice partnerships: Building two-way streets of engagement. *Social Policy Report*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED581655.pdf>



- Among the 100 largest school districts in the nation, they experienced the highest growth rate between third and eighth grade; and
- The average Chicago student's test scores improved by nearly *six grade-level equivalents* in five years (20 percent more growth on average).
- Successive CPS classes are outperforming the class that came before and are improving at rates far above the national average.

Over the past 10 years, [at least 13 cities](#), including New York and Los Angeles have created a version of the consortium's model, with varying results. Numerous models are available for the development of a St. Louis version that fosters equitable academic, social, and emotional growth for students in St. Louis. Whichever version of a research-practice partnership is created must also entail an evaluative component to understand the value and effectiveness of working this way.

# A Proposed Research-Practice Partnership for St. Louis

The proposed educational research-practice partnership, the STL School Research-Practice Collaborative (SRPC), is structured as an independent research-practice partnership that brings multiple universities, industry researchers, school practitioners and community leaders together to conduct mutually beneficial research that will foster improvements for students in STL schools. Housed independently from districts and universities, the SRPC is free to focus on questions at the regional-level, in order to understand systemic challenges that persist for students in St. Louis schools, irrespective of school type, whether that be traditional public, magnet, charter, or alternative school settings.

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### **Actionable**

In the spirit of being intentional for the sake of improvement in practice, research conducted through the SRPC will focus on what is actionable as a result of learning from analyses. Curiosity should not stop at understanding. We believe that curiosity extends to ensure that data and analysis are used for meaningful adjustments and application in St. Louis’ educational space for the benefit of students and educators.

## *Strategies*

In congruence with the model proposed by Turley & Stevens (2015) and in consultation with national experts in school research-practice partnerships, such as Dr. John Easton (University of Chicago’s Consortium for School Research) and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti (National Network of Educational Research Practice Partnerships), the collaborative has agreed to develop the following:

1. A data repository for research utilization,
2. Structures for researchers and practitioners to authentically collaborate in bidirectional power-relationships in the process of research and interpretation of data and analysis,
3. Platforms for knowledge engagement between researchers, community, and practitioners.

All of these functions are dependent upon relational trust amongst all parties, so understanding the activities that lead to growing trust are necessary to create and maintain these structures.

### **I. Data Hub**

A model for housing and managing the data for the collaborative will be adapted from [University of Michigan’s ICPSR](#). Year 1 would include soliciting the legal agreements and secure data servers and infrastructure to obtain data from participating schools and districts to be gathered by the SRPC, de-identified, linked across waves, and cleaned for ease of use. Data available on the hub may include previously collected data from older projects and collaborations between schools and researchers. Additionally, it may include DESE datasets that are already collected. Software and web infrastructure options will be explored and/or developed to house the data on a secure site. Code-books and downloadable packages will be made available to researchers via the site to “members” with access to publicly available data. Staff of the SRPC may also provide limited technical assistance to researchers and practitioners utilizing data.

Private-level data would be made available for researchers based upon pre-agreed contractual agreement in partnership with the collaborative for questions that are co-designed and approved by district-level personnel. This is a model that puts practitioners in control of questions that matter to them, with the understanding that not all questions of practice are ideal questions of research (See WT Grant Foundation's [Strategies for Setting Joint Research Agendas](#)). A Request for Proposals process would be aligned with the schools' topics of interest and should include them as partners in the review of proposals. Proposals would also require researchers to report their findings to the relevant school or district at 30 days before submitting them for publication.

## II. Fellowships for Scholars and School Personnel

Scholarship is critical for insights to be best made. According to Turley & Stevens (2015), researchers should be developed from both partnering institutions--the university staff and faculty, as well as the school research staff. The proposed fellowship includes programming for both academics and practitioners. The purpose of these fellowships are for cross-pollination between university researchers, school professionals, and students/families, so that both can learn from one another while focusing on an issue pertinent to school transformation. Weekly meetings allow school leaders and external researchers to learn from one another and provide opportunities for researchers to gain feedback from the team on how to improve their work theoretically, methodologically, and substantively to make it useful for a school practitioner audience.

1. *University and Research Fellowships.* The proposed fellowship includes a paid fellowship to the host institution to offset the costs of time spent away from institutional duties. Fellows would include an opportunity for faculty to spend one to two years away from university to partner with schools and collaborate intensely on a question of practice of mutual interest. Students may also apply for research fellowships to be part of research projects as part of this work. Faculty and students may be housed in physical space at the Collaborative office.
2. *Fellowships for School Personnel.* The proposed fellowship allows principals and teachers to build teams that learn alongside and partner with university fellows. School Personnel will work alongside research fellows to design research questions, develop insights from analyses and recommendations for practice.
3. *Student Data Fellowships.* One more aspect of understanding school data is by interpreting it through the lens of students. These student data fellowships are targeted to high school students in the partnered schools. They serve as partners to university and school fellows in the development of research projects, collection, and interpretation of data and analysis.

## III. Communications and Engagement in Learning

It is not considered the domain of a researcher to consider how a finding may percolate down into decision makers' and practitioners' conceptualizations of problems that affect changes in behavior or policy<sup>4</sup>. In the gap of research to practice sits work that is necessary to bridge the two activities. The gap must be bridged by a process that changes the relationship between the way researchers and practitioners work and interact around

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<sup>4</sup> Roderick, M., Easton, J.Q., Sebring, P.B. (2009, February). The Consortium on Chicago School Research: A New Model for the Role of Research in Supporting Urban School Reform. The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

research. This may include activities that center practitioners in the interpretation of research findings, or unique mediums in which practitioners can quickly and effectively download research results. In business, market segmentation is a strategy that substrafies users into various market segments to ensure users in each category are met with approaches that meet their unique needs for consumption and engagement.

With this approach in mind, the collaborative will develop a user-centered infrastructure to share and engage in bi-directional learning with multiple stakeholders who would benefit from the activities of its work. The infrastructure will be built with educator and user-based insights in mind, using User Experience Design (UXD) insights garnered from a process conducted by SKIP Designed researchers. Potential modalities for sharing learning will be based on user needs (e.g., website, webinar/seminar formats, panels, and/or podcasts). The goal is to share and discern research insights with practitioners through methods that are most likely to meet their resource/capacity constraints.

All learning will be shared with the ethos of trust and a focus on improving practices for children across all the different stakeholders involved in schools and research, including a) school leaders, b) school research staff, c) external researchers, d) school board members, e) vendors and organizations that design or implement educational products, and f) students and parents (Turley & Stevens, 2015). For instance, though a longitudinal multi-level analysis was conducted with data from multiple schools, the research brief would highlight practice implications for teachers and principals on educating students from the demographic or conditions of interest, rather than focusing on whether the analysis applied a new statistical method in R.

For research that is specific to any given school district or program, models of learning and sharing research can be gleaned from the University of Chicago's School Consortium for Research partnership with Chicago Public Schools. Any research specific to a school or district will be shared with the school or district directly at least 2 months before being released either through research publications or any other avenue (e.g., news articles, public forums, etc.). This allows the school or district lead time to respond to any issues that might be flagged and/or provides an opportunity for them to make changes necessary to adapt to the implications of the data.

### *Evaluation of SRPC Effectiveness*

Measuring the effectiveness of the SRPC will be conducted based on its stated goals. Additionally, measures developed by the National Network of Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP) can provide a measure of effectiveness across multiple national RPPs. Current best practice on evaluation of RPPs includes ensuring one is measuring the hoped outcomes against actual outcomes. Additionally, one can look at core components, such as trust, support, knowledge sharing, and capacity.

One potential way to measure this RPP is to track the storyline of the research agenda and outcomes. For instance, one could say that because of the RPP, SRPC learned X. That finding helped us create a new intervention Y and we tested the intervention randomly with students and compared it to students who didn't go through the same intervention and the result was .....

Other potential questions to evaluate the RPP are to ask both researchers and practitioners pre- and post-questions, such as:

### Questions for Practitioners:

- How often do you talk with your researchers?
- How much do you think research affects your practice in schools?
- How much do you think partnerships with local universities is helping you serve students better?
- How much do you think partnerships with local universities are leading to educational change in St. Louis?

### Questions for Researchers:

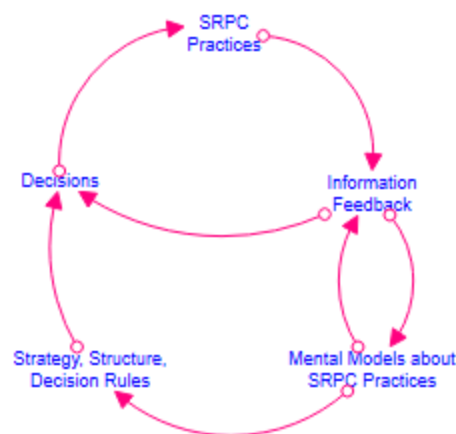
- How do you think the schools are doing to collaborate with you as a researcher?
- Do you have access to the people/departments you need to conduct your research?
- What's your sense that the research you're conducting will be used for practice?

### Questions for Students/Families:

- Do you feel your student's privacy is being protected?

## Double-Loop Learning

Evaluation of SRPC's effectiveness will be rooted in the concept of Double Loop Learning. As opposed to single loop learning, where information only leads to change in decisions, then practices, double loop learning suggests that the information feedback changes the mental models of what we know to be true and thereby the strategy and decisions made about practices. This is supposed to lead to better outcomes over time. Feedback is therefore not only used to modify current decisions, but will also be used to adjust the underlying policies, structure and strategy of the RPP.



*Based on Model of Double Loop Learning from Stermann (2000)*

## *Funding and Sustainability*

Fiscal support for staff and operations will be sought from a diverse pool of funding sourcing, including foundation dollars, institutional support, research grants, and other means. This section will be updated with more information as the Design Council moves into Phase 2.

# Development of the SRPC

## *Implementation Timeline*

### **Historical Overview**

The development of the SRPC has been in progress since 2017, when Dr. Saras Chung from SKIP Designed first reached out to St. Louis Public School's superintendent, Dr. Kelvin Adams, to ask his thoughts on the development of a research-practice partnership for schools in St. Louis. Since then, numerous leaders from local universities, experts in research-practice-partners, local teachers, principals, and other community leaders have been engaged in the discussion, design, development, and ideation of a potential partnership. Additionally, national experts were officially invited to provide advising and insight on the work. Dr. John Easton (University of Chicago's Consortium on School Research), Hank Webber (Washington University in St. Louis), and Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti (National Network of Educational Research Practice Partnerships) were asked to support the group in this capacity.

The official launch of a multi-stakeholder Design Council was convened in January of 2021 by SKIP Designed with the partnership of the St. Louis Public School District's superintendent's commitment to explore this work more systematically. The structure of the council intentionally included deans of local universities, community organizational leaders, teachers, principals, a school board member, and superintendent/CEOs from the local school district and charter schools. The Design Council was asked to meet monthly to discuss the ideal characteristics for this work, to ensure that the development of the SRPC adhered to the methods of research for practice, and to provide direction and leadership to the managing entity, SKIP Designed.

The Design Council is scheduled to conclude by June 2021 and will move into the phase of building and development, based on the council's recommendations. Previous members will have the opportunity to stay engaged in the work. During the Design Council meetings, members came to consensus that SKIP Designed should temporarily manage the entity housing the research-practice partnership activities. Additionally, instead of focusing on a governance structure, it was recommended that the work be focused on piloting a research agenda with this large group of stakeholders on a topic of interest to local educators. Based on workshops and interviews conducted by a subset of the Design Committee through SKIP Designed staff, student mobility was identified as a target area for the first research project under the SRPC. Research questions were further developed through engagement with practitioners from St. Louis Public Schools and area charter schools.

Phase 2 of this work will entail conducting the research agenda on student mobility, engaging with practitioners and researchers to collaboratively interpret and share the results, and developing a regional data hub to house St. Louis specific school data. Once the activities of the research agenda are complete, Design Council members will be re-engaged to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the work for practitioners and redesign the structure and activities of the SRPC as necessary. The group will also evaluate and designate the best place to house the work ongoing. These activities are intentional so as to create the most minimally viable product for greatest usefulness to educators in the St. Louis Region.

## Table of Timelines

Stage		Timeline	Objectives	Deliverables
<b>Phase 0: Planning</b>		October 2020- January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner cultivation</li> <li>Prepare Backbone &amp; governance recommendation</li> <li>Seek input from partners</li> <li>Decide on the design committee members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch timeline</li> <li><a href="#">Design Council Overview</a></li> </ul>
<b>Phase 1: Design</b>	<b>1a: Setting Vision</b>	January 2021 - July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design committee launch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charter: Mission, vision, &amp; operating principles</li> </ul>
	<b>1b: Designing the Experience</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Form working groups</li> <li>Conduct stakeholder discovery &amp; listening sessions to develop a research agenda</li> <li>Explore funding pathways</li> <li>Gain input on design components of SRPC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deck architecture of data hub, fellowship, and knowledge sharing informed by subcommittees and approved by the design council.</li> <li>Budget projections</li> <li>Charter document</li> <li>Understanding of member needs</li> <li>Funding Planning</li> <li>Proposed Research Agenda</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2: Building and Piloting</b>		August 2021- July 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the development of a data hub</li> <li>Provide staffing</li> <li>Develop communications plans &amp; protocols (public facing, practitioner, between universities, between practitioners &amp; universities, etc.)</li> <li>Funding development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding proposals ready for submission <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For research</li> <li>For the RPP broadly (3 major donors committed)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Broad MOU/Letter of Cooperation for members of SRPC</li> <li>Research Proposal(s) Developed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defined roles, partnerships, &amp; expectations for engagement</li> <li>MOUs/Letters of cooperation</li> </ul> </li> <li>Research study conducted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot fellowship experience to conduct research</li> </ul> </li> <li>Knowledge Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a strategic communication plan for shared learning</li> <li>Create deliverables to communicate research findings that are hyper-targeted to practitioners</li> <li>Work with practitioners to communicate &amp; implement findings</li> </ul> </li> <li>Data Hub Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather data sharing agreements</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Create protocol for accessing data/requirements for sharing back results</li> <li>○ Issue RFP for system engineers and/or data scientists to build the platform</li> <li>○ Build platform/data hub system engineering</li> <li>● Design of Evaluation of SRPC</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3 - Evaluation and Ongoing Reflection, Augmentation, and Development</b>	July 2022-December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reflect &amp; adjust process/work-to-date</li> <li>● Create a strategic direction for year 2</li> <li>● Add additional partners as needed &amp; re-evaluate criteria for partnering based on year 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Database launch</li> <li>● Strategic plan for year 2</li> <li>● Updated MOUs</li> <li>● Research fellow development</li> <li>● Plan to iterate based on feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4 - Sustainability of SRPC</b>	TBD (Contingent upon Phase 3 evaluation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop long-term sustainability for the SRPC for funding, relationships, staffing, and research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fellowships for both researchers and practitioners</li> <li>● Permanent staffing</li> <li>● Permanent managing entity</li> <li>● Strong relationships across schools and researchers, as evidenced by continued/new projects and requests for continued partnership</li> <li>● Measurable changes in outcomes for students in St. Louis</li> </ul>

### *Phase 0: Planning*

From July to December 2020, members of SKIP, St. Louis Public Schools, and Washington University in St. Louis met to start the process of developing a research practice partnership in St. Louis. The goals of these meetings were to:

- Discuss the feasibility of creating a research-practice partnership in St. Louis, including any potential barriers to collaboration
- Develop an initial proposal for the research-practice partnership
- Identify potential partners for the Design Phase
- Build institutional buy-in

Beginning in December 2020, the working group held one-on-one meetings with stakeholders from universities, schools, and community organizations involved in education research to get feedback on the proposed structure for a research practice partnership and to invite stakeholders to engage in the next phase as members of the Design Council.

Members of this working group were Jay Hartman, Vicki May, Abbey Loehr, Maia Elkana, Deanna Childress, Saras Chung, Ellen O'Neill, and Rachel Matsumoto.

## *Phase 1: Design*

The Design Council was a time-limited entity whose purpose is to develop the mission and design the initial structure of the St. Louis Research Practice Collaborative (SRPC). It met monthly from January to June 2021 for a total of 5 meetings and 1 written update.

### **Members included:**

Candice Carter-Oliver, PhD  
*Confluence Academies*

Amber Jones, PhD  
*Harris-Stowe State University*

Kelly Garrett  
Christopher Frills  
*KIPP Schools*

Maureen Clancy May, PhD  
*MO Department of Elementary  
and Secondary Education  
(DESE)*

Saras Chung, PhD, MSW  
*SKIP Designed\**

Kelvin Adams, PhD  
Deborah Schmidt, PhD  
*St. Louis Public Schools*

Gary Ritter, PhD  
Evan Rhinesmith, PhD  
Dorothy Rohde-Collins  
*St. Louis University*

Andrew Butler, PhD  
Rachel Rugirello, PhD  
Hank Webber  
Victoria May, PhD  
Abbey Loehr, PhD  
*Washington University in St.  
Louis*

Ann Taylor, PhD  
*University of Missouri - St.  
Louis*

Jay Hartman  
Deanna Childress  
*Consortium Partnership  
Network*

Jesse Dixon  
Izzy Rubin  
*The Opportunity Trust*

Karishma Furtado, PhD  
*Forward through Ferguson*

Paul Sorenson  
Kiley Bednar  
*Community Innovation and  
Action Center  
University of Missouri - St.  
Louis*

Robbyn Wahby  
*MO Charter Public School  
Commission*

Natalie Self  
*STEMSTL*

Sarah Patterson, PhD  
*James S. McDonnell  
Foundation*

Official advisors for this project included:

Dr. John Easton  
*Senior Fellow  
University of Chicago Consortium on School Research*

Hank Webber  
*Executive Vice Chancellor for Civic Affairs and Strategic Planning*

*Washington University in St. Louis*

Dr. Paula Arce-Trigatti  
*Rice University, Kinder Institute*  
*Executive Director*  
*National Network for Educational Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP)*

Colleagues directing the activities of other educational research-practice partnerships across the nation were also consulted for perspective and advice. They include the following individuals:

Dr. Meg Bates  
*Director*  
*Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC)*

Dr. Laura Wentworth  
*Director of Research Practice Partnerships at*  
*California Education Partners*

Dr. Ruth Turley  
*Founder/Director of the Houston Educational Research Consortium (HERC)*  
*Associate Professor of Sociology*  
*Rice University*

Dr. Matthew Chingos  
*Vice President*  
*Education Data and Policy*  
*Urban Institute*  
*DC Education Research Collaborative*

Dr. Marc L. Stein  
*Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins University School of Education*  
*Director of the Baltimore Educational Research Collaborative (BERC)*

Support for facilitation, coordination, and design was provided throughout the process by members of the SKIP Designed team: Ellen O'Neill, Rachel Matsumoto, Hannah Levin, and William Liem.

## Phase 1a: Vision Setting

In January 2021, the Design Council met to set the vision for the SRPC, identify potential challenges, and decide on the geographical scope of the work.

The Design Council determined that their goals for school data in St. Louis was to transform data from its current overwhelming, hard-to-find, siloed, weaponized, and disconnected state into something user-friendly, accessible, and useful for practitioners in decision-making.

- The Design Council identified key challenges to launching SRPC:

- Making sure that research questions aligned with practitioner interests
- Effectively moving multiple institutions with different incentive structures
- Making sure the SRPC created the right structure to meet everyone's needs and ensure even contribution
- Building trust between actors.

The group decided that SRPC would initially focus on charter and district schools within St. Louis City, with the long-term goal of expanding to the St. Louis region as a whole.

## Phase 1b: Designing the Experience

From February to June 2021, the Design Council worked to develop the governance structure, research agenda, initial knowledge engagement pathways for practitioners, and data hub through subcommittees. Subcommittees proposed work back to the overall Design Council for approval. By the end of this process, SRPC has:

- Created and approved a research agenda for the first research projects
- Committed to clear and robust decision making structures that align with the needs and incentives of stakeholders
- Developed a plan for data hub development over the following years
- Designed initial user-centered pathways for practitioners to engage with research that will be incorporated into the first research projects

Additional stakeholders beyond the Design Council members were included in some subcommittees due to their subject expertise.

### SRPC Design Council Subcommittee: Governance & Structure

The Governance & Infrastructure subcommittee made recommendations to the Design Council based on the following three goals: 1) Identify a managing entity for the SRPC, 2) Create the parameters of a leadership body including: Roles and responsibilities, membership composition, and a decision-making structure and 3) Develop a plan to link the SRPC with external groups working on city-wide educational issues (if appropriate).

The subcommittee is defining a managing entity as an organization that can house the work of the SRPC. The structure of this managing entity is important and should enable a diversity of partners to participate. This is similar to the concept of a backbone in Collective Impact initiatives. If hired, staff will be housed here. A leadership body is defined as a group of individuals or organizations responsible for the SRPC's strategic direction, making select decisions for the initiative and ensuring fidelity. If an Executive Director is hired, s/he will report to this leadership body.

The subcommittee considered the following questions:

- Will this governance structure be limited to only to the student mobility research or extend beyond?
- What are the main roles & responsibilities of this leadership body?
  - What is the ideal composition?
  - Who needs to be represented?
  - Will it be organizational or individual?
- As a temporary leadership committee, what is the expected term and compensation?
- How will decisions be made?
- What conditions need to be true for a managing entity?

- What are the main roles and responsibilities of a managing entity?
- What staff capacity is needed?

As of June 20, 2021, the recommendation from the Design Council is to create a temporary governance structure to observe the minimum viable structure needed to effectively conduct this work. The Design Council's Governance subcommittee proposed a [Temporary Governance Structure](#) where SKIP Designed continues to serve as the managing entity to house and coordinate the research agenda until it is complete.

**Members of the subcommittee include:**

Andrew Butler, Kelly Garrett, Jay Hartman, Hank Webber, Ellen O'Neill and Saras Chung.

SRPC Design Council Subcommittee: Proposed Research Agenda

A [research agenda](#) was developed in partnership with the Design Council and community-based stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, principals, students, and community members). The Design Council sought research topics that were critical to warrant a collaboration through the SRPC, but also practical enough to make a difference in the everyday decisions and programs of school practitioners.

The Core Planning Committee proposed general research parameters that practitioners within the subcommittee felt were applicable to their practice to the Design Council for approval. Following this, SKIP conducted listening sessions with education stakeholders and worked with the Core Planning Group in research design workshops to develop specific research questions within those parameters. The proposed research agenda includes short-term projects that can provide practical insights to practitioners throughout the process of conducting longer-term research.

The council identified student mobility in St. Louis as a challenge faced by numerous schools, with up to 40% of students in some districts leaving or entering schools at any given time<sup>5</sup>. Research questions will use mixed-methods of analysis to explore longitudinal, secondary data of existing student-level indicators and outcomes from DESE. Additionally, qualitative interviews will be conducted with students and families to further understand trends from the initial analysis. Interventions will be examined for potential use by the SRPC.

**Members of the subcommittee include:**

Dorothy Rohde-Collins, Jay Hartman, Deanna Childress, Andrew Butler, Karishma Furtado, Jesse Dixon, Kelly Garrett, Saras Chung, Deborah Schmidt, Evan Rhinesmith, Chris Frills, Hank Webber, Sarah Paterson, and Rachel Matsumoto, with support by Hannah Levin.

See the full report from the [Research Agenda Development](#) process. Additionally, see the [proposed research agenda](#) that documents the questions around student mobility to be explored through the inaugural project.

SRPC Design Council Subcommittee: Data Hub

With expertise from the Regional Data Alliance, SRPC plans to build shared infrastructure to support the collection, use and analysis of educational data in the region. The goal of this data hub is to 1) build a bridge

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<sup>5</sup> Metzger, M. Fowler, P., Swanstrom, T. (2018). Hypermobility and educational outcomes: The case of St. Louis. *Urban Education*, 53, 6, 774-805.

between practitioners and researchers, 2) prioritize families,' districts,' and practitioners' concerns over research interest, 3) elevate privacy and security concerns while learning from data sharing models in other sectors like public health. This group will use the St. Louis Covid Data Sharing Partnership as proof of concept that illustrates how shared infrastructure can reduce collection and analysis burden.

This subcommittee within the SRPC Design Council will explore questions of discovery, governance, legality, storage, standardization, integration, expansion, access and use. The group will provide the Design Council a scoping document for the June meeting, that outlines initial ideas regarding a data hub to answer research questions around student mobility. The work of this subcommittee will set the foundation for building the proposed data hub in Phase 2 and beyond.

**Members of the subcommittee include:** Kiley Bednar, Paul Sorenson, Deanna Childress, Izzy Rubin (Opportunity Trust), Brian Huxtable (UMSL), and Saras Chung.

### SRPC Design Council Subcommittee: Knowledge Sharing and Engagement

To ensure research has direct implications for practice, the SRPC will develop systems to share and provide opportunities for practitioners to engage with research conducted by the Collaborative. This goes beyond dissemination of knowledge and includes developing novel methods of data sharing designed for practitioners to question conclusions and develop interventions, identifying existing best practices that practitioners already use to consume and engage with information, and embedding knowledge engagement as an essential component of all research conducted by the SRPC.

A subcommittee within the Design Council will conduct user research using methods of user-centered design to identify needs of practitioners when consuming and applying new information to practice. The subcommittee will then use these insights to design avenues for practitioners to both engage with and apply research to their practice.

**Members of the subcommittee include:**

Chris Frills, Debbie Schmidt, Deanna Childress, Rachel Matsumoto, and William Liem.

See the report from [Knowledge Engagement Interviews](#) and the [proposed structure](#) for knowledge engagement.

## *Phase 2: Building and Piloting*

Phase 2 will begin in August 2021 and span until June 2022. The Design Council will dissolve and those that wish to commit to the SRPC will formalize their partnership. A steering committee will form to continue to guide this work.

During this phase, the SPRC will seek financial support to sustain and launch the first research project, and steering committee members will continue to develop infrastructure.

Success in this phase will look like:

- Formalizing partnerships to carry out the initial research agenda through a MOUs.
- Secure diverse sources of funding to sustain the work outlined in the research agenda

- Execution of the research agenda
- Incorporation of research results back into practice
- Clear measures to evaluate for success, including check-ins throughout the project
- Continued work towards building SPRC infrastructure including:
  - Data Hub development
  - Long-term funding mechanisms

### *Phase 3: Evaluation, Reflection, Augmentation, and Development*

Phase 3 will begin in July 2022, focusing on continued development of the SPRC from Phase 1 and incorporating feedback from Phase 2. This process will involve an evaluation of Phase 2 by all partners, re-visiting MOUs, and adjusting strategic direction moving into year 2.

Success in this phase will look like:

- Partners adjusting and agreeing to new MOUs as needed
- A plan for addressing any changes needed from the past year
- A strategic plan for year 2 that includes plans for funding, staffing, building relationships and managing turnover, and project sustainability
- Launch of the data hub

### *Phase 4: Sustainability*

Phase 4 will be focused on building the long-term sustainability for the SRPC.

Success in this phase will look like:

- Fellowships for both researchers and practitioners
- Permanent staffing
- Permanent managing entity
- Strong relationships across schools and researchers, as evidenced by continued/new projects and requests for continued partnership
- Measurable changes in outcomes for students in St. Louis

### *Timeline for Development*

*Year 1: July 2021*

*Phase 2*

*Governance/Structure and DataHub Development.*

The first part of this plan is focused on developing legal agreements with partners and dataset creation. Legal agreements include all aspects pertaining to FERPA and HIPAA (if applicable) as well as contractually binding understandings of what is to be included and for how long. Database creation includes linking data longitudinally from across districts and school type and creating a master dataset. Secure servers and website infrastructure to download data are also targeted for development in year 1.

### *Design of Knowledge Engagement Practices*

This year will include building the social infrastructure and a pilot research partnership to answer a specific question of practice with university partners and a team of practitioners. The knowledge engagement structure will be piloted to co-design learning agendas, gauge frequency of meeting schedules, and research questions that correspond to the priorities of partners. Concurrently, methods of communication will be developed--website infrastructure, sharing format, brand, tone, etc. Research findings from publicly available data will also be garnered as a result of "open access" data sharing.

*Years 2 and 3: 2022-2024*

*Phase 3-4*

### *Sharing Findings with STL Practitioners and Researchers: Learning and Sharing in Community*

Research from open access data and knowledge engagement activities will be communicated back to practitioners and also made available for public consumption. Year 3 will move beyond the pilot year of fellowship to start solidifying practices and programs. Reflection on the previous process will guide the development of a new research agenda with advisory for ongoing work. The Research Advisory Council will also reconvene to consider where to permanently house the SRPC.



# Appendix

## *Internal Meeting Notes and Resources*

### Design Council

1. Meeting 1: Launch of Design Council 1/29/21
  - a. [Slides](#)
  - b. [Notes](#)
2. Meeting 2: Research Agenda Part 1 2/26/21
  - a. [Slides](#)
  - b. [Notes](#)
3. Meeting 3: Research Agenda Part 2 4/2/21
  - a. [Slides](#)
  - b. [Notes](#)
4. Meeting 4: Data Hub and Structure 4/30/21
  - a. [Slides \(SKIP\)](#) & [Slides \(Regional Data Alliance\)](#)
  - b. [Notes](#)
5. Meeting 5: Subcommittee Updates
  - a. [Updates \(Asynchronous Meeting\)](#)
6. Meeting 6: Closing Design Council and Next Steps 6/26/21
  - a. Slides
  - b. Notes

### Subcommittees

1. [Core Planning Committee](#)
2. [Governance](#)
3. [Data Hub](#)
4. [Knowledge Sharing Subcommittee](#)

## *Additional Resources*

Why Am I Always Being Researched? Accessed on <https://chicagobeyond.org/researchequity/>

Lopez Turley, R. N., and Stevens, C. (2015). Lessons from a school district-university research-practice partnership: The Houston Education Research Consortium. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37, 1S, 6S-15S.

Metzger, M. Fowler, P., Swanstrom, T. (2018). Hypermobility and educational outcomes: The case of St. Louis. *Urban Education*, 53, 6, 774-805.

Penuel, W. R., & Gallagher, D. J. (2017). *Creating Research-Practice Partnerships in Education*. Harvard Education Press: Cambridge, MA.

Sterman, J., 2000. *Business Dynamics: Systems Thinking and Modeling for a Complex World*, Boston ; London: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.