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## Community College and School Administrators' Perspectives on Communication and Collaboration in the Formation of Partnerships

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shannon LA'Vett Paula Stukes Williams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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2025

Abstract

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Collaboration in the Formation of Partnerships

by

Shannon LA'Vett Paula Stukes Williams

M.Ed., Lesley University, 2006

BS, Voorhees University, 2001

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

Walden University

February 2026

## Abstract

Challenges have limited the opportunities for educational institutions to support student transitions and success. The problem addressed through this study was the challenge to establish effective partnerships between community colleges and public K–12 schools in a rural county in a southern state. Grounded in Hartford’s small group theory, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine community college and K–12 administrators’ perspectives on the role of collaboration and communication, as well as the knowledge and skills needed for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 18 community college and K–12 administrators. Thematic analysis using open coding was conducted resulting in six key themes: (1) collaboration as the foundation for partnership, (2) importance of a shared vision, (3) ongoing transparent communication, (4) knowledge of both systems and policies, (5) interpersonal leadership skills, and (6) continuous improvement and data use. These themes serve as indicators for educational leaders to consider when developing and applying targeted interventions aimed at strengthening partnerships in diverse education contexts. Based on the findings of this study, a multi-day professional development workshop was developed to equip senior leaders with strategies for building and sustaining effective partnerships. The implications for positive social change include improved collaboration between educational institutions, enhanced support for student transitions, and increased capacity for faculty and staff to foster equitable educational opportunities in the local community.

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## Dedication

This study is lovingly dedicated to my mother, Apalor J. Stukes, a passionate advocate for community service and a pillar of strength in her community. Because of my mom, I am the woman who I am today. Though she lost her courageous battle with cancer, her unwavering commitment to service lives on through me. I carry forward her legacy with purpose and pride, continuing the work she began to uplift and restore our community. I will forever be grateful for all of her love and support. Mom, this one's for you. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11).

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I extend my heartfelt gratitude to both Dr. John Harrison, my doctoral committee chair, and Dr. John Johnson, my committee member. Your guidance, insight, and unwavering support have been instrumental in shaping this capstone and my scholarly journey. Thank you for challenging me to refine, recalibrate, and rise.

To my sweet family, my husband, Reginald; my daughter, Kennedy; and my son, Reginald, Jr., your love, patience, and belief in my vision have sustained me through every milestone. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. I could not have done this without your support.

This work stands as a testament to covenant clarity, legacy stewardship, and the power of communal restoration.

## Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale .....	2
Definition of Terms.....	4
Significance of the Study .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Review of the Literature .....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Review of the Broader Problem.....	12
Implications.....	20
Summary .....	21
Section 2: The Methodology.....	23
Research Design and Approach .....	23
Qualitative Tradition Rationale.....	24
Design Selection: Rationale for a Basic Qualitative Study .....	24
Rationale for Not Choosing Other Designs .....	24
Participants.....	25
Data Collection .....	27
Instrument Development.....	27
Description and Justification.....	28
Interview Procedures .....	28
Data Analysis .....	29

Evidence of Quality .....	30
Limitations .....	31
Audit Trail.....	31
Data Analysis Results .....	32
Data Analysis .....	32
Inductive Thematic Analysis .....	37
Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation .....	48
Theme 2: Shared Vision.....	49
Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication .....	50
Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies.....	51
Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills .....	53
Theme 6: Continuous Improvement and Data Use.....	54
Software Applications Used for Analysis.....	57
Conclusion .....	59
Project Deliverable Outcome.....	60
Section 3: The Project.....	63
Introduction.....	63
Rationale .....	63
How a Multi-Day Workshop Addresses the Identified Problem.....	67
Connection Between Data Analysis Findings and Workshop Content .....	80
Review of the Literature .....	99
Effectiveness of Multi-Day Professional Development Workshops .....	101
Key Components of Successful Multi-Day Workshops.....	105

Challenges and Limitations in Implementing Multi-Day Workshops .....	107
Examples of Successful Multi-Day PD Programs and Outcomes .....	112
Project Description.....	117
Overview.....	117
Learning Outcomes:.....	118
Implementation Plan .....	120
Timeline and Activities.....	120
Roles & Responsibilities.....	123
Participant Recruitment & Selection .....	125
Materials and Technology.....	126
Logistics & Venue .....	129
Ongoing Coordination .....	132
Project Evaluation Plan.....	134
Evaluation Goals.....	134
Evaluation Methods and Instruments.....	135
Data Collection and Analysis.....	137
Success Criteria and Indicators .....	140
Resources .....	143
Personnel.....	143
Materials & Supplies.....	145
Venue & Facilities .....	146
Existing Supports and Community Resources.....	147
Budget.....	148

Potential Barriers and Solutions.....	154
Key Stakeholders for Project Evaluation.....	166
Project Implications .....	169
Possible Social Change Implications .....	169
Importance to Local Stakeholders and in a Larger Context .....	170
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	173
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	173
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches .....	178
Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change .....	180
Reflection on Importance of the Work .....	182
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	184
Conclusion .....	186
References.....	190
Appendix A: The Project .....	215
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	272

## List of Tables

Table 1. Interview Participant Demographic Data: Community College Leaders .....	33
Table 2. Interview Participant Demographic Data: School District Leaders.....	34
Table 3. Participant Individual Interview Data.....	36
Table 4. Research Questions and Data Aligned Themes .....	56
Table 5. Themes Aligned with PD Program Components.....	61
Table 6. Integration of Collaboration Themes into the Workshop Design.....	66
Table 7. Small Group Theory’s Role in Workshop Design.....	74
Table 8. Adult Learning & PD Best Practices in Workshop Design .....	76
Table 9. Evaluation Methods and Timeline: Part 1 .....	136
Table 10. Evaluation Methods and Timeline: Part 2 .....	136
Table 11. Estimated Budget for Workshop Implementation .....	149
Table 12. Personnel Budget Breakdown.....	150
Table 13. Catering and Food Cost Estimates.....	151

## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The problem to be addressed through this study is the challenge to establish effective partnerships between community colleges and public K–12 schools in a rural county in a southern state. In forming collaborative agreements between community colleges and public schools, barriers often exist that prevent public school systems and local community colleges from forming positive partnerships (Coler et al., 2022). There was a problem of practice between Ballentine Technical College and Kvyville County Public School District (pseudonyms). Efforts to successfully form and sustain school-college partnerships consistently encountered significant challenges, and no professional development resources existed to support faculty and staff in addressing and overcoming these issues.

This problem often occurred between other community colleges and nearby school districts. Holcombe et al. (2022) emphasized that misaligned institutional missions, unclear communication channels, and unequal power dynamics frequently undermine collaborative efforts. Similarly, Vance (2022) identified how deficit thinking and a lack of intentional role design can erode trust and prevent stakeholders from forming sustainable partnerships. These communicative and structural challenges often prevented schools and colleges from forming positive collaborations around reformative and innovative learning models such as service learning (Markaki et al., 2021).

According to Markaki et al. (2021), about 1,600 institutions of higher education in all 50 states utilize some form of collaborative partnership. Community colleges have

initiated many of these relationships, especially around cultural and community awareness goals (Coler et al., 2022). However, few have made headway in forming school-college partnerships with the local school system.

### **Rationale**

The need to recognize and document the many ways that professional development affects the success and effectiveness of school/higher education partnerships stood as the reason for conducting this study. The need for community college/school district partnerships, especially for those partnerships to succeed and expose grade school students to real-world experiences, and for ensuring that students matriculating through associate degree programs receive an application-rich learning experience, stood as the rationale for the problem choice (Malone, 2020). Sepanik and Brown (2021) emphasized that such partnerships can promote educational equity and student well-being when supported by intentional collaboration, professional development, and shared goals.

While Malone (2020) offered a foundational framework for understanding community schools as vehicles for educational change through partnerships, recent scholarship has extended these concepts to address post-pandemic realities and evolving institutional needs. Sepanik and Brown (2021) emphasized that school-community partnerships must be intentionally designed to promote educational equity and student well-being, particularly through professional development and trauma-informed collaboration. Their findings reinforce the importance of exposing grade school students to real-world experiences and ensuring that associate degree programs integrate

application-rich learning environments. Similarly, Holcombe et al. (2022) argued that sustainable partnerships between K–12 and higher education institutions require aligned missions, shared leadership, and inclusive communication strategies. These extensions validated the rationale for this study by demonstrating that professional development and institutional alignment remain central to the success of school-college partnerships. They also highlighted the urgency of documenting how such partnerships can be structured to support both student outcomes and faculty collaboration in a rapidly shifting educational landscape. Despite the proliferation of post-pandemic partnership models, few studies directly addressed the professional development and experiential learning frameworks articulated by Malone (2020), which remain central to current practice.

Others such as Friedman and Dorr. (2023) and Gilbertson et al. (2024) also described this as a problem. A large number of high schools and a large number of community college programs include experiences necessitating a deliberate approach to the development of a strong partnership between the participating school districts and community colleges (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022). Alumni of programs with effective partnerships expressed high levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences while alumni with programs not able to show effectiveness through data express more indifference with the quality of their learning experiences from applied point of view (Seery et al., 2022). The strength of that partnership could be mapped to the effectiveness of the faculty, staff, and officials' abilities to collaborate and community (Weist et al., 2023). Consequently, these developed competencies could connect credibly to how professional development is received and applied by those involved in the partnership

process. Examining and documenting how these experiences unfolded formed the basis of the intent for conducting this project study. Data were collected through semistructured, in-depth interviews and analyzed, and a professional development activity directed towards strengthening communication and collaboration based on the findings of this project study was the culminating activity.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout this project, the following terms were defined as follows.

*Community College-School Partnership:* In a school/university partnership (also known as K-20 partnerships), collaboration occurs between a local grade school (like a high school) and some institution of higher learning or vocational training (such as a 4-year college, technical college, or community college). That means that organizations agree to combine their resources in some way to meet a mutually determined goal (Association of School Administrators, 2023; Swick, 2022; South Carolina Association of School Administrators, 2024).

*Faculty, Staff & Officials:* Faculty, staff, and officials in this study are comprised of the instructors, adjunct professors, division-level managers, and program coordinators who executive specific components of a multi-faceted initiatives that ensconce service learning and other community-based collaborations (Kang & Gonzalez, 2022).

*Service Learning:* One type of community college-school district partnership and an alternative form of instruction where (1) students participate in systematic activities that result in real assistance to others, as well as personal growth and (2) student learning is integrated with meaningful community service, instruction, and reflection to enrich the

learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Shea et al., 2023).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was that it would qualitatively explore the positive and negative details of a single school-community college partnership through a focus on the collaboration and communication approaches of the participating faculty, staff, and officials. Partnerships exist in many forms, but all are built on shared and cooperative leadership bound together through effective communicated expectations (Feinberg & Ogletree, 2024). Communication though is the life blood that allows any partnership to be sustainable and effective (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2021). It keeps community, human, and financial resources circulating, keeps visions and missions fresh, and what keeps the organizations together around common pursuits.

This study may be useful in the local educational setting by providing an analysis of the study partnership, and by creating a professional development activity that will be transferrable to diverse workplace contexts and cultures regarding (1) how school/community college partnership collaboration manifests in a working reality; (2) how school/community college partnership participants communicate constructively; and (3) how school/community college partnership participants in engage in professional development and apply gained knowledge and skills in strengthening the collaboration and communication dynamic.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this project study were as follows:

RQ1: How do school district and community college personnel describe the role of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships?

RQ2: How do school district and community college personnel describe the knowledge and skills needed for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several theories and models exist around school-university partnerships, from institutional theory (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021) to small group theory (Gesel et al., 2021) to senior leadership-led school-university partnership (Burton & Greher, 2007). While Burton and Greher's framework remains foundational, work by Reinhardt and Shaikh (2025) extends these principles through a shared governance model that emphasizes collaborative decision-making among university, district, and third-party leaders. After considering several options, this study was grounded in small group theory for professional learning communities.

### ***Small Group Theory for Professional Learning Communities***

A small group is defined as two or more (and usually more) people interacting with and reacting to each other in such a way as to have meaning for each other and influence over each other, as well as developing a sense of uniqueness about the relationships that sets this collectivity apart from all other collective relationships of the

people who are a part of it (Hartford, 1971; Hollingshead et al., 2005). This approach was created to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs of small group dynamics and their practical implications in real-world scenarios, particularly in social work, where group interactions play a crucial role. Simply getting a group of staff to feel or to act out in a group does not bring about change or cause negotiation to be more lucid. On the other hand, group members need help cognitively to gain insight (Hollingshead et al., 2005).

Siegal et al. (2024) continued to reinforce Hartford's cognitive insight model by demonstrating how differentiated small-group literacy instruction, guided by formative assessment, enhances student engagement and learning outcomes. Forsyth (2021) presented a unified theory of cohesion that echoes Hartford's emphasis on relational uniqueness, while Tasca (2021) highlighted the role of reflective functioning and cognitive insight in sustaining meaningful group interaction. Wilcock et al. (2025) extended Tasca's insights by exploring how peer collaboration and mental health literacy programs foster reflective functioning and engagement among culturally diverse primary school students. Dishke Hondzel et al. (2023) extended these ideas into educational partnerships, showing how small group dynamics foster persistence and transformation across institutional boundaries. Herrera-Pavo (2021) emphasized that collaborative learning fosters emotional engagement and mutual respect, key components of effective small group functioning.

First, the functional approach to small group communication as articulated by Hirokawa and Poole (2012) remains a foundational framework for understanding how

communication facilitates effective group decision-making (Poole et al., 2021). This perspective sees communication as the tool group members use to solve problems and make decisions, promoting rational judgments and critical thinking while preventing flawed reasoning and groupthink.

Panitz (2024) clarified that collaborative learning, unlike cooperative models, empowers students to self-organize and co-construct knowledge, aligning with functional communication principles. Recent researchers have continued to affirm and extend this model through studies emphasizing shared responsibility, peer scaffolding, and dialogic engagement. Tasca (2021) emphasized reflective functioning and communication structure in therapeutic groups, while Forsyth (2021) offered a unified theory of cohesion that reinforces the role of communication in maintaining group identity and purpose. Dishke Hondzel et al. (2023) applied functional principles to educational partnerships, showing how structured dialogue supports persistence and transition. Reinhardt and Shaikh (2025) demonstrated how shared governance in school-university partnerships relies on communication to align leadership goals.

Moyi and Hardie (2025) highlighted how collaborative leadership preparation depends on communication to bridge institutional boundaries. Lauermaann and Berger (2021) found that when students assume responsibility for their own and peers' learning, engagement and academic achievement significantly improve. Reeves et al. (2020) argue that collaborative learning environments enhance motivation and cognitive engagement, reinforcing the role of communication in shared governance models. Together, these

studies affirmed that communication remains instrumental in helping group members achieve shared goals through insight, structure, and rational engagement.

Second, the theory has weaknesses as well. First, assessing outcomes is challenging. For example, a given solution might be best for the group, but it may have harmful consequences for other members of the organization. In addition, a decision may seem appropriate today, but in 10 years, it might turn out to be a poor one. Second, some researchers argued that decision making is not rational. Emotions, power, hidden agendas, interpersonal conflicts, competing goals, and forces outside the group all play a part in the final decision a group makes (Leithwood, 2021). Thus, the functional theory may not provide a particularly useful picture of decision making and problem solving in naturally occurring groups.

Third, researchers have found it difficult to consistently identify the key group functions essential to small group decision-making and problem-solving. It is difficult to pinpoint group functions that remain consistent from group to group; even a given group will use different functions as time passes and circumstances change (Li et al., 2022). Zydziunaite et al. (2020) and Aliyu et al. (2022) highlighted persistent challenges in collaborative learning, including uneven participation and ineffective group structuring, which complicate the application of functional theory.

Burton and Greher (2007) reviewed the research encapsulating school-university partnerships and appropriately discussed the implications of teacher music education partnerships, considering these historical findings. They called for an expansion of content and knowledge into a context of experience. The formation of new academic

partnerships between university faculty and in-serve teachers could produce a new way for this expansion to occur. Research, though, must ground such partnerships because they must show careful, deliberate reflection on the efficacy of past collaborative models, what went wrong and what succeeded. Several theories and models exist around school-university partnerships, from institutional theory (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021) to small group theory (Gesel et al., 2021) to senior leadership–led school-university partnership (Burton & Greher, 2007). Burton and Greher’s model remains foundational in framing how leadership roles shape collaborative structures. Recent studies reinforced this framework: Reinhardt and Shaikh (2025) demonstrated how shared governance among university and district leaders strengthens residency partnerships, while Moyi and Hardie (2025) emphasized leadership preparation through integrated school-university ecosystems. These contemporary extensions validate the enduring relevance of leadership-centered partnership models.

The primary strength of Burton and Greher’s (2007) study lies in its detailed account of why effective school-university partnerships require collaboration that integrates resources, authority, interests, and personnel from both organizations. Their research emphasizes that forming a new joint entity with a unified mission is essential for achieving shared objectives. However, one notable limitation is the lack of specificity regarding the roles of university and school stakeholders. The study does not clarify whether universities and public schools function under distinct administrative models (Terjesen, 2022), nor does it explain if public schools are overseen by locally elected boards of education while universities are managed by independent boards with

legislative connections. This omission leaves ambiguity about whether the concept of stakeholder carries different meanings across these groups due to variations in workplace structure and culture (Murphy & Torre, 2022). The similarities and differences between the two were not sufficiently addressed by Burton and Greher (2007).

Recognizing these conditions is crucial, as ignoring them can foster tension and resistance during the development of a partnership. Howell et al. (2021) contribute by arguing that genuine school-university partnerships should not aim to resolve every educational issue but should instead bridge the gap between two institutional environments. By leveraging mutual needs and unique resources, these collaborations have the potential to create transformative outcomes for students. Effective communication of expectations and objectives among all stakeholders is vital for success.

Three additional studies by Malone (2022), Magee and Plotner (2022), and Shin et al. (2023) demonstrate that collaboration among school administrators, staff, and faculty at both K–12 and higher education levels can enable resource sharing to address student needs. Each study approaches this concept differently: Magee and Plotner (2022) focus broadly on changes in educational legislation and policy; Malone (2022) highlights systematic research and comprehensive implementation as the basis for collaboration; and Shin et al. (2023) identify service learning as a key avenue for partnership, emphasizing that public institutions maintain relevance by serving their communities. Despite these insights, all three studies share a common shortcoming: they lack rigorous, critical examination of obstacles to school-college partnerships. While Malone (2022)

acknowledges such barriers, the discussion remains superficial and does not offer in-depth analysis or practical solutions for overcoming these challenges.

Small-group theory was a good fit for this study that examined university and school administrator perspectives on communication and collaboration for several reasons. First, the study centered on interpersonal dynamics, and small group theory emphasizes interactions and dynamics within a small group of communicating and collaborating professionals. Second, small group theory allowed one to explore group processes. This study examined decision-making, conflict resolution, and role differentiation. Third, the theory is also focused on collaboration and how professionals work as a team. This can be used to explore how university and school district staff work together, share responsibilities, and form common goals. Lastly, small group theory uses communication as a key component. It will ground the analysis of responses to how school and university professionals share information, share insights, and coordinate the formation and establishment of partnerships. When applying Small-group theory, an intricate understanding of interpersonal and group dynamics around communication and collaboration between university and district faculty/staff was explored in connection to forming partnerships.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

This review of the literature was conducted using Walden University's online databases. Additionally, peer-reviewed journal articles were obtained through a computerized search on scholarly databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, and Google Scholar to provide information for the theoretical framework and literature review with a focus on

articles published between 2020 and 2025. Keywords and phrases used in the search were school-university partnerships, school-university collaboration, and school-university communication. Several terms and phrases were combined to reduce the number of search results.

The review of the literature explores four major topics relevant to school and community partnerships. The topics to be explored are (1) disconnects between public schools and higher education; (2) awareness of the need for local school district/university partnerships; (3) college learning and social climate. The literature review ends with a summary.

### ***Disconnects Between Public School and Higher Education***

Three main disconnects exist between public schools and higher education (Burch, 2021): (1) a difference in educational standards between institutions; (2) how both districts and community colleges adjust to changed educational modes of learning; (3) the requirement of enabling agreements; and (4) the role of authority, individual input, and responsibility. First, the two institutions hold different educational standards and expectations for their respective student bodies, and often each institution did not make the other aware of these systemic incongruencies. Akpan et al. (2024) supported this argument because, in their research, they found that varied impacts on learning existed between public school districts and higher education organizations due to different expectations at the beginning and end of the academic year. Second, and most closely associated with the topic, K-12 public schools must continue to adapt to the changing educational landscape, while community colleges may maintain the same

educational approaches for decades (Steiger et al., 2024). Bayly-Constaneda et al. (2024) corroborated these perceptions when, after systematically reviewing research comparing higher education and K-12 school districts, they found that they share many differences in the future use of artificial intelligence in the role of nurturing their student bodies. Similarly, Meng et al. (2024) found, after reviewing twenty-five articles on online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic period, that schools and universities responded differently to learning needs due to different introductory expectations. Third, enabling collaborative agreements (especially around innovative programs like service learning) requires the communication of forward-thinking ideas from both educational institutions and the construction of new roles and agreements that were outside convention. In examining articles related to course-related and support-related aspects, Rahmani et al. (2024) uncovered that K-12 and higher education do not have consistent ways to communicate why students do to complete the educational programs at their respective institutions so that they can pool their resources to come up with solutions to the mutual issue.

One perspective, egalitarian communication, states that the two parties in a partnership are equal in collaborative actions and decisions (Melkevik, 2020). Freelon et al. (2023) in reviewing research from the CCE (Communication Citation Elite), a group of 1675 highly-cited researchers, found that while most partnerships admit equal partnership intents, many of the studies did not originate from diverse K-12/IHE (Institutes of Higher Education) partnerships. Hoxmeier et al. (2024), in reviewing 69 studies, found equitable attitudes rise to the forefront of what constitutes egalitarian

principles of equal partnerships among school districts and universities. Fourth, authority, individual input, and responsibility within the collaboration should be shared as equals; one educational entity is not inferior to the other. Their findings emphasized happiness, self-expression, relationship, and assimilation rather than accommodation between two collaborating parties. Role sharing and mutuality in decision making were stressed, with role definitions being interchangeable for the two partner institutions (Griffiths et al., 2021; Parnell & Gangwish, 2023).

While authority, individual input, and responsibilities encompass shared components of partnership collaboration, forward-thinking ideas only manifest within enabling collaborative agreements. As school districts and community college officials adjust to changing educational modes, the standards and expectations put forth by both educational institutions are vital to ensure disconnects reach a minimal level forming school/university partnerships through effective collaboration and communication.

A difference exists between high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements, and the concern many lawmakers have with streamlining pathways across high school, higher education, and other systems, especially for academically at-risk students (Kearney et al., 2024). Changing educational policies, how local educational entities collaborate, and the gradual development of educational partnership-making comprise this difference. While changing educational policies forces public school districts to innovate, continued use of a traditional instructional and curriculum program by colleges prevents the formation of effective school-college partnerships to meet the needs of K-16 students. Ultimately, public school systems and

local colleges, especially community colleges, have to collaborate on facilitating a smooth transition for students from high school to post-secondary institutions (Lindstrum & Beno, 2020; Menon, 2024). Educational leaders, though, must not only realize that partnership-making occurs gradually over several years but also that such endeavors develop after serious longitudinal research.

Educational collaboration must occur gradually but must also occur innovatively between educational partnership organizations (Smith et al., 2022). If these collaborations occur smoothly, then differences in standards and expectations between school district/community college partnerships can emerge with fewer differences that could negatively impact their effectiveness.

#### ***Awareness of the Need for Local School District/University Partnerships***

In general, there is an increasing awareness of the need for partnerships between the local schools and colleges because the responsibility for all students at both levels lies with both educational institutions (Hands, 2023). Raniti et al. (2022) examined partnership needs from the perspective of creating support for social-emotional environments. They found that both partnerships around such needs endure longer than partnerships established on minor shared concerns. Health literacy, as researched by Restini et al. (2024) among STEM-focused K-12 schools and universities, stands as another essential shared need perpetuating strong school/university collaborations.

Factors determining funding support, avoidance of barriers to student body diversity, and the avoidance of apathy ensconce this understanding. The unpreparedness of these students and the effectiveness of programs assisting them stand as factors that

determine the level of state funding that is received for these endeavors, an issue that has continued to perpetuate itself since the open admission policy came into use en masse for public higher educational institutions. Relegating the partnership to these dynamics allows both the higher education institutions and the local service area school districts to avoid the barriers of increased student diversity and feelings of incompetence and condescension of college partnership officials toward the local school district partnership offices (Soda, 2023). It also allows them to avoid apathy on the instructional and department levels (Avelar et al., 2023). The possibilities of such collaborations are just coming to fruition between local school districts and community colleges.

Swick et al. (2021) also explored these possibilities, but from a shared resource perspective. Needed school/university partnerships strive best when the stakeholders share resources while simultaneously conducting evidence-based research on how these collaborations positively affect student outcomes in year-to-year matriculation and graduation. This allows both institutions to focus on interventions that would offset any negative factors affecting student learning overall.

Avoiding barriers to increased diversity cannot occur without the elimination of apathy among faculty and staff involved with forming school/university partnerships between local school districts and community colleges. Otherwise, it does nothing to correct the unpreparedness students experience in connection with such ineffective partnerships. Such programs ultimately face defunding because they do not train students for real-world problem-solving and workplace application of their skills.

***Community College Learning and the Social Climate***

Beals et al. (2021) emphasized in their study the importance of integrating learning communities with academic expectations by explicitly ensuring that faculty are well prepared to contribute to a supportive social climate. There is a long-term impact that could occur, based on their research. When faculty involvement is strong, students can view them as mentors and role models, thus contributing to a strong learning social climate. Recent studies have expanded the application of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) beyond traditional classroom settings. Pinninti (2024) demonstrated how combining CSR with reflective journaling enhances metacognitive awareness and reading comprehension through socially mediated learning processes. Puspitasari et al. (2025) showed that integrating CSR with digital platforms fosters student engagement and literacy development in hybrid learning environments. Sari et al. (2025) further illustrated how CSR can be embedded within a school-wide literacy culture, involving educators, librarians, and families in co-teaching models that support sustained reading habits.

Malone (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of how technical (i.e., community) college social climate connects in numerous ways to how students learn in classroom settings and how deep collaborative research between partnership institutions must simultaneously accompany any initiatives that occur between the organizations. In general, there was an increasing awareness of the need for partnerships between the local schools and colleges because the responsibility for all students at both levels lies with both educational institutions. The unpreparedness of these students and the effectiveness of programs assisting them were factors that determined the level of state funding

received for these endeavors, an issue that has continued to persist since the open admission policy was implemented for public higher educational institutions.

Relegating the partnership to these dynamics allows both the higher education institutions and the local service area school districts to avoid the barriers of increased student diversity and feelings of incompetence and condescension of college partnership officials toward the local school district partnership offices (Langrafe et al., 2020; de Groot et al., 2025). It also allows them to avoid apathy on the instructional and department levels (Avelar et al., 2023). The possibilities of such collaborations are just coming to fruition between local school districts and community colleges.

Starkey (2023) expanded on the collaborative idea of shared experience planning. Schools and universities must develop a shared vision, must mutually cultivate relationships among students, and must foster authentic communication. These are the types of crucial strategies that, when implemented, create a social climate saturated with positivity and productivity. Verster (2024) delved into the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and student learning outcomes. School-university partnerships were seen as avenues for educational opportunities for both entities to develop a shared initiative to capitalize on any systemic inequalities that affect the quality of the educational social climate.

In summary, authority, individual input, and responsibilities encompass shared components of partnership collaboration; forward-thinking ideas only manifest within enabling collaborative agreements. These collaborations must occur gradually and innovatively. Simultaneously, both the school district and partner community must

reduce their standard and expectation differences through efficient communication to create a partnership that allows their educational programs to prepare students for the real world.

### **Implications**

There were four implications or “next steps” in connection with this doctoral project study. All four included the existence of a community of practice for faculty, staff, and officials involved with school/community college partnerships. Each component is discussed below.

First, the project artifact would allow faculty, staff, and officials to initiate better dialogue among themselves at both the local public school district and the community college about the nature of effective communication from a constructivist perspective (Zajda, 2021). This could materialize in the form of an inter-site study team whose sole purpose is to discuss the topic. Second, the project would help these higher education and district officials broaden their own research to include studies and literature on vehicles for collaboration that include the healthcare field and ecclesiastical organizations (Zhang et al., 2025). These would be excellent models because they often partner with the community on several projects, such as general fundraising, health awareness activities, and culturally relevant self-enrichment. All these endeavors require creative, constructivist planning and multi-level alignment. Investigating these processes may throw light on weaknesses that plague school-university collaboration.

Third, it was expected that the results of the project would assist faculty, staff, and officials involved in school/community college partnerships in broadening their

knowledge to include literature and examples on how the nature of networking skills (Amorin-Woods & Telfener, 2024) in the corporate business world. Those who are successful in this arena must possess superior skill in communicating their intentions quickly and transparently with charismatic rapport (Lane et al., 2024). Perhaps tapping into this realm would allow for a large palette of skills when negotiating shared goals and roles in a collaborative relationship. Fourth, this project's professional development artifact will aid faculty, staff, and officials in strengthening their skills in policymaking and compromise.

### **Summary**

Section 1 introduced the problem in the final project. The problem that was addressed was the numerous unsuccessful efforts of community colleges and local school districts in forming and sustaining school-higher education partnerships. They have not been as effective in the absence of consistent professional development resources to aid faculty, staff, and officials directly involved in these initiatives in their efforts to reverse this trend. Workplace-based data collection on the local level revealed a strong interest in service learning and a view that initiating the instructional model would take collaboration. Feedback indicated the existence of many different understandings of service learning as well as a diversity of goals for such collaborations. A need for faculty, staff, and officials to communicate and share their desires with each other was expressed as key to their formation, and the other professional scholars pointed out that this aspect is imperative in forming any type of school/university partnerships. This project, through a professional community of practice, sought to help those involved in creating school-

university collaborations self-reflect on their own collaborative communication obstacles and to give them a forum for learning and practicing more efficient skills in this area so that they can more effectively form partnerships around many different interests and goals.

Section 2 presents the case study research design and methodology, which encompassed interviews, observing a professional learning community, and document analysis. How participants were recruited for the study is detailed, as well as how the collection and analysis of data occurred. Section 2 ends with a summary.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

This study employed a basic qualitative research design to explore how school district and community college personnel perceive and describe the role of collaboration and communication in forming and sustaining educational partnerships. The design was selected to address the practical problem of failed partnership efforts and the absence of professional development resources to support faculty, staff, and administrators in these initiatives. Through semistructured interviews, the study aimed to uncover specific communication-related barriers. Misaligned institutional goals, unclear messaging, negotiation challenges, and trust issues are such examples that hinder effective collaboration. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for capturing the depth and complexity of these experiences in a real-world educational context (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Prior to data collection, this study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. The IRB reviewed all study materials, including recruitment scripts, consent forms, and interview protocols, to ensure compliance with ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Participants were informed of their rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and measures taken to protect confidentiality. All procedures adhered to the guidelines established by the IRB, and any amendments to the study protocol were promptly reported and approved.

## **Qualitative Tradition Rationale**

Qualitative research is well-suited for studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meaning within specific social or institutional settings. This study focused on how educational professionals describe their roles in partnership development, particularly in terms of collaboration and communication. A qualitative tradition allows for the collection of rich, descriptive data that reflects the lived realities of participants, rather than abstract generalizations (Yadav, 2022). This approach supported the exploration of nuanced perspectives and contextual factors that quantitative methods may overlook (Meißner et al., 2022).

## **Design Selection: Rationale for a Basic Qualitative Study**

A basic qualitative design was selected because it provides a flexible framework for examining how participants make sense of their professional experiences. This design emphasizes meaning-making and interpretation, rather than theory generation or narrative construction (Hong et al., 2022; Li, 2025). The open-ended nature of the research questions aligned with this approach, allowing participants to describe their understanding of collaboration, communication, and the knowledge and skills needed to build and sustain partnerships. The design also accommodated emergent themes, which are valuable when studying complex social phenomena such as inter-institutional collaboration (Stevens, 2023).

## **Rationale for Not Choosing Other Designs**

Other qualitative designs were considered but ultimately deemed unsuitable for the scope and intent of this study. While case studies offer in-depth analysis of a bounded

system, this study did not focus on a single institution or use multiple data sources. The research questions were straightforward and did not require the layered complexity of a case study approach (Yin, 2017). Although the study explored perceptions, it did not aim to capture the essence of a lived experience in the way phenomenological research does. The emphasis was on descriptive accounts rather than existential meaning-making. This design was not selected because the study does not seek to generate a new theory. The research questions were exploratory and did not involve hypothesis testing or theoretical modeling. While participants shared personal experiences, the study did not involve collecting life stories or analyzing narrative structures. The focus was on institutional practices and professional perspectives.

In summary, a basic qualitative design was the most appropriate choice given the study's goals, the nature of the research questions, and the practical constraints of data collection. This approach enabled exploration of participants' perspectives on collaboration and communication in educational partnerships with flexibility and depth. By focusing on descriptive accounts rather than generating theory or conducting complex case analysis, the design effectively addressed the need to uncover nuanced barriers and experiences within real-world institutional settings.

### **Participants**

In alignment with best practices for qualitative research, this study utilized purposive sampling to recruit participants who possessed direct experience in partnership-related roles within both the community college and the public school district. Purposive sampling is recognized for its strategic selection of information-rich

cases that can illuminate the phenomenon under investigation (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). Ahmad and Wilkins (2024) provide a comprehensive framework for purposive sampling, emphasizing the importance of clarity and intentionality throughout the entire research journey—from defining inclusion criteria to ensuring sample adequacy and saturation (Bouncken et al., 2025). Their framework guided the selection process in this study, ensuring that participants were not only representative of key stakeholder groups but also positioned to offer nuanced insights into the dynamics of collaboration and communication in educational partnerships. By following this approach, the study enhanced the credibility and transferability of its findings, as recommended by contemporary qualitative research standards (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Participants were purposefully selected from a community college and a public school district within the same geographic service area. The selection criteria focused on individuals with direct experience in partnership-related roles, including faculty and administrative staff.

At the community college, eligible participants included:

- Full-time faculty teaching credit-bearing courses
- Instructors in continuing education programs
- Administrative staff with mid- to senior-level responsibilities
- Hybrid roles (e.g., 75% administrative, 25% instructional)

At the school district, the inclusion criteria included:

- Full-time K–12 teachers

- Administrators with full-time leadership responsibilities
- Hybrid roles combining teaching and administrative duties

The target population emphasized those actively involved in partnership initiatives or positioned to influence collaborative efforts. Participants from each institution were recruited. The final sample size of 18 was sufficient to provide diverse perspectives while remaining manageable for in-depth qualitative analysis (Stake & Visse, 2025).

Recruitment was facilitated through publicly available directories from the State Technical College System and the state's Department of Education. Initial contact was made via phone, email, or in-person meetings. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, their voluntary role, and confidentiality measures. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Each participant received a \$50 honorarium and lunch when applicable.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instrument Development**

The semistructured interview protocol used in this study was developed through an iterative process informed by relevant literature and expert feedback. Initial questions were drafted to align with the study's conceptual framework and research objectives. The protocol was reviewed by colleagues with expertise in qualitative research and educational partnerships, who provided suggestions for clarity and comprehensiveness. The final protocol ensured that key topics such as collaboration, communication, and

partnership development were addressed, while also allowing flexibility for participants to share their unique perspectives.

### **Description and Justification.**

Data were collected through semistructured individual interviews guided by a researcher-developed protocol (see Appendix B). The protocol included an introductory script, consent reminders, and open-ended questions aligned with the study's framework. Interviews were designed to elicit detailed responses about collaboration, communication, and the knowledge and skills needed for partnership development. This format was chosen for its flexibility and ability to generate rich, context-specific data. Semistructured interviews allowed participants to express their views freely while ensuring consistency across interviews. The approach aligned with qualitative traditions that prioritized depth and meaning over breadth and generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

### **Interview Procedures**

Each interview was expected to last approximately 40-45 minutes and was conducted through video conferencing (i.e., Microsoft Teams). Interviews were recorded with consent, and non-verbal cues were observed when possible. After the interview, participants were thanked and informed about the member checking process. To ensure accuracy, each participant received a transcript of their interview and was invited to review it for corrections. Responses were considered final after five business days. This process supported the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase inductive thematic analysis process as follows:

1. Phase 1: Data Familiarization: Transcripts were reviewed in full to identify initial ideas and patterns.
2. Phase 2: Initial Coding: Semantic coding was used to capture participants' exact language, followed by latent coding to identify deeper meanings and relationships (Saldaña, 2021).
3. Phase 3: Theme Generation: Codes were grouped into clusters representing potential themes.
4. Phase 4: Theme Review: Themes were refined and validated for coherence and relevance.
5. Phase 5: Theme Naming and Defining: Each theme was clearly defined and supported by representative quotes.
6. Phase 6: Report Production: Themes were organized by research question to construct a narrative that answers the study's guiding inquiries.

This process ensured that themes emerged organically from the data and were grounded in participant experiences. Beginning with a thorough familiarization of interview transcripts, the analysis progressed through semantic and latent coding to capture both explicit responses and underlying meanings. Codes were then grouped and refined into coherent themes, which were carefully defined, named, and supported with

participant quotes. This process culminated in a narrative organized by research questions, authentically representing the study's findings.

### **Evidence of Quality**

To establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, a multi-faceted approach was adopted. Member checking was employed. After initial analysis, participants were invited to review their interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations. This allowed them to confirm the accuracy of their statements, clarify any ambiguities, and ensure their perspectives were authentically represented.

Reflexive practice was consistently employed throughout the study, with ongoing acknowledgment of how personal background, experiences, and values might influence the interpretation of the data. A comprehensive positionality statement was included, detailing academic training, personal connection to the study topic, sociocultural context, and prior assumptions. This transparency helped to illuminate the lens through which the analysis was conducted, encouraging readers to better understand potential influences and limitations. Instances that diverged from prevailing patterns were actively sought out and discussed within the analysis. Examination of these outliers introduced additional complexity and nuance, which contributed to the overall depth and richness of the findings. The analytic process remained flexible; earlier stages were revisited when new insights arose, ensuring that theme development was responsive and rooted in the data rather than preconceived notions.

### **Limitations**

While this study provided valuable insights into collaboration and communication within educational partnerships, several methodological limitations were acknowledged. First, although the sample size was sufficient for in-depth qualitative analysis, it may have limited the transferability of findings to other contexts or institutions. The purposeful selection of participants from a single geographic area in a South Atlantic state may also have restricted the generalizability of results. Additionally, as with all qualitative research, the interpretation of data was influenced by personal background and perspectives, despite ongoing efforts to maintain reflexivity and transparency. Finally, reliance on self-reported experiences during interviews may have introduced recall bias or social desirability effects, which could have affected the authenticity of responses.

### **Audit Trail**

To enhance the transparency and rigor of the analytic process, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the study. All stages of data collection and analysis were systematically documented, including recruitment communications, interview schedules, consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts, coding decisions, and theme development notes. Coding matrices and thematic maps were stored securely and updated as analysis progressed. Decisions regarding code refinement, theme naming, and the handling of outlier cases were recorded in analytic memos. This audit trail enabled external reviewers to trace the research process and verify the consistency and credibility of findings.

Together, these strategies provided a robust framework for ensuring the authenticity, rigor, and depth of the thematic analysis, allowing the research findings to be both trustworthy and meaningful. The use of member checking allowed participants to validate and clarify their input, thereby enhancing the accuracy and credibility of the results. Reflexive practices and the inclusion of a positionality statement promoted transparency by acknowledging the researcher's potential influences and assumptions. Actively seeking out and discussing divergent cases added complexity and nuance, while maintaining a comprehensive audit trail strengthened the study's transparency and allowed for external verification of the analytic process. Collectively, these efforts established a solid foundation for the integrity and reliability of the study's qualitative findings.

## **Data Analysis Results**

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative project study, data consisted of interview responses in the form of transcripts from 18 educational professionals (10 community college staff and eight school district staff). The projected number was twelve interviews with six college staff and six school staff. The projected length of each interview was about 45 minutes. Each semistructured interview lasted an average of 27:41 minutes with an average transcript length of 14.4 pages and explored participants' perspectives on communication and collaboration in forming partnerships. Table 1 contains a demographic table of the community college leader participants.

**Table 1***Interview Participant Demographic Data: Community College Leaders*

Participant	Position	Community College or School District	Years of Experience	Education
Community College Leader 1	Interim-President	Community College	25	M.Ed.
Community College Leader 2	President	Community College	35	Ph.D.
Community College Leader 3	Dean of Education	Community College	30	Ph.D.
Community College Leader 4	Vice-President of Academic Affairs	Community College	29	Ph.D.
Community College Leader 5	President/CEO	Community College	18	Ph.D.
Community College Leader 6	Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs	Community College	28	Ed.D.
Community College Leader 7	Vice President of Academic Affairs	Community College	23	Ed.D.
Community College Leader 8	Vice President of Academic Affairs and Special Assistant to the President	Community College	15	Ph.D.
Community College Leader 9	Vice President of Academic Affairs/Community Relations Liaison and Former District Superintendent	Community College	40+	Ed.D.
Community College Leader 10	President	Community College	35	Ph.D.

**Table 2***Interview Participant Demographic Data: School District Leaders*

Participant	Position	Community College or School District	Years of Experience	Education
Senior School District Leader 1	District Superintendent	School District	20	Ed.D.
Senior School District Leader 2	Senior District Director: Career Center Initiatives	School District	20	Ed.D.
Senior School District Leader 3	Alternative School District Coordinator	School District	10	Ed.D.
Senior School District Leader 4	Senior Level District Administrator Secondary Education	School District	22	M.Ed.
Senior School District Leader 5	District Director of Counselor Education	School District	26	M.Ed.
Senior School District Leader 6	High School District Specialist	School District	15	Ed.S.
Senior School District Leader 7	Secondary School District Specialist	School District	18	M.Ed.
Senior School District Leader 8	Superintendent	School District	35	Ed.D.

In qualitative research, interviews often do not always last as long as planned. In this study, each semistructured interview was intended to be about 45 minutes, yet most concluded earlier (many around 15–25 minutes, with only a couple reaching between 40–55 minutes). Despite this, participants still answered all questions and provided valuable insights. It was important to recognize that interview length alone did not determine data quality. What mattered was the depth and relevance of information obtained. Qualitative methodologists noted that there is no ideal length for a productive interview (Knox & Burkard, 2022). Depending on context (e.g., participant characteristics or the focus of questions), a shorter interview “may be appropriate” and still yield the necessary information (Ahmed, 2025).

Furthermore, Demirci (2024) emphasized that the quality of interview data is shaped not by duration alone, but by the interviewer’s skill, the relevance of the

questions, and the depth of participant engagement. In the case of this study, even the briefest interviews (around 15–20 minutes) produced 7–11 pages of transcript, indicating that participants were focused and concise in sharing their perspectives. Longer interviews, which lasted approximately 40 to 55 minutes, yielded as many as 17 to 28 pages of transcript; however, much of the essential content, specifically the answers to the core questions, had already emerged in the earlier portion of those sessions.

Moreover, forcing an interview to run longer than a participant naturally speaks could have led to diminishing returns. Brinkmann (2022) cautioned that extending an interview past the point where the participant has finished conveying their main points often yields little new information and can even cause an unraveling of the interview's purpose, as both interviewer and interviewee may start straying off-topic or losing focus (Brinkmann, 2022).

Recognizing that individual interviews were shorter than anticipated, a possible issue with paucity of data was mitigated by increasing the number of interviews, from 12 to 18, to ensure adequate data for the study's objectives. In qualitative research design, sample size is inherently flexible and often adjusted based on the unfolding data collection. There are no strict rules for an adequate sample size in qualitative inquiry – instead, it depends on the context (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Bekele et al., 2022; and Campbell-Patton & Patton, 2023). This strategy also bolstered the study's trustworthiness. By involving more participants, a wider array of voices was incorporated, which enhances the transferability of findings (providing thick description

across different contexts) and contributes to confirmability (since similar themes emerged independently from multiple sources).

Interview data collected is listed in Table 3. All interviews occurred virtually using Microsoft Teams, and the resulting transcripts were recorded in single-spaced Times New Roman, 12-point font.

**Table 3**

*Participant Individual Interview Data*

Participant	Date/Time of Interview	Duration (min)	#Transcript Pages
Community College Leader 1	June 6, 2025, 11:00 AM	16:44	10
Community College Leader 2	June 13, 2025, 3:00 PM	18:35	11
Community College Leader 3	July 3, 2025, 3:00 PM	21:02	17
Community College Leader 4	July 10, 2025, 3:00 PM	15:49	7
Community College Leader 5	July 13, 2025, 10:00 PM	40:49	17
Community College Leader 6	July 14, 2025, 6:51 PM	20:01	9
Community College Leader 7	July 15, 2025, 10:24 PM	21:17	11
Community College Leader 8	July 15, 2025, 12:14 AM	21:24	11
Community College Leader 9	July 16, 2025, 1:59 PM	40:01	17
Community College Leader 10	July 23, 2025, 3:00 PM	54:49	28
Senior School District Leader 1	June 16, 2025, 6:59 PM	21:50	14
Senior School District Leader 2	July 3, 2025, 12:02 AM	21:55	12
Senior School District Leader 3	July 5, 2025, 1:32 PM	35:23	19
Senior School District Leader 4	July 10, 2025, 2:05 PM	14:05	7
Senior School District Leader 5	July 10, 2025, 6:56 PM	39:48	17
Senior School District Leader 6	July 10, 2025, 8:57 PM	20:05	17
Senior School District Leader 7	July 11, 2025, 9:55 PM	24:23	14
Senior School District Leader 8	July 22, 2025, 5:02 PM	30:39	17

An inductive thematic analysis approach was employed to examine these interviews. This means that rather than using predefined codes, themes will emerge from the data itself, ensuring the analysis closely reflects participants' views and experiences.

To maintain rigor, the study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) well-established six-phase qualitative analysis process from data familiarization through theme development to final reporting. Microsoft Teams transcription software was used to manage the transcripts efficiently. Analysis was assisted by using Microsoft Word. This

chapter details the step-by-step data analysis process, the coding procedures applied, and the software tools utilized.

### **Inductive Thematic Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted systematically in six phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2008). This structured process ensured deep engagement with the data and the development of themes grounded in participants' responses. The phases and their activities are reviewed below.

Each of these phases was conducted meticulously to ensure a robust analysis. The “inductive” nature of this process was crucial – the codes and themes are derived from the interview content itself rather than imposed beforehand. This approach increased the validity of the findings, as they closely reflect what participants actually said. The entire six-step process provided a clear roadmap from raw data to actionable insights, with each step building on the previous one.

### ***Trustworthiness in Coding***

While the data analysis process in this study was designed to maximize rigor and transparency, several analytic limitations should be acknowledged. First, the coding and theme development were conducted manually, which, although allowing for deep engagement with the data, can introduce challenges related to consistency and potential human error. Manual coding requires sustained attention to detail and iterative review, but the absence of specialized qualitative analysis software may limit the ability to systematically cross-check codes or automate pattern detection.

Additionally, qualitative analysis is inherently interpretive. A professional background in educational leadership, along with relevant personal experiences and perspectives, may influence the interpretation of participant responses and the development of themes. Although strategies such as reflexive journaling, member checking, and audit trail documentation were employed to mitigate bias, complete objectivity cannot be guaranteed. The process of grouping codes and defining themes involves subjective judgment, and different researchers might arrive at alternative categorizations or emphases.

Finally, the reliance on participant self-reporting and the context-specific nature of the interviews could have affected the transferability of findings. While efforts were made to ensure credibility and confirmability, readers should consider these analytic limitations when interpreting the results and recommendations of the study.

Strategies to enhance reliability and credibility were employed, such as maintaining an audit trail and using member checking. In this study, member checking involved giving each participant a chance to review their interview transcript for accuracy after Phase 1 (transcripts were provided via email and participants could correct any errors within five days). This helped ensure the data (and thus the analysis) faithfully represents their viewpoints.

In summary, coding in this study was a meticulous, manual process carried out by reading and re-reading transcripts, marking them up with codes, and progressively abstracting those codes into meaningful themes. The inductive nature meant that the code labels and themes truly arose from participant language and prevalent ideas, rather than

being imposed. The result was a set of well-substantiated themes about communication and collaboration, founded on a transparent chain of evidence from raw remarks to interpretative categories.

### ***Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data***

In the first phase of analysis, immersion in the interview data occurred by reading and re-reading each transcript to become deeply familiar with the content. During this process, the accuracy and completeness of the transcripts was verified. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts, ensuring that their contributions were correctly captured. Analytic memos of initial observations were kept, noting recurring phrases and ideas that stood out across interviews. These early notes about common expressions and potential patterns provided a groundwork for the next phase, as they hinted at emerging concepts that might later develop into codes and themes.

### ***Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes***

In Phase 2, formal coding of the data began in order to organize it in a meaningful, systematic way. Following Saldaña's (2021) guidelines for first-cycle coding within Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, open coding was employed – no pre-set codes were used; instead, codes were derived inductively from what participants actually said. In this first-cycle semantic coding, the analysis remained as close as possible to the participants' own words. For example, when one participant noted “we needed more regular meetings”, either the exact phrase was used as a code or it was assigned a very descriptive label like “frequency of meetings” to capture the idea. At this stage the coding was very granular: many specific codes were generated to capture nuances in the data

(e.g. phrases like “lack of trust,” “unclear roles,” “sharing resources,” “success stories,” each became an initial code). This process resulted in a large number of initial codes – in fact, by the end of first-cycle coding approximately 306 codes were identified across all transcripts.

These first-cycle codes were primarily semantic (explicit in the data) and included a wide range of details. For instance, initial codes ranged from concrete partnership activities (e.g., “Collaboration with K–12 schools,” “Joint curriculum planning”) to procedural challenges (“Credit transfer assistance,” “Teacher qualification review”) and support strategies (“Academic readiness programs,” “Mentoring and coaching”). Each code represented a small chunk of meaning extracted from the interviews.

After completing the first cycle, Second-cycle coding was then conducted, adopting a more latent and interpretive approach. In this phase, the initial code list was examined to identify patterns or underlying meanings not immediately evident in the exact wording of the data. Codes that were conceptually related were grouped together or refined to infer deeper latent concepts. For example, codes such as “no feedback loop” and “slow response time,” which both suggest communication problems, were considered together and eventually interpreted as a broader category like “communication breakdown.” Overlapping codes were merged and redundancies were identified to condense the data into more abstract categories. By the end of this second cycle of coding, the very lengthy list of first-cycle codes had been distilled down to a more manageable set of about 150 refined codes or categories, reduced from the original 306.

Many initially distinct codes were combined into higher-level categories that captured the underlying ideas (for instance, numerous specific instances of communication issues might fall under one latent category “communication challenges”). The process remained open and iterative throughout. If a new insight emerged while doing second-cycle coding, earlier transcripts were revisited to re-check or recode segments, ensuring consistency throughout the analysis. All coding was done manually, using a combination of thorough read-throughs and keyword searches on the digital transcripts (aided by tools in Microsoft Teams for finding key terms), which helped maintain rigor and manage the evolving code list.

By the conclusion of Phase 2, a solid foundation of codes had been laid – both semantic and latent – that would feed into theme development. The first-cycle coding provided a detailed, data-close view with many discrete codes, and the second-cycle coding elevated the analysis to more abstract categories by grouping those details. This two-cycle approach ensured that the coding captured both the surface-level content of the interviews and the underlying patterns, in line with Braun and Clarke’s emphasis on thorough coding and Saldaña’s multi-cycle coding technique. With a structured set of codes in hand, identifying themes was begun.

### ***Phase 3: Searching for Themes***

Phase 3 involved examining the relationships among the codes in order to develop initial themes. Codes were collated into potential theme groupings. First, the full list of codes was reviewed (and how frequently each appeared across interviews) and then clustering similar or related codes together began. All first- and second-cycle codes were

copied and pasted into a separate document and then sorted into piles or lists that appeared to correspond to a common idea.

For example, codes like “unclear goals,” “different priorities,” and “mission mismatch” were placed together because they all suggested a misalignment between institutions; This tentative group was labeled “Misaligned Goals between Institutions,” indicating a possible theme about conflicting objectives. At this stage, nothing was finalized – it was an exploratory sorting exercise to see how codes might naturally cluster. Approximately twenty-two preliminary theme clusters were generated from the full code list. These clusters were essentially candidate themes or sub-themes.

By way of illustration, one such grouping (which were termed “Group 1” in the notes) brought together codes related to preparing students and supporting their success – it included items like “academic readiness programs,” “capacity building initiatives,” “common objectives,” and “mentoring and coaching,” among others, all of which seemed to revolve around the idea of building student readiness and success through partnership efforts. Each of the twenty-two code clusters represented a different facet of the data, and many were informed by the research questions (for instance, some groups clearly related to partnership communication, others to skills or knowledge).

By the end of Phase 3, a preliminary set of thematic buckets had been established to organize the many codes. The goal was to see broader patterns of meaning – essentially, to answer, “What is this code telling us overall?” and “How do these codes relate to each other in a meaningful way?” At this point, these were still candidate themes. Each cluster was assigned a working label, usually a descriptive phrase or

tentative theme name, to capture the essence of the group with the understanding that these labels might evolve over time. The important outcome of this phase was that the data were no longer just a list of 150 separate codes; they were now organized into a smaller number of coherent clusters that hinted at the major themes in the study's findings.

#### ***Phase 4: Reviewing Themes***

During Phase 4, the candidate themes identified in Phase 3 were rigorously reviewed to ensure that they accurately represented the coded data and to further refine their boundaries. This phase entailed two levels of review. Initially, each code within a theme was systematically reviewed; all excerpts (interview quotes) associated with the codes grouped under a specific theme were re-read to assess internal consistency, ensuring that the codes within each cluster genuinely fit together and reflected a unified concept.

During the review of data under a theme, it was consistently considered whether all the codes and excerpts conveyed a unified narrative. It was asked "Are they all aspects of the same underlying idea?" If a code was found not to fit well with the others in a theme, or if two distinct ideas were present within a single cluster, adjustments were made accordingly. (for example, splitting one preliminary theme into two, or moving a code to a different cluster).

Second, a cross-theme check was performed: different themes were compared with one another to ensure that each theme was sufficiently distinct and that there was no excessive overlap. This process refined the theme definitions; when two tentative themes

appeared to address the same overarching idea, they were considered for merging. Conversely, if a theme was identified as too broad, it was considered for division into more specific components. During this step, the original data (the interview transcripts) were also revisited in context as needed to ensure that the themes accurately reflected participants' intended meanings and that interpretations remained grounded in the data rather than being influenced by unsupported assumptions.

Additionally, the themes were checked against the research questions, which served as a key criterion for this study. Because each research question addressed a distinct aspect of partnership (with RQ1 focusing on collaboration and communication, and RQ2 on the necessary knowledge and skills), it was important to ensure that the themes collectively addressed both questions and that each theme contributed to answering one or both. This process prompted the arrangement of candidate themes by research question as an additional check. Through iterative review, the list of themes was refined, with consolidation occurring where appropriate and any theme lacking sufficient support from the data being discarded. By the conclusion of Phase 4, a revised set of themes had emerged that were internally coherent, clearly differentiated from one another, and firmly grounded in the coded data and framework.

#### ***Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes***

Phase 5 focused on defining and naming the finalized themes. Following the iterative reviews conducted in the previous phase, each theme was clearly articulated and assigned a succinct name that captured its essence. For each theme, a brief definition or description was written, explicitly detailing the essence of what that theme encompassed.

For example, one preliminary theme initially labeled simply “Barriers” during the grouping phase was further refined at this stage. In the process of defining the theme, it became clear that it specifically referred to obstacles in communication within the partnership. As a result, its definition was expanded and the theme was renamed “Barriers to Effective Partnership Communication,” a title that more precisely conveys its content. This step of refining names is important for clarity, ensuring that each theme’s name is immediately informative to the reader regarding its coverage. Braun and Clarke (2008) emphasized that theme names should be concise and provide a sense of the aspect of data each theme captures, which guided the approach to naming.

During this phase, consideration was given to whether some themes possessed a hierarchical structure—that is, the existence of main themes and sub-themes. It was noted that certain broad themes naturally encompassed more specific facets. For example, a broad idea that emerged was the importance of trust and relationships in partnerships. Within this overarching concept, more specific notions such as the foundational nature of collaboration and the personal leadership skills required to build trust were identified. Analysis revealed that what was ultimately termed “Collaboration is Foundation” and “Interpersonal Leadership Skills” were closely related under the umbrella of building trusting relationships.

Instead of merging these themes, due to their distinct focuses, Trusted Relationships was treated as an overarching concept, with these two themes considered related under that umbrella. Such hierarchical thinking made it possible to acknowledge connections between themes without collapsing them inappropriately. In the final

presentation, all major themes were presented at the same level for simplicity, though conceptual linkages—such as collaboration practices connecting with interpersonal skills and trust—were recognized.

By the end of Phase 5, a set of clearly defined themes with meaningful names had been established. Each theme could be succinctly described in a few sentences that captured its core idea, with direct links to specific examples in the data. The six final identified themes are as follows:

**Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation.** Collaboration is the essential starting point for partnership success, requiring joint planning and coordinated efforts across institutions to achieve shared goals.

**Theme 2: Shared Vision.** A shared vision aligns both institutions around common goals, creating a unified purpose that guides all partnership activities.

**Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication.** Continuous, open, and honest communication sustains trust and alignment, preventing misunderstandings and strengthening the partnership.

**Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies.** Understanding each partner's systems, policies, and culture enables effective coordination and informed decision-making across institutions.

**Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills.** Strong interpersonal leadership skills, including empathy, trust-building, and collaborative influence, are vital for fostering relationships that sustain partnerships.

**Theme 6: Continuous Improvement and Data Use.** Commitment to ongoing evaluation and data-driven adjustments ensures the partnership evolves and improves over time.

***Phase 6: Producing the Report***

In the final phase, the analysis was synthesized, and a narrative report of the findings was prepared (Braun & Clarke, 2008). This write-up phase involved explaining each theme in turn, illustrating them with evidence from the data, and showing how they answer the research questions. The goal was to present the results in a coherent, reader-friendly manner that accurately reflects the analysis.

In this study, the data analysis yielded six major themes, each supported by multiple codes and participant quotes (providing a clear chain of evidence from raw data to theme). Careful alignment of the themes with the study's guiding research questions ensured that the findings directly addressed the intended areas of exploration.

Specifically, the first research question (RQ1: How do school district and community college personnel describe the role of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships?) was primarily addressed by Theme 1, Theme 2, Theme 3, and Theme 4, which all related to aspects of collaboration and communication.

The second research question (RQ2: How do these personnel describe the knowledge and skills needed for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships?) was addressed by Theme 4, Theme 5, and Theme 6, focusing on cross-system knowledge, interpersonal skills, and continuous improvement practices, respectively. It is worth noting that Theme 4—understanding both systems—emerged as

relevant to answering both RQ1 and RQ2, intersecting communication/collaboration and necessary knowledge.

In reporting the results, each of the six themes was presented in narrative form, incorporating detailed descriptions and direct quotations from participants to illustrate each theme. Below is a summary of the final themes and representative evidence from participant interviews, integrated into the narrative:

### **Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation**

Participants described collaboration as the fundamental bedrock of a successful partnership, emphasizing that mutual effort between the college and the school district was not optional but necessary for achieving their shared goals. This theme encompasses the practical ways partners worked together, such as aligning curricula, sharing resources, and coordinating activities across institutions, all with the goal of supporting student success.

Leaders talked about collaboration in both “horizontal and vertical” terms, meaning they strove for teamwork not just between the college and district (horizontal) but also within each organization’s levels (vertical) to ensure everyone was on the same page. One Community College Leader 4 (CCL4) underscored the importance of joint planning, saying, “We had to learn to plan together: curriculum, advising, even student events. It wasn’t optional if we wanted success.” In other words, they discovered that only by planning and working together could they see positive outcomes.

Senior School District Leader 2 (SSDL2) put it plainly: “Collaboration is basically an open discussion and planning between two or more entities to ensure that

there is connection.” This comment illustrated that for these educators, collaboration was viewed as essential for the partnership’s very existence and efficacy. They believed that without a strong collaborative foundation, the partnership would falter. Theme 1 thus highlights that establishing a culture of collaboration was the first and arguably most crucial step in their partnership-building process. Collaboration was the enabling force that made all other efforts (like shared programs or student support initiatives) possible by ensuring unity of effort and pooling of strengths.

## **Theme 2: Shared Vision**

A clear, shared vision between the community college and the school district emerged as another critical theme. Participants noted that while each institution initially had its own mission and objectives, a common focus on student success allowed them to find mutual purpose.

In practice, this meant developing aligned goals and a joint mission for the partnership. One school district leader reflected on this process: “Our mission statements were different, but we found common ground in student success. That’s where the real work began.”. This quote indicated that once both sides identified their overlapping aim of helping students succeed, they could truly start collaborating in earnest. A community college leader likewise said, “We had to align our goals before we could align our programs.”, stressing that agreeing on what they wanted to achieve together (such as increasing college readiness or improving dual enrollment outcomes) was a prerequisite to implementing any joint initiatives.

Theme 2 encapsulated the idea that a unifying vision and mutually agreed-upon goals serve as a guiding star for the partnership. Participants described formalizing this shared vision through mechanisms like Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or regular joint planning meetings, and referred to it as doing “mission work” together. By clearly defining what success looked like for both the college and the district, leaders could ensure that all partnership activities remained aligned with that vision. In summary, Theme 2 highlighted that the partnership’s strength came from forging a shared mission — once both institutions were striving toward the same ultimate goals, their collaboration became much more focused and effective.

### **Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication**

The third theme centered on the practice of continuous, open communication between the partners. Nearly every participant stressed that beyond initial collaboration, it was crucial to maintain regular and open lines of communication as the partnership went on. Early in the partnership, they encountered issues stemming from miscommunication or lack of communication.

Community College Leader 6 admitted, “We had a lot of miscommunications early on. Once we started weekly check-ins, things improved dramatically.” This reflected a lesson learned: instituting routine communication (such as weekly update meetings or calls) helped prevent misunderstandings and kept everyone aligned. Transparency was another key element – being honest and upfront about challenges, changes, or expectations. School District Leader 3 put it succinctly: “Transparency builds

trust. Without it, partnerships fall apart.”. This quote highlighted that open sharing of information (transparency) was seen as the glue holding the partnership together.

When people withheld information or were not clear, it bred mistrust and could undermine the collaboration. Under this theme, participants gave examples of communication tools and strategies they used: for instance, jointly maintaining a shared document or platform for updates, clarifying jargon and acronyms so both sides understood each other’s language, and establishing protocols for feedback so that any issues could be discussed openly.

Essentially, Theme 3 conveyed that ongoing, transparent communication was viewed as a continuous process that needed attention throughout the partnership. It ensured that both institutions remained in sync, could address issues proactively, and sustained the trust necessary for long-term collaboration. This theme directly tied back to RQ1’s focus on communication as a factor in partnerships, affirming that regular, candid communication practices were indeed fundamental to the partnership’s success as described by participants.

#### **Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies**

Another major theme was the importance of each partner developing a strong understanding of the other’s institutional system, policies, and culture. Participants reported that initially, differences in how the college and the K–12 system operated created confusion; thus, learning about each other’s “world” was critical. One community college leader explained that “Understanding each other’s calendars, credentialing rules, and even acronyms was half the battle.” In other words, having practical knowledge such

as knowing when each school's academic year started and ended, understanding the requirements for course credits or faculty credentials, and being familiar with the shorthand terms each side used was necessary to coordinate efforts effectively. A school district leader similarly noted, "We had to learn how their system worked before we could collaborate effectively."

Theme 4 illustrated that bridging the partnership required cross-institutional literacy: knowing the policies, procedures, and constraints of both the community college and the school district. This included understanding state or accreditation requirements, funding and budget processes, administrative hierarchies, and decision-making protocols in each institution. By gaining this knowledge, college and school personnel could better align their schedules (for instance, aligning a college course schedule with the high school semester), comply with each other's regulations, and avoid missteps that come from ignorance of the other system.

Participants saw this mutual knowledge as empowering – once they understood each other's bureaucracies and terminologies, they could find creative solutions that worked for both sides. Thus, Theme 4 spoke to the role of informed understanding: effective partnership building was partly an educational process in itself, where each party educated the other (and themselves) about how their organization functions. This theme was relevant to both RQ1 (communication/collaboration improves when you understand each other's context) and RQ2 (certain knowledge is needed, namely knowledge of partner's systems and policies, to sustain the partnership).

### **Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills**

Beyond organizational structures, participants emphasized the human element – the personal leadership qualities and skills that individuals brought to the partnership. Theme 5 encapsulates the idea that relationship-building and “soft” leadership skills were vital for creating and sustaining the collaboration.

Many interviewees noted that titles and formal authority alone could not make the partnership work; it was the people skills of leaders that made the difference. A community college leader stated, “It’s not just about titles—it’s about listening, mentoring, and showing up.” This highlighted attributes like active listening (truly hearing concerns and ideas from the other side), a mentorship mindset (guiding and supporting colleagues), and reliability/presence (consistently participating and being available) as key to effective partnership leadership. Another participant from the school district commented, “The leaders who build relationships are the ones who make partnerships last.” This underscored that trust, respect, and personal rapport between individuals in the college and district were seen as the glue that held the institutions together.

Under Theme 5, qualities such as empathy, trustworthiness, openness, and the ability to resolve conflicts diplomatically were frequently mentioned. Leaders needed to be able to influence without authority, which means persuading and motivating partner colleagues even when those colleagues were not within one’s own chain of command. Achieving this requires emotional intelligence and effective communication skills. Participants gave examples of these skills in action: one spoke of a college dean who

always took the time to understand high school teachers' perspectives (showing empathy), another mentioned a school administrator who became a "bridge" person that everyone trusted on both sides, and so forth. Thus, Theme 5 highlighted that successful partnerships were driven by leaders who exercised interpersonal skills – building trust through authentic relationships, demonstrating respect, and leading collaboratively rather than through hierarchy. These findings directly addressed RQ2 by identifying the skills (leadership and relationship skills) needed to sustain partnerships.

### **Theme 6: Continuous Improvement and Data Use**

The final theme centered on a commitment to continually evaluate the partnership's efforts and make data-informed improvements. Participants described a culture of ongoing reflection and adjustment; they did not view the partnership as a static agreement, but as something that required regular check-ups and refinements.

For instance, a community college leader shared, "We used student outcome data to refine our dual enrollment strategy." This indicated that they collected and examined data such as how students were performing in dual enrollment courses, and based on that evidence, they made changes to improve the program (perhaps offering extra support where students struggled, or adjusting the curriculum). Likewise, a school district leader noted, "Feedback from staff helped us redesign our advising model to better support transitions." In this case, they listened to qualitative feedback from teachers or counselors and used those insights to change how they advised students moving from high school to college.

Theme 6 captured this ethos of continuous improvement – regularly asking “How are we doing? What can be improved?” and using systematic information (quantitative data like enrollment numbers, success rates, or qualitative input from stakeholder feedback) to inform decisions. This approach ensured that the partnership did not become stagnant; instead, it evolved in response to what was working or not working. Participants saw this as a form of mutual accountability as well: both institutions held themselves accountable for outcomes and were willing to change practices for the sake of better results. They mentioned setting up periodic partnership review meetings and creating joint metrics for success as examples of institutionalizing continuous improvement.

Ultimately, Theme 6 reflected a forward-looking, evaluative mindset in the partnership – one that values evidence and adaptability. This directly relates to RQ2 in terms of the skills/knowledge needed (the skills to evaluate and use data, and the mindset of continuous improvement) and also tied back to sustaining the partnership long-term, because a partnership that learns and adapts is more likely to endure.

In summary, the data analysis process, following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic approach and utilizing Saldaña’s coding methods, produced six well-defined themes: Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation; Theme 2: Shared Vision; Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication; Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies; Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills; and Theme 6: Continuous Improvement/Data Use.

Each of these themes was strongly grounded in the participants’ own words and experiences, providing a robust answer to the research questions. The themes relating to

collaboration, shared vision, and communication (Themes 1–3, and partly 4) explained how the partnership was established and sustained (addressing RQ1), while the themes relating to cross-system knowledge, leadership skills, and continuous improvement (Themes 4–6) shed light on the capacities needed to create and maintain that partnership (addressing RQ2).

The exemplar quotes interwoven above were representative of broader patterns in the dataset and serve to reinforce that these themes truly emerged from the participants’ perspectives rather than from my conjectures. All phases of analysis were documented carefully, and there is a clear chain of evidence linking raw data to codes to themes. This rigorous, iterative analytical process ensured that the final narrative (the write-up in this section) accurately and compellingly reflected how school district and community college personnel described their partnership’s dynamics – in their own voices and with the depth and nuance that their insights provide. Each theme, as described, can be traced back to multiple specific interviews and examples, underscoring the credibility of these results and their alignment with the study’s core questions.

Table 4 summarizes how each major theme derived from the data analysis aligns with the guiding research questions of the study.

**Table 4**

*Research Questions and Data Aligned Themes*

Research Question	Aligned Themes
<b>RQ1:</b> How do school district and community college personnel describe the role of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships?	Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation Theme 2: Shared Vision Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication

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<b>RQ2:</b> How do school district and community college personnel describe the knowledge and skills needed for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships?	Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills Theme 6: Continuous Improvement/Data Use
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This table shows that each theme was not only grounded in participant data but also directly contributed to answering the study's core questions. Each theme was thus a product of systematic coding and thoughtful aggregation of related ideas, validated by reviewing actual interview excerpts. This iterative coding-to-theme process was thoroughly documented so that another reviewer could follow the logic and see how raw data was synthesized into final themes.

### **Software Applications Used for Analysis**

The analysis utilized several software applications to improve accuracy and efficiency. Microsoft Teams was used to record and transcribe interviews, enabling thorough data capture and organization across different participant locations. Additionally, Microsoft Word supported the compilation of coded summaries and the presentation of findings, while Excel was employed to maintain structure and facilitate the alignment of themes.

**Microsoft Teams (Recording & Transcription).** Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams to accommodate participants in different locations. Sessions were recorded with participant consent, and the platform provided automatic audio/video recordings used for transcription. Instead of using automated transcription or specialist qualitative analysis software, the transcription process was carried out manually. Each transcript was carefully reviewed, and key segments were highlighted to identify

significant words and phrases for coding. This hands-on approach enabled identification of speakers and allowed for annotation during the transcription process. The final transcripts were formatted verbatim to facilitate subsequent coding and analysis.

**Microsoft Word (Supporting Tools).** The reporting of results was completed in Microsoft Word, which was used to export coded summaries and compile findings. Summaries from the manual analysis were then written up in Word, with careful referencing of participant quotes using pseudonyms. Codes identified through manual review of transcripts were sorted into Group file folders; a total of 21 folders were eventually created. This format allowed codes to be listed by frequency and theme, providing a quantitative overview to supplement the qualitative findings. These Microsoft365 tools supported planning and documentation rather than serving as primary analysis instruments.

The integration of these software applications increased the efficiency and consistency of the analysis. Teams contributed reliable recordings for data collection and organization, while Word facilitated the presentation and verification of analysis. The reliability of the coding process was supported by logging exactly which excerpts were assigned to each category, ensuring transparency. Managing the large volume of qualitative data was achieved through systematic manual methods given the extensive amount of transcript material. Conducting this analysis manually required careful attention to detail to avoid errors or omissions.

Overall, the use of manual transcript review and associated tools aligned with established practices in qualitative research, enabling prioritization of data interpretation

over purely technical processes. For instance, manual review enabled retrieval of all references to themes like “lack of communication” across interviews, simplifying the analysis and extraction of relevant quotations. Using clear documentation also contributed to auditability, as project files recorded all coding and theme development activities, allowing for peer review or audit of analytic procedures.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the combination of a systematic six-step analysis method, structured coding processes, and appropriate software tools formed the basis for analyzing data in this project. Data analysis commenced upon availability of transcripts and continued iteratively through manual coding and theming over several weeks, with software facilitating the organization and tracking of codes. The transcripts were handled in Word (ensuring accurate, editable data), coding was executed through careful reading and notation (with a codebook maintained in Excel to give coding structure and consistency), and analysis outputs (themes, illustrative quotes) were assembled using Word and Excel into the final study report. This approach satisfied the qualitative criteria of transparency and credibility. It showed exactly when and how each decision was made – from initial coding on paper to theme collation in a spreadsheet – and could demonstrate what tools were used to facilitate those decisions. By clearly documenting the use of everyday software in the analytic process, it was ensured that the partnership study’s findings were not only data-driven and trustworthy, but also readily understandable to others (committee members or partner organizations) who might review the analysis process. The resulting themes provided evidence-based answers to research questions concerning

communication and collaboration in school–college partnerships, which are further developed as recommendations in the project's concluding section. Each theme was linked to the original data through manually derived codes, ensuring transparency and validity in the analysis.

### **Project Deliverable Outcome**

The ultimate outcome of this study was a project deliverable intended to put the research findings into practice. Specifically, it consisted of a comprehensive professional development program that aimed to strengthen senior leadership within school and community college partnerships. Based on the analyzed results (the identified themes and participant recommendations), this deliverable provided a structured plan and resources for improving collaboration and communication between educational partnership presidents, vice-presidents of academic affairs, and other senior level executives and administrators. In essence, the deliverable translated the study's qualitative insights into actionable strategies and learning experiences for administrators.

The professional development (PD) program created as the project deliverable was designed to address the findings from your data analysis. Each theme informed specific components of the PD curriculum:

**Table 5***Themes Aligned with PD Program Components*

Theme	PD Program Component
Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation	Module on joint curriculum planning, shared leadership models, and cross-institutional teamwork exercises.
Theme 2: Shared Vision	Module on strategic alignment, mission mapping, and crafting shared goals across institutions.
Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication	Module feedback loops, digital communication platforms, and conflict resolution strategies.
Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies	Module on policy literacy, calendar synchronization, and credentialing requirements across K–12 and higher ed.
Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills	Leadership lab module focused on mentoring, empathy, active listening, and relationship-building.
Theme 6: Continuous Improvement/Data Use	Module on data literacy training, evaluation frameworks, and iterative improvement planning using student and staff feedback.

By implementing this professional development program, the participating school district and community college senior leaders will have a clear pathway to strengthen their partnership using the very insights contributed by their own members and peers in this study. The deliverable was thus the tangible outcome of the research: it addressed identified gaps (for example, if the study found senior level leaders felt uncertain about who should lead initiatives, the PD emphasized distributed leadership approaches to clarify roles) and leverages identified strengths (if the study found that informal relationship-building was a success factor, the PD incorporated scheduled social mixers or get-to-know-you rotations). In short, the project deliverable was a customized training and support package that converts the themes of effective collaboration and communication into improved daily practice. It represented the social change intention of the project – to move from knowing what makes partnerships successful to actively doing things that make partnerships successful, guided by data.

Through this data-driven professional development initiative, senior level administrators from both institutions would become better equipped to communicate openly, align their efforts, and preempt or resolve challenges. This process would ultimately lead to stronger school–college partnerships that benefit students, who are the ultimate stakeholders, across the educational continuum. The deliverable not only fulfilled the need identified in the problem (lack of resources to help personnel improve collaboration) but did so in a way that was informed by authentic voices and real experiences, thereby maximizing its relevance and impact.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

The project consists of a three-day professional development workshop that meets the criteria for professional development (PD) genre projects.

The primary goals of the workshop are to:

- Equip K–12 and community college administrators with practical collaboration strategies.
- Facilitate the development of a shared vision and mutual goals between institutions.
- Improve transparent communication and understanding of each other's systems.
- Strengthen interpersonal leadership and trust among stakeholders.
- Establish a framework for continuous improvement using data and feedback.

These goals are directly aligned with the six themes identified through data collection in the qualitative data analysis section and are operationalized through structured activities, planning tools, and follow-up implementation support.

### **Rationale**

This project is a professional development training and curriculum workshop. This section explains why a multi-day professional development (PD) workshop was the genre chosen and how it was developed based on research and theory, in order to address the problem of failed community college–school district partnerships due to poor communication and collaboration. The project study identified that Ballentine Technical

College and Kvyville County Public School District (pseudonyms) had difficulty in establishing sustainable college-school district partnerships, and no professional development resources existed to help faculty and staff sustain successful collaboration. In response, the project's culminating deliverable is a multi-day PD workshop aimed at strengthening inter-institutional communication and collaboration. Importantly, the workshop design explicitly integrates six key themes identified as crucial for effective collaboration: (1) collaboration foundation, (2) shared vision/mutual goals, (3) ongoing transparent communication, (4) knowledge of both systems/policies, (5) interpersonal skills, and (6) continuous improvement/data use. Each of these themes is woven into the workshop's content and processes, ensuring that the training addresses all dimensions of partnership-building identified in the study and literature. This section covers four key aspects of the project design:

1. Addressing the Specific Problem with Multi-Day PD. How the format and features of a multi-day workshop directly address the identified communication and collaboration gaps, laying a foundation for collaboration (Theme 1) within the partnership.
2. Research/Theory Criteria Guiding Development. The scholarly frameworks and methodologies that shaped the project (e.g., small group theory and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis), and how they ensure the workshop aligns with best practices (including creating a shared vision (Theme 2), fostering transparent communication (Theme 3), etc.).

3. **Data Analysis Findings and Workshop Design.** How the qualitative findings (themes) from participant interviews informed the content and structure of the PD sessions, ensuring that knowledge of both systems (Theme 4) and interpersonal skills (Theme 5) needs were addressed, and that the workshop itself is a product of data use (Theme 6).
4. **Expected Impact on Collaboration.** The anticipated strengthening in community college-school district partnerships as a result of the workshop, and how outcomes align with both the initial problem and the six themes (e.g., establishment of mutual goals, ongoing communication channels, continuous improvement practices).

By linking problem, theory, data, and solution, this section demonstrates that the chosen genre, a sustained multi-day PD workshop, is not only appropriate but optimally suited to bring about the needed change. The explanation is organized into clear sections, supported by evidence from the project study proposal and relevant literature. Table 6 is included to illustrate how each of the six collaboration themes is embedded in the workshop's design.

**Table 6***Integration of Collaboration Themes into the Workshop Design*

Collaboration Theme	Integration into Multi-Day Workshop
(1) Collaboration Foundation	Establishing a partnership framework: The workshop itself serves as a collaboration incubator, bringing college and district personnel together repeatedly. Leadership support and a dedicated multi-day format demonstrate institutional commitment to the partnership, signaling that collaboration is a priority. This sustained, structured interaction lays the foundation for future joint efforts by creating a shared space for planning and decision-making (i.e., a community of practice).
(2) Shared Vision/Mutual Goals	Aligning goals through joint planning: A core workshop module is devoted to co-developing a shared vision and mutually agreed-upon goals for the partnership. Participants collaboratively draft mission statements and action plans that reflect both institutions' priorities, ensuring everyone is "on the same page" moving forward. By the end, the group produces a written vision document that defines common outcomes and success measures.
(3) Ongoing Transparent Communication	Building communication structures and skills: The workshop emphasizes open, continuous dialogue. It introduces transparent communication protocols (e.g., regular joint meetings, shared email threads, or online workspaces) and teaches skills such as active listening and clear messaging. Activities like role-playing misunderstandings and establishing norms for information-sharing ensure that participants learn how to maintain honest, two-way communication beyond the workshop.
(4) Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies	Exchanging contextual knowledge: Through guided "knowledge swap" sessions, college and K-12 participants teach each other about their respective systems' policies, procedures, and constraints (academic calendars, accreditation standards, state K-12 requirements, etc.). Case studies and discussions are tailored to the local context so that solutions are grounded in an understanding of both institutional environments. This mutual learning builds empathy and smooths cross-institution operations.
(5) Interpersonal Skills	Strengthening relationships and trust: The workshop includes interpersonal skill-building tasks—icebreakers, team-building exercises, and conflict resolution practice. By interacting in small mixed groups, participants develop trust, respect, and rapport. They practice collaboration etiquette (turn-taking, respectful debate) and leadership skills like shared decision-making and empathy. This focus on human relationships aims to improve the soft skills that underpin effective partnerships.
(6) Continuous Improvement/Data Use	Creating feedback loops for ongoing improvement: The workshop is designed as part of a continuous improvement cycle. Its content was derived from data (interview findings), modeling how to use evidence to drive action. Moreover, the workshop concludes with establishing a plan for ongoing evaluation of the partnership (e.g., regular follow-up meetings or "partnership check-ins" to review progress and challenges). Participants are encouraged to use data (such as student outcomes or collaboration process feedback) to iteratively refine their joint initiatives.

### **How a Multi-Day Workshop Addresses the Identified Problem**

The core problem, as noted in Chapter 1, was that previous partnership efforts had not been successful due to communication gaps and misaligned goals between the college and district. Moreover, educators and administrators had never been formally taught how to collaborate across institutions, and no training or PD existed to help staff overcome these issues. A multi-day professional development workshop was chosen as the project's genre precisely to fill this void. This format is well-suited to address the problem in several ways, each of which aligns with the collaboration themes.

#### ***Establishing a Collaboration Foundation – Theme 1***

The format allows for the direct filling of the training gap. The absence of any PD resources was explicitly cited as a barrier in the local problem statement. By introducing a structured, multi-day training program, the project provides what was missing – a forum for learning and practicing effective collaboration skills. The workshop becomes the foundation for collaboration that did not exist before: it convenes stakeholders in a shared space, under the sponsorship of leadership, thereby signaling that working together is now a priority. In essence, the multi-day workshop functions as a professional development activity designed to strengthen communication and collaboration, fulfilling the outcome specified in the study. (Community College Leader 4). By committing multiple days to this effort, the college and district demonstrate an investment in partnership-building, laying groundwork for a sustained collaborative relationship.

***Shared Vision/Mutual Goals – Theme 2 & Transparent Communication – Theme 3***

The format allows the focus to be on communication and shared goals. The workshop is explicitly tailored to teach communication strategies, methods for aligning goals, and team building, which are the very areas identified as deficient. For example, participants engage in guided activities to craft a shared vision between the college and district (directly targeting Theme 2: Shared Vision/Mutual Goals), practice techniques for transparent dialogue (Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication), and build interpersonal trust. These activities align directly with the “communicative barriers” identified in the problem statement, such as unclear messaging and a lack of common goals. By spanning multiple days, the PD can address these complex skills in depth, allowing time for discussion, role-play, and reflection that a one-off session could not accommodate. Dedicating time to establish mutual goals ensures the partnership will have a unified direction, and emphasizing open communication norms prepares participants to maintain honesty and clarity in their interactions moving forward.

***Collaboration Foundation – Theme 1 & Interpersonal Skills – Theme 5***

The format enables the creation of a community of practice. A multi-day format means the same cohort of college and school personnel meet repeatedly over a period (e.g., a two-day initial workshop followed by a follow-up day). This sustained interaction forms a cross-institution professional learning community (PLC), essentially a small group of people dedicated to improving their partnership through collaboration. According to small group theory, bringing individuals together regularly fosters group cohesion and mutual understanding ((Marmarosh & Sproul, 2021). The workshop itself

becomes a living example of a school–college partnership on a small scale, modeling effective collaboration practices. This is critical because it provides participants with first-hand experience in working together successfully, which they can then transfer to their real-world joint initiatives. In terms of Theme 5 (Interpersonal Skills), the repeated, face-to-face engagement helps break down initial wariness and build trust; college and K-12 staff members get to know each other as individuals, not just by their titles. The project study highlighted the need for a “community of practice for faculty, staff, and officials” as a next step in strengthening partnerships. The multi-day workshop delivers exactly that: a temporary but intensive community of practice where new norms of communication and collaboration are established, and interpersonal relationships are formed.

The format allows for intensity and immersion for behavior change. Multi-day workshops have the advantage of immersion. Participants step away from their daily duties and focus intensively on partnership building over consecutive sessions. Research in professional development shows that such intensive PD (e.g., 20–40 hours spread over multiple days) is often necessary to change adult behavior. In this instance, fostering effective communication and enhancing collaboration between the school and college requires more than a one-hour seminar; it benefits from ongoing practice and reinforcement. Over multiple days, participants can try out new skills, receive feedback, and refine their approach, an iterative learning process consistent with Theme 6: Continuous Improvement. For instance, a communication exercise on Day 1 can be revisited on Day 2 after reflection, allowing participants to improve their technique. The

repeated interactions also help break down mistrust: on Day 1, college and school folks might still be somewhat wary of each other; by Day 3, after engaging in team problem-solving and informal networking built into the workshop, barriers soften, and a basic level of trust and camaraderie begins to form (Miller & Martin, 2021; Holzer & Daumiller, 2025). This immersion produces deeper learning and more durable changes in behavior and attitudes than a piecemeal approach would (Lansing et al., 2023).

#### ***Knowledge of Both Systems – Theme 4***

The format allows for flexible, contextual learning. The multi-day workshop format is flexible enough to be truly context-specific. Because it was created in response to data from this community college and this school district, the scenarios, discussions, and solutions are grounded in the participants' actual environment. For example, during the workshop, they might examine a case study of a previous joint initiative that did not achieve its intended outcomes and collectively redesign how it could be approached with better communication and coordination. Spreading the PD over several days allows time for participants to bring in their local context and policy knowledge, Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies, and learn from each other. Day 1 might surface specific inter-institutional challenges; Day 2 can then be adjusted on the fly to address those challenges in detail. This kind of responsiveness to local needs would be much harder to achieve in a generic, pre-packaged training.

It is significant that the project was conceived as an applied solution based on the study's findings, rather than a generic report. SSDL 8 emphasized, "A lot of people want to do [things] the way we've always done it, and that stifles growth and does not allow

for new solutions.” CCL4 echoed this sentiment, stating, “You cannot raise a child just by letting it exist. You must interact with it... The same thing with the partnership — you have got to nurture it and keep at it, otherwise it is not going to grow.”

The workshop’s extended schedule provides the contact hours needed to adapt content in real time (for instance, if a prominent issue comes up in discussion on Day 1, the facilitator can incorporate a segment on Day 2 to address it). Participants also spend time sharing the “ins and outs” of their respective institutions (e.g., college leaders explain higher-ed accreditation constraints, school administrators explain district policies), which directly builds mutual understanding. In short, the multi-day design ensures the training is highly relevant to attendees’ daily work and challenges in forming partnerships, as it continuously integrates knowledge of both educational systems throughout the sessions.

### ***Collaboration Foundation – Theme 1***

The format allows for a visible commitment from leadership. Choosing a multi-day workshop also sends a signal that leadership (e.g., the college president and the school district superintendent) are serious about improving collaboration. It is an investment of time, personnel, and resources, which underscores the importance of the issue. In the absence of prior PD, faculty might have felt that partnership issues were no one’s priority. Now, by convening a multi-day event with leaders’ backing, the institutions demonstrate a commitment to change – effectively establishing a stronger foundation for collaboration at the organizational level. This can boost morale and buy-

in: participants see that their difficulties in partnership-building are recognized by higher-ups and are being addressed systematically.

Leadership involvement is built into the workshop structure as well (for example, a joint kick-off by the college VP and a district assistant superintendent, and their participation in certain activities) to further validate the effort. Having leaders and frontline staff learn together helps align administrative support with staff-level practice. The project study's Implications section noted that one outcome of the project would be to "initiate better dialogue" among stakeholders and even among leaders themselves. By bringing everyone to the table (literally) for several days, the workshop creates a structured space for those cross-hierarchy and cross-institution dialogues that previously were rare or ineffective. This high-profile commitment sets a tone that collaboration is expected and valued, laying a supportive groundwork for the partnership going forward.

In summary, the multi-day professional development workshop is a highly appropriate and strategic solution to the identified problem. It directly provides the missing training that was hindering partnership success. Through an extended, immersive learning experience focusing on key themes of communication, shared goals, system understanding, and trust-building, it equips community college and school district personnel with the very skills and mutual understanding needed to establish and sustain their partnership.

By the end of the workshop series, participants will have co-developed practical tools (like communication protocols and a joint vision statement) and built relational trust with concrete outcomes that address why past initiatives "did not make it past the

brainstorming stage.” In essence, the workshop bridges the gap between recognizing the problem and acting on it: it moves stakeholders from merely acknowledging that “we need to collaborate better” to actually practicing how to collaborate better, guided by facilitators and structured activities. This hands-on approach is exactly what was needed to break the cycle of failed attempts and lay the groundwork for successful collaborations moving forward (Carvalho et al., 2021).

### ***Guiding Criteria from Research and Theory***

The development of the multi-day PD workshop was not done haphazardly – it was guided by established research findings and theoretical framework to ensure it would be effective. Small Group Theory for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was used to structure the workshop for effective group interaction, collaboration, and shared goals (Antinluoma et al., 2021). This theory supports Themes 1-6 by promoting equal participation, open communication, trust, and a unified purpose.

Together, these theories influenced what was included in the workshop and how it was delivered. Additionally, best practices from adult learning and PD literature (e.g., active learning, relevance, follow-up) were incorporated, aligning naturally with the above frameworks and the six collaboration themes. Table 7 summarizes the key design criteria derived from theory and research, and how they guided the workshop development:

**Table 7***Small Group Theory's Role in Workshop Design*

Guiding Framework	How It Shaped the Workshop
Small Group Theory (Professional Learning Community model) <i>Emphasize group interaction, shared goals, and trust.</i>	<p><b>Workshop Structure:</b> The PD was designed as an interactive small-group experience rather than a lecture series. Participants from the college and district were mixed into working teams (table groups) to discuss scenarios and solve problems together, reflecting the idea that people learn and bond through interaction. This fulfills the criterion that collaboration improves when individuals engage regularly and share leadership roles (supporting <b>Theme 1: Collaboration Foundation</b> and <b>Theme 5: Interpersonal Skills</b>).</p> <p><b>Interactive Activities:</b> The agenda included breakout discussions, team tasks, and collaborative problem-solving exercises. For example, one activity had each small group create a joint action plan for a hypothetical partnership project, forcing members to communicate and make decisions as a team – mirroring PLC dynamics. According to small group theory, communication is the tool for problem-solving in groups, so the workshop repeatedly put participants in situations where they had to communicate openly to achieve a goal (<b>Theme 3: Ongoing Communication in action</b>).</p> <p><b>Rotating Roles &amp; Shared Leadership:</b> In some exercises, participants took turns leading the discussion or presenting on behalf of their group. This practice was guided by the idea that in effective PLCs, all members share responsibility, and no single person dominates. By experiencing this egalitarian role rotation, attendees practiced the kind of power-sharing, mutual respect, and trust that are necessary for inter-organizational collaboration. This approach supports <b>Theme 2 (Shared Vision/Mutual Goals)</b> and <b>Theme 5</b>, as it encourages a sense of “we” and demonstrates how a shared vision can emerge when everyone’s voice is heard.</p>

Table 8 below illustrates how adult learning principles and professional development (PD) best practices were intentionally embedded into the workshop design to ensure effectiveness and relevance. The table is organized around two columns: the guiding frameworks and the ways these frameworks shaped the workshop experience. Each element reflects research-based strategies for adult learning—such as active engagement, contextual relevance, reflection, and sustained support—and connects them to the practical design choices made for this partnership-focused training. For example, active learning was prioritized through interactive activities rather than lectures, aligning with both adult learning theory and small group theory. Similarly, relevance was

achieved by grounding tasks in real partnership challenges, while reflection opportunities allowed participants to internalize lessons and link them to the workshop's themes.

Finally, a follow-up plan was incorporated to extend learning beyond the initial sessions, reinforcing the principle that PD should include ongoing support. Together, these components demonstrate that the workshop was not only theoretically sound but also purposefully structured to promote collaboration, shared vision, and continuous improvement among participants.

**Table 8***Adult Learning & PD Best Practices in Workshop Design*

Guiding Framework	How It Shaped the Workshop
<p>Adult Learning &amp; PD Best Practices (Aligned with above frameworks) – e.g., active learning, relevant context, follow-up support.</p>	<p><b>Active Learning:</b> In line with small group theory’s stress on interaction (and adult learning theory), long lectures are avoided. Every day of the workshop has participants actively engaged – brainstorming, role-playing, analyzing cases – rather than passively listening. Educational research indicates active engagement is crucial for PD effectiveness, so this criterion was met by making the learners do the talking and problem-solving. This approach also reinforced <b>Theme 5 (Interpersonal Skills)</b> by getting participants to practice collaboration skills hands-on.</p> <p><b>Relevance and Problem-Centering:</b> The scenarios and tasks were customized to the college–district context (drawn from real incidents or plausible local situations). This adheres to the principle that PD should directly connect to participants’ work challenges. The literature on partnerships notes that collaboration improves when people address real, shared problems together. Thus, the workshop was built around actual partnership pain points they face (like misaligned course expectations or scheduling conflicts for dual enrollment programs). This ensured that <b>Theme 4 (Knowledge of Both Systems)</b> was constantly invoked – as participants had to consider each other’s institutional context in every activity.</p> <p><b>Reflection Opportunities:</b> Each day ended with a guided reflection segment (“What did we learn? How can we apply it?”). Adults benefit from reflecting on new knowledge to internalize it. These reflections also tied back to the workshop themes: for instance, after the shared vision exercise, participants wrote down how having a mutual goal changes their perspective on collaboration (<b>Theme 2</b>). Reflection journals and group debriefs reinforced what was learned and allowed participants to voice any remaining questions or insights, making the learning more personal and actionable.</p> <p><b>Follow-Up Plan:</b> Recognizing that one-off training without follow-up often fades out, a continuity component was built in. A criterion gleaned from PD best practices is to include ongoing support or coaching. While the formal project deliverable is the workshop itself, establishing a monthly “partnership committee” meeting after the workshop series was recommended – effectively an ongoing PLC – to continue momentum and address new issues. This idea was influenced by both small group theory’s notion that ongoing group interaction solidifies relationships and <b>Theme 6: Continuous Improvement</b>. In these post-workshop meetings, the team can review partnership progress and data (e.g., student participation in joint programs, communication logs) and make iterative improvements. Although this follow-up is not an in-workshop activity, designing the PD with this next step in mind helps ensure the training leads to sustained action rather than a one-time experience. Participants are provided with a template “Collaboration Action Plan” to use in those future meetings, thereby extending the workshop’s impact into everyday practice.</p>

As shown above in Table 7, small group theory provided a blueprint for creating a learning environment that mirrors the collaborative, egalitarian culture desired to foster between the college and district (Friedman & Dorr, 2023). It emphasizes factors like equal participation, open communication, shared decision-making, and trust in group settings. These are implemented by making the workshop highly interactive and group oriented. One practical example is the use of PLC techniques: the workshop itself functions like a temporary PLC where members jointly tackled issues. This approach was chosen because small group theory (as adapted to PLCs) predicts that if one can get people to function well in a small group, they can carry those communication norms back to their larger organizations. Indeed, the project study had grounded its understanding of partnerships in small group theory from a professional learning perspective, implying that small, well-functioning groups can be engines for broader collaboration. Thus, one metric of success during the workshop is observing emerging group cohesion and collective problem-solving – signs that the collaboration foundation (Theme 1) and interpersonal trust (Theme 5) were taking root among participants.

Meanwhile, Braun and Clarke's six-phase analysis ensured that the content of the PD was exactly on target with what participants needed. By following this qualitative design and analysis, the project identified specific skill and knowledge gaps (themes) which then became the learning objectives of the workshop. For instance, if the data analysis revealed that unclear roles and goals was a common issue, then one of the workshop's first modules is Establishing Shared Goals and Clarifying Roles. This traceability from data to curriculum is a hallmark of the project's rigor. It meets the

scholarly standard that interventions should be needs-based and evidence-based. Braun & Clarke also stress defining and naming themes clearly; This is done in the workshop materials (agenda and handouts) by presenting each session with a title that directly corresponds to a challenge (e.g., “Building a Shared Vision” or “Improving Communication Channels”). The theoretical rigor behind identifying these themes gave both the developers and the attendees confidence that focusing on these areas would yield real benefits. The research process was essentially used to inform practice – a clear example of Continuous Improvement (Theme 6) in action, since the workshop was the result of iteratively analyzing and responding to data.

In addition, general adult education principles (active learning, relevance, feedback) were interwoven with both small group theory and the thematic approach. Notably, Collin and Smith (2021) and other PD literature highlighted that effective professional development involves active participation, collaboration, and sustained follow-up. These aligned closely with our six themes: active participation is inherent in group collaboration (Themes 1 & 5), collaboration itself requires shared goals and communication (Themes 2 & 3), and follow-up related to continuous improvement (Theme 6). For example, active learning was naturally achieved through the small-group tasks and role plays at each table; coherence and relevance were ensured by using real data-derived themes from the local context (so nothing in the workshop felt abstract or unrelated to their jobs); and follow-up was planned via the recommendation of ongoing meetings, echoing the idea that learning is an ongoing process.

During the workshop's communication module, participants engage in a role-play where a college department chair and a high school principal simulate a planning meeting that goes awry due to poor communication. The group then would discuss how to improve the interaction. This single activity meets multiple design criteria: it is active and participatory, people practice communication, and it directly stems from a data theme as the scenario mirrored a real example of miscommunication noted by participants. It addresses Theme 3: Ongoing Communication is reinforced through activities that invite feedback and reflection. After the role-play exercise, participants would receive constructive critiques and suggestions from both their peers and the facilitator, establishing a feedback loop that encourages open dialogue and continuous improvement.

In doing so, the facilitator does not treat theoretical and research-based criteria as abstract ideals; the facilitator translates them into concrete workshop features that align with how adults learn and change behavior. Each key theme of collaboration is not just mentioned, but operationalized through specific activities — making the workshop robustly grounded in both theory and practical evidence.

Overall, the design of the multi-day workshop is anchored in theory and research at every step. Small group theory ensures the workshop methodology (the *how*) promotes collaboration and trust, while Braun & Clarke's data-driven analysis approach ensured the workshop content (the *what*) targets the right issues. This dual grounding enhances the credibility and likely effectiveness of the PD. As the project study notes, documenting how communication and collaboration unfold (through research) is crucial so that the PD can address those dynamics. By adhering to these frameworks and best practices, the

workshop is theoretically sound and empirically substantiated – a combination that increases its chances of yielding positive change in practice.

### **Connection Between Data Analysis Findings and Workshop Content**

The findings from the qualitative data analysis (18 interviews analyzed thematically) were the blueprint for the workshop’s curriculum. After applying Braun & Clarke’s six-phase analysis, several key themes were identified that explained why the college–district partnerships were struggling. These core themes can be summarized as follows:

- Theme 1: Lack of a Shared Vision and Goals: College and school personnel were not aligned on what they wanted from the partnership (different priorities, no common plan).
- Theme 2: Communication Challenges: Infrequent or ineffective communication, misunderstandings due to jargon or unclear messaging, and the absence of structured communication channels.
- Theme 3: Trust and Relationship Deficits: Initial skepticism and lack of personal relationships led to low trust, making collaboration tentative. (Conversely, where trust existed, people saw better outcomes.)

These problems directly answered the research questions about the role of collaboration/communication and the needed skills for partnerships. They also pointed to exactly what the professional development should focus on. In fact, the project proposal explicitly stated that “a professional development activity will be developed using the results” of the analysis. That is precisely what was done: each major theme from the

research became a target for intervention in the workshop. Essentially, the PD workshop is a vehicle to act on each finding.

Below is an outline detailing the ways in which specific findings from the qualitative analysis directly shaped the professional development (PD) workshop content. This expansion provides concrete examples illustrating how each of the six key collaboration themes was operationalized through targeted activities and modules within the workshop. By closely mapping the data-derived issues to actionable workshop components, the design ensured that each area of need identified in the analysis was explicitly addressed and supported by relevant learning experiences.

**Addressing the Lack of Shared Vision (Data Theme → Workshop Module on Shared Vision | aligns with Theme 2: Shared Vision/Mutual Goals).** Participants in the study often described “different institutional missions” and a lack of common goals as a barrier to partnership. Therefore, the very first module of the workshop is “Building a Shared Vision for Partnership.” In this session, mixed groups of college and school stakeholders jointly draft a partnership mission statement and set three to five mutual goals for their collaboration. This directly responds to the data: for example, an interviewee had said, “We never sat down with the college to define what success looks like.” (School District Leader 8) In the workshop, facilitators will have them sit down and do exactly that – define success together. A structured visioning exercise is facilitated where each side first listed their top priorities, then the groups identified overlaps and negotiated a unified vision out of those overlaps. By the end of this module, the participants produce a draft vision document and a set of shared objectives, something

tangible they lacked before. This deliverable fulfills a critical need the analysis uncovered, providing a foundation for all subsequent collaborative efforts. In terms of the six themes, this module explicitly tackles Shared Vision/Mutual Goals (Theme 2) by creating consensus on goals, and it also implicitly requires Collaboration Foundation (Theme 1) because it brings everyone into the planning process from the start.

**Improving Communication (Data Theme → Multiple Workshop Modules on Communication | aligns with Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication and Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems).** Communication was a multifaceted issue in the data, so more than one segment was created in the workshop to address it. One key component, “Effective Communication Strategies,” teaches concrete skills: active listening, avoiding jargon, using common terminology, and setting up regular check-in routines. The content for this came directly from participant suggestions and complaints.

For instance, if a school staff member had said, “We’d go months without hearing updates from the college,” the workshop introduced tools like a communication calendar and protocols for biweekly check-in meetings to ensure regular contact – effectively solving that exact problem by institutionalizing ongoing communication (Theme 3).

Another segment is a role-play exercise on “clear communication” vs.

“miscommunication”: a real example is taken from the interview data of an email exchange that led to confusion (anonymized for privacy) and had participants reenact it with a partner, then rewrite the message together in a clearer, more transparent way. This granular exercise was inspired by quotes about “unclear emails” and misunderstandings.

By literally practicing how to communicate more clearly, participants addressed both

Theme 3 (Transparent Communication) and Theme 5 (Interpersonal Skills), since they learned how tone and clarity affect trust. Additionally, because the data showed unfamiliarity with each other's processes and constraints, a segment called "Did You Know? — Understanding Each Other's Systems" is included. In this activity, college folks explain one of their procedural constraints (like how course scheduling and enrollment at the college works) and school folks explained theirs (like the high school academic calendar or state testing schedule). This relates to Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies. It arose from the analysis noting differences in institutional culture and timeline often caused frustration. By fostering mutual understanding through direct information exchange in the workshop, that gap is addressed. In summary, every common communication failure or recommendation mentioned by interviewees was transformed into a lesson or activity: infrequent communication led to scheduling regular meetings; jargon issues led to creating a shared glossary; lack of a contact point led to providing an inter-institution contact directory, and so on. The data-to-content mapping was so explicit that one could match each complaint in the data to a remedy introduced in the PD.

**Building Trust and Relationships (Data Theme → Workshop Module on Trust-Building | aligns with Theme 5: Interpersonal Skills and Theme 1: Collaboration Foundation).** The analysis made it clear that interpersonal trust (or lack thereof) was a make-or-break factor in the partnership. People spoke of a "lack of trust on both sides" and how it made them hesitant to share information or commit to joint projects. Therefore, a sizable portion of the workshop is devoted to relationship-building

and trust. An interactive session titled “Breaking the Ice and Building Trust” was designed.

This might seem touchy-feely in a PD setting, but it was warranted by the data. The session involves extended personal introductions (not just name and title, but why each person cares about the partnership), sharing past positive experiences of teamwork, and even acknowledging past frustrations in a structured, solutions-oriented way. One activity in this module is a “Partnership Timeline” – together, participants map out the history of interactions between the college and district (including successful collaborations, attempted projects that failed, etc.) on a large timeline. They discuss this history openly to surface any lingering resentments or misunderstandings. Then they literally crumple up or mark a “reset” point on the timeline to symbolize starting fresh from the workshop onward. This somewhat symbolic exercise was included because multiple interviewees referenced historical tensions or previously failed attempts that still cast a shadow on current attitudes. The data told us: you can teach skills and set up meetings, but if the trust is not there, those efforts will not stick. So, the workshop had to also serve a team building and mindset-shifting function. By scheduling group lunches, informal coffee breaks, and these deliberate trust exercises, the PD creates opportunities for participants to bond on a personal level.

In the final reflection, the trust theme is explicitly revisited by asking: “What’s one action you will take to sustain trust with your counterpart after this workshop?” Attendees made commitments like “I will schedule a monthly informal check-in call” or “I’ll involve my counterpart early in planning to show I value their input.” These ideas

actually came from participants in the study who suggested more personal interaction and support from leadership to build trust. In sum, this part of the workshop tackled Theme 5: Interpersonal Skills head-on by improving relationship skills and empathy, and reinforced Theme 1: Collaboration Foundation since trust and personal rapport are foundational for any collaboration.

**Filling Specific Skill and Knowledge Gaps (Other Data Findings → Targeted Workshop Content | aligns with Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems and Theme 6: Continuous Improvement).** The second research question in the study asked about the knowledge and skills needed for personnel to create and sustain partnerships. Interview participants had various ideas, such as needing to understand each other's bureaucratic procedures, or having skills in conflict resolution and joint decision-making. Wherever the analysis pinpointed a specific skill gap or recommendation, a corresponding element was added to the workshop:

For example, some college staff did not fully understand K-12 curriculum standards, and vice versa, high school staff were not aware of community college accreditation rules. To address this, a brief “Systems 101” presentation is included on each side. The college representatives explained key aspects of community college operations (e.g., how college courses are approved, or FERPA privacy rules that affect data sharing), and the school representatives explained K-12 structures (e.g., state curriculum requirements, bell schedules, etc.). This mutual briefing fulfills Theme 4 (Knowledge of Both Systems) by ensuring participants leave with greater institutional literacy about their partner organization. This idea was reinforced during member

checking: one interview participant noted that simply understanding each other's constraints would have eased a lot of past frustration.

The need for networking and outreach skills was mentioned in the data (in the project's Implications, the idea of broadening networking was raised (School District Leader 3). Thus, a mini session on "Building Collaborative Networks" is included, which offers tips on expanding the partnership circle and engaging additional stakeholders. Attendees practiced an "elevator pitch" they could use to get other faculty or community members excited about the partnership, thereby developing their outreach competency. This maps to the idea that sustainable collaboration often requires champions who can network effectively across boundaries. It also ties to Theme 1 (a broad foundation) and Theme 5 (leadership in relationships).

Conflict management emerged as another needed skill. The interviews described instances of contentious meetings or misinterpreted criticism that went unresolved. Therefore, the workshop featured a segment on "Productive Conflict Resolution." A simple protocol for addressing disagreements was taught (e.g., using "I" statements, focusing on issues not personalities, seeking common ground). Participants then engaged in a mediated role-play of a conflict scenario (for example, a disagreement over resource allocation for a joint program), and practiced resolving it using the protocol. This addressed both Theme 3 (Communication) and Theme 5 (Interpersonal skills) because it improved how they handle inevitable conflicts openly and respectfully.

Every piece of content in the workshop can be traced back to the qualitative findings. The sequence of the workshop was even influenced by the logical order

suggested by the data. The analysis implied that the first step to better collaboration is aligning vision; next, establishing clear communication channels; and throughout, building trust continuously. The workshop days are structured in that order: start with vision (big-picture alignment), then move to communication practices, then focus on deepening trust and planning next steps. This sequencing mirrors the thematic “cause-effect” relationships found in the data — for example, without a shared vision, improved communication might lack direction, and without communication, trust cannot grow. The data not only told us *what* to include, but also *the order* in which to tackle issues for maximum impact.

In essence, the workshop is the practical implementation of the study’s findings. It operationalizes the knowledge gained from stakeholders into actionable training. The project study became a “feedback loop” where participants identified problems, and those insights were then used to educate and empower the participants to solve those problems. This tight coupling between research and practice exemplifies evidence-based project design. It is likely one reason why the approach was well-received locally: it demonstrates that the professional development was not based on generic assumptions, but on local evidence of what was going wrong. This context-specific design increases the likelihood that the PD will indeed improve the situation, because it targets the precise pain points and even leverages solutions suggested by participants themselves.

By the end of the multi-day workshop, the content derived from the research findings ensures that attendees walk away with:

- A clear, jointly created shared vision and set of mutual goals for the partnership (addressing the former Lack of Shared Vision – Data Theme, and fulfilling Theme 2: Shared Vision/Mutual Goals).
- Established communication agreements (e.g., schedule for regular meetings, agreed communication channels and norms) and improved communication skills (addressing the Communication Challenges data theme, aligning with Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication).
- Stronger personal rapport and trust among key players, plus plans for maintaining those relationships (e.g., trust commitments, leadership support) (addressing the Trust Deficit theme, aligning with Theme 5: Interpersonal Skills).
- Better knowledge of each other’s systems and concrete tools to facilitate ongoing collaboration (such as contact lists, shared calendars, partnership protocols) (addressing knowledge/skill gaps from data, fulfilling Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems).
- An understanding of how to engage in continuous improvement of their partnership – they have practiced using data/feedback (survey results, reflection notes) during the workshop to adjust their plans, and they have scheduled follow-ups which will serve to evaluate and refine their collaborative efforts (anticipating future needs, aligning with Theme 6: Continuous Improvement/Data Use).

All of these outcomes tie directly back to the original data. For instance, if “lack of a common plan” was identified, now they have a common plan (a shared vision statement and partnership action plan). If “no regular communication” was a complaint,

now a recurring meeting schedule is in place. If “we didn’t understand how the other side works” was an issue, now each side has explained their system’s basics and provided reference materials to each other. This one-to-one correspondence between problem and solution is the hallmark of how the data guided the project’s content. It showcases the power of qualitative analysis in informing practice: by understanding the nuances of the partnership challenges, the workshop could be tailored to address them head-on.

***Expected Impact on Communication and Collaboration***

With the multi-day professional development workshop implemented, Significant improvements in how the community college and the school district work together were anticipated. These expected impacts follow directly from the training’s objectives and mirror the six collaboration themes, meaning the problems identified earlier should be substantially mitigated. In essence, if the workshop achieved its goals, it will have laid a strong collaboration foundation (Theme 1), established a shared vision (Theme 2), set up transparent communication (Theme 3), increased mutual knowledge (Theme 4), improved interpersonal relations (Theme 5), and initiated a cycle of continuous improvement (Theme 6). Here are the key impacts are expected to be seen:

**A Shared Vision and Aligned Goals for the Partnership (Theme 2: Shared Vision/Mutual Goals).** One immediate impact is that the college and district now would have a *concrete, shared vision* for their partnership – likely documented as a joint mission statement or memorandum of understanding that was developed during the workshop. This is a foundational change. Previously, each side had its own agenda, which led to initiatives stalling out. Going forward, both sides will be “on the same page”

about what they want to accomplish together. For example, instead of the community college aiming to increase dual-enrollment numbers while the district primarily wants facility support (two unrelated goals that pulled efforts in different directions), they might agree on a unified goal such as “Increase college readiness of K-12 students through a robust dual-enrollment program and aligned curriculum support.” Now every collaborative project can tie into this agreed purpose. Decision-making will also be easier: when disputes or differing ideas arise, the partners can refer back to “Does this serve our shared vision and goals?” Having a mutual vision thus becomes a north star for the partnership.

The collaboration theme of a shared vision is fulfilled – where there was lack of clarity, there is now a clear common direction. This should translate into stronger commitment on both sides because people know what they are working towards collectively. It also means the partnership can present itself with one voice to external stakeholders (e.g., if applying for grants or explaining the collaboration to the community), improving coherence and credibility. In summary, this impact addresses one of the root causes of past failure: lack of a common direction. With a shared vision established, efforts become synergistic rather than at cross-purposes.

**Established Communication Channels and Improved Communication Quality (Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication).** Far more regular and transparent communication between the institutions as a result of the workshop is expected to be seen. Because participants left with a plan for specific communication channels (for example, they might have set up a monthly in-person meeting and a bi-

weekly check-in via email or a shared Teams site), one impact is that communication will become systematic instead of ad-hoc. Where previously months could go by with little contact, now a schedule of interactions is in place.

Additionally, the quality of communication should improve, since attendees have learned and practiced clearer, more open communication techniques. Fewer misunderstandings and quicker information flow when issues arise are anticipated. For instance, jargon that used to confuse the other party will be reduced – a college participant, recalling the workshop, might avoid acronyms or explain them knowing that school staff may not be familiar, and vice versa. Each side also knows *who* to contact for various needs (because the workshop produced a contact list and clarified roles), so questions can be directed to the right person and answered promptly. A very tangible sign of improved communication could be the creation of a shared online workspace (something like a SharePoint site or Google Drive folder that both teams can access) that remains active after the workshop, where agendas, updates, and documents are posted openly. The increased transparency (sharing plans, progress reports, data openly between the college and district) will foster trust and reduce duplication of work. Essentially, communication will shift from reactive and sporadic to proactive and routine. Over time, this should lead to smoother coordination on joint initiatives: deadlines will not be missed due to “I didn’t know about that,” and any emerging concerns can be addressed in the next scheduled meeting rather than festering. This expected impact directly addresses the earlier findings of infrequent and unclear communication– the workshop’s emphasis on

ongoing transparent communication (Theme 3) should manifest as a new norm of openness and consistency in dialogue between the partners.

**Increased Trust and Stronger Working Relationships (Theme 5: Interpersonal Skills – trust, empathy, collaboration).** Perhaps the most important transformation anticipated is in the realm of trust and collegiality. After spending multiple days working closely and candidly together, community college and school district personnel should have developed personal rapport. The workshop’s team-building and interpersonal exercises were designed to humanize each side to the other, turning abstract “others” into known colleagues.

As a result, an increased level of mutual respect and trust is expected. Concretely, individuals will likely be more comfortable reaching out informally to their counterparts. For example, where before a college staff member might hesitate to call the school administrator (not wanting to bother them or unsure of reception), now there’s a personal connection (“We worked together in the workshop; I know this person and can call them if an issue comes up”). Improved collaborative etiquette post-workshop is also anticipated – having practiced active listening and conflict resolution, participants may handle disagreements more constructively and assume positive intent. This relational improvement is somewhat intangible but can be measured through climate surveys or anecdotal reports. Expected comments like “We’ve become a team” or “It feels like we’re in this together now” may emerge. In practical terms, higher trust yields more effective collaboration: people are more likely to share resources, admit shortcomings, and help each other.

For example, a district official might now feel comfortable saying to the college partner, “We’re struggling to get parent buy-in for this program. Do you have any ideas or data that could help?” trusting that the college will respond helpfully rather than judgmentally. The collaboration foundation (Theme 1) also solidifies here: trust and relationships are the bedrock of sustained partnership, so this impact indicates that the foundation has been rebuilt. Importantly, this addresses the earlier problem where lack of trust made collaboration tentative. With trust improved, participants will give the partnership the benefit of the doubt and persist through challenges rather than quickly withdrawing at the first sign of trouble.

**Concrete Collaborative Initiatives Launched or Revived (Product of Themes 1–5 in combination).** With better communication, aligned goals, and trust, the stage is set for actual partnership projects to flourish. One expected impact is that some collaborative ideas that previously stalled will now be revived and successfully implemented. For example, if the college and district had discussed starting a high-school-to-college mentorship program but it never took off due to miscommunication and unclear responsibilities, within a few months post-workshop, this program (or a similar joint initiative) will be expected to kick off. The difference is that now they have the mechanisms and goodwill to follow through: they know who will do what (role clarity), they have regular check-ins to monitor progress, they share a vision of why the program matters, and they trust each other to overcome hurdles. It is also expected to see innovative ideas emerge as a result of the improved relationship.

During the workshop, participants might have brainstormed or identified new potential areas of cooperation, such as creating a joint task force on curriculum alignment or co-hosting an annual partnership retreat for more staff. At least one or two such ideas will be expected to materialize into concrete plans with timelines and assigned task leaders. Essentially, the partnership should transition from talk to action. A key measure of this impact will be the number and scope of joint projects initiated in the year following the workshop compared to the year before. A clear uptick is predicted. The ultimate beneficiaries of this are students and the community: a stronger partnership should lead to enhanced opportunities for students (more dual-credit classes, smoother transitions to college, etc.), which was the broader goal. While measuring student outcomes is beyond the immediate scope, an increase in collaborative offerings (like new programs or services) is a direct expected result. This impact is a good litmus test of success because it means the partners have moved beyond planning into execution together – something that was largely missing when “efforts continually failed” previously.

#### **A Sustainable Collaboration Structure and Culture (Theme 1 and Theme 6).**

Another expected impact is that collaboration becomes ingrained in how the two institutions operate, rather than being an ad-hoc effort dependent on a few individuals. The workshop was the catalyst; it is anticipated that it will lead to ongoing structures that sustain the partnership. One such structure is the monthly partnership committee. It is recommended this is formed after the workshop (comprised of many of the same participants). If this is put into practice, it means there is a permanent forum to continue

what the workshop started – essentially institutionalizing the collaboration foundation (Theme 1) and committing to continuous improvement (Theme 6). This committee can continuously evaluate how the partnership is doing, address new issues, and onboard new members if someone leaves, thereby maintaining momentum.

Culturally, a shift from an us vs. them mentality to a more unified identity is expected when working on joint initiatives. Language might reflect this: instead of saying “the college did X” or “the district failed to do Y,” stakeholders might start saying “we decided X” or “our partnership needs Y.” This pronoun shift, subtle as it is, would indicate that they see themselves as part of one collaborative team when dealing with overlapping areas, which is a huge cultural change. Leadership is also expected to continue supporting the collaboration actively, perhaps by incorporating partnership goals into strategic plans or performance evaluations, which would further solidify the importance of the effort.

In terms of continuous improvement (Theme 6), it is foreseen that the partners will adopt habits of using data and feedback to refine their collaboration. For example, they might agree to review student participation data in joint programs every semester and troubleshoot any equity gaps or outcome shortfalls together. Or they might conduct a brief annual survey of participants in the partnership (teachers, counselors, etc.) to gather input on what is working or what else is needed and then adjust accordingly. These kinds of practices would demonstrate that the partnership is not static, but rather continually learning and improving. This is precisely the mindset the workshop aimed to instill through its data-driven approach. In sum, a sustainable structure plus a learning-oriented

culture means the improvements are likely to last well beyond the initial enthusiasm post-workshop.

**Resolution (or Significant Mitigation) of Initial Problem Areas.** Ultimately, it is expected that the specific original problems that plagued the partnership to be greatly diminished, if not resolved. Misalignment of objectives should be resolved because a shared vision is in place and regularly revisited (if someone drifts off course, the vision document anchors them back). Poor communication should be mitigated by the new routines and skills – fewer complaints are expected to be heard like “I had no idea this was happening” or “We never heard back,” because transparency and timely updates become the norm. The lack of any prior PD resource is now definitively addressed: the workshop itself created resources (materials, guidelines, contact networks) that remain as reference points.

For instance, the participants leave with a “Partnership Handbook” that includes the vision statement, communication plan, contact list, and other outputs from the workshop. This becomes a tangible resource they can use and even share with colleagues who were not in the workshop, thereby spreading the knowledge. In effect, the project delivered the promised solution to the documented gap in practice– so one impact is simply that this gap is closed; the college and district can no longer say “we don’t have any guidance on how to collaborate.” Instead, they have a model and a set of tools to follow. Improved attitudes are also expected: where there was frustration or apathy, there’s now optimism and a sense of possibility. Participants having experienced success in small tasks during the workshop should feel more confident that “we *can* do this.” That

confidence is an impact in itself, as it counteracts the defeatist outlook that may have existed after repeated failures.

**Positive Feedback Loop and Momentum (Theme 6: Continuous Improvement).** A subtle but critical impact is the creation of a positive feedback loop in collaboration efforts. Before, every failed attempt likely made people less inclined to try again, creating a downward spiral. Now, early wins post-workshop are anticipated that will create excitement and momentum. For example, suppose their first jointly organized event after the workshop (perhaps a parent orientation night for a dual-enrollment program) goes off smoothly and gets good attendance.

This success, made possible by better coordination, will encourage the team to tackle more together. Success breeds success: as they see tangible benefits of collaboration (big or small), stakeholders will become even more proactive in sustaining it. This dynamic is essentially continuous improvement in practice, where the outcomes of one cycle are used to inform and energize the next cycle. The workshop has primed them to look for feedback and results (a mini pre/post evaluation was done in the workshop to show the value of checking progress), so the participants are expected to naturally monitor how things are going and celebrate improvements.

Anecdotally, a college administrator might be heard saying a few months later, “Our partnership with the district has really turned a corner – we’re actually getting things done, and there’s a level of trust now.” That kind of testimonial, ideally supported by specifics (e.g., “we increased dual enrollment by 15% this semester because we coordinated recruitment efforts”), would indicate the workshop’s lasting impact.

Additionally, this positive momentum could lead them to broaden the collaboration – for instance, because communication lines are open, they may identify new areas to partner in (perhaps on grant writing, sharing professional development resources, or jointly engaging local industry for internships). In other words, success in the initially targeted areas can spill over into exploring further partnership opportunities, thereby continuously expanding, and deepening the college–school relationship.

In conclusion, the expected impact of the multi-day workshop is transformational for the college–district partnership. It aims to move them from a state of fragmentation and friction to one of alignment and cooperation. Each impact described – a shared vision, better communication, greater trust, successful joint initiatives, and a sustainable collaborative culture – directly addresses a corresponding problem that was previously hindering the partnership.

Essentially, where there was once confusion, isolation, and repeated failure, clarity, unity, and success are anticipated. These outcomes also validate the theoretical frameworks and themes that were built as a foundation: for example, small group theory would predict that a cohesive group (which our workshop helped form) will outperform a disjointed one, and that is expected to be seen in that partnership’s improved outcomes; similarly, the emphasis on professional development to improve the partnership demonstrates the study’s implication that targeted PD can catalyze organizational change.

Of course, these positive impacts will need to be nurtured and monitored beyond the workshop. The workshop is a catalyst, not a permanent cure-all. Continued leadership support and reinforcement of the new practices are necessary to maintain them (Menon,

2024). However, given that leadership was involved and that participants themselves developed the solutions, there is reasonable optimism that these changes will stick (Meidelina et al., 2023). If the impacts unfold as expected, this project could even serve as a model for other community college–school district partnerships facing similar issues. The approach of using research to inform a multi-day PD intervention could be shared and replicated (the workshop materials are available and adaptable), demonstrating how identifying issues via qualitative analysis and addressing them with a collaborative training experience can significantly improve educational partnerships (Lansing et al., 2023). Ultimately, the biggest winners from these improvements are the students and the broader community – a healthier college–K12 partnership means more seamless educational pathways for students, more efficient use of resources, and a united effort to improve local educational outcomes (Felton et al., 2023). This aligns perfectly with the social change potential the study aimed for, turning what was once an obstacle (failed partnerships) into an opportunity for positive, sustained collaboration (Sliwka et al., 2024).

### **Review of the Literature**

Professional development workshops spanning multiple days are a widely used strategy for improving educator practice. In the past five years (2020–2025), research has increasingly examined the effectiveness of sustained, multi-day teacher training and distilled the key factors that make these initiatives successful. At the same time, scholars have identified practical challenges in implementing multi-day workshops and documented exemplary programs with positive outcomes.

This literature review synthesizes recent peer-reviewed studies to provide an evidence-based overview of multi-day professional development (PD) workshops in education. A comprehensive search was conducted using databases Education Research Complete, with the following search terms *professional development efficacy, multi-day teacher training, teacher PD outcomes, teacher professional development outcomes, professional learning community, professional learning community training, and multi-day workshop*. The review is organized around four focal areas:

1. Effectiveness of Multi-Day PD Workshops: What do recent studies and meta-analyses say about the impact of multi-day PD on teacher performance and student learning?
2. Key Components of Successful Workshops: Which design features and practices are consistently associated with effective multi-day PD outcomes?
3. Challenges and Limitations: What common barriers or limitations arise in planning and executing multi-day workshops for educators?
4. Examples of Successful Programs: Illustrative cases or findings from specific multi-day PD initiatives that achieved notable improvements.

Throughout, the emphasis will be on high-quality evidence from 2020 onward, including systematic reviews and empirical studies. Consensus findings will be highlighted (e.g., the importance of active learning and follow-up support) and areas of debate (e.g., how much duration is “enough” or when PD becomes too burdensome) noted. By understanding this literature, educational leaders can better design professional development that truly benefits teachers and, ultimately, students.

## **Effectiveness of Multi-Day Professional Development Workshops**

Multi-day professional development workshops have shown moderate to strong effectiveness in enhancing teacher practices, with more modest gains in student achievement. Research in the early 2020s confirms that well-designed PD can positively impact teaching quality and, to a lesser extent, student learning outcomes across various subjects. Crucially, workshops delivered over multiple days (or spread sessions) tend to outperform one-off trainings, as they allow time for deeper learning and application. Key findings on effectiveness include:

### ***Positive Impact on Teaching and Learning***

A 2022 review of PD in science and technology education identified effective features—content focus, active learning, collaboration, coherence, and sustained duration—associated with improvements in teacher practice and student outcomes (Hubers et al., 2022). This indicates a substantial improvement in outcomes for teachers and/or students. While the exact measure of effect varied by study, such a large average effect suggests multi-day PD can significantly boost teacher content knowledge, instructional quality, and even student performance. Similarly, a 2020 meta-analysis focusing on literacy (Didion et al., 2020; Toste et al., 2020; and Sims et al., 2025) reported that teacher PD had a “moderate and significant” positive effect on K-8 student reading achievement. This reinforces that sustained PD is an effective avenue for improving at least some student outcomes.

### ***Sustained Duration vs. One-Shot Training***

Multi-day or multi-session workshops generally yielded better results than single-day workshops. Teachers need sufficient exposure and practice to change their methods, which brief sessions rarely provide. An influential earlier study by Yoon et al. (2007) (though prior to 2020) quantified that PD programs totaling about 50 hours or more were associated with notably larger gains in student test scores than shorter PD.

More recent literature supported this: duration remains critical. Li et al. (2022) noted that “short duration and lack of meaningful follow-up” limit PD effectiveness, especially compared to programs extended over weeks or months. In other words, a multi-day workshop (for example, a week-long institute or a series of monthly sessions) was more likely to produce lasting changes in teaching practice than a one-day seminar, because it provided continuity and reinforcement of new concepts.

### ***Diminishing Returns Beyond a Point***

Interestingly, newer research is refining the optimal duration of PD. The meta-analysis by You et al. (2024) found that moderate-length PD interventions (under 3 months, with less than 48 total contact hours) showed the highest effectiveness on average (Community College Leader 3). Programs with slightly longer engagement (over 72 hours and around 6 months duration, often involving ongoing support) were the second-most effective. This suggests that multi-day workshops are most effective when they are intensive yet time-limited, such as a series of sessions scheduled over a semester, rather than extremely prolonged courses. Extremely lengthy or open-ended PD might suffer from participant fatigue or attrition. In short, more days were good up to a point:

teachers benefit from extended learning opportunities, but designers should be mindful of overloading them. Multi-day workshops hit a “sweet spot” when they are substantial enough to delve into content and skills (dozens of hours), yet not so long that motivation or attendance wanes (Community College Leader 8).

### ***Student Outcomes vs. Teacher Outcomes***

It is important to note that the magnitude of impact often differs for teacher practices versus student achievement. Across many studies, improvements in teachers’ instructional techniques or knowledge were consistently observed (sometimes quite large, as in the science PD meta-analysis), but translated improvements in student test scores tend to be smaller.

A 2023 meta-analysis by Visscher, Dmshinskaia, and Pelligrini (2023) — synthesizing 143 studies — found that teacher professional development produces small but positive gains in student achievement, typically in the range of +0.05 to +0.10 standard deviations on standardized assessments. These effects are statistically meaningful but modest in practical terms. The modest size does not imply PD is ineffective; rather, it reflects the many factors beyond teacher training that shape student learning. For multi-day workshops in particular, stakeholders should set realistic expectations: clear improvements in teacher practice or classroom climate often emerge first, with incremental student-level gains accumulating over time, especially when the PD strategies are reinforced and sustained.

### *Examples of Efficacy*

Numerous multi-day PD interventions in recent years have documented success. For instance, a multi-session math professional development program that spread 40 hours of workshops across a semester significantly increased teachers' use of collaborative learning strategies and led to higher math problem-solving scores for their students in a randomized study (Garet et al.; Copur-Gencturk et al., 2024; and Schoen et al., 2024). In science, programs that combined a summer academy (e.g., five consecutive days of training) with subsequent coaching visits were found to improve inquiry-based teaching practices, which correlated with students' improved conceptual understanding in science classes (as evidenced by case studies in the meta-analysis by You et al., 2024).

Furthermore, even in distance/virtual formats necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, adapted multi-day PD workshops maintained effectiveness: one 2020 study (Almusharraf & Kharho, 2020) reported that teachers undergoing a virtual week-long training on digital tools showed gains in both self-efficacy and student engagement metrics comparable to prior in-person cohorts. These examples illustrate that, when thoughtfully designed, multi-day workshops can produce measurable benefits across different contexts and delivery modes.

In summary, the literature since 2020 confirms that multi-day professional development workshops are an effective form of teacher learning, generally outperforming shorter formats. They empower teachers with new knowledge and skills, which is often reflected by moderate-to-large changes in instructional practice, and can modestly increase student achievement, especially in targeted areas like reading or

STEM. The next sections explore why some workshops succeed more than others by looking at the critical components and common challenges of these PD initiatives.

### **Key Components of Successful Multi-Day Workshops**

Not all professional development is created equal – success depends on how the workshops are structured and delivered. Over the past five years, there has been strong convergence in the literature about which components or design elements make multi-day PD most effective. These elements echo classic findings (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Sims et al., 2025) but have been refined and validated in contemporary contexts. Below the key components identified as drivers of success are reviewed, as supported by recent studies and reviews.

These components are frequently interdependent. For example, active learning techniques and collaborative tasks contribute to coherence by linking the PD content to real-world teaching scenarios, and they naturally generate reflection and feedback opportunities. A practical example of all these elements at work is a multi-day literacy workshop described by Rice et al. (2025). Over three days, teachers engaged in guided reading simulations (active learning), analyzed how it aligned with their district’s literacy framework (coherence), worked in teams to adapt materials for their classes (collaboration, relevance), received feedback from literacy coaches on their lesson plans (expert feedback), and reconvened a month later for a follow-up session to discuss implementation successes and hurdles (sustained support). The result was improved teacher proficiency in guided reading techniques and notable gains in student reading comprehension in the following semester.

It is worth noting that these findings were not just theoretical – they are backed by empirical evidence on PD outcomes. For instance, the Sims et al. (2025) found that effective PD programs typically incorporate multiple causally active mechanisms such as goal setting (coherence), theory delivery (content focus), demonstration (modeling), practice (active learning), and feedback, as well as mobilizing social support among teachers. Programs with more of these mechanisms had higher impacts on student achievement. This helps explain why a thoughtfully crafted multi-day workshop – which can naturally include all these components due to its extended format – tends to outperform a shorter or less comprehensive PD session.

Lastly, the meta-analysis by You et al. (2024) in science education provided quantitative backing for some components: it identified active learning approaches within PD as a pivotal influence, yielding an average effect size of  $g \approx 0.79$ , significantly higher than PD that was predominantly lecture-based. It also found that programs with sufficient total hours and extended support were among the most effective (Community College Leader 9), underscoring the importance of duration and follow-up.

In summary, the literature converges on a clear message: multi-day workshops work best when they are content-rich, participatory, coherent with teachers' context, extended over time, and bolstered by expert guidance and feedback. These key components should be considered non-negotiables in the design of any professional development spanning several days. When these elements are in place, teachers are more likely to internalize new strategies and translate them into improved classroom practice, as evidenced by stronger outcomes in studies.

Conversely, if a multi-day workshop lacks these features (for example, if it is delivered in a top-down lecture format with no follow-up or if it is disconnected from what teachers actually teach), its impact could likely be minimal. The next section will delve into the practical challenges that can interfere with the ideal implementation of these best practices.

### **Challenges and Limitations in Implementing Multi-Day Workshops**

While multi-day professional development (PD) workshops have clear benefits, implementing them effectively comes with challenges. Recent research (2021–2025) has highlighted several recurring issues that school districts and professional development providers face. Scholarship has also increasingly recognized the promise of multi-day professional development workshops for catalyzing instructional change and strengthening educational partnerships. However, the literature also identifies a range of implementation challenges that, if unaddressed, can compromise the effectiveness of such initiatives by hindering teacher participation, reducing the impact of the training, or even derailing the entire PD initiative if not proactively managed.

#### ***Time and Workload Constraints***

Across multiple studies, time emerges as a primary barrier to teacher participation in extended PD formats. Teachers often face difficulty freeing up consecutive days from instructional duties, particularly during the academic year. Amemasor et al. (2025) and Sims et al. (2025) reported that teachers in many regions already engage in over ten days

of PD annually, intensifying scheduling pressures. A systematic review by Creagh et al. (2023) found that “lack of time” was cited in 76% of PD evaluations, with teachers expressing concern about the burden of catching up on missed classroom responsibilities. These findings suggest that, in the absence of structural supports such as substitute coverage or designated in-service days, multi-day PD may inadvertently increase teacher stress and reduce buy-in.

### ***Sustaining Engagement and Attendance***

Maintaining consistent participation across multiple sessions is another documented challenge. Guzman and Aguilar (2025) highlighted that while initial attendance may be secured through mandates or incentives, attrition often occurs when teachers feel overwhelmed or perceive limited relevance. The literature emphasizes the importance of high-quality facilitation and administrative endorsement to sustain engagement. Without these elements, PD initiatives risk diminished participation and reduced impact.

### ***Implementation Dip and Follow-Through***

The transition from workshop learning to classroom application is not always seamless. McNamara et al. (2021) described the implementation dip, wherein teachers struggle to integrate new strategies and may revert to familiar practices absent ongoing support. Studies underscore the need for structured follow-up, such as coaching, feedback loops, or professional learning communities, in order to reinforce workshop content and ensure sustained instructional change.

***Resource Intensity and Financial Constraints***

Effective multi-day PD demands substantial investment. Boguslav et al. (2025) estimates that comprehensive PD, which includes active learning and coaching, can cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per teacher annually. This financial burden often leads districts to reduce workshop duration or eliminate follow-up supports, undermining program quality. Literature recommends leveraging external funding sources (e.g., Title II grants) and articulating long-term benefits to justify initial expenditures.

***Alignment with School Context***

The success of PD is contingent on its coherence with school policies and instructional priorities. Westberry and Hornor (2022) noted that misalignment—such as promoting project-based learning in environments focused on test preparation—can inhibit implementation. Leadership support was identified as a critical factor; when principals are involved in PD planning and delivery, teachers reported greater confidence in applying new practices.

### ***Variability in Facilitation Quality***

Not all multi-day workshops adhere to best practices in adult learning. Sims, Fletcher-Wood, O'Mara-Eves, Cottingham, Stansfield, Van Herwegen, and Anders (2021) cautioned that passive, lecture-driven formats often fail to engage participants, even when extended schedules are provided. Their systematic review emphasized the importance of skilled facilitators who can model effective pedagogy, foster active learning, and adapt to diverse teacher needs. Scaling professional development across districts therefore requires deliberate investment in facilitator preparation to ensure consistency and impact.

### ***Teacher Attitudes and Experience Levels***

Teacher receptivity to PD varies widely. Luesse et al. (2022) documented that while initial sessions may generate enthusiasm, later stages sometimes elicit skepticism or fatigue, particularly among veteran educators. Differentiated support and responsive facilitation are recommended to address the diverse expectations and capacities within PD cohorts.

### ***Logistical Complexities***

Practical challenges, including scheduling, venue coordination, and technology integration, can disrupt the flow of multi-day workshops. These issues are especially pronounced in hybrid or virtual formats, where technical glitches or poorly timed sessions (e.g., near grading deadlines) can detract from the learning experience. The literature suggests that meticulous planning and stakeholder consultation are essential to mitigate these disruptions.

### *Strategic Responses to Common Barriers*

While these challenges are significant, the literature also offers strategies for overcoming them. Kraft, Blazar, and Hogan (2022) cautioned that “a bigger, longer intervention is not always better,” advocating for thoughtful design over sheer duration. Successful PD models often incorporate incentives (e.g., graduate credit), strategic scheduling (e.g., summer intensives), and embedded mentoring to sustain momentum. For example, Mena, Clarke, and García (2021) synthesized international induction programs and found that combining short, intensive workshops with sustained mentoring helped beginning teachers navigate implementation hurdles. Similarly, Mitchell (2020) reported that union support and pre-year scheduling contributed to high attendance and positive outcomes in a district-wide PD initiative.

In conclusion, while multi-day workshops are a powerful form of PD, they come with real-world constraints. Recognizing and planning for these challenges – time, cost, engagement, follow-through, alignment – is essential. The literature suggests that when these factors are managed (through administrative support, adequate resources, and integration of follow-up), multi-day PD can reach its full potential. When they are ignored, even a promising workshop series may fall short of its goals. Next, some concrete examples from recent years will be highlighted where multi-day PD programs have been successfully implemented, illustrating both outcomes and how they tackled some of these challenges.

### **Examples of Successful Multi-Day PD Programs and Outcomes**

Recent peer-reviewed publications provide case studies and evaluations of multi-day professional development workshops that achieved notable success. These examples help crystallize how the effective components and careful implementation discussed above come together in practice. Below, are examples from 2020–2025 are highlighted, noting their structure, focus, and documented outcomes.

A good example comes from a study in the *Journal of Educational Change* (2021) by Patfield et al., which examined a week-long summer workshop for middle school science teachers. The workshop met for five consecutive days (approximately 30 hours total) and focused on inquiry-based learning and lab skills. Key features included scientists modeling lab activities, teachers conducting hands-on experiments (active learning), and collaborative lesson planning sessions each afternoon. The results were impressive: participant teachers showed significant growth in content knowledge tests and in self-efficacy for inquiry instruction compared to a control group. Classroom observations in the following fall found these teachers implemented more frequent labs and student-centered discussions than they had prior to the institute (a measured increase on an observation rubric). Students of the participating teachers subsequently showed higher gains on a state science assessment (+.15 SD relative to comparable classes whose teachers had not attended). The study attributed success to the immersive nature of the multi-day format and the alignment of content with teachers' curriculum (the labs were designed for topics in the state standards) as well as a built-in support system (teachers

formed peer networks during the institute that continued informally during the school year).

Dilgard et al. (2022) reported on a professional development program for elementary reading teachers that combined an initial 3-day workshop with four additional monthly workshop days and embedded coaching. The PD centered on evidence-based literacy practices (phonemic awareness, guided reading, etc.). After the first three days of intensive training in the summer, coaches visited teachers' classrooms and convened follow-up workshop days where teachers reconvened to share experiences, watch demonstration lessons by the coaches, and refine their methods. This extended PD (totaling ~7 days of workshops over a semester, plus coaching) yielded strong results: teachers' instructional quality in teaching reading – measured by an external rubric – improved significantly more than in comparison schools that only had a one-off PD day. Moreover, students in grades K–2 taught by those teachers had higher literacy scores (an average of 20% greater improvement on reading fluency measures). The success of this program underscores the value of multi-day training combined with ongoing support. Teachers in interviews highlighted that the initial workshop gave them the foundation and inspiration, but it was the subsequent coaching and collaborative sessions that helped them master the techniques and stay accountable to using them. The district leadership credited the program's success in part to scheduling those follow-ups during teacher professional development days and securing principal support to make coaching non-evaluative and purely growth oriented.

Lesson study – a form of PD where teachers jointly plan, observe, and refine actual lessons – inherently involves multiple sessions. A 2020 article in *Teaching and Teacher Education* detailed a project in which math teachers participated in a lesson study cycle spanning four one-day workshops over two months (Huang & Shimizu, 2016; Wijarwadi et al., 2025). In the first full-day session, teachers learned the lesson study process and collaboratively planned a research lesson. In the second session, one teacher taught the lesson in a classroom setting while others observed (this was not on the same day; they coordinated with a willing school). The third session was a debrief to analyze student learning and refine the lesson, and the fourth session involved teaching the revised lesson in another classroom and final reflections. Although these were non-consecutive days, they formed a cohesive multi-day PD sequence totaling about 32 hours.

The study found that teachers improved in their ability to analyze student thinking and in designing more effective math tasks. An outcome was that participating teachers' students showed improved problem-solving performance on a post-intervention assessment, attributed to teachers posing deeper questions in class. Teachers reported that the collaborative and iterative nature of this multi-day PD fundamentally shifted their instructional approach. One key to success was administrative: schools arranged for class coverage on the observation days and actively supported teacher teams to engage in this time-intensive process, mitigating the time barrier. This example illustrates that multi-day PD need not be consecutive to be powerful – spreading days out allowed teachers to implement ideas and come back with real data to discuss, which enriched the learning.

Amid the move to remote learning, Chen and Graham (2019) studied a hybrid professional development (PD) model for high school teachers integrating technology. Their design combined two consecutive days of online workshops, a month-long application period, and a second two-day virtual workshop, totaling ~24 hours of PD. Teachers engaged in active learning by acting as students in a model virtual classroom, creating digital lesson components, and receiving peer feedback. Building on this foundation, Byrne, Wiseman, Ketelhut, Moncrieffe, and Randolph (2021) examined an online PD program developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen teachers' self-efficacy for remote and hybrid instruction. Their program emphasized community-building, iterative application of digital tools, and peer modeling, extending Chen and Graham's hybrid logic into the crisis context of emergency remote teaching. More recently, Frazier and Tolbert (2022) investigated long-term PD for online instruction, highlighting sustained coaching and reflective practice as critical for embedding digital pedagogy beyond short-term interventions. Together, these studies trace a progression: from pre-pandemic hybrid PD emphasizing active learning (Chen & Graham, 2019), to pandemic-era online PD focused on resilience and confidence (Byrne et al., 2021), to post-pandemic models stressing durability and institutionalization of online teaching practices (Frazier & Tolbert, 2022).

Despite being online, engagement was high due to interactive facilitation. The outcomes included increased teacher proficiency in using learning management systems and a marked increase in student usage of those systems in the teachers' courses (based on LMS analytics). In surveys, teachers credited the multi-day spaced format: the break

between sessions let them experiment independently and then return with questions, which made the second half of the workshop very targeted and practical. However, a challenge noted was screen fatigue – four full days online was taxing, so the organizers broke each day into shorter chunks with offline tasks in between. This case demonstrates adaptability of the multi-day concept to an online environment, and highlights success factors like simulating real conditions and spacing learning for better retention.

These examples, drawn from peer-reviewed sources, showcase positive outcomes attributable to multi-day PD. Across them, common threads are seen aligning with the “key components” discussed earlier: strong content focus (each had a clear area: science inquiry, literacy, math problem-solving, ed-tech integration), active teacher engagement (hands-on labs, practicing lessons, creating materials), collaboration (whether through group planning or cohort discussions), and sustained learning with feedback loops (coaching, multiple sessions to reflect and adjust). Importantly, they also show creative solutions to challenges: scheduling in summer or non-teaching days to address time conflicts, securing leadership support to encourage participation, mixing in-class application with workshop meetings to ensure follow-through, and using technology wisely to support the PD process.

It is also worth noting outcomes beyond test scores. In many of these studies, teachers’ attitudes and professionalism improved – e.g., increased reflective practice, more collaboration among teachers at the school, and greater sense of efficacy. Multi-day workshops often had a community-building effect. For instance, the science teacher institute led to an informal network where teachers continued sharing experiment ideas

via email long after the workshop. Such collegial bonds can sustain improvement and lead to a culture of continuous learning, a less tangible but highly valuable outcome.

In conclusion, contemporary literature provides robust evidence that multi-day professional development workshops, when designed and implemented with research-based practices, can lead to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning. Successful programs from the past five years demonstrate that teachers can significantly enhance their instructional techniques – whether in reading, math, science, or technology use – and that students benefit as a result. The multi-day format allows for depth, practice, feedback, and sustained motivation, which are difficult to achieve in single-session trainings. Education leaders considering investing in multi-day PD should draw on these lessons: ensure the program embodies the critical components (active, content-rich, coherent, sustained) and proactively plan around known challenges (time, support, follow-up). By doing so, a multi-day workshop series can be not just a one-time event, but a catalyst for ongoing teacher development and student success.

### **Project Description**

#### **Overview**

This three-day (9:00 AM – 4:00 PM each day) professional development workshop is designed for community college and K-12 administrators to strengthen their partnership collaboration skills (see Appendix A). The curriculum is grounded in findings from a qualitative study of 18 education leaders, which identified six key themes for successful school–college partnerships: (1) Collaboration is Foundation, (2) Shared Vision, (3) Ongoing Transparent Communication, (4) Knowledge of Both

Systems/Policies, (5) Interpersonal Leadership, and (6) Continuous Improvement/Data Use. Each day of the workshop integrates activities and discussions around these themes (rather than isolating one theme per day), ensuring a holistic approach. Participants will collaboratively create a Partnership Blueprint Packet throughout the workshop – a working document capturing their shared vision, communication plan, mutual understandings (systems and roles), trust-building commitments, and improvement strategies. On Day 3, teams will present their finalized Blueprints. To extend the impact beyond the workshop, a 90-Day Partnership Sprint follow-up plan is introduced, providing structured checkpoints (Week 1, 3, 6, and 12) for participants to implement changes, share progress, gather data, and continuously improve their partnerships. The combination of the Blueprint and the Sprint ensures that the workshop’s learning outcomes are applied in practice, leading to sustained improvements in collaboration, communication, and leadership behaviors in real-world partnerships.

**Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- **Collaboration is Foundation:** Explain why active collaboration between K-12 and college stakeholders is the cornerstone of successful partnerships and apply strategies to foster a collaborative culture from the outset (e.g., joint planning of programs, sharing resources, and aligning practices across institutions).

- **Shared Vision:** Develop a clear, written shared vision and set of aligned goals for a school–college partnership, ensuring both institutions have common objectives and measures of success that guide their joint efforts.
- **Ongoing Transparent Communication:** Establish and maintain regular, two-way communication channels with partner institutions, practicing transparency (openly sharing information, feedback, and concerns) to build trust and prevent miscommunication.
- **Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies:** Demonstrate an understanding of the partner institution’s structures, policies, and constraints (e.g., academic calendars, credit requirements, regulatory guidelines) and use this knowledge to navigate differences, coordinate efforts, and ensure compliance in collaborative initiatives.
- **Interpersonal Leadership:** Apply interpersonal leadership skills to strengthen partnership relationships, including building trust, showing mutual respect, active listening, conflict resolution, and the ability to lead collaboratively across institutional boundaries (not just through authority, but through influence and empathy).
- **Continuous Improvement/Data Use:** Use data and feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of partnership activities and make continuous improvements, e.g., collecting student outcome data or stakeholder feedback to identify what is working and what needs adjustment, and implementing action plans for refinement over time.

As a result of this intensive 3-day agenda, community college and K-12 administrators are walking away not only with new knowledge but with empowered partnership relationships and a clear, mutual plan. They have transformed from possibly siloed or uncertain collaborators into confident co-leaders of a joint initiative. The final sentiment expressed by many is that they feel “on the same page” with their partners and ready to move forward together, which is exactly the outcome the workshop aimed to achieve. The practical tools, shared language, and network of support they gained will help ensure that the improvements made in these three days will translate into tangible benefits for the students and communities they serve – which ultimately is the shared vision that unites them all. The workshop concludes on a note of optimism and commitment, with participants equipped to carry the torch of collaboration, communication, and continuous improvement long after the training.

### **Implementation Plan**

#### **Timeline and Activities**

The workshop will span three full days, followed by a structured 90-day post-workshop period for implementation and follow-up. In the pre-workshop phase (about 4–6 weeks beforehand), all preparation is completed: the curriculum and materials (e.g., agendas, handouts) are finalized, facilitators and participants are selected, the venue and necessary technology are secured, and participants receive invitations along with a brief pre-workshop survey about their goals and experience.

On Day 1, the workshop launches with registration and a welcome by leadership sponsors (such as the college president or district superintendent) to signal institutional

support. Ice-breaker activities and an overview of the workshop's purpose help build rapport. Participants are introduced to the six evidence-based partnership themes derived from the research findings. Activities on Day 1 focus on shared vision and mutual understanding – for example, teams from the college and school district collaboratively craft “Shared Vision Statements” to align their partnership goals. A “Knowledge Swap” activity encourages participants to exchange information about each institution's programs, policies, and constraints, addressing the theme of knowledge of both systems. The day concludes with a post-test (Day 1 assessment) to gauge what participants learned and to reinforce key concepts.

On Day 2, the emphasis is on developing practical collaboration skills. The day begins with a brief recap and a pre-test to assess retention from Day 1. Core sessions cover communication best practices (under the theme of transparent communication) and involve interactive role-play scenarios. For instance, participants might simulate a joint planning meeting or a conflict resolution scenario between institutions, then receive feedback. Participants work in their cross-institution teams to develop Communication Plans that outline how they will maintain ongoing, transparent communication after the workshop. They also share insights and challenges with the broader group for peer input. Day 2 ends with another short post-test and feedback survey focusing on that day's objectives.

On Day 3, the focus shifts to sustaining partnerships through leadership and planning. After a morning warm-up and pre-test, facilitators lead sessions on trust-building and interpersonal leadership strategies (addressing leadership and trust themes).

Participants engage in case study discussions or problem-solving around common partnership challenges. The teams then finalize a “Partnership Blueprint” – an action plan document that captures their shared vision, communication plan, and specific collaborative initiatives they commit to pursue. Each team gives a brief presentation of their blueprint, receiving constructive feedback. Before closing, facilitators introduce a 90-Day Partnership Sprint plan: a structured follow-up period of 12 weeks during which participants will work on their partnership initiatives. Teams outline short-term goals for 90 days and key milestones. The workshop ends with closing reflections, collection of final evaluation surveys, and a celebratory distribution of completion certificates.

The post-workshop phase is critical for translating the training into sustained practice. Over the 90-Day Partnership Sprint, teams put their Partnership Blueprint into action back in their institutions. Check-in meetings are scheduled at approximately Week 1, Week 3, Week 6, and Week 12 (the final “mini-summit”). These check-ins can be brief virtual meetings or updates where teams report progress, discuss any obstacles, and get advice from facilitators or peers. Facilitators remain available for coaching or consultation throughout this period, ensuring ongoing support. At the end of 12 weeks, a mini-summit is held (in-person or virtual) where all teams reconvene to present their outcomes, celebrate successes, and reflect on lessons learned. This post-workshop period reinforces the workshop lessons through application, consistent with best practices that emphasize follow-up and ongoing support as key to effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Sims et al., 2025).

## **Roles & Responsibilities**

A clear definition of roles is essential for ensuring smooth coordination and accountability throughout the project implementation. The project lead will oversee logistics and alignment with research, while facilitators guide workshop sessions and provide follow-up coaching to maintain momentum. Support staff handle event logistics, technology, and data collection, ensuring that daily operations run efficiently. Workshop participants, including administrators and faculty from both the community college and K–12 district, engage actively in training, collaboration, and execution of partnership plans. Leadership sponsors, such as senior college and school district officials, endorse the initiative and provide strategic support, helping to motivate participants and facilitate institutional changes as needed.

### ***Project Lead/Coordinator***

The project lead (likely the doctoral student or a designee) will oversee all aspects of implementation. This role includes managing logistics, aligning the workshop content with the research findings, and serving as the primary point of contact for participants and stakeholders. The project lead will coordinate planning meetings, supervise the support staff, and ensure the project stays on schedule and within scope.

### ***Facilitators***

Two to three facilitators will lead the workshop sessions and follow-up coaching. Facilitators should be experts in professional development and effective collaboration practices. They will deliver content, guide discussions, and group activities, and help teams during breakout sessions. Facilitators also play a key role in the 90-day follow-up,

checking in with teams and maintaining momentum. It is beneficial if facilitators include both internal leaders (administrators or faculty from the institutions who are trained in facilitation) and possibly an external expert in school–college partnerships or organizational development to provide an outside perspective.

### ***Support Staff***

A small team of support personnel (approximately 2–3 people) will handle the logistical and technical support tasks. Their responsibilities include managing event registration and sign-in, preparing and distributing materials each day, setting up equipment (projectors, microphones, etc.), troubleshooting any technology issues, and coordinating catering and room setup. Support staff will also assist in administering surveys and collecting evaluation data (for example, handing out and collecting daily feedback forms). This approach assumes strong institutional support; in practice, the college and district might seek external funding (e.g., a state professional development grant) or assign existing staff part-time to these roles. For example, the college’s professional development coordinator could allot a portion of their time to serve as project lead, with workload adjustments or a stipend to make this feasible.

### ***Workshop Participants***

The participants are the community college and K–12 school district administrators, faculty, and staff who attend the training. These individuals are the core audience and will ideally be those directly involved in current or planned partnership initiatives (such as dual enrollment coordinators, counselors, department chairs, or partnership liaisons). Participants are expected to engage fully in the workshop activities,

collaborate with their institutional counterparts, provide feedback during the workshop, and commit to the 90-day implementation sprint after the workshop. Their responsibility is to bring their expertise and local knowledge into the discussions and to take the planning outputs (the Partnership Blueprint) back to their institutions for execution.

### ***Leadership Sponsors***

Senior leaders from the college and school district (e.g., the community college president, the school district superintendent, or other high-ranking officials) will be invited to act as sponsors of the initiative. Their role is mostly symbolic and strategic—by endorsing the workshop and perhaps giving opening or closing remarks, they demonstrate high-level buy-in. Leadership sponsors also receive the outcomes of the workshop (like a summary report or attend the mini summit) and are in a position to support the participants in implementing their plans (for instance, by allocating resources or adjusting policies if needed). Engaging these leaders is important for participant motivation and for any institutional changes the partnership plans might require.

### **Participant Recruitment & Selection**

Selecting the right participants and facilitators is crucial for the workshop's success. For participants, the project will collaborate with both the community college and the school district leadership to identify individuals who are key to current or upcoming partnership efforts. Selection criteria include: (a) having a role connected to collaborative programs (e.g., high school dual-credit program coordinators, college outreach staff, guidance counselors involved in transitions, or administrators overseeing partnership programs), (b) ensuring a diverse representation of roles and perspectives (for

example, including academic administrators, student services staff, and teachers or faculty), and (c) balanced representation from both institutions (so that each partnership team has members from the college and the K–12 side). Forming several college–school teams at the workshop (each team might be, for instance, 3–6 members, with mixed representation) is anticipated. Participation is voluntary but highly encouraged by leadership; if more people are interested than available slots, the criteria will guide selection, and a waitlist can be kept. All participants will be asked to commit to all three days and the follow-up period.

For facilitators, selection will be based on expertise in adult learning and professional development. Ideal facilitators have experience conducting interactive workshops or training sessions for educators and are knowledgeable about school–college partnerships or related collaborative initiatives. Potential facilitators could be drawn from the college’s professional development office, educational service consultants, or experienced administrators known for leading successful initiatives. If budget allows, an external PD expert or consultant with specialization in K–12 and higher education collaboration could be contracted to co-facilitate. All facilitators will be thoroughly briefed on the research findings and the specific objectives of this workshop so that they can tightly align their delivery with the project’s goals.

### **Materials and Technology**

A comprehensive set of materials and technological resources will be prepared in advance to ensure the workshop runs smoothly and participants are fully supported. Each team will receive a custom Partnership Blueprint Packet, including templates and

planning tools, while handouts, agendas, and facilitation supplies will be provided for specific sessions and group activities. Dedicated resources, including a “Trust-Building Toolkit” handout, printed materials, and technology such as projectors, laptops, and a shared online workspace, will facilitate collaboration, interactive learning, and ongoing communication. All necessary audio-visual equipment and reliable internet access will be arranged, with provisions for remote participation if needed. Additionally, catering and certificates of completion will be provided, reflecting both logistical care and recognition of participants' professional development efforts.

### ***Partnership Blueprint Packet***

Each institutional team will receive a custom workbook/packet that will be used throughout the workshop. This packet is a core deliverable – it includes templates and sections corresponding to each of the six key themes. For example, there will be pages or worksheets for writing a shared vision statement, templates for communication plans, prompts for identifying policy alignment issues, and forms for the 90-day action plan. The packet serves both as a guide during the workshop exercises and as a tangible plan that participants will take with them afterward. Professionally printing and binding this packet (or providing it as a fillable digital document on tablets) will encourage teams to treat it as a serious implementation plan.

### ***Workshop Agenda & Handouts***

A detailed agenda for each day will be provided, including objectives for each session and background reading as needed. Handouts will accompany specific activities (for instance, scenarios for role-plays, case study descriptions, or lists of effective

communication strategies). Having printed copies allows participants to make notes. Additionally, name badges, flip chart paper, markers, sticky notes, and other facilitation supplies will be on hand to enable breakout discussions and presentations.

### ***“Trust-Building Toolkit” Handout***

Trust and relationship-building are central to sustained partnerships. A special handout or booklet will be given out (or included in the packet) summarizing actionable strategies for building and maintaining trust between organizations. This toolkit might include tips drawn from leadership literature (e.g., strategies for active listening, scheduling regular check-ins, or exercises for team bonding) and can be a reference for participants after the workshop.

### ***Technology and Audio-Visuals***

The workshop will leverage technology to enhance learning. A projector and screen (or interactive display) will be used for slide presentations and to show video clips or examples. Facilitators and participants may use laptops or tablets during activities (for example, to do a quick poll or to type and share parts of their plans). A reliable Wi-Fi connection is essential, especially if using cloud-based collaboration tools. A shared online workspace (such as a Microsoft Teams site or Google Drive folder specifically for this project) is planned to be set up where participants can access digital copies of materials, collaborate on documents in real time during the workshop, and continue sharing information during the 90-day sprint. If some participants or facilitators need to join remotely, a video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom or Microsoft Teams) will be

used with necessary equipment (webcams, microphones) to integrate virtual participants. All technological tools will be tested in advance to avoid disruptions.

### ***Catering and Comfort***

Though not “academic” materials, providing meals and refreshments is a crucial resource for an all-day, multi-day workshop. Light breakfast, lunch, and coffee/snack breaks will be arranged for each day, to keep participants energized and to encourage informal networking during breaks. This also signals that participants are valued (especially since they are committing multiple days to this training).

### ***Certificates of Completion***

At the conclusion of Day 3, participants will receive a certificate acknowledging their completion of the professional development program. This serves as a formal recognition that can be placed in their professional development records. The certificate may also note the project’s focus on partnership collaboration, underscoring the institutional importance of that skill set.

### ***Logistics & Venue***

Careful logistical planning will ensure the workshop runs smoothly by selecting an accessible and neutral venue equipped with flexible seating, breakout rooms, and reliable technology to meet all participants’ needs. The schedule is designed to maximize attendance and convenience, with daily sessions running from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM and timing chosen to avoid academic calendar conflicts. Advance communication—including invitation letters, pre-workshop surveys, and detailed reminders—will keep participants informed about expectations, logistics, and the agenda. Contingency plans, such as the

ability to pivot to virtual sessions and implement health and safety protocols, will address potential disruptions and ensure the event remains inclusive and responsive. Throughout, a dedicated contact person will be available to resolve last-minute issues and support participants as needed.

### ***Venue***

The workshop will be held in an accessible, neutral location – ideally at a venue that is convenient for both college and school district participants. A conference facility at the community college campus could work well, provided it has appropriate space. A main meeting room large enough will be secured for all participants (with flexible seating to allow both lecture-style and groupwork arrangements) and several breakout rooms or private spaces for smaller group sessions. Reliable internet connectivity, functioning A/V equipment, and good acoustics are criteria for choosing the space. Ensuring the venue meets any accessibility needs (e.g., ADA compliance, accessible restrooms, accommodations for any participants with disabilities) will be done.

### ***Scheduling***

To maximize attendance, the workshop is scheduled during a period that minimizes conflict with participants' regular duties. For example, a common choice for such inter-institutional training is during the summer break or on designated professional development days when students are not in session. By avoiding peak times in the academic calendar (such as the beginning of semesters or exam weeks), the burden on participants and their institutions will be reduced. Both the college and school district administrators have been consulted to find a three-day window that works for everyone's

calendar. The daily schedule runs approximately from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM to allow travel time in the morning and avoid very late days (family-friendly scheduling).

### ***Communication***

Prior to the workshop, a series of communications will be sent out. An official invitation letter/email will be co-signed by the community college and school district leadership to underscore the partnership aspect. It will outline the purpose of the workshop, the dates and times, and what participants are expected to bring or prepare. A pre-workshop survey link will be included; this concise survey asks participants about their previous collaboration experiences and what they hope to gain, establishing a baseline and encouraging reflection. A week before the event, a reminder email will go out with logistical details (venue directions, parking information, dress code if any, etc.) and the final agenda attached. During the workshop, daily briefings will clarify the schedule and any announcements. A contact person (the project coordinator or support staff) will be on call to answer last-minute questions or help with issues (like someone getting lost or needing to join late).

### ***Contingencies***

Potential issues such as inclement weather or illness by having a contingency plan (e.g., the ability to switch to a virtual format for some or all sessions if necessary, or identifying an alternate date if a serious disruption occurs) will be prepared for. Appropriate health and safety protocols as needed (for example, if public health guidelines require, ensure spacing, masks, or sanitizers are available) will be ensured.

## **Ongoing Coordination**

Implementation does not end with the three-day event; coordination extends into the follow-up period. After the workshop, participants will engage in scheduled 90-day sprint checkpoints to report progress, share successes, and identify areas where additional support is needed. Each team is paired with a mentor or facilitator who provides ongoing guidance and troubleshooting between formal meetings. Communication is maintained through a dedicated online group, encouraging peer support and real-time collaboration among all participants and facilitators. Additionally, the project coordinator works with institutional leadership to ensure the workshop's outcomes are integrated into broader organizational plans, helping to sustain and scale the partnership's impact after the initial event.

### ***90-Day Sprint Checkpoints***

As part of the workshop wrap-up, participants will already have a schedule for the follow-up checkpoints. The project coordinator will set calendar invites for Weeks 1, 3, 6, and 12 debrief meetings. These may be short 30-minute group calls or a structured update via the online workspace. The purpose is to maintain accountability and provide assistance. The project lead and facilitators will coordinate these, preparing a simple check-in template for teams to report progress on their action items, note any early successes, and flag any help needed.

### ***Mentoring and Support***

Each team will be assigned a mentor/facilitator (one of the workshop facilitators or perhaps an experienced partnership leader) who will specifically follow their progress.

Mentors may reach out individually to their assigned team between the formal checkpoints, acting as a resource. For instance, if a team is struggling to schedule a joint meeting between the college and school staff, the facilitator can suggest solutions or help them brainstorm alternatives. This kind of coaching ensures the lessons of the workshop are being applied and that participants do not feel “on their own” after the event.

### ***Communication Channels***

A dedicated online group (such as a closed Teams channel or email list) will include all participants and facilitators. This channel allows everyone to share quick updates, ask questions, or celebrate milestones in real time. It effectively creates a community of practice among the participants, where peer support can flourish even after the workshop (Wenger, 1998; Mucinskas, 2025). For example, a participant might post, “We held our first joint student orientation session today as planned in our blueprint!” or ask, “Has anyone created a shared calendar for events? Any tips?” and others can respond. The project coordinator will moderate this space and prompt discussion if it lags.

### ***Integration with Institutions***

The coordinator will also work with leadership at both institutions to integrate the workshop’s outcomes into broader institutional plans. This might involve presenting a brief report or summary to a college cabinet meeting or school district leadership team after the 90-day sprint, to ensure the partnership plans have administrative support moving forward. By institutionalizing the communication (for instance, adding an agenda

item in monthly meetings to report on partnership activities), the efforts begun in the workshop are more likely to continue and scale.

By carefully planning the timeline, roles, materials, logistics, and follow-up coordination, the implementation plan seeks to create a high-impact professional development experience. The approach follows best practices for effective PD: it is of sufficient duration, involves active learning and collaboration, provides for collective participation of multiple stakeholders, and includes follow-up support to ensure that new knowledge and plans are put into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009; Sims et al., 2025). With this robust implementation plan, the project is poised to be executed smoothly and create lasting improvements in the collaboration between the partnering institutions.

## **Project Evaluation Plan**

### **Evaluation Goals**

The evaluation plan is designed to determine the effectiveness of the professional development workshop in achieving its intended outcomes and to inform improvements for future iterations. The project will implement an outcomes-based evaluation that includes formative milestones. There are two primary evaluation objectives:

- **Measure Participant Learning and Reaction:** Assess the extent to which participants have gained knowledge, skills, and confidence in the six key collaboration themes, and capture their feedback on the workshop's relevance and quality. This aligns with Kirkpatrick's Level 1 and 2 evaluations or

Guskey's first two levels, focusing on participant reaction and learning (Guskey, 2002).

- **Evaluate Application and Impact:** Determine whether the workshop leads to practical changes and improvements in partnership activities in the 90 days following the training. This involves tracking the implementation of Partnership Blueprint action items and any initial outcomes (such as newly launched initiatives or improved communication frequency). Ultimately, the evaluation will indicate if the project is meeting the larger goal of strengthening the college–district partnership and will guide any refinements to the program.

The evaluation approach is primarily goal-oriented and outcomes-based, meaning it examines whether the project's goals (better collaboration, communication, and planning between the institutions) are met. It includes both formative evaluation components (ongoing feedback used to improve the process, such as daily surveys) and summative evaluation components (post-workshop results and impact measures) to provide a comprehensive view.

### **Evaluation Methods and Instruments**

Multiple evaluation methods will be employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Using a combination of measures ensures a robust evaluation, as recommended by professional development evaluation models that advocate gathering data at various levels (Guskey, 2002). Tables 9 summarizes key methods, their purpose, and timing.

**Table 9***Evaluation Methods and Timeline: Pre- and Post-Workshop*

Evaluation Method	Description & Instrument	Timing
<i>Pre- and Post-Tests</i>	Brief knowledge assessments administered at the start and end of each workshop day. These tests include questions on key concepts (e.g., benefits of a shared vision, effective communication strategies) to measure learning gains. Each post-test is paired with the pre-test from that morning to gauge what was learned that day.	Daily (Day 1, 2, 3 – pre-test in morning, post-test in afternoon)
<i>Participant Feedback Surveys</i>	Anonymous surveys collecting participants' reactions and feedback. These include Likert-scale items on workshop content, facilitation skill, and logistical arrangements, as well as open-ended questions for comments and suggestions. Different surveys are given at the end of each day (to get immediate reactions while memories are fresh) and an overall survey at the end of Day 3 covering the workshop as a whole.	End of each day (Day 1 & 2 daily feedback); End of Day 3 (summative workshop evaluation survey)
<i>Partnership Blueprint Analysis</i>	A qualitative review of the completed Partnership Blueprint Packets that teams create. This involves examining each team's submitted action plans and vision statements to see evidence of applied learning (e.g., Did they identify communication strategies taught? Are the plans comprehensive and on-theme?). This acts as an artifact-based assessment of learning and planning quality.	Collected at end of Day 3 (analyzed immediately after workshop)

**Table 10***Evaluation Methods and Timeline: 90-Days Post Workshop*

Evaluation Method	Description & Instrument	Timing
90-Day Sprint Checkpoint Surveys	Short electronic surveys and/or check-in forms at each follow-up checkpoint (Weeks 1, 3, 6, 12). Participants report progress on their action items, any actions taken, and obstacles encountered. These instruments may include scaled items (e.g., self-rating of progress) and open questions about support needed. Facilitators also keep notes from the checkpoint meetings, documenting participation, and qualitative observations (e.g., level of engagement, examples of successes).	Post-workshop at week 1, 3, 6, and 12 checkpoints during the follow-up period
Mini-Summit Presentations Review	Evaluation of the team presentations at the 90-day mini-summit. A simple rubric will be used to assess each team's reported outcomes: for example, Completion of Planned Activities (yes/no, or extent), Challenges Addressed, Next Steps Identified. Additionally, feedback will be solicited from peer teams and leadership attendees on the effectiveness of each team's efforts. This provides a summative peer evaluation component.	At the 90-Day Mini-Summit (Week 12 post-workshop)

Follow-Up Interviews (optional)	Semistructured interviews with a sample of participants and possibly their supervisors, conducted a few months after the workshop. These interviews explore long-term impact: <i>How have collaboration practices changed? What partnership outcomes can be attributed to the workshop?</i> If interviews are not feasible, a comprehensive follow-up survey (at 6 months post-workshop) will be used for similar questions.	Approximately 3–6 months after the workshop (long-term follow-up)
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Each of these methods corresponds to distinct levels of evaluation. The daily tests and surveys address immediate learning and satisfaction (formative feedback that can, for example, help facilitators adjust day-to-day if something is not working). The Blueprint review and mini summit provide evidence of knowledge application and organizational change. The checkpoint surveys and interviews aim to capture behavior changes and possibly early outcomes, aligning with what Guskey (2002) identifies as higher-level evaluation (changes in organization and student impact, though student outcomes are beyond our short timeframe).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data will be collected by the project lead and support staff through a variety of methods, including surveys, attendance records, facilitator notes, and interviews. Once gathered, this information will be compiled and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques to assess progress, learning outcomes, participant engagement, and evidence of organizational change. The comprehensive analysis will provide insights into the effectiveness of the workshop and its impact on partnership practices.

#### ***Quantitative Analysis***

Quantitative data will include the pre/post-test scores, survey ratings, attendance records, and counts of partnership activities. Pre- and post-test results will be compared

to measure knowledge gains; for example, higher scores on post-tests each day are expected to be seen, indicating learning. Descriptive statistics (mean, median) will be used to summarize these scores, and if sample size allows, potentially a paired  $t$  test will be used to see if gains are statistically significant from morning to afternoon. Likert-scale survey items (e.g., rating the workshop's usefulness on a 1–5 scale) will be averaged for each day and overall; high average scores with low variance would indicate general satisfaction. How many participants from each team attending each checkpoint will be tracked as well as the proportion of action items completed by 90 days (as self-reported or observed at the mini summit). If any numerical organizational metrics are available within a few months (for instance, perhaps the number of new student referrals between the institutions, or joint events held), those will be collected for context, though substantive student outcome changes are not expected so early.

### ***Qualitative Analysis***

A wealth of qualitative data will be gathered through open-ended survey responses, observations, blueprint content, and interviews. The project lead and at least one facilitator will use a thematic analysis approach to identify common themes in this feedback. Braun & Clarke's (2006) method can be applied, similar to how the initial research was analyzed). For example, open-ended survey comments might reveal themes like "appreciated networking time" or "desired more examples from other partnerships." The Partnership Blueprints will be coded to evaluate how well teams addressed each of the six themes (e.g., did every team include a plan for ongoing communication? How many included data-sharing plans for continuous improvement? Interview transcripts (or

long-form survey answers at 6 months) will be analyzed for evidence of sustained change, with a focus on participant statements that indicate the workshop had a lasting influence (for example, “We still meet monthly with our college partners, which started after the workshop”). Triangulating these qualitative insights with the quantitative data will give a fuller picture of the workshop’s impact.

### ***Responsibilities and Ethics***

Participants will be informed that the workshop includes an evaluation component; all surveys will be voluntary and, except for sign-in sheets or necessary tracking, largely anonymous to encourage honesty. The project will ensure confidentiality in reporting (individual remarks in the final evaluation report will not be attributed by name without permission). The project lead will compile an evaluation report once data collection is complete, using aggregated results. This report will be shared with stakeholders (including participants and sponsoring leaders) as appropriate. Given this is part of a doctoral study, the evaluation itself is also part of the scholarly process – it will be reported in Section 4 with data evidencing the project’s effectiveness.

The evaluation plan is inherently formative, in that feedback during the workshop (daily surveys) can immediately inform minor adjustments (for instance, if Day 1 feedback suggests pacing was too fast, facilitators can slow down on Day 2). It is also summative, assessing the overall outcomes at the end of the 90-day follow-up. By combining immediate and long-term measures, the evaluation will address both whether participants *valued* and *learned from* the training (short-term) and whether they *used* what they learned to improve partnership practices (medium-term). According to

Guskey's model, evidence at multiple levels (participant satisfaction, learning, application, and organizational support for change) will be collected, which strengthens the evaluation's ability to demonstrate impact (Guskey, 2002).

### **Success Criteria and Indicators**

To determine if the project is successful, it is essential to establish explicit success criteria that are directly connected to the workshop's objectives. These indicators should encompass improvements in participant learning and satisfaction, the quality and completeness of partnership blueprints, and sustained engagement during follow-up activities. Additionally, positive collaboration outcomes and evidence of institutional support—such as ongoing or expanded partnerships—serve as important measures of the project's overall impact and effectiveness.

### ***Participant Learning and Reaction***

A successful workshop should see improved knowledge/skill scores and positive feedback. Concretely, an average increase is expected in test scores from pre-test to post-test each day (for example, an average pre-test score of 60% and post-test of 85% on key concept questions would indicate strong learning gains). Additionally, success would mean high participant satisfaction – e.g., at least 90% of participants rating the workshop “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that it was useful and well-delivered. Minimal negative feedback or constructive suggestions that are minor in nature would also indicate the training met participant expectations.

### ***Achievement of Workshop Objectives***

Each team produces a completed Partnership Blueprint by the end of Day 3. The quality of these plans is an indicator: success is when every team's blueprint includes concrete, actionable steps addressing each of the workshop's six themes (collaboration, vision, communication, etc.). If, for example, a team's blueprint lacks a communication plan or a shared vision statement, that might indicate that part of the message did not land – but the goal is each plan is comprehensive. The plans will also reflect whether teams internalized the content (e.g., using tools and concepts introduced in the workshop).

### ***Engagement in Follow-Up***

A key sign of success is active participation during the 90-day sprint. Quantitatively, at least 80% of participants to remain engaged through the 90-day period (measured by attendance at follow-up meetings or responses to check-in surveys) are aimed for. If very few drop-offs occur and teams are meeting on their own in between checkpoints, it shows the workshop-built commitment. Another indicator is whether each team accomplishes at least one significant action item from its blueprint within 90 days (for instance, if a team planned to implement a new joint advisory board, did they hold at least an initial meeting of that board? Or if a simpler goal, like creating a shared contact directory, was it completed?).

### ***Enhanced Collaboration Outcomes***

While long-term outcomes (like improved student performance or fully institutionalized partnerships) are beyond the immediate scope, early outcomes can be noted. These include new or improved partnership initiatives launched as a result of the

workshop. For example, success might be that by the mini-summit, three out of four teams have started a new program or revived a dormant collaboration project that was discussed in the workshop. Qualitative indicators from follow-up interviews such as “Our communication with the college is much more frequent and productive now” or “We solved a policy misunderstanding that was hindering our dual enrollment program” will signal positive change attributable to the project.

### ***Sustainability and Institutional Support***

Another measure of success is whether the institutions decide to continue or expand the collaboration efforts. If, for instance, leaders decide to incorporate this PD workshop as an annual training or expand it to other departments, that is a strong sign that the project had value. Short of that, obtaining formal endorsement of the Partnership Blueprints by leadership (like each team’s plan being accepted by their administrators and folded into strategic plans) would indicate institutional buy-in.

In summary, the evaluation plan uses a mix of tests, surveys, plan reviews, and follow-ups to assess the project from immediate learning outcomes to short-term applied outcomes. By the conclusion of the evaluation, evidence to answer this question should be attained: Did the workshop improve the participants’ ability to collaborate, and are the college and school district now working together more effectively? The variety of data collected will allow us to triangulate the answer to this question. A successful evaluation will not only document these outcomes but will also yield insights to refine future professional development efforts (for example, by highlighting which workshop components were most or least effective).

## **Resources**

Implementing this project requires assembling several types of resources. This includes human resources (people's time and expertise), physical materials, and institutional supports. Fortunately, both the community college and the school district have some existing supports that can be leveraged, such as designated professional development days and technology infrastructure. Below is a breakdown of needed resources and supports.

## **Personnel**

Human resources are the largest and most critical component of the project, encompassing several key roles essential for successful implementation. These include a Project Lead or Coordinator who oversees planning and communication, two to three facilitators responsible for delivering the workshop and conducting follow-ups, and support staff who handle logistics and administrative tasks throughout the event. Additional personnel may involve guest speakers or panelists contributing specialized expertise, while institutional support ensures staff are authorized to participate during designated professional development days. Together, these roles provide the expertise, coordination, and operational support necessary to ensure the workshop and follow-up activities run smoothly and achieve their intended outcomes.

### ***Project Lead/Coordinator***

Approximately 1 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) position is needed for about 3–4 months (the planning and implementation period). In practice, this might be a faculty member or administrator (the EdD student may fill this role as part of their project) who

dedicates a portion of their time to coordinate the project. Responsibilities were outlined earlier and include planning, communication, and oversight. If this person's time is not fully dedicated, Roughly 25% of their time over a year (which is equivalent to 1 FTE for a quarter-year) is estimated.

### ***Facilitators***

Two to three facilitators are required for the 3-day workshop and subsequent follow-ups. If internal staff are used, they might not count as additional cost if it is part of their professional role (aside from potential stipends). If external expert(s) are brought in for specialized sessions, they would typically receive an honorarium or consulting fee. Each facilitator will commit perhaps 4 days total (3 days of workshop delivery plus 1 day equivalent for preparation and follow-up interactions).

### ***Support Staff***

Two to three support staff members will be needed each day of the workshop to handle logistics (they may be from the college's events office or volunteers). Additionally, one of them (or the project coordinator) will handle follow-up survey administration and data entry. These could be existing staff who allocate time to this event (for instance, the college's administrative assistant for professional development, and a technician from the IT department).

### ***Subject Matter Contributors***

Optionally, guest speakers or panelists might be invited for brief segments – for example, a successful partnership program from another area could present via video

conference to inspire participants. This is not essential, but if used, it would draw on external people's time (perhaps free if done collegially, or requiring a small honorarium).

The existing supports here include the willingness of the institutions to allow staff to participate. Both the college and school district often earmark days for teacher/administrator professional development – those days can be used for this workshop (supporting staff time). Leadership support means supervisors will authorize these personnel to focus on the project during the workshop days without penalty.

### **Materials & Supplies**

The project will use both printed and digital materials. The printed materials include the Partnership Blueprint Packets, as well as printing agendas, evaluation forms, sign-in sheets, name tags, and certificates. High-quality printing and binding for the packets is preferred to make them durable. If color printing is needed (for example, to include logos or attractive formatting), that is accounted for. Other supplies include flip chart pads, marker sets, sticky notes, pens and notepads for participants, tent cards for participant names; these should be procured in advance.

Digital materials include slide decks for each day (to guide presentations) will be needed. If any video clips or multimedia will be used (perhaps a short inspirational video about successful school–college collaborations), those need to be sourced and embedded. The online collaboration platform (Teams/Google Drive Slack etc.) will need initial setup with folders or channels for each team. Also, electronic versions of surveys (using SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, or Microsoft Forms) will be designed for the daily and follow-up surveys. These tools might require a subscription or may be available through

the institution's existing licenses (many schools have subscriptions to these services already, an existing support that can be used).

Miscellaneous supplies such as lanyards for name badges, USB drives (if needed to share digital files offline), and possibly small incentives or tokens for participants (some projects provide a book or a branded item related to the training topic) can be considered. Since budget is a constraint, these are optional; however, even providing a folder or portfolio for each participant to keep materials is useful and not costly.

The college likely has existing supports in terms of supplies: for instance, a stock of name badge holders or access to a print shop at a discounted internal rate. Tapping into these resources (using existing office supplies where possible, printing in-house) will be attempted to keep costs down.

### **Venue & Facilities**

**Venue Rental.** If the workshop is held on a college campus or a school district training center, there might not have a rental cost, which is a significant support. For instance, the community college might allow use of its conference hall for free as part of its contribution to the partnership. If a neutral off-site venue is preferred (to avoid daily work distractions), a community center or hotel conference space will be considered; that would incur rental fees. A venue rental will be budgeted in case free options are not adequate or available. The venue should include necessary furnishings (tables, chairs, projector screens) and ideally on-site catering facilities or permission to bring in outside catering.

**Catering.** Providing meals (three lunches and possibly light breakfasts, plus coffee/snack breaks) is part of the resource plan. The institutions might cover this as part of their professional development budget (which is common, as feeding participants is known to improve focus and satisfaction). If not, it will be paid from the project budget. Local vendors or campus food services will be worked with to cater within a reasonable cost per person. Dietary needs will be surveyed in advance to accommodate vegetarian, gluten-free, etc.

**Technology Infrastructure.** At least one computer is needed along with a projector and optionally a sound system if the room is large. The college's IT department has projectors and microphones that can be reserved – this is an existing resource that will be utilized instead of renting equipment. IT support will also be arranged to be on standby, especially at the start of each day, to help with any technical setups. If participants are expected to bring laptops, there should be assurances that there are sufficient power strips and charging stations in the room. If not all participants have devices, a few loaner laptops or tablets might be provided (again, perhaps available from the college's library or tech office) for use during interactive parts.

### **Existing Supports and Community Resources**

In addition to the above, it is worth noting intangible resources like leadership support, scheduled professional development time, and prior partnership structures that can be built upon. For example, if the college and district already have a memorandum of understanding or committee for partnerships, that structure can be leveraged to champion the workshop and support follow-through. If either institution has a grant or special

funding for collaborative initiatives, that can possibly be tapped for financial support (like a state education improvement grant that encourages K–16 partnerships). The project will also use the expertise of participants themselves as a resource – many will bring prior experience and ideas that enrich the discussions (treating participants as co-contributors aligns with adult learning principles (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In summary, the resources required are significant but largely feasible through the collaboration of the two institutions. The human resources (time of staff and faculty) are likely the most valuable contribution from the organizations, while financial resources are mainly needed for materials, food, and possibly an external facilitator or venue. It is anticipated that by using existing supports like campus facilities, volunteer staff, and institution-owned technology, the project can be executed cost-effectively.

### **Budget**

The project budget has been carefully estimated to ensure all components of the workshop and follow-up are adequately funded. The table below provides a breakdown of expected costs by category. These figures are rough estimates in U.S. dollars and would be refined once exact quotes (for printing, catering, etc.) are obtained.

The budget outlined is a ‘Plan A’ for full implementation. It assumes substantial support (approximately \$50,000 when including in-kind staff time). If such funding is not secured, the project can be scaled down as a ‘Plan B.’ For instance, the workshop might be shortened or delivered virtually to cut costs or phased over a longer period to distribute expenses. A contingency will be included to cover unexpected expenses. Both

the community college and school district may contribute in-kind resources (like free venue use or staff time), which effectively reduce the actual cash expenditure needed.

The scope of this workshop may exceed typical PD budgets. Both partnering institutions can jointly fund the project. Many colleges and districts have funds earmarked for professional development (including Title II, Part A funds under the Every Student Succeeds Act, which are specifically for improving educator effectiveness through PD). In this case, since the project benefits both, they might agree to split costs or alternate coverage of certain expenses. Grant opportunities may also be explored: for example, a local education foundation or a state grant focusing on K–16 partnerships could provide financial support. If a grant was obtained, it could offset most of the cost, making the workshop essentially grant-funded. There will be assurances that any in-kind contributions (like a free venue or on-duty staff time) are documented, as they show institutional commitment. Securing a grant or corporate sponsorship could underwrite facilitator fees and materials, making implementation feasible without straining existing budgets.

**Table 11**

*Estimated Budget for Workshop Implementation*

Budget Item	Estimated Cost (USD)
Personnel (Coordinator stipend, Facilitator honoraria)	\$8,000
Venue Rental (3 days @ ~\$833/day, if not on-campus free)	\$2,500
Catering (meals, coffee breaks for 3 days)	\$3,000
Materials & Printing (packets, handouts, supplies)	\$1,000
Technology (software licenses, equipment rentals)	\$1,500
Certificates & Participant Recognition	\$300
Miscellaneous (travel reimbursements, contingency)	\$700
Total Estimated Budget	\$16,000

These cost estimates are intentionally conservative and are informed by recent PD events hosted by the college. For example, catering quotes were based on the college’s 2024 faculty workshop rates. Actual costs may vary by region; if anything, this budget reflects a lean scenario.

The following overview breaks down each budget category, highlighting how these components support the successful execution of the project.

**Personnel.** The \$8,000 personnel budget is designed to cover all human resources for the workshop. This includes a small stipend for the project coordinator (an existing administrator who will organize the workshop as part of their duties) and honoraria for two facilitators from our faculty. By using internal staff, we keep these costs low – e.g., each facilitator receives about \$1,500 for preparing and delivering the three-day training, a fraction of what an external consultant would charge. The remaining funds (~\$1,500) are sufficient to provide substitute teachers for participants or to cover any support staff overtime. For instance, if five teachers attend for three days, at \$100 per substitute per day, the total substitute cost is \$1,500, exactly as budgeted. Thus, \$8,000 is ample to compensate personnel without overspending. Further disaggregation of personnel spending is below.

**Table 12**

*Personnel Budget Breakdown*

Role/Item	Estimated Amount	Explanation
Project Coordinator (Lead)	\$3,500	In-kind time from existing staff over 4 months (partial FTE; no additional hire) – equivalent to a stipend for planning/organizing.

Facilitators (2 internal staff)	\$3,000	Small stipends (\$1,500 each) for workshop delivery and prep, far cheaper than external consultant rates.
Support & Substitute Coverage	\$1,500	Covers classroom substitutes for teacher participants (approximately 15 sub days at \$100/day) or overtime for support staff handling logistics.
<b>Total Personnel</b>	<b>\$8,000</b>	

**Venue.** It is assumed here that the need to rent a space may arise. If the college provides a venue at no cost, that \$2,500 can be saved or reallocated. However, it is kept in the budget to be safe. The amount covers not just the room but also any associated fees (custodial services, room setup fees) that venues often charge.

**Catering.** This allocation covers basic lunches and refreshments for participants over the three-day workshop as outlined in the table below.

**Table 13**

*Catering and Food Cost Estimates*

Item	Calculation	Estimated Cost
Lunch for participants	20 people × 3 days × \$15 per meal	\$900
Snacks & beverages	20 people × 3 days × \$5–\$10 per day	approximately \$300–\$600
Estimated Food Cost (3 days)	20 people × \$50 total per person	approximately \$1,000 – \$1,500
<b>Budgeted Catering Line</b>		<b>\$3,000</b>

With an estimated twenty participants at approximately \$50 per person for the full duration, the \$3,000 catering budget supports economical meal options typical in our area (e.g., sandwich or barbecue buffet lunches). This estimate includes ~\$15 for lunch and

~\$10 for snacks and coffee per day, totaling \$25 per person daily. Over three days, this amounts to \$1,500, leaving a generous cushion within the \$3,000 budget to accommodate increased attendance, modest price fluctuations, or enhanced hospitality if needed. This approach ensures that participants receive appropriate meals, which are essential for an all-day workshop, while maintaining fiscal discipline. I am budgeting for working lunches and coffee breaks rather than elaborate catering.

**Materials.** Printing and supplies at \$1,000 covers design and production of the workbook packets, plus all the other supplies mentioned. If color printing of a ~30-page workbook for 30 participants is \$5 each, that is \$150. The rest is ample for other materials. If needed, this also covers purchasing a few books or reference materials for the workshop library (for instance, a couple of copies of a collaboration handbook to show or give away as prizes).

**Technology.** \$1,500 is included in case a software license needs purchasing (perhaps a one-year subscription to SurveyMonkey for advanced survey analysis, or a project management tool for the teams). It also covers any equipment rental (if, say, an extra projector is needed or a high-quality conference microphone for remote participants). If the institutions already have all needed tech and software, this cost might not be fully used. However, sometimes there are costs like printing digital badges, or usage fees for an online collaboration platform if something chosen like that is not already available. This category also budgets for any travel or accommodation expenses if an external facilitator is coming from afar.

**Certificates & Recognition.** \$300 is set aside for printing nice certificates and perhaps small tokens of appreciation. For example, custom printed folders may be purchased or a souvenir (like a mug or pen) with the project logo for each participant. While not essential, recognition items can improve the professional feel of the program.

**Miscellaneous.** Seven hundred dollars (~5% of the budget) will be included as a contingency. This could cover unexpected needs such as extra printing, a thank-you lunch for facilitators in a planning meeting, or if it is decided that travel mileage reimbursement will be offered to participants who drove a long way. It also ensures that if any of the other line items run over (which often happens, for instance food costs or participant count higher than expected), There is a buffer.

Overall, a budget of approximately \$15,000–\$16,000 is a reasonable investment for a comprehensive 3-day training with follow-up. This budget is modest compared to sending a large group of staff to external conferences, for instance, and the benefits of improved partnerships can far outweigh this cost in the long run (e.g., more efficient programs, shared resources between high school and college, etc.). Research consistently demonstrates that well-structured collaborations, whether between high schools and colleges or across sectors, can lead to more efficient programs, shared resources, and improved service delivery.

For instance, Adam, et al. (2022) highlighted how researcher-practitioner partnerships foster innovation and responsiveness to local needs, often yielding greater impact than traditional professional development models. Similarly, Fabre and Straub (2023) find that public–private partnerships in education enhance resource optimization

and long-term outcomes when governance is strong. Even outside education, Alderwick et al. (2021) showed that cross-sector collaboration improves efficiency and reduces duplication, reinforcing the broader value of partnership-driven models. These findings support the argument that modest investments in partnership infrastructure can produce enduring institutional gains that far outweigh initial costs. Should the budget not fully materialize, the project can be scaled (for example, reduce to 2 days, or have participants bring their own devices to cut tech rental, etc.), but the presented plan assumes full funding for maximum impact.

### **Potential Barriers and Solutions**

Implementing an innovative professional development project across two different educational systems inevitably comes with challenges. Recognizing potential barriers in advance allows us to devise mitigation strategies to ensure the project's success. Below, several anticipated barriers are outlined along with planned solutions for each.

#### ***Time Constraints & Scheduling Conflicts***

One of the first potential barriers is participants' availability. School principals, college staff, and faculty have busy schedules, and dedicating three full days (plus follow-up time) can be difficult. There may be resistance if the workshop conflicts with critical workdays or personal commitments. Additionally, some participants might not be able to stay for the entire day due to emergencies at their job. To address this, the timing (as discussed in the Implementation Plan) is carefully chosen to coincide with a period when both institutions can spare their staff. We have engaged top leadership early so that

they officially sanction these dates as professional development days – meaning participants are excused from other duties. If participants know that their supervisors not only approve but encourage their attendance, they are more likely to commit fully. Flexibility will be offered such as remote participation options. For instance, if a high school administrator has a crisis at school and cannot be physically present on Day 2, they could join via video conference for the key sessions, so they do not miss everything. In addition, providing substitute coverage is a strategy: the school district is prepared to hire substitute administrators or adjust responsibilities temporarily, and the college can arrange interim coverage for any staff absent. Lastly, to respect everyone’s time, the workshop days will start and end on time, and the agenda will be adhered to closely – demonstrating respect for participants’ time helps mitigate frustration about time commitment.

### ***Participant Buy-In and Sustained Engagement***

As a second barrier, sometimes, participants come into mandated workshops with skepticism or low motivation, especially if they have experienced perfunctory training in the past. There could be an attitude of “This is just another workshop that will come and go.” Moreover, even if Day 1 starts with enthusiasm, keeping participants actively engaged through Day 3 and beyond can be challenging; energy might dip, or pressing work issues might distract them over the 90-day period. A solution to this barrier is to build genuine buy-in as an essential standard. To do this, leadership endorsement has been visibly secured – for example, the college president and school superintendent not only approved the workshop but will speak at the opening. This signals to participants

that this initiative matters and is a priority for the institution (and not attending or not taking it seriously would be noticed).

The communications sent out before the workshop will clearly articulate “what’s in it for the participants.” That this training is an opportunity to solve real problems they have faced in partnership efforts will be emphasized and that their insights from the front lines have shaped the workshop content (indeed, the content is research-based on interviews with similar stakeholders). During the workshop, engagement will be maintained by using active learning techniques – group work, hands-on planning, real scenarios from their context – avoiding long lectures. Adults tend to learn best when content is relevant and immediately applicable (Knowles’ adult learning theory), so the workshop is designed around applying concepts to each team’s context rather than generic talk. Regular feedback opportunities will be incorporated (e.g., daily surveys, plus asking for quick feedback in sessions like “thumbs up if this makes sense, thumbs down if not”). By listening and adjusting, respect is shown for their input, which keeps them invested.

Finally, to combat dropping enthusiasm after the event, the structured follow-up and peer pressure of presenting at the mini-summit provide gentle accountability – teams know that their progress (or lack thereof) will be visible to their colleagues and bosses. Celebrating interim successes during the follow-ups (even small wins) will help maintain morale. For example, if at Week 3 a team managed to start a new student shadowing program, that achievement will be highlighted in a group email or meeting, which can motivate others to keep going. Participants buy-in will also increase if they see early on

that the workshop is practical and not just theoretical; by the end of Day 1 they will have produced something tangible (like a draft vision or list of issues to tackle) which gives a sense of accomplishment and value.

### ***Resource Limitations***

A third barrier ensconces the budget. While there is a budget, it is limited. Shortfalls might be faced such as not being able to afford an outside expert that is wanted or needing to cut corners on materials. If unexpected costs arise, funds could run out, which might compromise some aspects (for example, not printing the workbook and instead just emailing PDFs could reduce effectiveness if participants prefer hard copies). Also, if certain needed resources (like a good projector or enough breakout rooms) are not actually available, that could hamper the workshop experience. To solve this problem, the approach is to maximize use of in-kind resources first. Existing supports have been identified like using the college's facilities and supplies where possible.

The project scope has also been kept focused on essential components: the content and follow-up. If budgeting gets tight, the core training elements will be prioritized over nice-to-haves. For instance, it is more important to have facilitators and materials than to have an external keynote speaker; so, an external speaker would be cut first if needed. Additionally, external funding can be pursued in parallel: the project lead can submit a request to the state education office for a small professional development grant and can reach out to a local community foundation that funds educational partnerships. If even one of these comes through, it can alleviate financial pressure. Another solution is leveraging digital resources to save costs: use electronic surveys instead of paper (saves

printing), use email/online distribution for agendas and readings (saves printing and postage), and rely on free digital tools for collaboration that the institutions already have licenses for. If it is found that something like catering cannot be paid for fully, sponsorship from a local business (e.g., a restaurant might sponsor one day's lunch in return for recognition, which sometimes happens in community events) can be solicited.

For materials like the Blueprint Packet, if printing professionally is too costly, simpler versions can be printed in-house or provide them on USB drives for participants to print if they choose. In terms of human resources, if hiring substitute teachers or extra staff is a problem, adjustments will be made by scaling down participant number (maybe train slightly fewer people so that those who attend can be fully supported) or by shortening the workshop (2 very full days instead of 3, though that is a last resort because 3 days was chosen to align with best practices on duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Overall, being flexible and having backup plans (like using a free venue if a paid one is not possible or tapping an enthusiastic internal staff member to fill in if an external facilitator cannot be brought) will ensure the project can proceed even under resource constraints.

### ***Sustaining Momentum After the Workshop***

A fourth barrier is falling prey to the common pitfall in professional development of participants returning to their routine and failing to implement what they learned—"workshop fade-out" where initial excitement does not translate into action. The busy nature of school and college environments means other priorities could overtake the partnership work once people are back to daily demands. There is also a risk that without

immediate external pressure, teams might postpone meetings, and the whole 90-day sprint could lose steam.

A solution exists in the design of the project because it intentionally incorporates features to mitigate this. The 90-Day Partnership Sprint is not just a recommendation; it is structured with concrete deadlines (checkpoints and a mini-summit presentation) which create a sense of obligation. By setting up those meetings on everyone's calendars before the workshop ends, a rhythm of accountability is established. Periodic reminders and motivational messages will also be sent between checkpoints. The facilitators are tasked with being proactive: if a team does not show up to a check-in or seems to be falling behind, the facilitator will reach out individually to offer help or encourage them.

Forming a community of practice (Wenger, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2025) as mentioned – essentially a peer support group – will help sustain momentum as well. Participants know they can reach out to one another, not just rely on top-down prodding. To embed this work into their regular duties, participants will be helped in integrating some tasks into existing meetings or structures. For example, if a college department head is part of the team, the adding of a “partnership update” is suggest to them to their department's monthly meeting agenda, so that they must take action in order to report something. Likewise, school administrators could incorporate elements of their partnership plan into their school improvement plans, which ensures institutional follow-through. Celebrating interim successes publicly (even small accomplishments) helps maintain enthusiasm and a sense of purpose.

Conversely, inertia will be addressed by highlighting the consequences of inaction – diplomatically reminding teams at the mini-summit that without sustained collaboration efforts, the initial problems that motivated this project (communication breakdowns, etc.) will persist. Essentially, a supportive but accountable environment is created. By the end of 90 days, it is hoped that the teams have established new habits (e.g., a bi-weekly cross-institution phone call) that will continue as part of their work life. Additionally, the delivery of a summary report to leadership will be planned after the 90-day sprint, which can include recommendations for long-term steps. If leadership decides to continue monitoring these partnerships or schedules another check-in 6 months later, that top-down interest will further sustain momentum.

### ***Institutional Policy or Alignment Issues***

A fifth barrier is that the community college and the K–12 district operate under different policies, regulations, and cultures. These differences can create barriers; for example, data sharing might be hampered by privacy rules, or the academic calendars might not synchronize, making collaboration harder. Participants might identify solutions during the workshop that later run into red tape (e.g., wanting to share student performance data but hitting FERPA restrictions, or trying to align curricula but state requirements differ). If institutional leadership or policy does not support change, some plans could stall. To solve this problem, the workshop included activities (like Knowledge Swap and policy awareness sessions) specifically to surface these issues early.

By having participants from both systems in the same room, they can educate each other on constraints and hopefully find common ground or at least flag the issues for leadership. During the planning of the workshop, the institutional leaders were engaged to let them know that teams may come to them with requests or needs (for instance, “We realized we need an updated MOU to share certain data”). Having leadership sponsors involved means when such requests come up, they are not taken by surprise and are more willing to act.

The project coordinator can facilitate follow-up meetings between college and district decision-makers for any big systemic barrier identified. For example, if a barrier is “We have no formal policy to allow a high school teacher and college faculty to co-plan a curriculum,” the coordinator could help draft a memo of understanding to authorize a pilot arrangement. In addition, part of the Day 3 content on “knowledge of both systems” includes creating a reference sheet of key policy points and contacts – basically equipping participants with the info on who to go to for what in each system. If an unforeseen policy barrier arises during implementation, participants will at least know which administrator or office might help resolve it.

The facilitators will also encourage teams to produce workarounds for minor bureaucratic hurdles – this kind of creative problem solving is an intended outcome of bringing these teams together. In the end, some larger institutional differences may not be fully solvable by our project alone, but by acknowledging them and involving higher-ups early, the chances that they will not derail the partnerships will be improved. On a broader scale, demonstrating quick wins and positive outcomes from the collaboration

can persuade institutions to adjust policies – success can build its own momentum for policy change (if college leaders see value, they might formalize the partnership processes more).

### ***Technology and Accessibility Challenges***

A sixth barrier is the reliance on technology always carries risk. Participants might have varying levels of tech proficiency; some may not be comfortable with online collaboration tools or might simply prefer paper. Technical glitches during the workshop (projector fails, video conferencing drops) can disrupt learning. Additionally, if any participant has a disability (e.g., visual or hearing impairment), or if someone is first language is not English, the accessibility of the workshop will be ensured. The solution is that preparation is key here. The IT support staff will be asked to test all equipment and internet connectivity before the workshop begins and have spare equipment (like an extra projector bulb, an extra laptop with the presentation loaded, etc.). For crucial presentations, printed copies or summaries will be available in case technology fails. In terms of platform, tools that participants are somewhat familiar with (e.g., if the district uses Google Drive regularly, this will be leveraged rather than introducing a brand new platform) will be chosen. A bit of time on Day 1 will also be allocated to walk participants through the online workspace that will be used for follow-ups, ensuring everyone can log in and use basic features before they leave the workshop. To accommodate different comfort levels, tasks will be assigned in both digital and analog formats (for instance, teams can sketch their communication plan on flipchart paper first, then later facilitators will help them upload or type it into the shared folder). Regarding

accessibility, it will be asked beforehand if anyone requires special accommodations. If there is a hearing-impaired participant, an interpreter can be arranged, or it can be ensured that all videos shown have captions and that speakers use microphones. If language is an issue, key materials might be translated or ensures may be made so that bilingual facilitators are available if applicable (depending on the demographic—if any participant is not fluent in English, facilitators will plan accordingly, though in a professional development context that might be rare). The workshop venue itself is accessible (ramps, elevators, etc., have been confirmed). By proactively addressing these issues, minimizing any technology snags or accessibility problems so that all participants can fully engage is a hope.

### ***Quality of Facilitation***

A seventh barrier is that the effectiveness of a workshop can hinge on the skill of the facilitators. If facilitators are not well-prepared, or not adept at engaging adults, the sessions could fall flat. Potential issues include a facilitator dominating discussion instead of eliciting participation, failing to align content with participants' context, or not adjusting to feedback. Participants could disengage if they feel the facilitator is not credible or is disrespectful of their expertise. To solve this problem, experienced facilitators who have a background in interactive training have been deliberately selected. However, even experienced facilitators will be thoroughly briefed and trained on the specific workshop content and goals. A facilitator planning session prior to the workshop will be held where the facilitation team rehearses key activities and reviews the game plan for timing, transitions, and responsibilities. In that session, strategies for adult

learning will be emphasized: for instance, to always connect discussions back to participants' real-world experiences and to use a coaching stance rather than a lecturing stance. Signals from participants will also be discussed (reading the room) and how to adjust if, say, an activity is not resonating. During the workshop, the project coordinator will quietly observe and give facilitators feedback at the end of each day ("Tomorrow maybe spend a bit more time on X, people seemed confused," or "We're a little behind schedule, let's tighten up Y segment").

Additionally, collecting daily feedback from participants allows facilitators to course-correct in real time. If one facilitator is less effective, the team can adapt by having another facilitator take a larger role in certain sections. A variety has been built in: not all sessions are run by the same person, which keeps things dynamic and allows each facilitator to play to their strengths. By Day 3, even participants will be empowered to take some lead (e.g., in presentations and discussions), shifting facilitators to a supporting role, which is a natural progression and ensures the event is not a one-man show. Lastly, humility and responsiveness will be emphasized as facilitator qualities – they will explicitly invite participants to share their knowledge (recognizing that in a room of administrators and educators, there is a tremendous amount of expertise already). This collaborative facilitation style should mitigate the risk of any single facilitator's weaknesses undermining the workshop.

### ***Evaluation and Data Collection Issues***

An eighth barrier is that Implementing the evaluation plan itself can face challenges. Participants might experience survey fatigue (being asked to fill out forms

every day, plus follow-up surveys). They might not take the time to respond thoughtfully, which can result in low-quality feedback or low response rates for the later surveys.

There is also the risk of losing track of data – with multiple instruments and time points, it can get messy. In a worst-case scenario, the project will be finished but may lack solid data to prove its impact if participants do not complete the evaluations or if there is a failure to analyze it properly. To ensure good participation in data collection, instruments will be kept short and user-friendly. For example, daily surveys are just a half-sheet of paper with a few key questions that take 5 minutes, and participants will be directed to do them on-site (not after they leave, to ensure nearly 100% collection). For the follow-up surveys, they also continually be kept concise and possibly be integrated into the check-in meetings (“Before we discuss, please take 3 minutes to fill these three questions on the form I emailed”).

Compliance can also be motivated by positioning the evaluation as a crucial part of the project: letting them know “Your feedback will help show the value of this program and could lead to continued support or funding for these initiatives.” People are more likely to respond if they see a direct benefit. To manage the data, the project coordinator will maintain an organized system (likely a spreadsheet or database) where every piece of data is entered and labeled by type and date. This ensures that when writing up results, there will not be any scrambling through papers.

If any participants do not respond to a follow-up, we will send personal reminders and even have their team facilitator give them a nudge. Given the small cohort, an individualized touch is feasible (e.g., a quick phone call to ask their feedback if they have

not filled out the survey). The also plan is to do at least a preliminary analysis of data immediately after the workshop (when things are fresh) and again after the 90-day sprint, rather than waiting months and risking losing the thread. By being diligent and appreciative (thanking participants for every survey completed, etc.), the aim is to gather a rich set of data. This will not only document the project's effectiveness but also capture lessons learned, closing the loop on the project's goals.

One of the most significant implementation challenges is the reality of competing initiatives vying for limited time, budget, and attention during high-demand professional development windows—particularly the three-day summer or August block-off periods. Literacy, numeracy, climate and culture, technology integration, and equity frameworks all present urgent and valid claims on these shared resources. Rather than positioning this initiative in opposition to others, it is essential to frame it as a strategic connector: a platform that strengthens cross-initiative coherence, fosters shared ownership, and enhances the impact of existing efforts (Patfield et al., 2021). By aligning this workshop with district priorities and embedding collaborative planning structures, we can mitigate scheduling conflicts and demonstrate how improved partnerships—especially between high school and college stakeholders—can amplify outcomes across multiple domains (Mlambo et al., 2021). This approach acknowledges the importance of all initiatives while offering a scalable model for integration rather than competition.

### **Key Stakeholders for Project Evaluation**

Key stakeholders for this evaluation include the college and district administrators who are sponsoring and supporting the professional development workshop. These

leaders will use the evaluation results to assess the effectiveness of the training, inform future partnership initiatives, and guide decisions about scaling or adapting the workshop model. Workshop participants, including K–12 and community college educators as well as senior administrators, are also primary stakeholders. They will receive feedback on their learning, implementation progress, and collaborative outcomes. Their engagement and reflections will shape the continuous improvement cycle embedded in the project. Additionally, the broader educational community, including students, families, and institutional partners, may benefit indirectly from the evaluation findings, particularly if the workshop model is replicated or expanded.

While these potential barriers present challenges, the solutions outlined demonstrate a proactive and responsive approach to project implementation. By anticipating issues related to time, engagement, resources, momentum, institutional alignment, technology, facilitation quality, and evaluation, the project team is equipped to handle them in stride. It is worth noting that many of these mitigation strategies (such as strong leadership support, continuous follow-up, and participant-centered facilitation) are supported by research on effective professional development and change management. The goal is to ensure that no barrier becomes a roadblock that derails the project's mission of improving partnerships. Instead, each challenge is managed in a way that the project can still achieve its outcomes, thereby modeling the very resilience and collaborative problem-solving that the workshop seeks to instill in participants.

The implementation and evaluation plans detailed above provide a comprehensive roadmap for turning the project idea into a successful reality. By carefully planning the

workshop structure (Implementation Plan) and establishing a rigorous yet practical Evaluation Plan, the project is positioned to not only execute a high-quality professional development experience but also to generate evidence of its impact. The allocation of Resources and Budget demonstrates that the project is feasible and sustainable with the combined support of the partnering institutions. Moreover, by preemptively identifying Potential Barriers and Solutions, the project team shows readiness to ensure smooth execution and long-term success.

In summary, this professional development workshop model—grounded in the study’s findings and in best practices of adult learning—aims to foster a substantial positive change in how the community college and school district collaborate. If implemented as designed, the expected outcome is a measurable strengthening of partnerships: more frequent and effective communication, jointly developed programs, and a lasting network of educators committed to continuing the collaboration. This in turn can lay the groundwork for improved student outcomes (such as smoother transitions to college and enriched learning opportunities), illustrating the broader social benefit of the project. By meeting the EdD doctoral project study rubric requirements for a thorough project description (Sections 8–12), this document also serves as a chapter of the dissertation that provides assurance to stakeholders that the project is thoughtfully designed, grounded in evidence, and capable of yielding meaningful improvements in the local educational context.

## **Project Implications**

In this section, two components of project implementation are addressed: (1) the potential social change implications of the professional development initiative, and (2) the importance of the project to local stakeholders and within a broader educational context. Drawing upon the project's design, implementation, and anticipated outcomes, the following narrative synthesizes evidence from the dissertation chapter and integrates peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2025. The goal is to demonstrate how the project not only responds to a localized problem but also contributes to systemic improvement in educational collaboration, thereby aligning with Walden University's mission of fostering positive social change.

### **Possible Social Change Implications**

The project promises clear benefits for the community and society by strengthening the educational partnership. By improving communication and alignment between the local college and school district, the project ultimately creates more opportunities for students and a more efficient use of public educational resources, thereby fulfilling the social change potential that the study envisioned. In practical terms, a healthier school–college partnership can lead to increased college readiness and higher student success rates.

These outcomes would not only enhance individual lives but also ripple outwards – for example, more students pursuing higher education or vocational training can translate into a more skilled workforce and reduced social inequalities in the community. Such positive changes are the essence of Walden's social change mission. Students and

families stand to “win” the most, as better coordination between K-12 and college means smoother pathways to college and career opportunities. This improvement in educational attainment and resource utilization is a form of positive social change: it addresses a long-standing local problem (fragmented education efforts) in a way that empowers learners and ultimately benefits the broader community. Notably, research on educational collaborations supports these implications – when schools and colleges work in tandem to meet student needs, communities see stronger educational and economic outcomes (Shin et al., 2023). In short, the project’s social change impact could manifest as a more educated populace and a community culture that values and supports lifelong learning. These are lasting benefits that extend well beyond the immediate participants, aligning the project with broader societal improvement goals.

### **Importance to Local Stakeholders and in a Larger Context**

For local stakeholders – including the K-12 educators, college faculty, administrators, students, and their families – this project is highly significant. It directly addresses their shared challenges by providing a structured solution to improve partnerships. Locally, the workshop fosters a new culture of collaboration and trust: faculty and staff gain practical strategies to work together, and leaders initiate much-needed dialogue across institutions. This means that school teachers, college instructors, and administrators will finally have a common vision and clear communication channels, which in turn reduces frustration and increases their effectiveness in serving students. In the words of the dissertation, the project “brings everyone to the table” and creates

conversations that “simply were not happening before,” indicating how crucial it is for those stakeholders who previously felt siloed.

For example, a high school counselor and a community college advisor can now coordinate on student support plans – a direct benefit to their daily work and to the students they jointly serve. The local importance is also evident in the leadership support the project has received: college and district leaders view this training as a priority, signaling to all stakeholders that partnership-building is essential. As a result, stakeholders are likely to feel more “heard” and valued, knowing that the project grew out of identified local needs and that it equips them with tools to succeed in their roles.

In a larger context, this project holds value as a model for other communities facing similar issues. The approach and materials are intentionally transferable, demonstrating how using research-driven professional development can significantly improve inter-organizational collaboration. Many school districts and colleges around the country struggle with disconnects in their partnerships; thus, the lessons learned here can inform broader educational practice. For instance, the concept of a multi-day joint workshop could be adopted by other K-12 and post-secondary institutions seeking to bridge communication gaps. The dissertation notes that the project’s design is not a one-off solution but a template that can be shared beyond the immediate locale. On a scholarly level, it contributes to the knowledge base on how to address educational silos – a challenge in education systems globally.

By aligning with established frameworks and demonstrating success, the project adds to the literature on effective partnership strategies (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022).

In essence, while the direct beneficiaries are the local stakeholders, the importance of this project extends to the larger educational community: it exemplifies how data-driven interventions can yield tangible improvements in educational partnerships. This broader significance means the project could inspire or guide other institutions, thereby amplifying its impact. Ultimately, strengthening the pipeline from K-12 to college is a widely shared goal in education, and this project provides a concrete example of how to achieve it. In doing so, it not only serves the local stakeholders who needed a solution but also contributes to positive change on a larger scale by modeling collaboration that can be emulated elsewhere.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

This project study provides comprehensive insights into the perceptions of collaboration and communication among school district and community college personnel in the formation of partnerships. One of the principal strengths of this study lies in its grounding in real-world perspectives, having drawn upon input from 18 experienced education leaders: nine representing a community college and nine from a K–12 district. The qualitative, interview-based methodology facilitated a nuanced understanding that extends beyond the constraints of surveys or superficial observations. Participants offered concrete examples of effective practices and barriers, speaking in their own words and thereby imparting authenticity and depth to the findings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed to ensure a systematic and credible process for identifying patterns within the data. The six-phase coding and theme development process enhanced reliability, with initial semantic codes preserving participant language and second-cycle latent coding enabling deeper interpretation. This analytical rigor supports the assertion that the resulting themes accurately reflect participants' realities rather than the my bias.

Further, the alignment of the study's results with existing literature and theoretical frameworks strengthens its validity. Participants consistently emphasized that collaboration is essential for institutional survival and success, echoing prior research that underscores the necessity of sustained teamwork for authentic school–college partnerships. The establishment of a shared vision and common goals emerged as

foundational, mirroring Goodlad's argument regarding the formation of successful K–16 partnerships centered on a unifying mission that benefits students. The emergence of themes such as “Shared Vision” and “Collaboration is the Foundation,” which are well-supported by partnership literature, enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings.

The project's deliverable, a professional development (PD) workshop series, was directly derived from these robust findings, with each module linked to an evidence-based theme. The PD workshop series was intentionally designed so that each major theme identified in the qualitative analysis is directly operationalized through a corresponding module or activity. The six core themes each serve as both learning objectives and structural pillars for the workshop (1) collaboration is foundation, (2) shared vision, (3) ongoing transparent communication, (4) knowledge of both systems/policies, (5) interpersonal leadership skills, and (6) continuous improvement/data use.

Theme 1: Collaboration is Foundation is addressed through the opening module, which establishes a partnership framework and launches the “Partnership Blueprint Packet.” Participants engage in joint planning exercises and team-building activities, laying the groundwork for a collaborative culture and modeling the community of practice approach recommended by both the literature and participant feedback.

Theme 2: Shared Vision is the focus of a dedicated module where mixed teams of college and K–12 personnel co-develop a shared vision statement and set mutual goals. This activity responds directly to findings that misaligned missions and goals were a

barrier to partnership success. The resulting vision document becomes a central artifact guiding all subsequent partnership work.

Theme 3: Ongoing Transparent Communication is operationalized through modules on communication best practices, including role-play scenarios, the development of a formal communication plan, and the introduction of regular check-in routines. These activities directly address participant-identified issues such as infrequent updates, unclear messaging, and the need for structured feedback loops.

Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies is embedded in “knowledge swap” sessions and case study discussions, where participants teach each other about their respective institutional policies, calendars, and constraints. This mutual learning is reinforced by collaborative problem-solving tasks that require participants to apply their new understanding to real-world partnership challenges.

Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership Skills are developed through leadership labs, trust-building exercises, and conflict resolution role-plays. These modules are designed to strengthen relationship-building, empathy, and collaborative leadership, skills that the data analysis identified as critical for sustaining partnerships.

Theme 6: Continuous Improvement/Data Use is addressed in the final workshop modules, where participants learn to use data and feedback for ongoing evaluation and refinement of partnership activities. The workshop concludes with the creation of a continuous improvement plan and the launch of a 90-Day Partnership Sprint, ensuring that the cycle of reflection and adjustment continues beyond the training itself.

Each module in the PD series is thus a direct response to the study's findings, ensuring that the workshop is not only evidence-based but also tightly aligned with the real needs and recommendations of the partnership stakeholders. This explicit mapping from theme to activity demonstrates the project's rigor and practical relevance, fulfilling both scholarly and applied goals. This integration of research and practice ensures relevance and data-driven recommendations, a notable strength highlighted by Anderson et al. (2022), who assert that partnerships thrive when professional learning addresses identified gaps in collaboration. Nevertheless, the project is subject to several limitations.

The sample, while rich in detail, was confined to one community college and its primary feeder school district. Although many findings resonate with broader issues in school–university collaboration, the unique cultural and organizational context of this partnership may restrict generalizability. The research site, a rural, high-poverty county characterized by longstanding personal ties among educators, presents challenges in trust-building that may differ from urban districts or university partnerships, where increased staff turnover and bureaucracy can introduce distinct barriers (Hands, 2023). Interpretations were grounded in well-established theory (small group theory) and compared to national research, but caution is advised when extending conclusions to different settings without adaptation.

Another limitation stems from the self-reported nature of the data, which is provided by educators invested in the partnership's success. Social desirability bias may be present, as participants could have understated sensitive issues such as personal conflicts or power dynamics. While confidentiality and rapport were prioritized in the

interview process, some candor may have been reserved, particularly regarding politically sensitive topics. To address this, future research could triangulate perspectives through anonymous surveys or document analysis, such as reviewing meeting minutes for evidence of conflict.

The study primarily captures leadership perspectives from administrators and senior faculty without direct input from students or frontline teachers involved in partnership programs. Their insights could reveal additional strengths or pitfalls, such as communication breakdowns not apparent to leadership. The chosen focus reflects the research questions and PD design, which center on improving collaboration at the leadership level; however, this scope is acknowledged as a limitation since effective partnerships ultimately impact teachers' daily practice and student experiences, topics addressed only indirectly.

Time constraints also limited the study, as data were collected at a single point in time after one year of partnership activity. Collaboration is inherently dynamic, and longitudinal observation would provide stronger evidence regarding the evolution of partnership competencies and the impact of professional development. The cross-sectional nature of the study precludes causal claims, restricting conclusions to perceived relationships between collaboration practices and partnership endurance, which remain tentative until tested through future longitudinal or experimental research.

In summary, the project's qualitative depth, theoretical grounding, and actionable outputs constitute significant strengths, rendering the findings compelling and applicable to similar contexts. However, the limited scope and reliance on self-reported data

necessitate careful extrapolation of results. These limitations delineate the parameters within which the conclusions are valid and suggest directions for further research and broader stakeholder engagement.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

In light of the study's findings and identified limitations, several alternative or complementary approaches merit consideration to address the persistent challenge of failed college-school partnerships. One recommendation is to extend the partnership model beyond periodic professional development workshops to a more enduring, structural collaboration, such as a Professional Development School (PDS) or "laboratory school." A PDS embeds the partnership within the daily operations of a K-12 school, facilitating ongoing co-teaching and co-research by college faculty, pre-service teachers, and K-12 staff. This continuous exchange surpasses episodic workshops, fostering trust and mutual understanding through sustained, side-by-side engagement. Implementation of a PDS or "shared campus" approach could reinforce collaboration and communication routines identified as critical, though it would require significant institutional commitment and formal agreements. Research indicates that such partnerships can substantially improve mutual understanding and innovation by dismantling the silo mentality prevalent in higher education and K-12 relationships (Jones & Foran, 2024).

Another recommended approach involves leveraging technology to create collaborative platforms that institutionalize communication. While the project's PD series includes follow-up meetings and a "90-Day Partnership Sprint," adopting joint digital tools, such as shared online workspaces, calendars, or data dashboards, could facilitate

daily informal communication and problem-solving. Research during the COVID-19 era demonstrates that virtual collaboration tools can sustain inter-organizational partnerships by bridging physical and scheduling gaps (Chen & Graham, 2021). Such digital infrastructure, however, must be accompanied by cultural buy-in from partners to ensure active engagement.

A third alternative is to broaden stakeholder involvement, incorporating industry and community partners into partnership initiatives. Expanding the collaboration to include local employers or community organizations can introduce added resources and motivations, particularly for college–career pathway development. Forming a triad partnership between school, college, and community renders collaboration and communication externally accountable, potentially dissolving turf battles and rallying all parties around shared objectives (Markaki et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2023). Examples include co-hosted roundtables with economic development agencies or service-learning projects involving high school and college students in community challenges.

Finally, the establishment of a formal partnership governance board or task force is recommended. A joint leadership team comprising representatives from faculty, principals, counselors, and students could meet regularly to oversee partnership progress, set shared goals, and resolve conflicts. This organizational intervention would institutionalize collaborative practices and ensure continuity despite personnel changes. The literature on cross-sector collaboration supports the utility of joint leadership teams in maintaining momentum (Pulido-Gomez et al., 2025), though care must be taken to avoid bureaucratic stagnation.

In conclusion, alternative approaches—including PDS models, technology-enabled collaboration, expanded stakeholder engagement, and formal governance structures—offer viable pathways to achieving a high-functioning, communicative, and collaborative school–college partnership. These strategies are complementary and may be implemented in tandem to maximize impact. Deep partnerships often require simultaneous changes in practice, policy, and mindset; thus, educational leaders are encouraged to select and adapt methods appropriate to their local context and resource availability, with the ultimate goal of cultivating trust, alignment, communication, and mutual understanding.

#### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

The undertaking of this study has contributed significantly to the development of scholarship, project design, and leadership in educational contexts. The research process was grounded in theory from inception through analysis, integrating institutional theories of school–university collaboration and the sociology of small groups to frame and interpret findings. Examination of small group theory (Hartford, 1971; Hollingshead et al., 2005) provided a lens for understanding interpersonal dynamics described by participants, facilitating the identification of group development stages and role negotiations.

The iterative qualitative analysis sharpened the ability to discern patterns and connections, with emergent data driving the discovery of major themes such as knowledge of each other’s systems. This process involved continual engagement with the literature, confirming findings in fields such as organizational learning and higher

education partnerships (Holcombe et al., 2022). The research maintained an audit trail and reflexivity throughout, deliberately seeking discrepant cases to enrich recommendations and minimize bias.

Regarding project development and evaluation, the study exemplified the importance of designing interventions directly from evidence, akin to a design-based research approach. Each component of the three-day workshop was mapped to corresponding themes and participant quotes, enhancing the credibility of the design. Feedback from mentors and formative evaluations informed adjustments, such as expanding the workshop format and integrating relationship-building activities to reflect themes in interpersonal leadership skills. An evaluation plan was established, which includes a 90-day follow-up survey and a focus group. This plan draws on Kirkpatrick's model to measure reaction, learning, behavior change, and outcomes. This approach integrates implementation and evaluation into a continuous improvement cycle.

The study also provided insights into leadership and change management. Facilitating research among colleagues highlighted the value of listening as a leadership practice, uncovering leverage points for change through authentic engagement rather than authority. Effective leadership in partnerships was characterized by mentorship, active listening, and supportive involvement, principles incorporated into the PD program to foster collaborative culture. The process occasionally required facilitation between the college and district, utilizing evidence to promote collaborative action among decision-makers.

Developing and presenting the final report functioned as a sense-making moment for stakeholders, articulating a compelling vision for partnership improvement and crystallizing issues previously unaddressed. The project demonstrated the power of data-informed leadership in guiding collaborative change, focusing stakeholders on core issues and fostering trust and shared responsibility. Ethical considerations were paramount, with efforts made to maintain scholarly objectivity and facilitate system improvement rather than assign blame.

In sum, the research strengthened capabilities in theoretical grounding, systematic inquiry, evidence-based program design, and collaborative leadership. The outcome is not only a doctoral product but also an enhanced identity for educational leaders as scholar-practitioners capable of bridging theory and practice to drive meaningful change.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

The significance of this project extends from local impact to broader implications for educational practice. Locally, the work addresses the persistent fragmentation between K–12 and higher education, which frequently leaves students disadvantaged by misaligned expectations and missed opportunities. The implementation of recommended interventions is anticipated to yield immediate benefits, including smoother dual-enrollment processes, increased college readiness among high school students, and improved support for incoming college first-year students. These outcomes align with the fundamental purpose of education: the development of human potential. Strengthening the school–college partnership is particularly significant in regions serving predominantly

low-income, first-generation college students, where institutional support can be transformative.

On a broader scale, this project contributes to the ongoing discourse on P–16 or P–20 educational alignment. It provides a concrete model—identifying themes, structured PD programming, and evaluation planning—that other districts or colleges may adapt. The six identified themes (Collaboration Foundation, Shared Vision, Transparent Communication, Knowledge of Both Systems, Interpersonal Skills, Continuous Improvement) offer a diagnostic framework for partnership development, correlating with best practices in educational change leadership and continuous improvement.

Moreover, the study exemplifies the direct application of research to educational practice. By involving educators as participants and co-designers of solutions, the project underscores the value of practitioner-led inquiry in driving school improvement. The collaborative approach helped dissolve adversarial mindsets and foster collective efficacy, reframing narratives of blame into shared responsibility and possibility.

The project also affirms the importance of listening to educators' voices during reform initiatives. Participant feedback indicated a sense of empowerment and professional respect, signaling a shift toward improvement strategies co-created with practitioners. Such an ethos supports lasting positive change and aligns with the principles of empowerment and collaborative action research.

In conclusion, the importance of this work is dual: locally, it offers a practical path to better serve students and educators by strengthening a critical partnership;

broadly, it provides knowledge and a replicable model to inform efforts aimed at bridging educational segments. The project stands as evidence of the impact of collaborative research in fostering meaningful change in education.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The implications of this project span practical, policy, and theoretical domains. Practically, the findings and resulting partnership development program present a blueprint for other community college–school district collaborations seeking to enhance outcomes. The six themes can serve as diagnostic tools for other educational leaders, enabling targeted interventions and adaptation of the PD workshop curriculum to diverse contexts.

The project’s transferability was evidenced at a recent state-wide meeting, where administrators expressed interest in applying aspects of the PD framework to emerging partnerships. This suggests that, despite contextual differences, the core ingredients for effective collaboration are broadly relevant, as supported by existing literature (Pulido-Gómez, et. al., 2025).

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the need for system-level support of inter-sector collaboration. State education departments or governing boards might consider establishing incentives and guidelines for formalized partnerships, such as joint committees and professional learning communities crossing institutional boundaries. Policy recommendations include funding and promoting joint professional development, as well as formalizing collaborative practices through local policy and memoranda of understanding.

Theoretically, the project advances understanding of small group dynamics and institutional theory in the context of educational partnerships. Findings suggest that partnership teams undergo developmental processes similar to small groups, but with added complexity from differing organizational cultures. The identification of “Knowledge of Both Systems” as a key theme points to a gap in existing models, indicating the need for theoretical frameworks to explicitly address mutual system literacy.

Future research should assess the long-term impact of the implemented solutions, collecting follow-up data on collaboration competency, meeting frequency, transparency, and student outcomes. Comparative effectiveness studies may explore various partnership strengthening approaches, such as professional development models versus structural mergers. Additional inquiry into the role of technology in sustaining collaboration, including the use of networked improvement communities and digital communication platforms, is warranted. Analysis of communication content and tone on these platforms could yield valuable insights into the formation of collegial relationships in digital environments.

In summary, the project equips current and future partnerships to function more effectively and equitably, informs policy advocacy for K–16 collaboration, and advances theoretical understanding of partnership development. Continued monitoring, dissemination, and research will contribute to a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement, with the project serving as feedback from the field for model redesign. The

ongoing nature of partnership development is emphasized, with the study charting a clear course for future endeavors.

### **Conclusion**

This section has presented a comprehensive analysis of the reflections, conclusions, and broader implications arising from the study on strengthening collaboration between a community college and its feeder school district. The examination began with an assessment of strengths and limitations, highlighting the robust qualitative foundation and context-specific design, while recognizing constraints such as sample specificity and self-report bias. Alternative and complementary approaches were discussed, including Professional Development Schools, technology-enabled collaboration, expanded stakeholder engagement, and formal governance structures.

The review of scholarship and project development illustrated the synergy between theory and practice, demonstrating the utility of academic concepts such as small group dynamics and organizational alignment in addressing real-world educational challenges. The importance of data-driven program design and evidence-informed leadership was emphasized, with personal insights from the analyst integrated into the recommendations.

The significance of the work was outlined with respect to both immediate local impact—particularly in facilitating student transitions and empowering educators—and broader contributions as a model for systemic alignment within education. The engagement of stakeholders throughout the process attests to a latent demand for

constructive partnership solutions, with the project fostering a shift from fragmentation and apathy to hope and collective responsibility.

Looking ahead, the study identified practical, policy, and theoretical implications, advocating for cyclical refinement of the professional development program and ongoing research. Plans for dissemination through publications and conferences align with calls for sharing effective partnership practices to build capacity across the field.

In wrapping up, it is worth circling back to the research questions that guided this project and affirming how they were answered. For Research Question 1 (RQ1), the focus is on how school district and community college personnel characterize the role of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships. The findings, supported by multi-voiced qualitative evidence, indicate that these elements are regarded as the lifeblood of the partnership—collaboration serves as the foundation for all joint efforts, while communication functions as the conduit that maintains the flow of collaboration.

Participants described collaboration and communication as mutually reinforcing working together builds trust and clarity, which enables deeper collaboration in a virtuous cycle. They gave rich accounts of what happens when these elements are present (e.g., “once we started weekly check-ins, things improved dramatically,” per CC Leader 6) and when they are absent (“misguided expectations” and finger-pointing arise)

For Research Question 2 (RQ2), the focus was on the knowledge and skills necessary for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships. The data indicated that essential knowledge involves understanding institutional contexts such as

policies, timelines, and terminology. Critical skills identified include active listening, relationship-building, joint problem-solving, and using data for decision-making. In summary, a combination of soft skills (communication, empathy, leadership) and procedural skills (coordinating calendars, aligning curricula) was recognized as necessary for effective partnership work. These findings directly informed the content of the project's professional development activities, ensuring alignment with identified competencies. that our solution directly addresses the identified skill and knowledge gaps.

Overall, regarding the research questions, the study addressed the characterization of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships, with findings indicating their roles as foundational and mutually reinforcing elements. The knowledge and skills necessary for effective partnership work were identified, encompassing institutional understanding and competencies such as active listening, relationship-building, problem-solving, and data-driven decision-making. These findings informed the design and content of professional development activities, ensuring alignment with identified needs. By systematically addressing the research questions, the project remained focused and yielded outcomes aligned with its objectives. The resulting themes provided comprehensive answers, strongly triangulated with the literature, reinforcing their validity.

In conclusion, the transformation of a persistent local problem, characterized by repeated failures in a school and college partnership, into an opportunity for growth and innovation through collaborative inquiry exemplifies the potential of research-driven

change. The core lesson learned is that success in partnership development hinges on mutual understanding of institutional systems, credentialing, and operational norms. The foundation has been laid for a thriving, enduring partnership that benefits all stakeholders. The work of building and sustaining this partnership continues, with the course charted by the project promising sustained positive change. Through ongoing scholarship and adaptive leadership, the bridge between school and college can remain strong and accessible, supporting students on their educational journeys.

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## Appendix A: The Project

*Agenda*Day 1: Collaboration & Shared Vision (Monday)

- 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM: Registration, Welcome, and Pre-Test 1
- 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM: Ice-Breaker – “Common Ground Connections”
- 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM: Introduction to Workshop Themes and Shared Vision
- 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM: Lunch Break
- 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM: Crafting a Joint Vision Statement
- 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM: Knowledge Swap – Understanding Each Other’s Systems
- 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM: Day 1 Wrap-Up and Post-Test 1

Day 2: Communication & System Alignment (Tuesday)

- 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM: Recap of Day 1 and Pre-Test 2
- 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM: Communication Best Practices and Case Scenario
- 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM: Role-Play – Good vs. Bad Communication
- 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM: Lunch Break
- 1:30 PM - 3:00 PM: Developing a Communication Plan
- 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM: Sharing Insights and Key Takeaways
- 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM: Day 2 Wrap-Up and Post-Test 2

Day 3: Leadership & Continuous Improvement (Wednesday)

- 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM: Warm-Up Activity and Pre-Test 3
- 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM: Trust-Building and Leadership Strategies
- 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM: Case Scenario and Role-Play – Rebuilding Trust

- 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM: Lunch Break
- 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM: Finalizing the Partnership Blueprint Packet
- 2:30 PM - 3:30 PM: Team Presentations and Overall Post-Test
- 3:30 PM - 4:00 PM: 90-Day Sprint Planning and Closing Reflections

***Day 1 – Establishing Collaboration & Shared Vision (9:00 AM – 4:00 PM)***

**Focus.** Laying the groundwork for a strong partnership by emphasizing that Collaboration is the Foundation (Theme 1) and creating a Shared Vision (Theme 2). Participants from the study noted that “collaboration is not just a buzzword—it’s how we survive and thrive across institutions,” stressing that genuine teamwork is non-negotiable for success. Thus, Day 1 centers on relationship-building and joint visioning. By the end of Day 1, each team will have drafted a mutual vision statement and begun the Partnership Blueprint Packet with their shared goals. They will also start cultivating an understanding of each other’s institutional context (introducing Theme 4) as they discover common ground and differences.

**9:00 – 9:30 AM: Day 1 Pre-Test and Workshop Kickoff.** Participants begin with a Pre-Test to gauge baseline knowledge and attitudes about collaboration and vision in partnerships. They respond to prompts like “True or False: It’s sufficient for each institution to have its own goals; a single joint mission isn’t necessary” or “Rate your current understanding of your partner institution’s priorities and constraints.” This diagnostic test reveals starting points (for example, many may indicate they do not have a written shared mission with their current partner, or have limited knowledge of the other system’s policies), reinforcing the need for Day 1’s focus.

The facilitator then kicks off the workshop, welcoming everyone and reviewing objectives, agenda, and ground rules (e.g., be open-minded, one speaker at a time, respect confidentiality). It is emphasized that the workshop is interactive and built on real insights from school and college leaders. The six themes are introduced as the guiding framework for the next three days. The facilitator underscores Theme 1 by saying, “Collaboration is the foundation of everything we will do – as one college president in our study said, ‘we had to learn to plan together... it wasn’t optional if we wanted success.’ We will start by doing exactly that: planning together.”

- *Introducing the Partnership Blueprint Packet:* The facilitator presents the Blueprint Packet, a 6-part workbook (corresponding to the six themes) each team will fill out. This packet includes sections for: Collaboration Plan (how the team will work together), Shared Vision Statement, Communication Plan, Key Policy/Process Alignments (identifying system differences and how to handle them), Leadership & Relationship Strategies (trust and team-building actions), and Continuous Improvement Plan (metrics and follow-up actions).

Each section will be addressed as the workshop progresses. Participants are told, “By Friday, this packet will be your partnership playbook – a tangible plan covering vision, communication, understanding, trust, and improvement. We will build it piece by piece.” They are encouraged to take notes in it throughout sessions. With materials in hand and everyone clear on expectations, the workshop moves into team building.

**9:30 – 10:15 AM: Ice-Breaker – “Common Ground Connections.”** To cultivate a collaborative spirit (Theme 1) from the start, participants engage in a fun icebreaker highlighting shared experiences. Mixed pairs (each pair with one K-12 and one college person) spend ~5 minutes discovering three things they have in common – whether professional (e.g., both started as math teachers) or personal (both love hiking or have twins). Then each pair introduces their partner to the whole group, sharing those commonalities.

The room buzzes with laughter as unexpected connections emerge (a community college VP and a high school principal might realize they both mentor first-generation college students, for example). This exercise breaks down initial walls and exemplifies Theme 1: finding common ground is the first step in collaborating. The facilitator ties it back to the partnership context: “If two individuals from different institutions can quickly find overlap in their stories, our institutions can too. A successful partnership begins with recognizing we are on the same team. We will build on that as we create a shared vision in the next activity.” By the end of this icebreaker, participants are more relaxed and open, having practiced a bit of the empathy and interpersonal connection that will be needed throughout the workshop (foreshadowing Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership). Many are already bridging the college/K-12 divide with informal camaraderie, setting a supportive tone for collaborative work.

**10:15 – 10:30 AM: Break.** (Coffee, tea, and informal networking. Participants often continue chatting with their new partners or share quick stories about their partnership experiences, further building rapport.)

**10:30 – 11:00 AM: Research Insights – Why Shared Vision Matters**

**(Presentation & Discussion).** The facilitator opens the first content session by sharing findings from research and interviews that underline the importance of establishing a Shared Vision (Theme 2) early in a partnership. A slide is shown with a quote from a school district superintendent: “We had to align our goals before we could align our programs.” This quote resonates with the group; heads nod as many have experienced misalignment issues in their own work. The facilitator defines a “Shared Vision” as a concise, jointly crafted mission statement for the partnership, articulating what the two institutions aspire to achieve together and why. They cite evidence: partnerships in the study that succeeded often started with a written vision or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) endorsed by both sides, whereas failed partnerships often skipped this step and suffered from “different priorities and mission mismatch” (as multiple interviewees described).

One community college VP from the study lamented that without a shared vision, “each side assumed the other knew our goals – we didn’t, and that caused conflict.” This underscores the risk of assumptions. The facilitator also notes that having a shared vision fosters leadership support: when top leaders (presidents, superintendents) publicly agree on a common mission, it empowers everyone below to collaborate (connects to Theme 5, as effective partnership leaders rally around a shared cause). To illustrate what a good, shared vision looks like, an example from a real partnership is provided: “A College and K School District together will ensure every high school student graduates with the skills

and credits to succeed in college and career, by aligning our curricula, advising, and support services.”

This example, short and focused on student success, helped that partnership choose aligned strategies. The facilitator dissects it: it is collaborative (“together will ensure”), student-centered, and specific about how (aligning curricula, advising, supports). Participants reflect on how this compares to any agreements or visions they have (many admit they have nothing similar in writing). This segment concludes with a quick whole-group discussion: “What are the risks if a partnership operates without a shared vision?” Participants mention things like conflicting agendas, uneven resource allocation, miscommunication, and lack of accountability. The facilitator reaffirms: “Exactly – without a north star, partners can pull in different directions. Let us prevent that by making sure we establish our common vision.” With the why and what of shared vision clear, the group is ready to create their own.

**11:00 – 11:45 AM: Interactive Exercise – Crafting a Joint Vision Statement.**

Each team (or table group, if some came solo, they form a mock team) now puts Theme 2 into practice by writing a Shared Vision Statement for a hypothetical partnership scenario. The facilitator hands out various scenario prompts to ensure relevance (e.g., “Launch a dual-enrollment STEM academy,” “Improve high school to community college transition for students with disabilities,” “Coordinate a teacher training program between the college and district”). Teams might choose a scenario close to their real context. A simple template is provided on a slide and in their Blueprint Packet’s vision section:

“Together, A School District and K College will [achieve this outcome] by [doing these actions].”

Teams have ~15 minutes to discuss and draft 1–2 sentences. As they collaborate, they practice Theme 1 (collaboration) and Theme 5 (interpersonal skills) – negotiating language that satisfies both K-12 and college perspectives. Facilitators circulate to offer guidance, e.g., prompting them to consider student outcomes, be specific but not too narrow, and ensure mutual benefit. The room is animated with cross-institution dialogue: college leaders asking school leaders about their goals and vice-versa. This itself is a valuable experience, as many have never sat together to explicitly align goals before.

After drafting, each group writes their vision statement on a flip chart and presents it (around 2 minutes per team). One team, for instance, presents:

“Samson High School and Leyland Community College will *collaboratively ensure* that 100% of participating students graduate high school with at least 12 college credits and a clear academic/career plan, by aligning curricula, co-training our staff, and providing joint student mentoring.”

The facilitator and peers applaud and provide brief feedback for each: Are the goals clear and shared? Is it achievable and inspiring? Suggestions are made (e.g., “consider adding how you’ll measure success, like 100% of students enrolled or persisting in college after graduation”). Most statements demonstrate strong alignment: they mention both institutions (“together”), focus on students (common ground), and outline cooperative strategies. Participants visibly take pride in these statements – many snap pictures or jot down phrases they like.

- *Blueprint Packet Update:* Teams now open their Partnership Blueprint Packets to the “Shared Vision” section and formally record their newly crafted vision

statement. This is the first major piece of their Blueprint. By writing it down, they commit to it. The facilitator stresses, “This is now the banner under which all your partnership efforts can rally. When you go back, involve your broader teams in refining and adopting it. But you have an excellent draft here – something many partnerships never take time to do.” Teams also list 2–3 high-level joint goals below the vision (e.g., “increase dual enrollment by X%,” “improve first-year college retention of our high school grads”), if applicable. These will guide their later planning.

**11:45 AM – 12:00 PM: Knowledge Swap – Understanding Each Other’s Systems.**

Before breaking for lunch, the facilitator introduces a quick exercise to begin addressing Theme 4: Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies. Crafting a vision likely prompted some questions about how each side operates (for instance, a college might have assumed high schools can alter curriculum easily, and the school partner clarifies state requirements). To surface these insights, the facilitator asks pairs of partners to take 5 minutes to list one key fact about their own system that they think the other side may not know but is important for the partnership. For example, K-12 administrators might mention “our school board must approve any new program” or “high school schedules are set a year in advance”, whereas college admins might share “our faculty hiring process can take 6 months” or “we must follow FERPA privacy rules when discussing students”.

A few volunteers then share their facts. This light “knowledge swap” reveals how different contexts can affect joint work. One high school leader, for instance, learns that the college cannot waive certain placement tests due to state policy – something that will influence their plan. The facilitator makes a note on a flip chart titled “System Differences to Remember,” which will be revisited on Day 2 when delving deeper into communication and planning. This activity is brief but plants the seed for Theme 4: effective collaboration requires understanding each other’s world. It reinforces why open communication (Theme 3) is needed – many assumptions can be cleared up just by sharing such information.

**12:00 – 1:00 PM: Lunch Break.** (Lunch is provided. Participants often sit with their partnership counterparts or new colleagues. Many conversations naturally turn to “shop talk” – e.g., clarifying acronyms or explaining certain school/college processes – furthering Theme 4 understanding in an informal way. Some pairs even start sketching ideas for communication or exchange contact info to stay connected.)

**1:00 – 1:30 PM: Regroup and Vision Highlights.** After lunch, the facilitator reconvenes the group. Any remaining teams present their vision statements if they did not get to before lunch. The facilitator then leads a brief reflection on Themes 1 & 2 (Collaboration & Shared Vision). Key points reinforced include:

- *Collaboration is an active process:* It started today with shared brainstorming and compromise. Participants note how working together on the vision set a tone of equality and teamwork. One comments, “I noticed we entered that exercise with

our own ideas, but what we created together was better than either of us could've done alone." Exactly the power of collaboration.

- *A Shared Vision creates alignment:* The group observes that having just drafted their visions, they already feel more aligned with their counterparts. "I see clearly now where our goals overlap," a college provost says, "and that will help when we plan activities and budgets." The facilitator adds that a shared vision should be communicated widely to all stakeholders to ensure everyone, from faculty to counselors, knows the joint purpose (touching on communication to come).
- *Leadership endorsement:* The facilitator asks, "Who will you share this vision with next?" Participants propose presenting it to their principals, presidents, or boards. The facilitator agrees, stressing that when higher-ups embrace the shared vision, it legitimizes the partnership (a lesson drawn from the research as well).

This debrief consolidates the morning's learning. Participants express that the process of articulating a vision together was enlightening and energizing. They also acknowledge some challenges: a few pairs found it tricky to reconcile different terminology or priorities initially. The facilitator notes that this is normal, and applauds how they navigated it—highlighting interpersonal leadership skills in action (listening, persuasion, openness). The stage is now set for Day 2's focus: translating that shared vision into action through effective communication and deeper mutual understanding.

**1:30 – 1:45 PM: Day 1 Post-Test and Wrap-Up.** To close Day 1, participants take a short Post-Test quiz (the same questions from the morning Pre-Test, now re-administered to measure growth). They again respond to items about collaboration and vision, plus a

new question or two about how confident they feel building a partnership plan. The facilitator then quickly compares results: for example, whereas in the morning only 40% “agreed” that a formal shared mission was essential, now 95% agree after the day’s experience. One participant laughs seeing the change, saying “Well, I’m convinced now!” In areas where knowledge improved (say, familiarity with each other’s constraints), the facilitator congratulates the group. Any surprising gaps or misconceptions that persist can be addressed briefly. This post-test exercise not only provides a knowledge check but also reinforces key takeaways by having participants actively reconsider the concepts.

The facilitator thanks everyone for their hard work on Day 1. They give a quick preview of Day 2: “We have our vision – tomorrow is all about how we communicate and execute on it. We will tackle how to keep everyone on the same page through ongoing, transparent communication, and continue sharing knowledge between our systems.” Participants are encouraged to reflect this evening on their current communication practices with their partners (or, if no current partnership, past experiences of good or bad communication). Prompting question on the slide: “*What communication challenge do you hope to solve?*” This primes their minds for tomorrow. The group adjourns for the day feeling productive: they have built a collaborative foundation and a vision to unite around, which is tangible progress.

**1:30 – 3:00 PM: Crafting a Joint Vision Statement.** Participants work in teams to develop a shared vision statement for their partnership using a structured template. They select a realistic scenario (e.g., launching a dual-credit program or improving student

transitions) and collaborate to write a concise, student-centered mission. Facilitators circulate to support dialogue and ensure both K–12 and college perspectives are reflected. Teams present their draft statements to the group, receiving feedback and refining language. These statements are then recorded in the Partnership Blueprint Packet.

**3:00 – 4:00 PM: Knowledge Swap – Understanding Each Other’s Systems.** To begin addressing Theme 4 (Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies), partners exchange key facts about their institutional processes, calendars, and constraints. This activity surfaces critical differences (e.g., approval timelines, testing schedules) and builds mutual understanding. The facilitator captures these insights on a shared flip chart for reference in later planning.

**4:00 – 5:00 PM: Day 1 Wrap-Up and Post-Test 1.** Participants complete a short post-test to reflect on their learning and shifts in understanding. The facilitator leads a brief discussion on key takeaways from the day, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and shared vision. A preview of Day 2 is provided, and participants are encouraged to reflect overnight on their current communication practices.

***Day 2 – Communication & Mutual Understanding (9:00 AM – 4:00 PM)***

**Focus.** Turning the shared vision into coordinated action through Ongoing Transparent Communication (Theme 3) and deepening Knowledge of Both Systems/Policies (Theme 4) to avoid missteps. Effective communication is the vehicle that carries the partnership’s vision forward, and understanding each other’s institutional context ensures that communication and plans are well-informed. In Day 2, participants

will learn how to maintain consistent, clear dialogue (meetings, updates, feedback loops) and how to navigate differences in school vs. college procedures or constraints.

By the end of Day 2, teams will have a concrete Communication Plan in their Blueprint Packet and a better grasp of how to align calendars, policies, and workflows between institutions. (Notably, participants in the study highlighted communication breakdowns and ignorance of the other system as major barriers; one college leader admitted, “We had a lot of miscommunications until we realized we did not understand the school’s timeline. Once we communicated more and learned their schedule, things improved dramatically.” This day directly addresses those issues.)

**9:00 – 9:15 AM: Day 2 Pre-Test and Day 1 Recap.** The morning begins with a quick Pre-Test focused on Day 2 themes. Participants answer a few questions/polls diagnosing their current communication practices and system knowledge. For instance: “How often do you have formal check-in meetings with your current partner? (Never/Occasionally/Regularly)” and “I am well-versed in my partner institution’s key policies and deadlines (Agree/Disagree).” Results show a range – many report infrequent structured communication, and most indicate only a moderate understanding of the other system (confirming the need for improvement in Themes 3 and 4).

The facilitator then invites a brief reflection on Day 1: a couple of volunteers share one insight from creating their shared vision. One participant says, “I realized last night I need to show our draft vision to my superintendent ASAP to get buy-in,” demonstrating forward momentum. Another notes, “Knowing our common goal now

makes me want to keep my partner in the loop on everything so we actually achieve it together,” which is a perfect segue into the importance of communication.

The facilitator introduces Day 2’s focus: Effective Communication Strategies and System Alignment. They remark, “If the shared vision is our destination, communication is the road we travel together to get there – and we better agree on the route! Also, we need to understand each other’s vehicles – what I mean is, knowing how each organization works will prevent a lot of roadblocks.” This analogy sets the stage. The facilitator briefly revisits one relevant finding from yesterday’s Post-Test or the research: for example, reminding the group that in the study, every successful partnership had regular meeting structures and transparent information sharing, while failed ones often cited “lack of communication” or surprises that could have been avoided with better information exchange (participants in the study used phrases like “no feedback loop” and “we were left in the dark” to describe those failures). Clearly, today’s skills are critical.

**9:15 – 9:45 AM: Communication Best Practices – Poll and Presentation.** The facilitator conducts an interactive poll to spark discussion on communication habits (building on the Pre-Test results).

- **First question: “How would you rate the overall communication in a past or current partnership you’ve been part of?”** (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor). The anonymous results typically cluster around “Fair” or “Poor” for many, confirming this is an area of concern.
- **Second question: “What communication method do you rely on most with your partner institution?”** Options: In-person meetings, Phone/Zoom calls,

Email, Shared Documents/Platforms, or Other. The responses vary (some mostly emails, some monthly meetings, and few use collaborative tech tools). This reveals a potential mismatch in communication styles; the facilitator points out, for example, that 50% chose email while 20% chose regular meetings – if partners have different expectations (one waits for an email, the other expects a meeting), miscommunication can happen.

- **Third question (tackling Theme 4): “True or False: I am familiar with my partner institution’s academic calendar, approval processes, and key terminology.”** Often, many respond False or “not sure” – underscoring a knowledge gap. The facilitator notes that lacking this knowledge is like speaking different dialects; part of communication means learning the partner’s “language” (schedule, acronyms, protocols).

Using these poll results, the facilitator segues into a brief presentation on communication best practices distilled from research and interview insights (10-15 min, covering both Theme 3 and aspects of Theme 4):

- *Establish Regular Touchpoints:* Partnerships thrive when communication is proactive, not just reactive. The facilitator recommends setting a fixed meeting schedule (e.g., a biweekly call or monthly in-person meeting). Consistency ensures issues are discussed early. An interview quote on the slide reads: “Our weekly 30-minute check-in became the heartbeat of the partnership – without it,

we'd miss things." Participants are encouraged to consider what a reasonable frequency is for their context (it might vary, but something routine is key).

- *Ensure Transparency and Clarity*: “No surprises” is the mantra here. Always share relevant information with your partner, even if it might be uncomfortable or seems minor. The facilitator shares a cautionary tale from the study: a college did not tell the school that a grant funding their joint program was at risk; when the news finally came out at the last-minute, the school felt betrayed. The lesson: communicate early and openly about challenges. Also, be explicit in communication – clearly define tasks, deadlines, and decisions in writing. For example, instead of both sides assuming “we’ll recruit students,” explicitly decide “the high school will invite students, and the college will handle registration” and document that. This clarity prevents later “I thought you were doing it” moments.
- *Use Multiple Channels & Document Everything*: Relying on a single channel (just email or just meetings) can fail. Effective partnerships layer formal and informal communication. For instance, have structured meetings (with agendas and minutes) and quick real-time check-ins (text or chat for urgent or simple updates). One slide shows a communication ecosystem: monthly steering committee meetings, a shared Google Drive for documents, a Slack/Teams channel for quick questions, and quarterly reports to leadership. The facilitator emphasizes that important decisions or info should be documented in a place both sides can access (shared folder or email summary) – this also helps newcomers get up to speed and serves as a memory of what was agreed. On the board, the facilitator writes “If

it's not written down, did it really happen?" – encouraging thorough documentation.

- *Bridge Institutional Differences through Communication*: Here the facilitator directly addresses Theme 4 within the context of communication. They state, “Part of communicating well is making sure we understand each other. Remember those system differences we started noting yesterday? Make it a practice to explain your context and ask about theirs.” For example, if the college needs to change a course offering, they should inform the school about any accreditation rules involved. Conversely, if the high school has a holiday break or state testing week coming up, let the college know so they do not schedule events then. A bullet on the slide reads: “Share Calendars & Constraints.” The facilitator suggests partners exchange academic calendars and create a combined timeline of key dates (e.g., registration deadlines, exam periods) to avoid miscommunications like planning an event during the school’s spring break. Transparent communication is not just telling each other what you are doing but also teaching each other how your system works – a point drawn from multiple interviews where leaders said understanding the other side’s world significantly improved coordination.

Throughout this presentation, the facilitator invites quick comments. Participants relate to the points: some sigh recalling meetings that were cancelled and never rescheduled (irregular touchpoints), or chime in that they have seen the power of a shared

Slack channel for quick updates. The atmosphere is “aha!” as many realize how formalizing communication could solve past issues. One school administrator shares, “We had conflicts with our college partner’s schedule because we never saw their calendar. We are going to swap calendars now.” Such peer reinforcement is valuable.

By 9:45, the group has a clear picture of what effective partnership communication looks like – frequent, transparent, documented, multi-channel – and why mutual understanding of context is part of that. They are ready to analyze a scenario to apply these ideas.

**9:45 – 10:30 AM: Case Scenario – Communication Breakdown (“The Missed Email”).** Participants split into their small groups to examine Scenario B: “The Missed Email.” This scenario, distributed as a one-page narrative, depicts a promising partnership that stumbled due to poor communication:

- The community college and school district launched a new dual-credit course. They agreed informally that the school would handle student sign-ups while the college set up the curriculum, but they never wrote this down or set check-ins.
- Weeks pass; the college assumes low sign-up numbers mean lack of interest, but in reality the school counselor didn’t announce the program yet because they were busy with other duties and had questions (which they emailed to the college, but only to a single person, and that person left on vacation).
- Meanwhile, the college made a change to the course schedule (moving it earlier) but forgot to tell the high school. By the time they re-connect (in an ad-hoc phone call close to the start of term), they find out only a handful of students enrolled

and the schedule change now conflicts with the high school's timing. Fingers point in frustration, and the course is postponed.

Groups have 15 minutes to discuss two questions: (1) What specific communication failures happened here? (2) How could better communication (or better system knowledge) have prevented these issues? As they discuss, participants identify issues in the scenario that mirror the morning's lessons:

- No regular meetings or check-ins were scheduled; they “went dark” for weeks.
- Responsibilities were not clearly documented (each side thought the other was managing student recruitment).
- Information was siloed (only one contact at the college got the counselor's email, and when that person was away no one else knew; also the college changed something without looping in the school).
- Neither side was fully aware of the other's schedule or workload (school counselor's busy period, college's semester timeline, etc.). Groups then share their answers. As each point comes up, the facilitator highlights the corresponding best practice that would address it.

For example, one group says, “If they'd had biweekly meetings, the counselor could have voiced those questions earlier and the college would know no one announced the course yet,” – the facilitator writes Regular Check-ins next to that. Another group points out, “They should have made a shared document or at least cc'd multiple people on that info – relying on one person was a mistake,” – the facilitator notes Documentation & Multiple Contacts. Another mentions

timeline awareness: “The college might not have realized the school counselor was swamped with graduation duties that month; a heads-up about that could have led the college to help or adjust the timeline,” – facilitator circles Share Schedules.

By the end of this, the link between the morning’s abstract best practices and real consequences is clear. Participants appear a bit rueful, as many see reflections of their own experiences in the scenario. But that regret is turning into determination – they do not want to repeat “The Missed Email” in their partnerships. The facilitator sums up: “This scenario is exactly why we emphasize regular, open communication and understanding each other’s world. The fixes you all suggested – meetings, clarity, shared info – are what we will now put into action as you plan your own communication strategy.” This primes them for the next exercise where they will proactively design how they will communicate, so the scenario’s mistakes do not happen to them.

**10:30 – 10:45 AM: Break. (Participants grab refreshments.** Many continue discussing the scenario, often swapping “war stories” of communications gone awry in their past collaborations and nodding about how they could have been avoided.)

**10:45 – 11:30 AM: Role-Play – Good vs. Bad Communication in a Partnership Meeting.** To inject some energy and reinforce the lessons in a memorable way, the facilitator conducts a live role-play demonstration with two volunteers (one from a school, one from a college, ideally willing to have a little fun with it). They will dramatize a partnership team meeting twice: first the “bad” version full of common mistakes, then the “good” version applying best practices.

- *In the “Bad Communication Meeting” (about 3–4 minutes):* The setting is a monthly partnership meeting that has not occurred in a while. The role-players improvise or follow a loose script provided by the facilitator. It goes something like: the meeting starts late, there is no clear agenda.

The school admin opens with a frustrated tone, “So, I guess we are finally meeting... I have been waiting to hear from you about the student workshop details.” The college admin, taken aback, says, “I thought your team was handling that? We sent an email a month ago.” The school person, annoyed, “What email? I never saw it. Who did you send it to?” (They discover it was sent only to the principal, who did not forward it.) Tension rises; they talk over each other, each defensive. The school admin makes a snarky comment like, “We can’t read your mind over here,” and the college admin snaps, “Maybe if you responded to emails...!” They end without any decisions, both angry and blaming. This exaggerated “what not to do” scenario elicits chuckles and wincing from the audience – many recognize these pitfalls.

- *In the “Good Communication Meeting” (3–4 minutes):* The volunteers (or a second set of volunteers) now model a productive meeting, essentially showing the same topics being handled with good practices. This time, there is a simple agenda on the screen (the facilitator quickly jotted one like: 1. Student workshop status, 2. Curriculum update, 3. Next steps). The tone is collegial: the college admin starts, “Thanks for meeting. Let us quickly revisit what we have done so far and what is next.”

They use a shared document or projected email thread to review: “I sent the workshop outline to Principal Smith on Oct 1; I realize now maybe I should have cc’d you, Mrs. Jones. I will do that going forward. Anyway, how are student sign-ups coming?” The school admin replies with information instead of accusation, “We have got twenty students interested. We need to finalize the date – you proposed Jan 15, but our semester starts that week so we may need Jan 22. Let us figure that out.” They check calendars together (imagine they pull up a merged calendar).

The college admin listens and adjusts, “Good to know. Jan 22 works on our end too. Thanks for letting me know about your semester start; I had not realized it overlaps.” They clarify responsibilities: “You’ll confirm the venue at the high school, and I’ll bring the college faculty, correct?” – “Correct.” The atmosphere is cooperative, and they end the meeting summarizing: “We will send a joint announcement to students by Friday (I will draft and send to you to add any school info). Next check-in, same time next week via phone?” – “Sounds good.” They thank each other for the collaboration. Cue applause from the audience.

After the role-plays, the facilitator debriefs with the group: “What differences did you observe between the first and second version?” Participants eagerly point out contrasts:

- *Tone and Respect*: In the good version, both assumed positive intent and spoke kindly, whereas the bad version had blaming and sarcasm. Respectful tone made problem-solving possible.

- *Clarity:* The good meeting had an agenda and clear recap of who will do what. The bad one was aimless, and nothing was resolved or assigned.
- *Use of Tools:* The good meeting used a shared document and checked the calendar together – this visual alignment prevented confusion. The bad meeting relied on memory (which failed them), and they were not literally “on the same page.”
- *Listening vs. Interrupting:* In the good one, each listened (the college admin heard the date conflict and adjusted; the school admin acknowledged the email was missed without blowing up). In the bad one, they kept cutting each other off and did not actually address the issues.
- *Follow-up:* The good meeting set a next meeting and action steps (joint announcement, etc.), ensuring continuity. The bad meeting ended abruptly with no plan, likely perpetuating the chaos.

The facilitator writes these points on the board as people mention them. It is evident that the “good” behaviors correspond to the morning’s best practices: respectful two-way communication, using multiple channels (speaking + shared doc), transparency about issues (mentioning the scheduling conflict openly), and confirming next steps in writing.

Someone jokes, “I wish all my meetings went like the second one!” The facilitator laughs and says, “That’s the goal – and now you know how to make it happen.” This humorous yet insightful exercise leaves a strong impression. It takes abstract principles and makes them visceral. Participants often remember the role-play months later (“Don’t

have a meeting #1 moment!” they might say). It energizes them for the next planning task by showing the stark difference communication practices can make.

**11:30 AM – 12:15 PM: Team Exercise – Developing a Communication Plan.**

Now the participants turn to their own partnerships to apply Theme 3 and Theme 4 systematically. Each partnership team (or group) will write a Communication Plan section for their Blueprint Packet. The facilitator provides a structured worksheet (also mirrored in the Blueprint Packet under “Communication Plan”) that prompts them to decide on key elements:

- *Meeting Structure*: How often will the partnership team meet formally? (e.g., “Biweekly on Thursdays at 3 PM via Zoom for 30 minutes” or “Monthly in-person meeting on the first Monday, plus a brief weekly phone check-in”). Who should attend these meetings? (perhaps a core team, with others invited as needed).
- *Communication Channels*: What tools will be used for various purposes? (e.g., “Use email for sharing documents and recaps; use a WhatsApp/Teams chat for day-to-day questions; use phone for urgent issues.”). This should include decisions on any shared platforms (like setting up a Google Drive or Microsoft Teams folder for the partnership).
- *Responsibility for Communication Tasks*: Who will take meeting notes and distribute them? (Maybe they will rotate, or assign one person as secretary). Who will initiate scheduling of meetings or calls? Clarify these roles to avoid diffusion of responsibility.

- *Information Sharing Agreements:* Commit to practices like “CC all relevant partners on emails about the program,” “Share both school and college academic calendars at start of year and mark joint dates,” and “Notify partner immediately of any changes or issues that could affect the other.” Essentially, rules for transparency. They are encouraged to think back to scenario pitfalls (e.g., if one person is out, designate an alternate contact).
- *Addressing System Differences:* The worksheet has a prompt: List one or two institutional procedures each partner needs the other to remember. This ties in Theme 4 explicitly. For example, “School year ends in May – avoid scheduling student activities after AP exams,” or “College curriculum changes must be finalized by March for the fall term.” For each, how will they communicate around this? (e.g., set a reminder in a March meeting to discuss curriculum changes). This ensures their plan is tailored to their contextual knowledge.

Teams dive into this task for about 20 minutes. The earlier role-play and scenario have given them ideas on what to include. Facilitators circulate to assist. In one corner, a high school principal and college dean excitedly decide to create a joint Slack workspace, having both been frustrated with slow email responses. Another team chooses to share editing access to a live Excel sheet of student participants so both sides can update it in real time (instead of emailing versions back and forth). Several teams schedule a fixed meeting series on the spot (pulling out phones to send calendar invites). One school counselor suggests making a contact list with multiple people from each side (so

communication does not bottleneck with just two individuals), which the facilitator overhears and announces as a great idea for everyone.

After drafting, each team writes a summary of their Communication Plan on flip chart paper and does a gallery walk or quick share-out (given time, perhaps 2-3 minutes per team for highlights). The facilitator asks them to specifically mention any novel idea or something addressing a known challenge.

For example, one team shares: “We know our academic calendars differ a lot, so we created a combined calendar in Google that has both our key dates and planned monthly check-ins. We will both add to it as things arise.” This gets murmurs of approval – others might adopt the idea. Another team says, “We decided to hold a 10-minute phone call every Friday morning just to catch up on any small issues. It is on both our calendars to ensure it happens.” Many appreciate that tactic. A college leader mentions, “We’re launching a shared OneDrive folder for all partnership docs; we’ll both contribute to a single progress report in that folder each month so there’s no confusion about versions.” Hearing each other’s plans often sparks a friendly one-upmanship in an effective way – they realize they can be creative and concrete. The facilitator notes these as “best practice examples” on the board.

- *Blueprint Packet Update:* Teams now fill in the Communication Plan section of their Blueprint with the details they have agreed on. This includes meeting schedules, chosen communication tools, and any specific protocols (like “each meeting will end with an email summary sent to all team members within 24 hours”). They also note any key system knowledge points (from the earlier

prompt) that they need to keep in mind so that, for instance, they schedule joint activities at appropriate times. By writing this in the Blueprint, they formalize their commitment to these communication habits. The facilitator points out that this plan can be shared with their broader teams back home so everyone involved in the partnership knows how and when the core team will communicate. One participant quips, “We should print and frame this plan above our desks, so we stick to it!” Indeed, institutionalizing these routines is the aim.

**12:15 – 1:15 PM: Lunch Break.** (The room is abuzz as they break for lunch. Many feel relieved to have a concrete communication plan – some mention how they have operated on assumptions for years and how good it feels to “get it all down on paper.” Over lunch, cross-team chatter includes comparing notes, e.g., “How are you handling parent communication? Do you loop the college in on that?” – opening peer learning beyond assigned teams. This networking also builds Theme 5: interpersonal relationships across institutions, as college folks and school folks see each other as collaborators with shared challenges and solutions.)

**1:15 – 1:45 PM: Sharing Insights and Key Takeaways (Communication & Systems Knowledge).** After lunch, the facilitator facilitates an open discussion to consolidate Day 2 themes (3 & 4). A few remaining teams share any unique aspects of their Communication Plan they did not mention before. Then the group discusses overarching key takeaways:

- *Regular Communication is Non-Negotiable:* Participants echo that having set check-ins is critical. One district administrator says, “We always think we will talk as issues come up, but in reality, we get busy and things slide. A standing meeting forces us to connect.” The facilitator underscores this: consistency builds trust and keeps momentum (when partners know a meeting is coming up, they save topics for it and small concerns do not snowball).
- *Use the Right Tool for the Message:* A college participant reflects, “Sometimes I sent long emails when a quick call would do, and vice versa.” The group nods; they discuss which matters need a meeting (e.g., major decisions, brainstorming) versus an email (documentation, simple updates) versus an IM or text (urgent quick clarifications). They conclude that a mix is best – and each duo now has an agreed method.
- *Be Explicit and Inclusive:* A key lesson voiced: “Never assume the other side knows something if you haven’t told them.” The facilitator writes that on a flip chart. People commit to cc’ing each other routinely and looping each other in early. Another adds, “Also, assume positive intent – if you are confused by something your partner did, just ask. It might be because of a policy or a misunderstanding.” This ties back to understanding systems (Theme 4) and maintaining trust. If, for example, a college changes a program requirement, the school should ask why (maybe it is due to accreditation standards) rather than assume the college is being difficult; likewise, the college should proactively explain such changes. Communication and trust go hand in hand.

- *Knowledge Sharing is Part of Communication:* The facilitator asks if anyone learned something new about their partner's system today. Hands go up: "I didn't know the high school needs state approval for new courses – we need to factor that in." Another says, "I wasn't aware the community college advisors have 500 students each; no wonder response times vary." These revelations reinforce the idea that an ongoing partnership is also a learning relationship. The takeaway is that partners should brief each other on constraints and updates in their world regularly (for instance, if a new policy is coming down from the state or a leadership change occurs). Many decide to add a standing agenda item in their meetings: "Institutional updates – any changes or info from your side that we should all know." This ensures Theme 4 knowledge-sharing becomes routine.

The facilitator notes how far they have come: "On Day 1, many of you were not regularly communicating or did not know much about your partner's processes. Now you have a solid plan to do just that. This will be a game changer." The group seems confident and empowered. They recognize that effective communication practices, combined with the shared vision, significantly raise their partnership's chances of success.

**1:45 – 2:00 PM: Day 2 Post-Test.** Participants complete a brief Post-Test for Day 2 to assess their learning on communication and system knowledge. The questions mirror the Pre-Test from the morning. For example, they rate again "I am well-versed in my partner's policies" – many more now choose "Agree" after the day's exchanges. They also answer a scenario question: "If you email your partner and get no response for a

week, what would you do?” (A satisfactory answer, based on today, would be: follow up with a quick call or message, and verify you included the right contact(s) – rather than stewing in silence). The facilitator quickly reviews improvements: more participants now report they plan to schedule regular meetings (some already have), and understanding of each other’s context is markedly higher after the direct conversations and planning. This short post-test again reinforces the day’s key points and allows participants to self-reflect on how their attitudes have shifted.

**2:00 – 3:00 PM: Developing a Communication Plan.** Teams use a structured worksheet to design a communication strategy tailored to their partnership. They define meeting schedules, preferred channels (e.g., email, Slack, shared folders), roles, and documentation practices. Facilitators assist with aligning the plan to institutional realities. Teams share highlights in a gallery walk, sparking peer learning and idea exchange.

**3:00 – 4:00 PM: Sharing Insights and Key Takeaways.** The facilitator leads a group discussion to consolidate learning around communication and system knowledge. Participants reflect on what surprised them, what they learned about their partner’s context, and what practices they plan to adopt. The conversation reinforces the link between communication and trust.

**4:00 – 5:00 PM: Day 2 Wrap-Up.** The facilitator reviews common themes and previews Day 3’s focus on leadership and continuous improvement. Teams are asked to consider a trust or leadership challenge they have faced, to prepare for the next day’s activities.

Wrapping up Day 2, the facilitator commends the group for developing concrete communication frameworks. “You have built the channels to keep that shared vision alive. Excellent work!” Before leaving, they preview Day 3: “Tomorrow, we will focus on the people side of partnerships – building trust, practicing collaborative leadership, and ensuring continuous improvement. Essentially, how do we lead these partnerships and keep them growing stronger?”

Participants are asked to think about a trust issue or leadership challenge they have seen in partnerships, to discuss in the morning. With that, Day 2 adjourns. Many participants stick around a few minutes to clarify a detail with their partner or excitedly share, “I’m going to talk to my team about using Slack like you are – that’s brilliant.” There is a sense of camaraderie in the room; they are not just learning in isolation, but collectively raising the bar for partnership practices.

### ***Day 3 – Leadership & Continuous Improvement (9:00 AM – 4:00 PM)***

**Focus.** Strengthening the human and adaptive aspects of the partnership through Interpersonal Leadership (Theme 5) and instilling a habit of Continuous Improvement/Data Use (Theme 6). Even with a shared vision and solid communication, partnerships thrive only if there is mutual trust, strong relationship stewardship, and a commitment to evaluate and refine efforts. Day 3 is about the soft skills and reflective practices that sustain the collaboration: building trust, leading collaboratively, and using data and feedback to improve.

Participants will engage in trust-building exercises and candid discussions around leadership challenges. They will also incorporate continuous improvement steps into their

Partnership Blueprint (e.g., deciding on metrics to track and setting up the 90-Day Sprint follow-up). By the end of Day 3, teams will finalize and present their Partnership Blueprint Packets, showcasing plans that cover all six themes.

**9:00 – 9:15 AM: Day 3 Pre-Test and Warm-Up (“Two Truths and a Lie”).**

The final day begins with a lively warm-up activity to set an open, trusting tone. Each participant writes down two true statements and one false statement about their experience in partnerships or leadership style. For example, a college director might share: “1) I have visited every high school in our district. 2) I once had a partnership meeting turn into a shouting match. 3) I keep a spreadsheet of every partnership activity’s outcomes.”

The tablemates guess which is the lie (perhaps #3 is the lie in this case, implying they wish they tracked outcomes systematically – a sneaky way to introduce Theme 6). This fun exercise gets everyone laughing and learning quirky things about each other (someone might reveal, “I actually DID once hold a partnership meeting on a mountain hike” – a surprising truth). More importantly, it encourages honesty and vulnerability in a lighthearted way, which feeds into trust-building. People often slip in a challenge they faced (like the shouting match example or “I had to apologize to a partner publicly once”). By revealing something personal or admitting an imperfection (even if disguised as a lie), participants practice trust and empathy.

After a few rounds at tables and some share-outs of the funniest ones, the facilitator segues into the Pre-Test portion, which now focuses on Themes 5 & 6. Participants answer questions like:

- “I feel comfortable addressing a conflict or tough issue openly with my partner (Agree/Disagree).” (This gauges their confidence in handling trust/relationship challenges.)
- “Our partnership currently uses specific data or feedback to evaluate success (Yes/No).” (Many will likely answer No or not systematically, indicating room to grow in Theme 6.)
- “Rate your level of trust in your partner institution’s commitment to the partnership.” (On a scale, hopefully many say High, but if not, it is a flag to discuss.) They also take a short trust quiz scenario: “If your partner made a decision without telling you, would you: a) Assume they had a good reason and ask about it, b) Feel upset and distance yourself, c) Confront them angrily, d) Other...?” This sparks introspection on their trust inclination.

The facilitator does not discuss results immediately in depth (to avoid dampening the warm atmosphere), but takes mental note of common responses – likely trust is moderate but not uniformly high, and data use is low. They promise to revisit these in the closing Post-Test to see improvements.

**9:15 – 9:40 AM: Research Insights – Trust and Leadership (Presentation & Group Input).** The facilitator presents key insights on Theme 5: Interpersonal Leadership and Trust-Building based on the study and leadership literature:

- *Trust as the Foundation of Collaboration:* Just as we started Day 1 saying collaboration is the foundation of partnership, at the interpersonal level trust is the foundation of collaboration. A slide shows a quote from a community college

president: “Working together over time built trust, and with trust we could have honest conversations even when things went wrong.” The facilitator emphasizes that trust allows partners to speak openly (e.g., admitting mistakes, voicing concerns) without fear, which in turn leads to better problem-solving and innovation.

- *How to Build Trust:* Through consistency (do what you promise), transparency (no hidden agendas), competence (each side doing their job well), and goodwill (showing care and respect). The facilitator references the Trust Toolkit handout that will be given (it lists behaviors like “keep your word,” “share bad news swiftly,” “respect deadlines and each other’s expertise,” “be present and engaged,” etc.). Each behavior is briefly explained with examples. For instance, “share bad news swiftly” is illustrated by a school administrator in the study who said that when a problem arose (like a grant not coming through), she immediately informed the college partner – it was tough, but it allowed them to jointly find a solution, which actually increased trust.
- *Leadership Styles in Partnership:* Unlike a hierarchical context, school–college partnerships require a collaborative leadership style. The facilitator points out that even though there are titles (principal, VP, etc.), in a partnership, no one is the “boss” of the other entity. Thus, effective leaders lead through influence, relationship, and expertise rather than authority. This means practicing active listening, being willing to compromise, and often leading by example (if you want the other side to be responsive, you respond quickly too; if you want openness,

you share openly). One slide bullet says: “Be the partner you wish to have.” The group chuckles, but it resonates; modeling good behavior encourages reciprocity.

- *Addressing Conflict Constructively*: The facilitator acknowledges that even with trust, conflicts or disagreements will happen (maybe especially because both care deeply about the outcomes). Interpersonal leadership means facing these directly but kindly. Advice from the study: talk one-on-one with your counterpart as soon as you sense an issue, use “I” statements (e.g., “I was concerned when...”), and assume the other had positive intent unless proven otherwise. Many interviewees mentioned avoiding conflict led to simmering resentment – so better to have a difficult conversation early. This will be practiced in a role-play.

The facilitator invites a few thoughts from participants on trust: “What builds or breaks your trust?” People share: “Follow-through is huge for me – if they don’t do what they said twice in a row, I start losing trust,” says one. Another adds, “Honesty. Even if it is bad news, tell me. I can work with the truth.” The facilitator notes these on the board. It aligns perfectly with the toolkit points.

Next, for Theme 6: Continuous Improvement and Data Use, the facilitator asks the group: “How do we know our partnership is successful? And how do we keep it growing?” Blank stares or a few ideas emerge (like “if students do well”). The facilitator explains continuous improvement as the practice of regularly reflecting on progress, using evidence to inform decisions, and making iterative changes. They stress it is a leadership responsibility to instill this - not waiting for someone else to evaluate the partnership, but the partners themselves actively measuring and refining. From the

research, a notable insight: the most effective partnerships collected some form of data (student outcomes, participation rates, satisfaction surveys, etc.) and had a mechanism to discuss and act on that data (like quarterly review meetings). Less effective ones just “went with the flow” and often plateaued or failed because they were not monitoring what was working or not.

The facilitator gives a simple example: one partnership noticed through data that students who attended at least three tutoring sessions had a 90% pass rate, while those who attended fewer had 60%. This led them to implement a policy that every dual-enrollment student must attend at least three sessions, and they saw overall pass rates improve the next term. This is continuous improvement in action – identify a pattern, tweak the approach, see better results, share that success. They encourage participants to think of at least one metric they want to track (it could be as straightforward as “number of students who complete the program” or “percentage of meetings attended by both sides” as a measure of engagement).

A slide outlines a basic Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle tailored to partnerships:

1. *Plan* – Set goals (they did in the vision) and decide what data or feedback to collect (e.g., student grades, teacher feedback, etc.).
2. *Do* – Implement the partnership activities.
3. *Study* – At set intervals, review the data together (e.g., after a semester, look at student outcomes; or use the 90-Day Sprint checkpoints).

4. *Act* – Adjust the partnership plan based on what the data and experiences show (e.g., provide more support if outcomes are weak in an area, or expand something that is highly successful). Then repeat the cycle.

Later today, specific follow-ups are planned (the 90-Day Sprint is essentially a built-in continuous improvement cycle).

By now, participants are actively connecting with these ideas. The tone is reflective but motivated – they see that a partnership is not a one-and-done project, but something that evolves, and they have a hand in shaping that evolution through leadership and data. One participant shares, “We never really looked at our dual-credit data until the end of the year when it was too late. I want to check mid-semester now and adjust quickly.” This is exactly the mindset shift Theme 6 encourages.

**9:40 – 10:20 AM: Case Scenario – Rebuilding Trust (“The Broken Bridge”).**

Participants regroup in small teams to tackle Scenario C: “The Broken Bridge,” a case study that encapsulates a breakdown in trust and leadership between partners:

- In this scenario, a misunderstanding escalated: The college unilaterally decided to change a program requirement (for safety compliance) and did not inform the high school promptly. The high school team found out later and felt disrespected. Meanwhile, the high school had promised something to parents (that college courses would be free) without confirming college budget, putting the college on the spot financially – the college felt the school overstepped.
- These missteps led to each side starting to question the other’s integrity and commitment. Communication became terse, meetings grew infrequent. At one

joint meeting, tension burst: the college dean publicly commented that “perhaps the high school isn’t prioritizing this program,” offending the school folks – who afterward started excluding the college from certain planning discussions, further eroding trust.

- Now, student participation is dropping, and both sides privately worry the partnership is falling apart. The scenario ends with: “Neither side has called a meeting to address the strain, but everyone feels it. What should they do now?”

Each group spends 10 minutes discussing two questions: (1) What were the trust breaches or leadership failures in this case? (2) What concrete steps could the partners take to rebuild trust and re-align leadership? This scenario hits nerves, as it is not uncommon. Groups identify issues such as:

- Unilateral actions (college changed requirement solo; school promised free tuition solo) – both seen as betrayals of trust or courtesy. The fix: more consultation and joint decision-making.
- Lack of communication/transparency (not informing about changes, not discussing financial constraints honestly). The fix: immediate, honest conversation and apologies for not looping each other in.
- Public criticism (the dean’s comment) – a breach of respect. The fix: address conflicts privately and with respect.
- Retreating from communication when upset (both sides pulled back rather than talking it out). The fix: initiate a frank meeting with a mediator if necessary.

- Leadership failure to address the tension (no one stepped up to call out the elephant in the room). The fix: leaders should proactively convene and clear the air rather than let resentment fester.

When groups share, the facilitator writes a “Trust Repair Plan” checklist on the board based on their suggestions:

- *Mutual Acknowledgment*: Both sides need to acknowledge the issue. For instance, the dean should admit they changed the requirement without consulting and apologize; the principal should admit they promised something beyond their authority and apologize.
- *Clarify Intentions*: They should explain why those actions happened (the college might say it was a safety compliance deadline they mishandled communication on; the school might say they were trying to boost enrollment by offering free tuition but realize they should have confirmed funding). Understanding the *why* can humanize the mistake – often it is not malicious, just miscommunication or pressure.
- *Recommit to Communication Protocols*: Perhaps they need to update their agreements: e.g., “No major program changes without discussion” and “All public statements or promises will be coordinated.” Also, set a fresh meeting schedule to get back on track.
- *Leadership Alignment*: Possibly involve higher leadership neutrally – maybe a joint statement from the college VP and district superintendent reaffirming support for the partnership to everyone, to counteract rumor or doubt among staff.

- *Small Win Collaboration*: Plan a quick joint project or success (maybe a student workshop or celebratory event) to rebuild positive momentum and trust through working together successfully again.

Participants emphasize that trust repair takes time but must start with sincere communication. One mentions a concept from research: “trust is earned in drops and lost in buckets” – meaning it can be slow to build, quick to break, so you have to be vigilant. The facilitator agrees and notes trust needs continuous attention (Theme 5 & 6 interplay: one might even gather feedback specifically on trust or satisfaction in the partnership as part of improvement).

This scenario discussion is a bit solemn because it reflects how easily things can go wrong. But it is also hopeful because the suggestions show that deliberate actions can heal a partnership. The facilitator adds a personal anecdote (if applicable) about a partnership they know that hit a snag and recovered after the leaders had a heart-to-heart conversation and reset expectations. The moral: leadership courage – someone has to initiate repairing trust, and true partnership leaders do so rather than walking away.

**10:20 – 10:35 AM: Role-Play – Navigating a Difficult Conversation.** Building on the scenario, the facilitator sets up a role-play exercise to practice interpersonal leadership skills in a tense situation. Two new volunteers (or perhaps the same scenario’s characters if someone wants to play them) enact a trust-rebuilding conversation between the partners from the scenario. They are given a simple prompt: “You are finally meeting to discuss the issues head-on.” With facilitator coaching if needed, they incorporate key elements:

- The college dean starts with an apology: “I want to begin by apologizing for making that program change without involving you. And for my comment last meeting – that was out of line.” This immediately softens the tone.
- The school principal also apologizes for their part: “Thank you. I appreciate that. I am sorry too – I realize I promised free tuition without checking and that put you in a tough spot.”
- They each explain their pressures (dean: “We had a safety audit, and I panicked to meet requirements, but I should have called you.” Principal: “We were desperate to get students signed up and thought waiving fees would help. We should have found another way or asked if the college could help.”).
- As they talk, they use “I” statements and avoid blaming. They actually listen to each other. The facilitator might pause them to highlight a good phrase used or to prompt a constructive response if they get stuck.
- Together, they then brainstorm how to move forward: “Let us establish a better process: any notable change, we will call or meet immediately. And let us jointly craft any messaging to students or parents.” They also decide on a tangible fix: maybe the school or district can cover the tuition from another budget this time, but going forward they will seek grant funding together for costs.
- They end on a positive note, perhaps expressing commitment: “I value this partnership and I know we got off track, but I’m fully committed to its success.” The other echoes that. They schedule a follow-up meeting and even discuss doing a fun partnership team-building day to rebuild goodwill.

The participants applaud this earnest role-play. In the debrief, the facilitator asks, “What did they do in this conversation that we should all emulate?” Answers include:

- They took ownership of mistakes (no defensiveness).
- They expressed empathy for each other’s situation (you could sense they understood why the other did what they did).
- They kept their focus on the common goal (implied by their recommitment to the program’s success).
- They actually produced solutions, not just venting.
- They were respectful and calm throughout.

This exercise shows that interpersonal leadership often means being the one to put ego aside and extend a hand to your partner, especially after trust has been dinged. It is about leading by example in humility and accountability. The facilitator notes not every conversation will be this smooth, but starting with apology and mutual purpose goes a long way. One participant reflects, “I can see now that when we had an issue with our partner, we kind of avoided talking about it. I should have just picked up the phone and cleared the air.” Exactly – courageous communication is part of leadership.

**10:35 – 10:50 AM: Trust-Building Toolkit & Commitments.** The facilitator distributes the “Trust-Building Toolkit” handout to each participant (also projected on screen and included in the Blueprint appendices). It lists practical tips (many already covered in discussion):

- Do what you say you will do.
- Be transparent (share relevant information promptly).

- Show appreciation frequently (thank your partner, acknowledge their contributions).
- Address issues face-to-face (or voice-to-voice) whenever possible, not only by email.
- Assume positive intent and check assumptions.
- Support your partner publicly; handle critiques privately.
- Invest time in getting to know your partner informally (have coffee, ask about their perspective, etc.).
- Use data as a neutral way to discuss progress (e.g., instead of “I feel you’re not committed,” look at meeting attendance or project data together to discuss).

Participants read the list. The facilitator asks them to each pick one item that they personally want to work on. They then take a minute to write down one personal commitment for sustaining trust or practicing collaborative leadership. Some might write, “I will not cancel our check-in meetings even during busy times,” or “I will praise my partner’s efforts in front of our stakeholders,” or “I will be more upfront when I’m feeling concerned, rather than holding it in.” A few volunteers share their commitments. This solidifies an individual sense of responsibility for Theme 5 behaviors.

Next, the facilitator directs them to the Continuous Improvement Plan portion in their Blueprint Packet (Theme 6). They prompt teams to identify 1-2 indicators of success they will track for their partnership and how they will gather feedback:

- For example, measure student outcomes (grades, enrollment numbers) each semester and compare against baseline or goal.
- Or track qualitative feedback: maybe commit to do a quick survey of participating students or teachers mid-year to get their perspective on the partnership activities.
- Another could be partnership process metrics: e.g., “how many joint meetings were held, and was attendance 100% from both sides?” Teams discuss and jot a couple down. One team decides on “student college matriculation rate” as a key outcome metric, aiming to see it rise through their partnership efforts. Another team chooses “teacher satisfaction with the program” measured via an end-of-semester survey for those involved. The facilitator encourages realistic metrics (use data they can actually obtain without too much difficulty) and to set a schedule for reviewing them (perhaps aligning with the 90-Day Sprint or other regular interval). They write these plans in their Blueprint under a section like “How we will evaluate and improve: [e.g., quarterly data review meetings, share findings with leadership, adjust activities accordingly].”

By doing this, teams are embedding Theme 6 into their blueprint – it is no longer an afterthought. The facilitator highlights that including continuous improvement steps is a mark of a mature partnership culture: “It shows you’re not just going to run on autopilot; you will learn and adjust together, which is a hallmark of effective partnerships.”

**10:50 – 11:00 AM: Break.** (Participants take a short break, stretch, and prepare for the final stretch of the workshop. Many express both excitement and a bit of disbelief

that the three days are almost over – time flew by. There is also a sense of accomplishment in the air; stacks of flip charts and thick packets full of notes stand as evidence of their intensive work.)

**11:00 AM – 12:30 PM:** Finalizing the Partnership Blueprint Packet (Integration & Preparation). The final working session is where teams put it all together. They spend the next 1.5 hours finalizing their Partnership Blueprint Packets, ensuring every section (Themes 1–6) is complete and coherent. The atmosphere is focused yet celebratory – this is the capstone of their work, and they can see how far they have come since Day 1.

Teams review each section:

- Shared Vision & Goals (Themes 1 & 2): They double-check the wording of their vision statement, refine any goals if needed, and ensure it still resonates after two days of further insight.
- Collaboration & Roles (Theme 1): Some add a brief note on how they will maintain a collaborative ethos (e.g., “hold a beginning-of-year partnership retreat for team bonding” – an idea one group got from another during break).
- Communication Plan (Theme 3): They verify all details (meeting schedule, channels, contacts) are clear. If the morning’s discussions prompted any changes (e.g., “we should cc not just each other but also our second-in-command as backup”), they incorporate that.
- Knowledge of Systems (Theme 4): They list any critical alignment points or where they need to develop joint protocols (like aligning academic calendars, mutual terminology cheat-sheets, or understanding each side’s approval process

for new initiatives). One team decides to include a mini-glossary in their packet of key terms from each system, which the facilitator applauds as a clever addition.

- Leadership & Trust Strategies (Theme 5): They summarize how they will maintain a healthy partnership dynamic. Many write commitments such as “Schedule informal check-ins quarterly (e.g., coffee or lunch) just to build relationship,” or “Use the Trust Toolkit tips as ground rules for our interactions.” Essentially, they put in writing the soft agreements: for example, “assume positive intent and clarify before reacting” becomes a line in one team’s Blueprint as a norm.
- Continuous Improvement Plan (Theme 6): They finalize what data or feedback they will collect and when they will review it. Most include participating student performance or enrollment as a metric and commit to discussing data at least semi-annually. Some also decide on conducting a partnership review meeting at year-end to celebrate successes and identify improvements (building that into their plan). They might also note the 90-Day follow-ups as part of improvement.

Facilitators circulate to give final feedback. They encourage teams to ensure the document is clear enough that if they handed it to a colleague not in the workshop, it would convey what the partnership is about and how it will operate. A few teams ask for help refining phrasing for formal use; facilitators assist with wording like “The partnership team will convene biweekly...” or “Both institutions commit to....” This also makes the blueprint potentially usable as part of an MOU or official partnership plan, which is a bonus outcome.

By around 12:15, teams are wrapping up writing. The facilitator reminds them to assign any tasks needed post-workshop (like, “update School Board about vision, by Person A” or “set first three meeting dates, by Person B next week”) – some add a short next-steps checklist in their Blueprint.

***Preparation for Presentations:*** Teams then prepare a brief presentation (about 5 minutes) to share their Blueprint highlights. They are encouraged to focus on the most innovative or important parts of their plan, rather than reading it all. Many flip back through flip charts from previous days to use as props or condense onto one new summary chart. There is excitement and a bit of nervous energy—presenting to peers adds a touch of formality, but by now this group feels collaborative, not judgmental.

A quick working lunch is provided from 12:30 – 1:00 PM so that teams can grab food without losing momentum (or they present while others eat, depending on logistics).

**1:00 – 2:00 PM: Partnership Blueprint Presentations.** Each partnership team (or cohort, if multiple from same partnership) takes the stage or front of the room to present the key points of their Blueprint Packet. This is a celebratory culmination – as they present, it is clear how much thought and effort has gone in. The facilitator may project a slide with the six themes as a checklist to subtly remind presenters to cover each area, but most do naturally:

- *Shared Vision:* Almost every team proudly reads out their vision statement. The difference from Day 1 is striking – what was a draft is now polished by the context of all themes. Applause follows each vision, affirming the collective buy-in to each partnership’s mission.

- *Goals & Metrics*: Some mention specific targets (e.g., “aiming to increase our dual enrollment student count from 50 to 80 next year” and how they will measure it).
- *Communication Plan*: Teams highlight their meeting schedules and any unique communication tools they plan to use. One team’s choice of using a Slack channel draws murmurs of interest; another’s commitment to draft a joint monthly email update for all stakeholders (teachers, counselors, administrators on both sides) is admired as a way to keep everyone informed widely.
- *Roles & Knowledge-Sharing*: Many mention cross-training or shadowing ideas – e.g., “Our college liaison will spend a day at the high school each semester to learn the environment, and vice versa.” This came out of recognizing Theme 4 needs; the audience nods, finding value in that approach.
- *Trust & Relationship*: Some teams share a norm they have adopted, like “We put in our plan that any time there’s an issue, we pick up the phone within 24 hours to talk it through.” A few have even scheduled social interactions: one partnership decided to have an annual summer barbecue bringing together folks from the college and high school teams – which garners smiles and “I want to come!” jokes.
- *Continuous Improvement*: Each team mentions at least one way they will review progress. One says, “We will look at student GPA data after each semester together and write a brief reflective report.” Another plans a feedback session

with students at year's end to gather suggestions. By articulating these, they publicly commit to them, which is powerful.

After each presentation, the facilitator leads a quick round of applause and perhaps one question or positive comment from the audience. Often, the teams congratulate each other: "We might steal your idea of the shared calendar," or "Your vision statement is really inspiring." This peer recognition reinforces the collaborative spirit – everyone wants each other's partnerships to succeed, not just their own.

The facilitator notes commonalities: "Every team here has a strong shared mission and has put structures in place to communicate regularly – that is huge. And I heard trust and data in the mix too. You all are walking away with very robust plans." There's visible pride on participants' faces – what was a vague concept of "improving partnership" three days ago is now a concrete plan they can hold and describe.

**2:00 – 2:15 PM: Overall Post-Test and Workshop Knowledge Check.** With the presentations done, the workshop transitions to closure. Participants take the Overall Post-Test, which is essentially the same questionnaire (or a composite of key items) that they answered on Day 1 before starting. Now, with all six themes experienced, they respond to items like:

- "In a successful partnership, it's important to have a written shared vision statement." (Most now "Strongly Agree," where Day 1 some were neutral or unsure.)
- "Regular communication should be scheduled rather than left to chance." (Likely unanimous agreement now.)

- “I understand the main differences in how K-12 and colleges operate (calendars, policies).” (Confidence here should be much higher than Day 1.)
- “I feel equipped with strategies to build trust and lead our partnership.” (This is a crucial self-assessment – hopefully, the majority now say Yes, reflecting growth in Theme 5 understanding.)
- “We have a plan to measure our partnership’s success and improve it.” (On Day 1, few would have said yes; now all should, given their Blueprint includes it.)

The facilitator then quickly tallies key answers or discusses as a group. It is clear that knowledge and confidence have markedly improved across the board. Jaws drop in a playful way when they recall Day 1’s skepticism about needing a shared vision versus now basically everyone sees the value. One participant jokes, “If I answered anything differently, I think [my partner] would poke me right now!” On a serious note, one says, “I knew some of this in theory, but now I truly understand how to do it.” That sentiment is echoed around the room. The facilitator highlights one or two notable changes – for example, “On Monday, half of you were unfamiliar with the other side’s constraints; today 100% of you said you have a handle on that. That is a huge leap in mutual understanding in a short time.”

This final assessment not only demonstrates learning for documentation purposes, but also solidifies in participants’ minds how much they have gained. It provides a satisfying sense of closure on the educational objectives of the workshop.

**2:15 – 3:00 PM: Next Steps and 90-Day Partnership Sprint Planning.** The facilitator moves to the practical “where do we go from here?” discussion. Having a plan

is excellent, but implementing it is the real test. Enter the 90-Day Partnership Sprint, which was mentioned on Day 1 and now is detailed:

- *Week 1 (Next week): Launch Meeting.* Each partnership team is expected to hold an initial post-workshop meeting (in-person or virtual) with their broader partnership members and any key stakeholders. The aim is to present their Partnership Blueprint Packet, finalize it if needed, and kick off the first few actions (like scheduling regular meetings, initiating any necessary approvals for joint activities, etc.). Essentially, translate the Blueprint into motion immediately while momentum is high. Participants mark their calendars now, for example “next Tuesday 10 AM – internal partnership team debrief meeting.”
- *Week 3: Peer Reconvene (Virtual).* In about three weeks, all the workshop participants will join a one-hour group video call (the facilitator provides a date/time now). This check-in serves multiple purposes: (a) accountability (everyone should have completed initial tasks and can report progress), (b) troubleshooting (if any team hit a snag, they can get advice), and (c) encouragement (sharing early wins – e.g., one team might say “we already held a joint student orientation and 50 students showed up!” which inspires others). On the call, each partnership gives a 2-minute update. The facilitator will moderate.
- *Week 6: Status Survey & Data Point.* Around six weeks out, the facilitator will send a concise survey or request an email update. Questions will include: (a) “Have you held your regular meetings as planned? (b) What successes or challenges have emerged? (c) Any adjustments to your plan? (d) Any support

needed?” Additionally, if teams identified data metrics that can be measured in short term (maybe early indicators like number of sign-ups or meeting attendance), they can share those. The facilitator compiles these responses and sends back a summary with any advice or resources targeted to common issues. For instance, if multiple teams report trouble engaging certain stakeholders, the facilitator might share a tip sheet on stakeholder engagement or schedule a quick coaching call.

- *Week 12: Partnership Mini-Summit (Half-Day Reunion)*. Three months after the workshop (roughly a quarter later), the cohort will reconvene in person (if geographically feasible) or via a longer virtual session to formally present and celebrate outcomes. This mirrors the final presentations of the workshop, but now about real implementation: each partnership reports on what they have accomplished in the 90 days, what impacts are visible (maybe some preliminary data or anecdotal successes), and what their next steps are beyond the sprint. They also honestly discuss any ongoing challenges, but by now, many issues will have been addressed via earlier checkpoints. The mini-summit is part reflection, part celebration – likely some success stories will emerge (e.g., “We’ve already increased our enrollment by 20% compared to last spring!” or “Our communication is so much better; faculty on both sides have commented on how smooth things are now.”). It is also an opportunity to reinforce continuous improvement: teams might set new 90-day goals at this point or plan for another check-in in 6 months. The facilitator ensures leadership from each institution is

invited to this summit to hear the progress (this gives participants a platform to shine and get recognition, which further incentivizes actual implementation of their plans).

The facilitator provides a one-page handout summarizing the 90-Day Sprint schedule and expectations, so everyone is clear. They stress that this structure aligns with Theme 6: it is essentially building an initial continuous improvement cycle – implementing, checking in, adjusting, and celebrating/improving. It also maintains the network of peers (which can become a community of practice). Everyone adds these key dates to their calendars as the facilitator speaks.

Participants seem appreciative of this follow-up design. One says, “I have been to workshops that felt great but then nothing happened after. This time, we have homework, and I actually like it, because I want to see this through.” Others agree; they know the real work is just starting, but they are not being left on their own.

The facilitator also offers support: “Between these checkpoints, if you hit any roadblocks, I am just an email or call away. Do not hesitate to reach out – I can provide advice or connect you with resources. We are invested in your success.” This reassures participants that they have backup.

Finally, the facilitator asks each partnership team to take 5 minutes now to schedule their Week 1 internal meeting and list their very first action items post-workshop (people do this at their tables). This way, before leaving the room, they have already set the immediate next step.

**3:00 – 3:30 PM: Reflections, Q&A, and Closing Remarks.** In the final reflection circle, each participant (or at least one from each partnership team if the group is large) shares a brief thought: maybe one key insight gained, or a shout-out to their partner, or a commitment going forward. It is informal but meaningful. Examples:

- “I came in thinking a shared vision was just fluff, but I am leaving knowing it is actually the anchor for everything. We have one now and it is going to guide us.”
- “I realize we were not communicating as well as I thought. Already, that is changed – I mean, we have talked more in these 3 days than in the past 3 months! We are going to keep it up weekly.”
- “I learned a lot from everyone here, not just about my partnership but in general. We are all dealing with similar issues, and it helps to hear how others handle them.”
- “I’m excited to implement this and even more excited to come back in 90 days and share good news.”

There is often a mix of pride and a bit of emotion; some may express thanks to their partner (which in itself builds trust: hearing “I want to thank my partner for being so open and dedicated this week” can deepen mutual respect).

The facilitator then delivers final remarks. They congratulate the group on their hard work and reiterate the key message: “Effective partnerships do not just happen – they are built, step by step, by leaders like you who collaborate deeply, communicate openly, learn continuously, and keep the students at the center. Over these three days, you have embodied that.” They might reference a few specific achievements (like the number

of plans now in place, or recall a moment of breakthrough like a particularly good vision statement or problem solved).

They remind participants to stay connected – with each other (swap business cards if not already, maybe set up a group email or chat to share resources in the future) – and with the facilitator/team (they may provide a contact list or online forum for the cohort). Finally, the facilitator addresses the group with encouragement: “You are pioneers of change in your institutions. The six themes we focused on – collaboration, shared vision, communication, understanding, leadership, improvement – will continue to guide you. When in doubt, come back to them; they will show you the path forward.”

To close on an upbeat note, the group does one last quick activity. It could be a unified cheer (like everyone says the workshop motto or tagline together – earlier someone coined “One Team, One Dream” or similar while working on their vision, which the facilitator picks up as a rallying cry). Or they might each state one word describing how they feel now, around the room (common ones: “Empowered.” “Focused.” “Motivated.” “Prepared.” “Excited.”). This creates a resonant final moment.

**3:30 – 4:00 PM: Evaluation and Farewell.** Participants fill out a workshop evaluation form (rating content, delivery, what was most valuable, etc. – likely all high marks, given their engagement). As they turn it in, the facilitator hands each their Certificate of Completion (if provided) or simply shakes their hand and thanks them individually. It is clear in these personal goodbyes that real bonds have formed – not only between school and college counterparts but across the whole cohort. Many promise to keep in touch and some even plan cross-district meet-ups.

As people depart, Blueprint Packets in hand, there is an atmosphere of positive anticipation. They are not just leaving with ideas; they have a plan and a timeline to put those ideas into action. The facilitator and staff pack up materials, feeling confident that these participants are equipped to drive meaningful change.

**Learning Outcomes Revisited.** By the end of Day 3, the participants have indeed achieved the workshop's learning outcomes:

- They understand that collaboration is the foundation and have practiced it through constant joint work with their partners (plus they have strategies like regular meetings to maintain it).
- They produced a shared vision and aligned goals that will guide their partnership (and know how to get leadership buy-in for it).
- They set up ongoing transparent communication channels and norms, and even experienced how it feels when communication is good vs. bad.
- They increased their knowledge of both systems – through direct exchange of information and creating plans to keep learning (like calendar sharing, cross-observations).
- They honed interpersonal leadership skills – apologizing, negotiating, empathizing, giving feedback – via role-plays and real interactions, and have committed to behaviors that build trust.
- They embraced continuous improvement, identifying data to track and committing to reflection points (the 90-Day Sprint is an immediate structure for that).

The Partnership Blueprint Packets each team carries home encapsulate all these themes in a practical form. The documents are an actionable blueprint – which, fittingly, can also be shared with others in their institutions to build broader support.

The 90-Day Partnership Sprint ensures this workshop is not an endpoint but a launch. It reinforces that learning outcome of continuous improvement by pushing participants to implement, measure, and refine in the real world. Essentially, the workshop itself models continuous improvement: the follow-up asks teams to apply what they learned, then come back and assess and improve again.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

### **INTRODUCTION (Researcher reads aloud)**

Good (morning or afternoon). My name is \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview. This interview will be one-on-one face-to-face open ended semistructured. The purpose of this interview is to get your perspective on communication and collaboration in the formation of partnerships between community colleges and school districts. There are no right or wrong or desirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

### **RECORDING INSTRUCTIONS**

If it is okay with you, I will be recording our conversations through the Microsoft Teams program. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain your comments without any reference to identity.

Before we get started, do you have any questions or concerns?

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. RQ1: How do school district and community college personnel describe the role of collaboration and communication in establishing and sustaining partnerships?
  - a. IQ 1: What is your understanding of collaboration?
  - b. IQ 2: What is your understanding of a school district and community college partnership?
  - c. IQ 3: Tell me about how such a partnership is established?
  - d. IQ 4: What is your role in this process of establishing a school university partnership?
  - e. IQ 4: Tell me how collaboration and communication play a part in establishing such a partnership?

2. RQ2: How do school district and community college personnel describe the knowledge and skills needed for faculty, staff, and officials to create and sustain partnerships?
  - a. IQ 1: When thinking about forming a school district and community college partnership, what specific knowledge is necessary to full participate?
  - b. IQ2: When thinking about forming a school district and community college partnership, what specific skills necessary to full participate?
  - c. IQ 3: Once the partnership is formed, tell me about what knowledge is necessary to sustain it?
  - d. IQ 4: Once the partnership is formed, tell me about what skills are necessary to sustain it?

**CLOSING STATEMENT (Researcher reads aloud)**

Thank you for interviewing with me today. Your participation in the study will be confidential. You will be provided a copy of the interview transcript. Please review with the transcript for accuracy and resonance. Notify immediately if you see a discrepancy in what you mentioned in the interview. Thank you for your time and have a great day.