DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PENN ALEXANDER SCHOOL:
UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS AND ITS FACTORS
Ann Kreidle
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Supervisor of Dissertation:
___________________________
Marybeth Gasman, Professor of Higher Education

Dean, Graduate School of Education:
___________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:
Marybeth Gasman, Professor of Higher Education
Jami N. Fisher, American Sign Language Program Coordinator
Nancy W. Streim, Associate Vice President for School and Community Partnerships,
Teachers College, Columbia University
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ABSTRACT

DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PENN ALEXANDER SCHOOL:
UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS AND ITS FACTORS

Ann Kreidle
Marybeth Gasman

With more than half of all higher education institutions in the United States located in or near urban areas, higher education institutions are particularly vulnerable to challenges faced today by cities, such as underperforming public schools, poverty, crime, economic disinvestment and residential abandonment in areas that surround their campuses (Feld, 1998; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City and CEOs for Cities, 2002). This study focuses on the partnership of the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania that was formed in 1998 to create a university-assisted public school for the purpose of demonstrating exemplary urban schools as a component of community renewal. A case study of the partnership from 1996 to 2014 with particular focus on understanding the partnership’s success and its factors is presented. Partnership success was defined in three ways: accomplishments of the school, which included the academic and developmental achievement of students, teacher achievement and building design; neighborhood stabilization; and quality of the relationship of the partners. Partnership success was
brought about by four factors: student centered goals, trust and respect, open and effective communication, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities aligned to goals.

This study informs the field of school-university partnerships by providing a case study of the first university-assisted school model. To educators and policy makers, this research contributes a case study of a university-school partnership that has given rise to a highly successful public school for children in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**ABSTRACT**

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Statement of the Problem

Research Questions

Overview of Study


The Operational Phase: 2001-2004

Analysis of Success and Its Factors

Background

Higher Education Institutions as Economic Engines

Higher Education Institutions’ Mission to Serve

Recognition of Service at Penn

Penn’s Storied Past

Making Peace with the Community

Interconnected Elements of Thriving Communities

Defining Disinvestment

Improving Public Education Through Partnership

**CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Why Do Higher Education Institutions Form Partnerships with Schools?

Teacher Preparation and Training
Data Collection

Documents 46

Archival Materials 47

Physical Artifacts 48

Individual Interviews 49

Interviewee Selection and Criteria 51

Memos 52

Data Collection Management 53

Data Analysis 54

Role of the Researcher 57

Issues of Validity 58

Limitations of the Study 60

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY 61

Overview 61

Conceptual Phase: 1996-2000 61

Operational Phase: 2001-2014 62

What is the Penn Alexander School Partnership? 63

Institutional Context 63

Community Context 64

Institutional-Community Crossover Context 65

West Philadelphia Initiatives: Improving Public Education and Conceptualizing a University-Assisted School 66

Community Planning Process 69
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design and Construction of the School and Grounds</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Admission</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Agreement</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Conversations</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Plan</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Selection Plan</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Opens: Partnership in Post-Concept Design</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Day</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Naming Process</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalizing the Partnership at the School Level</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Opening Leadership Changes</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued Enrollment Growth</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five: Analysis, Findings and Discussion</strong></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the Partnership Successful and How Has Success Been Defined?</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Has the Partnership Achieved Success?</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Centered Goals</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and Respect</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and Effective Communication</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities Aligned to Goals</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness of Success Factors</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and Discussion</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusions</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Practice and Research</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Protocol for Interviews</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Partnerships are formed to solve a problem or obtain a goal that an individual organization cannot accomplish alone (Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Kanter, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Tushnet, 1993). Partnerships may be formed with an intentional goal of accomplishing a success relationship in and of itself, but rather organizations join forces when one organization cannot accomplish a goal or resolve an issue without assistance from another organization. Higher education institutions have long been uniquely positioned to partner with their local K12 schools in this regard. Harvard University played a key role in the advancement of the Cambridge Grammar School in late 17th century when the town refused to fund construction of the required public school (Burton, 1997). According to Burton’s research, the 1647 Old Deluder Satan law required towns of 100 or more families to have a grammar school. Cambridge already had a private grammar school whose headmaster was determined to prepare boys for Harvard. The town turned the private school into the public school but did not fund the school. Harvard President intervened by constructing the schoolhouse. When the school had difficulties again in the in the late 1690’s, Harvard faculty provided assistance.

In more modern times, higher education institutions have continued to have a vested interest in partnering with their local K12 public school system. For urban universities in particular, the challenges of city life that surround their campus, including economic and housing disinvestment, poverty and crime, and low performing public schools impact their ability to attract faculty and students (Feld, 1998; Initiative for a
Competitive Inner City and CEOs for Cites, 2002; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007).

However, when neighborhood-based public schools perform well, they attract families, who in turn patronize local shops, restaurants, markets, and parks; communities are thus renewed (Cox, 2000; Essex, 2001; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Harris, 2009; Khadduri, Turnham, Chase & Schwartz, 2003; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013; “University park campus school,” 2005). In addition to self-preservation, higher education institutions also have a moral imperative through their mission to serve, to address the needs of their urban communities (Maurrasse, 2001; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Thelin, 2011). Likewise public school systems have suffered from weak academic performance of their students and have been called upon to reform their strategies for improving student learning (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, and Luppescu, 2010; Gardner, 1983; Kezar, 2007). As a result, partnerships arise in many different shapes.

In order to learn about the phenomena of school-university partnership, one must read the case study literature. According to Clifford, Millar, Smith, Hora and DeLima (2008) who used the EPPI-Centre methodology, an international standard for conducting research that resulted in a search of over 9,000 for peer-reviewed articles written in the last ten years, found that the methodology to understand the phenomena of higher education institution-school partnerships has primarily been single case study. Case study provides an essential methodology for identifying issues for further research (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). The strength of case study methodology is that it provides for understanding a contemporary, social phenomenon in depth and in its real-life context (Yin, 2014). It has a distinct advantage over other methods, because it can get at the “how” and “why” questions of a contemporary event (Yin, 2014).
There is one partnership model called the University-assisted school model that was developed at the University of Pennsylvania to demonstrate that urban schools could have high academic performance and revive a university neighborhood (Vissa and Streim, 2006; Rodin, 2007). A search of the literature on the Penn Alexander School partnership revealed less than a handful of studies or reports (Etienne, 2012, Feinblatt, 2004, Vissa and Streim, 2006, Rodin, 2007), none of which was a thorough documentation or description of the model. Judith Rodin’s book *The University and Urban Revival* is often the most cited, but it focuses only on the development of the partnership and initial years of the school in operation.

In university-assisted schools, higher education institutions have formal agreements for a role in the management and/or governance of a school (Vissa & Streim, 2006). University-Assisted Schools feature higher education institutions as powerful resources that aim to build community assets (Feinblatt, 2004; Vissa & Streim, 2006; Rodin, 2007). In this model, student academic success of K-12 students is the primary focus of the collaboration (Vissa & Streim, 2006). This model is not to be confused with the university-assisted community school (UACS) model created by Ira Harkavy and colleagues at Penn in the late 1980’s (Harkavy, Hartley, Hodges and Weeks, 2013). In the UACS model, schools become organizing hubs of democratically engaged partners (of which universities are considered a powerful resource) and as such could address the challenges facing its community including those of the schools (Harkavy, et al., 2013). For example, university faculty provide expertise to a community identified issue, such as lead poisoning or poor nutrition but perhaps not the reading or math levels of K12 students.
Furthermore, the university-assisted school model of Penn Alexander has achieved unprecedented student academic success using a nonselective admissions model. It has overcome the persistent challenge of academic performance in the School District of Philadelphia. It ranks as one of the top performers in the City of Philadelphia and performs above the average Commonwealth public school as defined by the Pennsylvania Student System of Assessment (Pennsylvania Department of Education School Performance Results 2013-2014). Finally, the community around the school has stabilized and grown (University City District Report, 2014).

An additional reason to study this partnership is that the Penn Alexander School is also the result of a three-way collaboration of a large urban school system, an elite private institution and a decades old teachers’ union. The American Federation of Teachers (2015) represents 1.6 million members in 3000 local affiliates, including Philadelphia. Teacher unions as partners with universities and districts do not readily appear in the literature yet are present in numerous cities.

This research project is a descriptive case study of the partnership between the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania, a partnership that was formed to create a university-assisted public school called the Penn Alexander School or PAS. The partnership officially commenced in 1998 and continues through 2021. The purpose of this study is to understand the university-assisted school model by defining the partnership that resulted from the model at Penn, defining and measuring the outcomes and understanding the factors that brought about the outcomes. The goals of this study are twofold. This study will to contribute to the field of school-university partnership literature by providing a
case study of a higher education institution-school partnership associated with positive K12 student outcomes and community renewal. Additionally, the goal is to provide practical expertise to the policymakers and educators interested in pursuing educational partnerships for community renewal via student success.

Research Questions

This study will focus on the partnership aspect of the Penn Alexander School. In other words, this is not a case study of the school as organization, curriculum and pedagogy. Three research questions will guide this study to better understand the partnership that created the Penn Alexander School:

1. What is the Penn Alexander School partnership and how is it defined?
2. How has the partnership defined and measured success?
3. How do the partnership features contribute to its success and why?

Overview of Study

This study will include a presentation of the case, organized into two sections: the conceptual phase of the partnership and the operational school phase of the partnership, followed by analysis of the success factors that enable the partnership to achieve its goals. I have organized the case description into these two phases for two reasons. The first section, about the conceptual and operational phase, will be about defining the partnership – the organizations and staff, partnership rationale, purpose and development. The second section will focus on clarifying the number and amount of partnership features related to success (as it is defined for this case). Student success as measured by the state assessment system did not occur until six years after the partnership launch, when students were eligible to take the state assessment.
choice of organization is that the number of partners changed. The partnership was initially three organizations. The partnership is between the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania. While the initial years of the partnership comprised three partners, after 2001, the school itself became essentially fourth partner. While the school is under the umbrella of the School District, it is an additional organization with staff, students, parents, and curriculum in the partnership. The conceptual phase focuses on the initial three partners. The second phase looks at the role of the school once it became operational in the partnership.

**The Conceptual Phase: 1996-2000**

The conceptual phase examines the context and formation of the collaboration between Penn, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. The conditions that were in place at the time that gave rise to the collaboration, what led to the creation of a new school, and how the partnership was formed. The process by which decisions were made and the implications for each decision were key points of this phase. Guiding questions included: How does the largest private employer in Philadelphia learn to work constructively and with positive outcomes in its neighborhood when it has not always been a good neighbor? How does a partnership support reform in one community when it cannot do the same in every community?

This phase examines the impetus for the university to create a school by examining the Spruce Hill Renewal Plan, Penn Faculty and Staff for Neighborhood Initiatives, the West Philadelphia Initiatives, prior efforts-such as the West Philadelphia Corporation, Netter Center (then called the Center for Community Partnerships)-past partnership with
the Lea School and the never-materialized partnership to create the University City High School, Penn support of the private school-University City New School, and School District reform agenda (Superintendent Hornbeck’s Children Achieving).

This phase also focuses on the official launching of the collaboration signing of the Memorandum of Understanding; the financial contribution of $1,000 per student (n.b. annual contribution is now $1330 plus the funding of an additional Kindergarten teacher and an agreement renewal to 2021); the Graduate School of Education as a leader of a university-wide, trustee oversight initiative; community-based partnership planning process; and the design and building phase of the school facility.

Once the partnership was formed, this phase also focuses on the type of school that was selected ultimately and how that decision was made. The type of school refers to issues such as using an existing school, creating a new, public, private or charter school, grade configuration, enrollment, size, mission, and three-part vision (rigorous academic program, a center for community activities, a professional development hub).

The Operational Phase: 2001-2014

The operational phase focuses on the role of the partners (SDP, PFT, Penn) once the school opened, as well as the school’s role in the partnership. A key focus of this phase examined the school’s role in the partnership. Guiding questions included: Who led the partnership at the school level? How does additional player affect the way the partnership works?

An Operating Agreement was signed laying out responsibilities of each partner for implementing the vision. The principal and initial staff was hired, curriculum decisions were made and students were enrolled. Prior to this phase, staff members from
the school had not been involved in the planning of the school. This is the first phase that included the principal and teachers, who were charged with implementing the vision on a daily basis.

This phase also examined the impact of leadership on the partnership, especially since research showed that projects that lose their champions often dissolve (Goodlad, 1988; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996; Maurasse, 2001). The founding principal remained as head of school, but there were four leadership changes to the School District of Philadelphia, a state governing board replaced an appointed local school board, and Penn installed a new president.

**Analysis of Success and Its Factors**

Following the case description is an analysis of PAS partnership objectives and accomplishments, how has success been defined and measured, and what factors enabled the success. School-university partnerships are formed to solve a problem or obtain a goal that an individual organization cannot accomplish alone (Goodlad, 1988; Maurrasse, 2001; Tushnet, 1993). Guiding questions included: How is partnership success determined for this case? How does the partnership change once a partnership creates a school? Has the partnership’s goal been achieved? Can the partnership be dissolved without undermining the obtained success? Can the partners declare success and go their separate ways? What challenges does sustainability present? What unintended consequences have resulted by achieving the goal?

In conclusion, the purpose of this research study is to gain a deep understanding of a university partnership that supported community renewal by giving rise to a highly successful school for neighborhood children in West Philadelphia. Through this study,
the term of partnership as per this case will be defined, along with its success factors and their interconnectedness. Penn Alexander has continuously been recognized for its academic achievement, teacher qualifications and beautiful facility and grounds. What makes for a successful partnership and how is success defined? Furthermore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of a project that has not been studied by many. This study not only contributes to the field of partnership literature, but also informs practitioners who are increasingly looking to partnerships for school and community renewal.

**Background**

With more than half of all higher education institutions in the United States located in or near urban areas, higher education institutions are particularly vulnerable to challenges faced today by cities, such as underperforming schools, poverty, crime, economic disinvestment and housing abandonment in areas that surround their campuses (Feld, 1998; Initiative for a Competitive Inner City and CEOs for Cities, 2002; Rodin, 2007). Unlike corporations and other organizations, higher education institutions do not relocate when their communities start to deteriorate economically, politically or socially. They are entwined with their communities: geographically, through their campuses, and philosophically, through their mission to serve (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Thelin, 2011). As their urban communities decline so does campus safety, student enrollment and faculty recruits (Eisenstein, 2005; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007).

**Higher Education Institutions as Economic Engines**

Higher Education Institutions, such as the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), can also be well positioned to address the disinvestment surrounding their campus. In the
knowledge-based economy, higher education institutions are enormous economic engines (Harkavy and Zuckerman, 1999). A 1999 survey conducted by Ira Harkavy and Harmon Zuckerman for the Brookings Institution found that in the largest 20 US cities, 35% of the top ten largest private employers are higher education institutions and their medical facilities. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Penn is the largest private employer in Philadelphia and the second largest in the Commonwealth (Eichel, Lowe, Visser & LeDuc, 2015). Furthermore, Penn provides over half of the direct economic impact of all higher education institutions in Philadelphia (Eichel, Lowe, Visser & LeDuc, 2015).

**Higher Education Institutions’ Mission to Serve**

Through their mission to serve, higher education institutions are also committed to directly addressing the needs of their urban communities (Maurrasse, 2001; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Thelin, 2011). This is especially true at Penn, which was founded by the pragmatist Benjamin Franklin, who valued the practical application of knowledge (University of Pennsylvania). This commitment can be seen at the highest levels of the institution, such as trustee committees, presidential visions and strategic plans. When Penn President Amy Gutmann launched the Penn Compact in 2004, the third of four principles was to “engage locally” (Gutmann, 2004). That commitment was renewed in her 2020 Compact (University of Pennsylvania, 2013a). Her predecessor, Judith Rodin, launched the West Philadelphia Initiatives (WPI), a comprehensive community revival effort (Rodin, 2007). In the mid-1990’s, this five-point plan was implemented to address increasing violent crime in the community surrounding the university that caused the university to lose students, raised concerns by parents about campus safety, and impacted the University’s ability to recruit top faculty (Rodin, 2007). The plan included a new
university-assisted public school, clean and safe streets, renovated houses, vibrant retail stores and economic development. This commitment was backed up financially. For example, Penn donates approximately $800,000 annually to the School District of Philadelphia’s Penn Alexander School in West Philadelphia (School Reform Commission, 2011).

Accompanying the WPI plan was the formation of a trustee committee designated solely to the stewardship of neighborhood initiatives (Rodin, 2007). Prior to Rodin, Sheldon Hackney supported the creation of the Center for Community Partnerships (University of Pennsylvania, 2013b). In 2007, the Center for Community Partnerships was endowed with a $10 million gift from Edward and Barbara Netter; it provides tutoring, college access, afterschool, and health and nutrition programs to local schools (University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

**Recognition of Service at Penn**

This commitment to directly addressing the disinvestment surrounding Penn’s campus has earned Penn accolades in several fields – community service, civic engagement, architecture, and education. It has received such recognition as the 2012 Corporation for National and Community Service; the 2009 Saviors of Our Cities: A Survey of Best College and University Civic Partnerships; the 2004 Schools as Centers for Community Honor Society (Knowledgeworks Foundation 2004); 2003 Urban Land Institute Award for Excellence for the Penn Alexander School (University of Pennsylvania, 2003) and the 2001 Penn-assisted school considered the “gold standard” by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (University of Pennsylvania, 2002).
Penn’s Storied Past

While many consider Penn as a leader in how it has addressed the challenges of its immediate surrounding community of West Philadelphia, Penn has had a storied past involving community renewal. In the 1950s through the early 1970s, Penn leveraged federal, state and city policy to raze neighborhoods for campus expansion under the guise of urban renewal and campus development (Eisenstein, 2005; Puckett & Lloyd, 2013). According to a recently published book by John Puckett and Mark Lloyd (2015) on the history of Penn from 1950-2000, in the second half of the twentieth century, the Harnwell administration launched the Educational Survey, a self-study that provided the rationale for the largest expansion of hundreds of acres west and north of campus (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). The campus reached from its historic core located at 34th and Walnut Streets in Philadelphia to the rail yards on the east, 40th Street to the west, and Market Street to the north. More than twenty-five buildings were constructed consisting of research facilities, dormitories, libraries, and classrooms; whereas, only one building had been built between 1930 and 1950 (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). The viewpoint was that what was good for Penn would be good for the city (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). Buildings for Penn’s faculty, staff and students dominated the approach towards community renewal.

This expansion would not have taken place without Penn’s involvement in city, state and federal policy, which included labeling much of the area surrounding the campus as deteriorated and blighted (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). Development during much of the twentieth century was characterized by eminent domain. While some residents felt properly remunerated, others did not (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). Some areas sat empty
while the promised vision languished in court or lacked financial interest (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015). In fact, Puckett and Lloyd specifically cite the area north of campus as particularly contentious. This area was envisioned as a science corridor of research and innovation. However, the residential neighborhood that was displaced fought bitterly. It was so contentious that Penn historian Michael Zuckerman viewed this debate as cementing “the inevitably wary relationship between Penn and the neighborhood” (Puckett & Lloyd, 2015, p. 105).

**Making Peace With the Community**

Despite the contention, Puckett and Lloyd argue that this expansion enabled the university become a top ranked research university and the economic engine it is today. According to Puckett and Lloyd, the Hackney era ushered in a new way in which the University interacted with its community to deal with the deteriorating conditions. Penn communicated more openly about its plans. It worked with the community to address needs they identified. The West Philadelphia Corporation was reconfigured to give the neighborhood more of a voice in the decision-making process. Rodin solidified this approach with her West Philadelphia Initiatives, which was not about clearing neighborhoods for campus buildings. She had grown up in West Philadelphia and vowed that Penn would be *of* the community (Rodin, 2007). The community had developed its own plan, the Spruce Hill Civic Association, which according to Puckett and Lloyd they had not done in the past. The Penn community that resided in the neighborhood – the Penn Faculty and Staff for Neighborhood Issues (PFSNI) – also developed a plan for ways in which the University needed to take steps to support community growth (W. Licht, personal communication, April 4, 2014; Priorities for neighborhood revitalization,
Much like Puckett and Lloyd (2015), the group believed that without such action the University would not survive (W. Licht, personal communication, April 4, 2014). President Amy Gutmann only solidified this approach when she was installed to lead the university in 2004: first with the 2004 Penn Compact and its three principles – Increase Access, Integrate Knowledge, and to Engage Locally and Globally (University of Pennsylvania, 2004) – and secondly with Compact 2020’s principles of Inclusion, Innovation and Impact.

Interconnected Elements of Thriving Communities

As the history at Penn demonstrates, identifying disinvestment does not always come by consensus. However, there is consensus in the literature that the elements of disinvestment, such as crime, poverty, vacant storefronts, abandoned housing, and underperforming public schools are entwined. For example, conditions of poverty, education and housing are interconnected (Rodin, 2007; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013): improving one will improve the others (Cox, 2000; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Harris, 2009; Khadduri, Turnham, Chase & Schwartz, 2003; Maurrasse, 2001; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013; Rodin, 2007; “University park campus school,” 2005).

Defining Disinvestment

Poor public school performance can be considered one sign of disinvestment (Rodin, 2007). In Philadelphia in 1996, the year Rodin launched the West Philadelphia Initiatives student academic performance at the nearest elementary school was abysmal. The Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA), a standardized test administered to 5th, 8th and 11th graders at the time, grouped performance into four categories: high, high middle, low middle and low (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1997). On the
1996 assessment, 83% of the 5th grade students and 65% of the 8th grade students performed in the low group. This performance placed the school in the fifth quintile citywide (Langland & Borowski, 1997). In John Kromer and Lucy Kerman’s (2005) case study of the West Philadelphia Initiatives, they report on the other areas of disinvestment evident in West Philadelphia in the 1990s. Crime had increased 10% in ten years. Housing and commercial activity in West Philadelphia had also deteriorated at this time to the point of concern:

West Philadelphia’s formerly thriving neighborhood commercial corridors experienced increasing storefront vacancies, the abandonment of most upstairs occupancy, and the replacement of community-based businesses by convenience stores…[this] generated complaints about loitering and criminal activity. (Kromer and Kerman, 2005, pg. 6)

**Improving Public Education Through Partnership**

With these disinvestment indicators for thriving communities, Penn saw an opportunity to improve the neighborhood by investing in the creation of a high quality public school as part of a multipronged approach to urban revival and campus survival (Rodin, 2007). A partnership model was developed and used to implement the school component of the West Philadelphia Initiatives. Like other school-university partnerships, this partnership was formed to solve a problem or achieve a goal that an individual organization could not accomplish alone (Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Kanter, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Tushnet, 1993). Ironically, a university founded on the vision of practical application of knowledge, one with financial resources and a graduate school of
education focused on urban education was surrounded by public schools that were underperforming.

In 1998, the University of Pennsylvania announced a partnership with the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to create a new university-assisted public K-8 school in West Philadelphia. Then-President Judith Rodin was the first female president of an Ivy League institution. She grew-up in West Philadelphia and attended the School District of Philadelphia public schools. The vision of this public school along with each partner’s role in the creation of the school was outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (1998). This school would have a rigorous academic program, serve as a hub of professional development for teachers in the area and be a state-of-the-art facility located in a park-like setting. The school would be located just west of the University’s campus in a diverse ethnic, racial, and economic neighborhood on Penn property that would be leased to the School District at a nominal rate. The University would contribute $1,000 per year for a ten-year renewable period (n.b. annual contribution is now $1330 plus the funding of an additional Kindergarten teacher and an agreement renewal to 2021) to reduce class size and to enhance the academic program. Penn Alexander opened in 2001 and was officially named after Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander in 2002. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander was an African American woman of significance and accomplishment, earning many “firsts” and in many ways symbolizing the accomplishments of an Ivy League institution to open its first nonselective public elementary school as part of an urban renewal effort (University of Pennsylvania Archives).
A city school district that once had overcrowded, underperforming schools in West Philadelphia now has a high performing school serving children in the community regardless of ability. Penn Alexander is now ranked among the top performing city schools and one that out performs the average Commonwealth public school, based on the Pennsylvania System of Standardized Assessment (Pennsylvania School Profile Report, 2015). A neighborhood once characterized by empty streets, deteriorating housing stock, high crime and violence is now filled with young families, renovated homes, and an eclectic mix of commercial and retail business (University City District Annual Report, 2013-2014).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on higher education institutions partnerships with schools exists largely in the form of case studies. The strength of case study methodology is that it provides for understanding a contemporary, social phenomenon in depth and in its real-life context (Yin, 2014). It has a distinct advantage over other methods, because it can get at the “how” and “why” questions of a contemporary event (Yin, 2014). A challenge, however, to case study literature is that it can be a daunting task to read the vast collection of case studies to gain an understanding of the field and to identify where there are gaps for further research. To guide my review of the literature, I used the following five questions:

1. Why do higher education institutions partner with K-12 schools?
2. What motivates higher education institutions to partner with K-12 schools?
3. What elements contribute to successful higher education institution partnerships with schools?
4. What challenges do higher education institutions partnerships with schools face?
5. What are some outcomes of higher education institutions partnerships with schools?

Why Do Higher Education Institutions Partner with K-12 Schools?

This literature review identified four purposes of higher education institution partnerships with schools:

1. teacher preparation and training,
2. school renewal,
3. civic engagement,
4. community renewal.

**Teacher Preparation and Training**

Teacher preparation and training is a traditional reason for higher education institutions to partner with K-12 schools (Clark, 1988). Post-WWII expansion of higher education marked the height of higher education institutions-school partnerships formed for this purpose. New state requirements for four-year teaching degrees fueled the need to find places to train teachers, and higher education institutions cornered the market on credentialing (Clark, 1988). K-12 schools met the need for training sites and developing and testing learning theories (Clark, 1988). Higher education institution-school partnerships continue today for this reason.

In more recent times, new types of teacher-credentialing organizations have partnered with schools; the largest one is Teach for America. In its model of teacher preparation, K-12 schools serve as primary training sites and higher education schools of education play a more supportive role in training (teachforamerica.org). Nevertheless, this purpose of higher education institution-school partnerships remains strong.

**School Renewal**

Another purpose for higher education institutions-school partnerships is school renewal. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* report described the state of education as “a rising tide of mediocrity” (Gardner, 1983). This report launched a new era of school improvement focused on standards and accountability. These reforms challenged K-12 schools, especially urban schools, so external partners, particularly higher education institutions, were viewed as sources of assistance. Several types of university-school
partnerships targeted this need, such as Partner Schools, Professional Development Schools, and what I call Focused Partnerships, that concentrate exclusively on one aspect of school renewal, such as the physical space, curriculum, or student support services (Baker, 2011; Goodlad, 1988; Osguthrope, 1995; Ravid & Handler, 2001; Vissa & Streim, 2006).

**Partner Schools**

The model of what would eventually be called Partner Schools brought together higher education institutions and K-12 schools for simultaneous renewal (Goodlad, 1993; Osguthrope, 1995). John Goodlad developed this model as a strategy for educational change. Based on his research of school change and higher education institution schools of education, Goodlad as well as others maintained that higher education institution schools of education were as much to blame for mediocre student achievement as K-12 schools (Howey & Zimpher, 2004; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). Preparation of teachers was not adequate to enable teachers to tackle reforms they would face, and schools lacked the support, technical assistance and research they would need to implement the reforms demanded of them (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988, 1993). Goodlad claimed that school renewal was impossible without simultaneous renewal to higher education institution teacher preparation (Goodlad, 1988). Partnerships between higher education institution schools of education and K-12 schools were a natural answer (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). Furthermore, Goodlad’s model aimed to demonstrate that through symbiosis, two dissimilar organizations – schools and universities - could mutually benefit (Goodlad, 1988). Goodlad developed this develop model over 20 years, starting
in the late 1960’s with League of Cooperating Schools and culminating with his National Network for Educational Renewal (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; Goodlad 1993).

While Goodlad focused on individual schools and the symbiotic relationship with higher education institutions needed for renewal, in the 1990’s, Boston University pioneered a partnership with the City of Chelsea designed to renew the city’s entire school district. In this model, Boston University assumed responsibility for the entire district of K-12 schools for a ten-year period (Greenes, 1994). The partnership’s purpose remained school renewal (though not teacher preparation renewal), but was aimed at improving student outcomes district-wide, stabilizing a distressed community and applying the university’s vast knowledge and expertise to the urban challenge of inadequate public education (Silber, 1994).

**Professional Development Schools**

The Professional Development School (PDS), a model similar to the medical school-teaching hospital model, dominated higher education institution-school partnerships in the 1990’s (Ravid & Handler, 2001) and had higher education institutions and K-12 schools preparing teachers and providing ongoing professional development jointly. Goodlad considered his Partner Schools a version of the PDS (Goodlad, 1993).

The Professional Development School model held that once higher education institution schools of education were more like medical schools, and teacher training and educating youth were integrated and no longer conducted in silos (university campuses/schools), outcomes for children and teacher training would improve (Ravid & Handler, 2001; Hess, 2009). Tom Del Prete demonstrates the effectiveness of this model on school renewal in his 2006 report on the University Park Campus School affiliated
with Clark University. Del Prete’s report states that in a school with a 61% minority population, all students achieved proficiency (2006).

**Focused Partnerships**

The literature is full of Focused Partnership models aimed at a specific aspect of school renewal, including partnerships that focus on physical space, curriculum (e.g., science, reading, math), student support services, or participatory action research. In Focused Partnerships, individual faculty members offer their expertise to a school or district and the collaboration takes the form of an informal or formal partnership to address an aspect of school renewal such as research, student support services, or curriculum (Gardner, 2011; Kuriloff, Reichert, Stoudt, & Ravitch, 2009; Walsh & Backe, 2013). Roy Strickland (1994) wrote about school renewal in urban communities through the physical design of schools buildings. He saw this as an unaddressed issue in higher education institution’s call for school renewal. Strickland’s work in the architectural department at MIT led to redesigning the master plan of the Berkley Unified School District (Strickland, 2015).

**Civic Engagement**

A third purpose the contemporary literature of higher education institutions-school partnership discusses is civic engagement. Civic engagement is a broad term that includes ways in which higher education institutions engage with their communities to jointly solve community problems and enhance the civic values of students (Harkavy & Hartley, 2008; Maurrasse, 2001). Civic engagement enables higher education institution to demonstrate their relevance to their communities by supplying their knowledge to address local problems (Checkoway, 2001; Harkavy & Puckett, 1991). In the 1990s,
service learning became one of the most prolific forms of higher education institutions civic engagement (Harkavy & Hartley, 2008). Service learning involves embedding experiential learning into the higher education institution curriculum, enabling students to apply academic course content to address a problem identified by the community. Students gain real world problem-solving skills while providing a service to the community and regaining democratic values sought by society.

Viewed as core institutions of the community, K-12 schools often become the locus of service learning (Harkavy, Hartley, Hodges, & Weeks, 2013), which could include studying child development, providing K-12 tutoring, teaching nutrition education, or college access assistance (www.compact.org/initiatives/service-learning/). School-based service learning as a form of civic engagement can be traced to John Dewey’s work and from the historical roots of higher education institutions in the United States (Harkavy, et al., 2013; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).

In many ways, civic engagement as a purpose of higher education institution-school partnerships is defined by the technical solutions available to solve community problems. The literature on this topic is filled with handbooks on developing service learning on campuses, as well as case studies of school-based service learning projects. More recently, however, scholars are questioning whether service learning in particular and civic engagement in general really enable students to gain democratic values that were sought originally by the civic engagement movement (Hartley, Saltmarsh, Clayton, 2010; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).
Community Renewal

The fourth purpose of higher education institution-school partnerships is to foster community renewal. Higher education institutions, particularly urban institutions, have a storied past involving community renewal. In the 1950s, institutions leveraged federal, state and city policy to raze neighborhoods for campus expansion under the guise of urban renewal and campus expansion (Eisenstein, 2005; Puckett & Lloyd, 2013). Since then, a more collaborative approach with neighborhoods has been embraced (Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007).

In many ways, fostering community renewal as a purpose of higher education institution-school partnerships grows out of the field of urban socioeconomics. Conditions of poverty, education and housing are interconnected (Rodin, 2007; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013); improving one will improve the others (Cox, 2000; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Harris, 2009; Khadduri, Turnham, Chase & Schwartz, 2003; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013; “University park campus school,” 2005). Therefore, it is understood that higher education institutions can improve their communities by improving the local schools. This purpose not only improves schools and communities, but also is at the heart of higher education’s public mission (Goodlad, 1988; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Harkavy and Puckett, 1991; Harris, 2009; Khadduri, Turnham, Chase, Schwartz, 2003; Rodin, 2007; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn & Luter, 2013; “University park campus school,” 2005).

Case studies in Worcester, Massachusetts and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania demonstrated that improved K-12 schools positively impacted the economics of their communities (Brown, J., & Geoghegan, J., 2011; Gillen & Wachter, 2011). This,
however, has lead to discussions in the literature about specifically who in the local communities, other than higher education institutions, reaps the benefits.

Two models originating at the University of Pennsylvania provide examples of higher education institution-school partnerships designed for community renewal: University-Assisted Community Schools and University-Assisted Schools.

**University-Assisted Community Schools**

Developed at the University of Pennsylvania beginning in the mid 1980s, University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) build on John Dewey’s theory of schools as core neighborhood institutions. School, community groups, and neighborhood residents join together to serve school children and solve community issues, resulting in thriving urban communities (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991). Researchers at Penn believe that higher education institutions are members of the communities themselves and repositories of both intellectual and human capital, so they can support schools towards community renewal as well as strengthen the higher education institution (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991; Harkavy et al., 2013). University leadership saw the fate of the community as the fate of the university (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991). University-Assisted Community Schools employ democratic principles of equality, transparency, and equity to ensure that all groups participate collaboratively, using the school as the locus of reform (Harkavy & Puckett, 1991; Harkavy et al., 2013). This approach is seen as a path towards school reform and by extension towards a thriving community. Higher education institutions also gain experience in real-world problem solving, advancing their core mission of teaching and research (Harkavy et al., 2013). This model has been
adopted nationally and is supported by several regional training sites (Harkavy et al., 2013).

**University-Assisted Schools**

University-Assisted Schools are the other model of higher education institutions-school partnerships developed at Penn to foster community renewal via school renewal. This model originated at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education in the late 1990’s. Similar to University-Assisted Community Schools, University-Assisted Schools feature higher education institutions as powerful resources that aim to build community assets (Feinblatt, 2004; Rodin, 2007). In University-Assisted Schools, higher education institutions have formal agreements for a role in the management and/or governance of a school (Vissa & Streim, 2006). Student academic success is the primary focus of the collaboration, whereas in UACS, democratic principles of engagement are the drivers of student success (Harkavy et al., 2013; Vissa & Streim, 2006).

**What Motivates Higher Education Institutions to Partner with K-12 Schools?**

Much of the more contemporary literature views scarcity of resources as a driving force behind higher education institutions-school partnerships (Clark, 1988; Goodlad, 1988; Maurrasse, 2001, 2013; Smedley, 2001); each comes together to gain some type of resource from the other. The 1983 Nation at Risk Report called for shifting focus from resources for schools to improving outcomes for students. School reform was needed to achieve the outcomes that were deemed necessary for a nation to be competitive (Gardner, 1983). School reform was considered too complex for schools to address independently; external partners such as higher education institutions were needed to support their efforts.
Clark (1988) describes universities needing K-12 schools as training sites for their student teachers. In the professional development school model popular in the 1990’s, K-12 schools provided training sites for student teachers and access to various real world education issues being researched by higher education institutions (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Greene & Tichenor, 1999). In exchange, schools received professional development classes, extra classroom assistance from student teachers, as well as prestige from being linked to higher education institutions (Ravid & Handler, 2001). Another way to describe the exchange of resources in higher education institution-school partnerships is that higher education institutions and schools form “strategic alliances,” a common term in the fields of business and organizational development. In a strategic alliance, partners join together not only to share information, but more importantly, to gain something that they could not get on their own (Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Kanter, 1994).

Another motivation, specific to higher education institutions, is self-preservation or enlightened self-interest (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001, 2013; Rodin, 2007). Higher education institutions, especially those in urban areas, feel the impact of social problems acutely, and to keep their campuses filled with students and faculty, they have to address social problems in their communities (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007). Higher education institutions are also motivated to form partnerships as a way to demonstrate relevancy. During the post-World War II era, higher education institutions were secure in their relevance due to booming enrollments...
and research funding (Puckett & Lloyd, 2013). After this era, however, numerous questions about relevancy emerged (Bok, 1982; Bringle, Games & Malloy, 1999; Checkoway, 2001; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Kerr, 2001).

What Elements Contribute to Successful Higher Education Institution-School Partnerships?

It is clear from the literature in this field that partnerships between higher education institutions and K-12 schools are complex; success is not easily attainable (Goodlad, 1988; Maurrasse, 2001; Osajima, 1989; Smedley, 2001; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). While the purpose of a higher education institutions-school partnership may be specific and full of promise, partnering is anything but simple, clear or short-term (Osajima, 1989; Smedley, 2001). Higher education institutions and their communities often need to overcome difficult legacies, such as neighborhoods being razed through eminent domain and higher education institutions remaining aloof and unresponsive to community concerns. There are also power imbalances between large higher education institutions and smaller communities, between higher education institutions and individual elementary or high schools, and between university professors and school systems (Fisher, 2014; Glass, 2010; Maurrasse, 2001; Kezar, 2007; Kronick, Lester & Luter, 2013a; Rodin, 2007; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988; White, 2008).

When the purpose of a higher education institutions-school partnership is non-hierarchal (one purpose is not better, greater or deeper than another), a common set of conditions exists for success, whether the purpose is teacher preparation and training, school renewal, civic engagement, or community renewal (Kersh & Masztal, 1998; Thorkildsen and Stein, 1996).
The literature reveals some debate over conditions for success if the purposes of higher education institutions-school partnerships are hierarchal. Some researchers distinguish between transactional and transformational partnerships. Transactional partnerships are characterized by partners pursuing their own goals with little consideration of mutual goals or shared purpose. Transformative partnerships occur as partners come together to work on shared goals that produce new knowledge and new ways of knowing (Butcher, Bezzina & Moran, 2011; Enos & Morton, 2003; Jacoby, 2003; Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Transformative partnerships result in “a highly shared endeavor in which members eventually commit themselves as much to the common goal as to the interests of their own organizations” (Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Some scholars believe that only transformational partnerships will be successful at bringing about the desired goal of the partnership since the partners share mutual trust, beneficency and respect (Goodlad, 1988; Butcher, Bezzina & Moran, 2011; Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Only when each organization has changed will a successful outcome be possible. Interestingly, Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) analyzed 22 case studies of higher education institutions-school partnerships, and they maintain that partnerships need not be transformational to be successful. They can simply be transactional, in which a set of services is exchanged.

Setting aside this debate of transformational versus transactional partnerships, the conditions necessary for a successful partnership are well documented but can be vague. According to Clifford, et al., (2008), there is substantial consistency in the characteristics of successful partnerships. It is important to note this consistency given that the cases cut across numerous different contexts. While this is good news for the field, the characteristics are not well defined. For example, the number of characteristics
that are needed for success or the amount of them is not clear. Using Goodlad’s definition of partnership, which Clifford, et al., (2008) found was most often cited, partnership characteristics lack specificity:

A school-university partnership represents a planned effort to establish a formal, mutually beneficial interinstitutional relationship characterized by the following:

- Sufficient dissimilarity among institutions to warrant the effort of seeking complementarity in the fulfillment of some functions.
- Sufficient overlap in some functions to make clearly apparent the potential benefits of collaboration.
- Sufficient commitment to the effective fulfillment of these overlapping functions to warrant the inevitable loss of some present control and authority on the part of the institution currently claiming dominant interest (Goodlad, 1991, p. 59).

Using the research of Clark Clifford et al. (2008), Goodlad (1991), Myran, Crum, and Clayton (2010), Smedley (2001), Thorkildsen & Stein (1996), the factors for success can be grouped into four areas:

1. Mutually Beneficial Goals
2. Trust and Respect
3. Effective and Open Communication
4. Leadership, Roles and Responsibilities

**Mutually Beneficial Goals**

The literature on higher education institution-school partnerships describes mutually beneficial goals as essential for successful partnerships with schools (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman & Cook, 2003; Goodlad, 1988; Maurrasse, 2001; Myran, Crum & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen, & Stein, 1996). Goodlad (1988), Schletchy and Whiteford
see mutually beneficial goals as necessary. They claim that partnerships can only succeed if the partners authentically share common goals. For them, partnerships need to be organic rather than based on a *quid pro quo* mentality. This is consistent with their philosophy that only transformational partnerships will bring about the desire outcome.

Contrary to this view, Cox (2000) who developed a framework for understanding partnerships between communities and higher education institutions maintains that self-interest on behalf of each partner is the only way to sustain interest. He bases this claim on research of the federal Housing and Urban Development Community Outreach Partnership Center programs (COPC), of which schools are components. Boyle and Silver (2005) also used research on the COPC to inform their writing about higher education institution partnerships with the community. Boyle and Silver found that the self-interest of the higher education institutions came to dominate the partnership.

Furthermore, simply being charitable is not enough for a partnership to succeed. As Maurrasse (2001) states, “It is one thing to be involved in service; it is another actually to be helpful.” For Maurrasse, being helpful involves holding “the needs of the communities as high as those of the institutions or individual faculty, students or administrators involved.”

Borthwick’s (2003) study of a university and several public schools in Chicago used the Q methodology, and found that people within the partnerships consider mutual interest and other conditions for partnership success differently. While partnerships are often thought in terms of two organizations, they typically involve large teams at different levels of the organization. Each person in the teams can value the partnership in different ways.
Firestone and Fisler (2002) employ a micro-political perspective to analyze partnerships using the professional development school model. They maintain that viewing the relationship between higher education institutions and schools from a macro level oversimplifies the issues. Partnerships between higher education institutions and schools are complex, involving multiple professionals at different levels and diverse interests and resources. Looking at partnerships and the various participants from the micro level provides a better understanding of the complexities of partnerships, particularly the conflicts that arise from the divergent interests (Firestone and Fisler, 2002). Firestone and Fisler (2002) recommend bringing divergent interests together through professional communities within organizations and using boundary spanners to connect the two partners – people in each organization who can cross function in both higher education institutions and their partner schools.

Some researchers define the mutuality argument using democratic principles. They claim that partnerships need to be democratic in purpose, process and product for successful to be fully realized (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Harris, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

Partners must balance self-interest with selflessness (Goodlad, 1988; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). This results in mutual trust and respect, which is an essential component of a partnership’s success.

**Trust and Respect**

Goodlad & Sirotnik (1988) note that building trust has as much to do with dismantling mistrust, especially of higher education institution motives. Higher education institutions seeking partners under the guise of research or convenience of field
placement sites are not authentic: “Lack of mutuality and authenticity might be apparent in K-12-focused partnerships when external partners view a K-12 school primarily as a site to conduct their work rather than as a place for engaging in collaborative work with educational professionals” (Furco, 2013). As Maurrasse (2001), Myran, Crum and Clayton (2010), Goodlad (1988), Rakow & Robinson (1997) and to some extent Furco (2013) indicate, developing mutual trust takes time, so patience is essential for each partner.

An essential manifestation of trust and respect in each partner is an awareness of their own history and that of the other partner, including any prior partnerships (Hora & Millar, 2011; Maurrasse, 2001; Osajima, 1989; Rodin, 2007; Zetlin, Harris, MacLeod & Watkins, 1992). Furco (2013) refers to this as “context acuity.” Unless higher education institutions truly understand the culture, dynamics and history of their K-12 system partners, legitimacy will be lost and partnerships will fail (Furco, 2013).

The organizational structures of both partners can thwart partnerships before they even begin (Edens & Gilsinan, 2005). Goodlad (1988) and Schlechty and Whitford (1988) talk about this concept on a very practical level. Understanding each partner’s reward systems, rules, policies and regulations indicates respect, and unless each partner is willing to put these in high regard, the partnership will not succeed. Higher education institutions must acknowledge that school districts function in a high stakes testing environment; similarly, communities and schools need to acknowledge the “publish or perish” reality at higher education institutions. Partnerships perceived to be distracting to that mandate do not show respect (Amrein-Beardsley & Barnett, 2012).
Open and Effective Communication

One way of building trust and respect is to have open and effective communication (Goodlad, 1988; Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002; Wasonga, Rari, & Wanzare, 2011). There must be a culture that encourages open and non-judgmental expression, especially during the planning stages (Essex, 2001). Open communications supports understanding and helps to dispel misperceptions (Essex, 2001). The culture must not only allow free expression, but also encourage it in order for the best strategies to be developed (Goodlad, 1988; Essex, 2001). Communication should also include written agreements. Goodlad (1994), and Verbeke and Richards (2001) include written agreements as essential elements. Other than Goodlad, who had a well established partnership model, there is not as much description of the written agreements as there is about the type of communication.

Leadership, Roles and Responsibilities

Maurrasse (2001), Rodin (2007) and Howey and Zimpher (2004) maintain that a committed leadership is a key element in partnership success. It is especially important for the higher education institution leadership to demonstrate to the school or community partner that they are committed to the partnership even after the semester ends, the grant expires, or the students graduate (Maurrasse, 2001). The higher education institution leadership can command and direct institutional resources to the partnership that a faculty member cannot (Howey & Zimpher, 2004). A committed higher education institution leadership can keep the partnership focused (Firestone & Fisler, 2002). Rodin (2007) and Maurrasse (2001) write about the need for administrative leadership as essential for partnerships to succeed. If the work of the partnership involves the academic side of the
institution, the provost’s support is necessary, but for the work to be accomplished, staff leadership is needed (Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin). Bringle, Hatcher and Holland (2007) also note this in their case study.

When organizations have missions that support partnership work, leadership can be more grounded institutionally rather than based on the individual currently in office. Some of the literature discusses the need for consistency of mission and leadership (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Howey & Zimpher, 2004; Maurrasse, 2001). Maurrasse is a scholar of community development, but he does address higher education institution partnerships with schools. Of his four case studies, schools are key elements of the partnerships. Institutions wishing to foster school or community renewal through their partnerships need to support the partnerships with their mission and their leadership, both of which must be compatible with their partner’s mission (Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007). Partnerships cannot be “add ons” to existing purposes and missions (Furco, 2013).

Howey and Zimpher (2004) and other researchers write about the “moral imperative” of higher education institutions to address school renewal through partnerships. Howey and Zimpher write about 19 public urban research institutions working to address issues of their urban communities, in particular the education of children. Harkavy and Puckett, scholars based at a private research university also write about the concept of “moral imperative.” In other words, partnerships designed for school or community renewal need to be valued at the core of the institution if for no other reason than it is the right thing to do. However, research institutions are generally unlikely to value service highly in their mission. Maurrasse (2001) and Harkavy and
Hartley (2009) point out that the University of Pennsylvania is unique in this regard – its founder’s value of practical knowledge application provides the values link of higher education institution partnerships with schools (Maurrasse, 2001).

An essential element for successful higher education institution-school partnerships is “border-crossing” or “boundary spanners.” This term refers to the ability of each partner or their liaison to cross over the invisible but very real boundary that exists between higher education institutions and their partner schools and communities (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Hora & Millar, 2011; Magolda, 2001, Maurrasse, 2001; Tsui & Law, 2007; Weerts, 2007). These people do not necessarily need to be the organizational leaders or partnership leaders. According to Goodlad and Sirotnik, “One must be able to move readily back and forth between the culture of the school and the culture of the university, to have an understanding and an appreciation of the values of both, and to be perceived as contemptuous of neither” (1988, p. 220).

In Paul Baker’s study of 36 higher education institution-school partnerships in Illinois and his review of the relevant literature, he found that identifying the characteristics of success did not fully describe the complexity of partnerships (2011). Baker adapts Henry Mintzberg’s model of structural properties to analyze how higher education institution-school partnerships are organized. The Mintzberg framework illustrates how organizational structures and functions work together in endless combinations. It also reorients the partnership or organization towards the core goal of the work – improving student learning – rather than focusing only on how partnerships are organized. With this reorientation, partnerships can be analyzed to determine if they are achieving their core goals, rather than simply achieving a relationship.
Another element of higher education institution-school partnership success is each partner’s responsibility and attention to resources. To paraphrase John Goodlad (1988), in any other industry, time and money are relevant variables. In education, time is perceived as limitless and money is not necessarily required for project success. Not only are resources such as time, funding, meeting space, and expertise necessary, but they must also be sustainable in order for a higher education institution-school partnership to succeed (Laguardia, 1998; Maurrasse, 2001; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988). Of the partnerships Kronick, Lester and Luter (2013b) write about, resources, especially financial ones, were crucial to sustaining partnerships. This is one reason that higher education institutions are viewed as desirable partners; they are anchor institutions with enormous economic wealth (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009; Maurrasse, 2001, Rodin, 2007).

**What Challenges Do Higher Education Institution-School Partnerships Face?**

It is to be noted that although this section is relatively short, its brevity does not reflect a lack of challenges faced by higher education institution-school partnerships. As evidenced by all the elements needed for success, partnerships are difficult work. However, there were a few challenges cited in the literature that deserve special attention.

Numerous researchers cited the power imbalance between higher education institutions and their partner schools and communities as a significant challenge to successful partnerships (Boyle & Silver, 2005; Gilderbloom & Mullins, 2005; Goodlad, 1988; Harris, 2009; Maurrasse, 2001; Strier, 2014). In their review of four higher education institution-community partnerships involving the federal COPC program, Boyle and Silver, two sociologists, found that despite using the language “of working with communities,” higher education institutions were still calling the shots. The
government gave grants for the renewal work to the higher education institution rather than to community groups, and the size of the grants were just a fraction to the overall higher education institutions budget. They are a few researchers in this area who refer to “privilege” and “elite,” and argue that the higher education institution-community partnerships aimed at community renewal in the 1990’s primarily functioned to maintain institutional power.

Strier (2011) wrote about a higher education institutions-community partnership related to poverty in Israel and was much more hopeful about power imbalances. Strier argued that even the weakest partners could achieve equality in a partnership through their organizational structures and leadership. Strier (2014) later uses organizational paradox theory as a way to overcome the conflict/collaboration opposition inherent in partnerships. Rather than trying to eliminate conflict between partners, conflict and collaboration are viewed as contributors to meaningful partnerships.

Strier uses social constructivist theory to study the participants’ experiences in a partnership between the School of Social Work at The University of Haifa, Israel and the Welfare Department of Haifa Municipality designed to address the living conditions of impoverished families. Social constructivism is the process by which different groups (in this case – different stakeholders in a partnership) create knowledge in a shared setting. Different stakeholders experience partnerships from various perspectives, so these perspectives should be understood and addressed when the partnership is established. Higher education institutions should attempt to do this, particularly when partnering with community groups, in case these groups do not have the capacity to handle all that the
As Maurrasse (2001) discusses in his case studies, communities are diffuse. Seyffert, writing in 1975, called for universities to create groups, which many universities did by creating community development corporations. The problem, however, is that one entity does not represent an entire community, nor can a school district necessarily mirror each school. Individual schools may be quite different from each other in a given district. Community leaders or those with political savvy are the ones higher education institutions end up working with.

James Harris (2009) writes about his experience as a new president of Widener University. Widener’s partnership efforts in Chester, Pennsylvania resulted in the creation of an elementary charter school. Widener approached the district about creating a new school within the district. After many delays, Widener decided to create a charter school, which did not require a partnership with the district. This story is much more complex, but it demonstrates the power imbalance prevalent in many partnerships that often cannot be overcome.

Another challenge to higher education institution-school partnership success is system misalignment (Goodlad, 1988; Kezar, 2007). Universities are loosely coupled systems, while public school systems are large entrenched bureaucracies (Goodlad, 1988; Harris, 2009; Weick, 1976). Each has its own reward systems, rules, and purpose, yet one is not better than other (Goodlad, 1988). Goodlad (1988) sees these differences as positive: “schools and universities are markedly different cultural entities. Herein lies both the promise of a productive school-university partnership and the sandtraps…” (p. 39).
14). In other words, partnerships of mutual benefit need these opposing cultural forces. Kezar (2007) examines the issue of culture clash more closely and offers strategies for addressing the obstacle of culture on partnerships, such as creating a new, shared culture. This requires extensive planning, communication, policies and rules (Kezar, 2007); an entirely new organization essentially needs to be created. This strategy is heavily process-oriented, but Kezar’s model is substantiated by several studies.

**What Outcomes Do Higher Education Institution-School Partnerships Have?**

Higher education institution-school partnerships are designed to be innovative strategies for solving social problems (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Forrer, Newcomer & Boyer, 2010; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Tushnet, 1993). Victor Rubin (2000) identifies many challenges to assessing the effectiveness of partnerships on social problems: the overlapping nature of multiple initiatives, overlapping funding sources, and existing neighborhood expertise. Clifford et al. (2008) also point out that school-university partnerships can have ambiguous definitions. Some partnerships develop an intervention others are the intervention. Partnerships represent an array of relationships between higher education institutions and schools. Partnerships are also different configurations of two, three or more partnerships. Without really being able to define a partnership, it is difficult to establish the attribution of outcomes to the partnership.

The literature on higher education institution-school partnership purposes, motivations, and success factors is considerably process-oriented. Given how complex partnerships can be, it is not surprising that process becomes the focus. Furthermore, when distrust has become embedded especially between higher education institutions and communities, relationship building becomes the goal (Feld, 1998). The means become
the ends. The question remains, though, whether these partnerships have achieved anything that they would not have been able to accomplish individually. More specifically, has the partnership met its goal? If the purpose of the partnership was school renewal, has student learning improved and if so, by how much as measured by an acceptable standard of assessment? Several researchers ask these questions (Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; McNall, Reed, Brown & Allen, 2009; Rubin, 2000; Strier, 2011), and Strier (2011), the most recent of these researchers, sums it up well: “[Are] University-Community partnership[s] suited to solve problems or are they endless exercises in relationship building?” (p. 95).

In cases where metrics were cited, they were typically inputs – simply the number of participants, number of hours, increased participation rates, type of activities, and duration of partnership. Where outcome are discussed, specifics are often lacking. For example, Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) studied 57 collaborations between the University of Rochester and the Rochester City School District. Although this was a quantitative study, it only looked at one university and did not include actual measures of the partnership’s impact, only perceptions of its impact. Maurrasse (2001) conducted four case studies, and asserts that higher education institution-community partnerships are worth doing, although he states that higher education institutions typical gain more than the communities.

Significant quantitative evidence of higher education institution-school partnership impact could look like what the Penn Institute for Urban Research (PIUR) found in its study of a school attendance zone. PIUR found that property values in the attendance zone of the Penn Alexander School had increased by 212% (Gillen & Wachter,
Brown and Geoghgan (2011) found a similar outcome using regression discontinuity to measure the impact on housing prices in the neighborhood of the school created by Clark University. Clearly homeowners in these particular communities have gained tremendous financial value from having a successful school in their neighborhood. Del Prette (2006) and Vissa and Streim (2006) cite state student assessment data to demonstrate that the higher education institution-school partnership schools in their studies are producing learning results higher than schools not in partnership. Few cases, though, discuss student outcomes in any depth.

Although Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, and Luppescu, (2010) did not study higher education institution-school partnerships in their large, multi-year quantitative study of Chicago publics school reform, they did identify a key element in partnerships that served as the glue that kept reform in place long enough for improved student learning outcomes to be realized – trust. Kezar (2007) maintains that several studies show that higher education institution-school partnerships are improving test scores, graduation and college attendance rates, and teacher quality. These studies, however, were from the 1990s.

Partnership outcomes are possible to study in the increasingly data rich field of school accountability in K12 systems. This provides an opportunity to better understand the student learning gains sought by so many partnerships. Perhaps student achievement data may better balance the outcomes typically weighted to the higher education institution side of partnerships.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design

This study uses descriptive case study methodology to generate an in-depth understanding of the partnership between the University of Pennsylvania, the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation that created the Penn Alexander School, including the features that are associated with this partnership’s success and the factors that brought about the success. Case study methodology was selected for its ability to enable one to study in-depth a contemporary, social phenomenon in its real-life context (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). It has a distinct advantage over other methods because it can answer the “how” and “why” questions of a contemporary event (Yin, 2014). In accordance with Yin’s (2014) research for quality case study design, this research design includes five elements. The first element of the research design are research questions that address not only “who,” “what,” “where” and “when,” but also “how” and “why.”

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the Penn Alexander School partnership and how is it defined?
2. How has the partnership defined and measured success?
3. How do the partnership features contribute to its success and why?

Conceptual Framework

While there are distinct components to any research study, such as research questions, methodology, analysis, these components and others need to be connected in order to bring coherence and depth to a study. This study was guided by a conceptual framework, which not only brought these components together, but also provided for a
research design that laid out how the components were related to each other (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012).

The framework that shaped this study and its research questions is the theoretical proposition that organizations that form partnerships attain benefits not otherwise possible and that these benefits are attained with certain number and amount of success factors (Clifford, et al., 2008). Furthermore, these benefits and success factors are contextualized to each partnership setting. Knowing how the partnership worked and the degree to which benefits were obtained within a given context provides practical information to policymakers and educators who are pursuing higher education institution-school partnerships to address the problem of underperforming schools and associated community disinvestment. It also contributes to the field of higher education institution-school partnership success, which is not well defined.

Using the Goodlad definition of partnership (Goodlad, 1991), a partnership is created that intends “to create a process and an accompanying structure through which each equal party to a collaborative agreement will seek to draw on the complementary strengths of the other equal parties in advancing its self-interests. Each partnership is a means to this end and not an end in itself” (Goodlad, 1988).

In Goodlad’s research, he defined benefits as the renewal of schools and colleges of education as his theory of action to improving student outcomes. As evidenced in the literature review, the concept of benefits cuts across many different purposes of partnerships. For example, in a strategic alliance, a common term in the fields of business and organizational development, partners join together not only to share information, but more importantly, to gain something that they could not get on their own
Defining these benefits and finding evidence of them is important, but it is also relevant to understand how the benefits are produced, which Goodlad cites (Clifford, et al., 2008) but without specificity. Defining these benefits is guided by studying the identified elements of partnership success (e.g., leadership, resources, communication) categorized in Goodlad’s definition. This conceptual framework guided the direction and scope of the study, the unit of analysis, data collection, analysis and findings.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this research study is the partnership of the University of Pennsylvania, the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers that created the Penn Alexander School. As such, this is not a case study of the Penn Alexander School *per se*, but rather a study of the partnership that created the school and once formed included the school. Case study methodology also calls for boundedness to clarify the unit of analysis (Yin, 2014). This study is bound by an entity. In this case, a partnership, which led to the creation of a school. This study is also bound by time: 1996 to 2014. This period was selected because it covers all phases of the partnership, both the conceptual phase (designing the partnership and its goal of creating an exemplary public school) and the operational phase (once the school opened).

This study is also bounded by the research questions and conceptual framework (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). Identifying the rival explanations for the findings in the research design phase enabled the data collection to include them. If rivals were only determined after data collection had occurred, there would be no way to address them in the current study. For an example in the case of the Penn Alexander School
partnership, rival explanations to the success of the partnership could be that Penn is an anchor institution. Another rival explanation could be leadership theory – the principal made the partnership successful. Or political-economical theory – the financial contribution from Penn to the school is what enabled the partnership to be successful.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was guided by four principles outlined by Yin (2014): using multiple sources of evidence; creating a database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and exercising caution with electronic data.

The case study methodology of going in-depth into a phenomenon lends itself to data collection that includes multiple sources of data. Furthermore, the multiple sources of data provide for divergent perspectives that can create a more complex understanding of the phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). Of the six data sources recommended by Yin (2014), four were used for this study: documents, archival records, physical artifacts and interviews. Direct observation and participant observation were not used, as they pertain more to a case study in which action is observable, such as a board meeting (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2012).

Four data collection methods were employed, and they were sequenced to address perceived weaknesses of the methodology (Flyvberg, 2006). After the initial collection of documents and archival material, an observation of facility and grounds was conducted (the physical artifacts), concluding with individual interviews. This order enabled the researcher to ask questions in the interviews about previously viewed documents and the physical artifacts of the building and grounds. Individual interviews were conducted so that individuals may speak more freely about documents without the presence of others.
Documents

As ideas are fleshed out in a partnership that is new, documents become a relevant source of information. These include agreements, emails, memos, notes, press releases, news clippings, evaluations, grant proposals, and reports. Often projects that involve multiple organizations will use documents to organize and communicate ideas (Eckel & Hartley, 2008). These may be documents that officially or otherwise describe the collaboration and/or describe the project throughout its many stages. The purpose of collecting data from documents was to verify information, refresh memories, supplement evidence from other sources, and identify additional data sources (such as informants). The challenge with documents is to understand the authorial bias they reflect. A systemic search for documents was conducted by requesting access to files of informants and of the Penn Partnership Office and by conducting an internet search for media clippings and social media posts. The criteria selection aimed for an even representation of archival materials from each phase of the partnership process, as well as any documents that addressed rival explanations. The result of the search process was hundreds of documents and electronic communication.

Archival Materials

The University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center houses the official records of the university. The partnership was both conceived and brought into existence by former President Judith Rodin and her administration (1994-2004). However, the Protocols for the University Archives and Records Center, the governing policy for the University Archives, states that all administrative records of the University are closed to research for 25 years from the date of their creation. The Rodin administration papers
will not be open for research until 2019, which would contain the first year of the Rodin administration’s administrative papers, and not until 2025 for the key years of the partnership initiative. Despite this challenge, information on the namesake of the school was accessible. Given that the school is named after a Penn graduate, Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, the school name process has been included in the study.

Physical Artifacts

This particular higher education institution-school partnership created a physical artifact – “a school in a park-like setting.” Observing that entity – the facility and grounds of the school – provided another source for answering the research questions. One of the three components of the vision of the school was its physicality, including its grounds... “a state of the art facility located in an urban arboretum.” Furthermore, the University managed the design and construction of the school through a turnkey agreement, thus the study’s research questions were applied to the decisions regarding this role.

One of President Emeritus Rodin’s tenets was that Penn needed to be “of the community” (Rodin, 2007). Data collection included observing the facility and grounds in relation to the community. How do the facility and site represent the vision of the school and Rodin’s goal of working with the community? Roy Strickland (1994), who studies the role of school design in urban revitalization, informed my thinking in this area.

Using Emerson, Fretz and Shaw’s (2011) guide to observation and field notes, I conducted two site visits of the facility and grounds for this study. My research questions guided both observations. I conducted two observations since I am new to the observation technique. The duration of each visit was one hour. The process for
observing was handwritten notes organized into two columns, one for description and one for reflection.

I shared my first observation field notes with an outsider to the project as a way of checking for insider bias. This person had no affiliation to Penn, other than as a longtime resident who lived across the street from the site and whose oldest child attended the University City New School, a private school supported by Penn and housed in the Divinity School on the site of Penn Alexander. The purpose of this review was to gain the inside perspective of a community member who is on the receiving end of the university’s intention of being “of the community.” I selected a holiday weekend, when school would be closed for students but the grounds would be open to the community. Information recorded was physical information of the building, the site and surroundings and the ways in which activities happened on the site.

**Individual Interviews**

After some documents and archival materials were reviewed and the site observations completed, data collection moved on to individual interviews with key participants. The goal of this phase was to hear directly from those responsible for the partnership and those most impacted by it, the Spruce Hill community and its families. Documents can often be edited and filtered for specific audiences, but participants can augment this information with their original thoughts. In individual interviews, I directly engaged in the meaning participants have made about their lived experiences. Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2013) provide a way to see the connections between meaning making and the larger social structures around those lived experiences:
Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences, are fundamentally well studied for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect specific information. They also allowed participants to share information that they believed relevant to the study or that I have not taken into account (Creswell, 2012; Weiss, 1994). The goal of conducting interviews was to clarify, corroborate and enhance the paper data collection process, and to better understand the number, amount and sequence of success factors for the partnership. The duration of each interview was about one hour. Yin (2014) cites this as sufficient time to allow for specific and for open-ended questions (Yin, 2014). Each interview included a description of the purpose of the research project, informed consent, reminding participants that the interviews were confidential and anonymous, and a copy of the questions (see Appendix A). I personally conducted and audio recorded each interview (using my password protected iPhone with the app Audiomemos). Only one person declined to be audio recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were sent to MWPTranscripts for transcription, a service I used previously for a pilot study.

The interview protocol varied somewhat to best address the uniqueness of the participant interviewed. Overall, the questions asked of each participant were guided by discovering the “who,” “what,” “how” and “why” of creating the partnership, defining success, and how success were brought about (especially the number, amount and sequencing of success factors). In other words, the questions for each interviewee needed to address the process, decision-making, intentions, intended and unintended outcomes of each decision, and the prompts for the decisions that were and were not made. Caution
was taken to minimize the threat of reflexivity. Semi-structured interviews can be
to become conversational, which can cause each person to subtly influence the other person.
My perspective unknowingly influences the interviewee’s responses, which can influence
my line of inquiry. Using the standard protocol in which a specific set of questions at a
minimum are asked helps to address the threat of reflexivity.

**Interviewee Selection and Criteria**

The organizations involved in the higher education institution-school partnerships
provided the source for participation selection and criteria of selection. These entities
include three organizations – the University of Pennsylvania, the School District of
Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Once the school opened, Penn
Alexander School became a fourth partner. I created a panel of knowledgeable
informants from these entities (Weiss, 1994). Twenty-two people were interviewed for
this case study. The participants each represent one of the partners as well as those
external to the partnership but significantly involved in the planning of the partnership or
its impact, such as the Spruce Hill Community Association and the Penn Alexander
School Home and School Association. These people were selected based on their current
or former role in the partnership as defined by their high level of involvement and/or their
leadership role in their organization. As such, they were authorized to speak for their
institution or program, not simply to give their individual opinions. Furthermore, they
were more likely to know the success received from the partnership and how their
organization participated in the partnership to bring this success about. Participation
from the “other” category (such as community or parent association) was to ensure that
multiple perspectives were included and to reduce selection bias. It should be noted that
equal numbers of representatives from each partnership was not possible. Two partners have had the same senior leader represent the partnership since its inception. Jerry Jordan is the senior leader of the PFT and has been the point person for the partnership since its inception. Sheila Sydnor has been the principal of the school since inception. Another partner had new leaders and the prior leaders were unable to be contacted. Still another partner had a change in representation but former and current leaders were available for participation. Every attempt was made to ensure that the number of participants from a partner did not result in a skewed perspective.

Memos

Throughout the data collection phase, I periodically wrote research memos (Yin 2014) in addition to my research journal that I started during my coursework. My research journal is a student’s composition notebook that I carry with me at all times. Throughout my day, I noted thoughts about my research project in my journal. I periodically reread this journal to see what my thoughts have taught me about my research project and the biases that my positionality present in this study. I wrote a memo after each type of data collection (e.g., document review, archival search, site visits and individual interviews) as a way to reflect on my data collection. The purpose was to ensure that each step of data collection reflected my research design, to note preliminary interpretations, and to make adjustments to the next collection method. I wanted to ensure that my data collection process was relational (i.e., connected to my conceptual framework and research design) and not simply implementing a recipe regardless of what I was learning during the process. Once all of the data was collected, I wrote a research memo that focused on data analysis. This combination of memos
enabled me to focus on the individual pieces of data and reflect on how the data relates or the emerging themes (and thus protect against analysis by data source).

Using the four data sources enabled the study to meet the four principles for data collection as cited by Yin (2014). A major advantage of case study research is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence. This enables triangulation of data aimed at corroborating a finding and lessens the bias of using only one instrument to collect data, such as a survey. It also strengthens the findings of a study because evidence can be found in multiple sources. This supported the construct validity needed for the study.

Yin’s second principle is to create a database of all the data collected. Having a database separate from the case study report prevents the raw data from becoming commingled with the researcher’s interpretations that were used to determine the case study’s conclusions. The database contained all data including documents, archival records, field notes and transcriptions. This database enabled the researcher to inspect the raw data separately from the case study report. This increased the study’s reliability.

The fourth principle is to maintain a chain of evidence. The reader of the case study should be able to “trace the steps in either direction (from conclusions back to initial research questions or from questions to conclusions).” This required that the case study report cite the source used for each finding, including highlighting evidence in specific documents. The fourth principle is to exercise caution with electronic data, especially its accuracy. Cross checking with other sources was done.

**Data Collection Management**

To ensure that I respected the time and confidentiality of my participants to participate in the study, I created a secure data storage method. Following each interview,
I uploaded my audio recording to my personal computer and to my Google Drive account. I had originally planned to use Penn Box, a university cloud-based service, but I choose to use Google since it was not be connected to the institution that I was studying. These provided two ways of storing my interview data. Written data was stored in my home office in a locked file cabinet. Prior to each data collection, I coded each participant with a pseudonym to protect confidentiality from the beginning of the data collection process. I kept a list of pseudonyms in a separate location to protect the privacy of my participants.

**Data Analysis**

The analytical strategy for this research study was driven by the theoretical proposition and reflected four principles of analysis as cited by Yin (2014):

1. The analysis will attend to all of the evidence that was collected. This includes the development of rival hypotheses. The analysis should demonstrate that I used as much evidence as was available and my interpretations should account for all the evidence and leave no loose ends.

2. To the extent possible, the analysis should address all plausible rival interpretations.

3. The analysis should reflect the significant aspect of the case as defined at the outset of the case. This will make the analysis tighter and less susceptible to the accusation that the study directed attention away from the main issue because of potentially contrary findings.

4. My analysis will reflect the expert knowledge that I gained by researching the field.

The analysis was an iterative process throughout data collection so that I did not leave all analysis until the end when it can become insurmountable. This method did not eliminate the possibility of collecting new data to fill in gaps or testing new hypotheses.
that arose during analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). I manually coded the data with Post-It notes and did not use a software program.

The first step in the data analysis was to gain a general sense of the data. There was substantial paper and electronic documents, emails and news clippings, which were pared down using the research questions as my guide. I conducted a close read of the data, both as I collected it and as a whole, whether it was a document, archival material, field notes or an interview that had been recorded and transcribed (Maxwell, 2013). This included reading the data several times, jotting thoughts, ideas, concepts or hunches in the margins and on Post-It notes (Creswell, 2012). By doing this I connected with the data rather than jumping right into categorizing it.

Next, I condensed the data through several cycles of coding. The codes were used to chunk or segment the data (e.g., sentences to whole paragraphs of an transcribed interview), identifying patterns that relate to my theoretical proposition and the research questions and conceptual framework. The codes were used as labels for the data chunks, reflecting their core meanings. Where possible I used vivo codes to preserve participant voice without compromising confidentiality. I began to the code the data by selecting one data piece, like the Operating Agreement, an early document regarding the partnership and one that I consider most interesting. In the margin I noted my general understanding of the document in two or three words. Next I did a close read and coded the text. In this first document, coding addressed setting and context of document, purpose, specific content, author or perspective (Creswell, 2012). As I continued the process of coding the other data pieces, the first cycle of coding all the data resulted in a large number of codes. A second cycle was conducted to find patterns in the codes with
the goal of narrowing down to 25-30 codes in the final cycle of coding (Creswell, 2012; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). These patterns found were the foundations of themes, explanation, relationships among people or theoretical constructs (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013).

The pattern codes were listed or mapped and formed the basis of identifying three to five themes. That is, similar codes were grouped together (Creswell, 2012) and written up in the form of an analytic memo that described and documented the significance of the code. Writing up an analytic memo was done to expand or describe the significance of the theme. The themes were used to inform my findings of the study.

In total there were five levels of analysis: Level 1 was the database/portfolio containing the raw data – transcriptions, reports, news clippings, memos, archival material, field notes; Level 2 was the descriptive analysis or presentation of case. This was a detailed description of the case such as history of the case and chronology of events. This served an important analytical purpose:

\[
\text{to investigate presumed causal events because the sequence of events is important or relevant to the explanatory theory, which specified that some events must always, occur before other events; certain time periods may be marked by classes of events that differ substantially from those of other times. (Creswell, 2012)}
\]

Level 3 was the three to five themes that were identified through the coding process; Level 4 was the findings. The findings were my interpretations based on the codes that were grouped into themes. These interpretations were linked to the research literature on partnerships (Level 5).
Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is essentially the instrument, which means that the role of the researcher in the study must be addressed (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). While one’s personal values, beliefs and attitudes towards data collection are unavoidable, I had procedures in place to address such biases, primarily my positionality. In this study one of the primary influences of my research questions is my positionality, and in particular, my experiential knowledge (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). I view my positionality as both a challenge and a strength. I have served as the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education program manager for the partnership with the Penn Alexander School since 1998. I came on board just as the University had publicly announcing the project. I was hired to coordinate a one-year community planning process, using my experience of organizing technical assistance for school districts undergoing organizational reform and my knowledge of the research on bringing about successful schools. This one-year assignment has turned into a seventeen-year tenure.

While I also assisted other Penn Graduation School of Education partnerships in West Philadelphia, Penn Alexander has been my primary project. My role has been to serve as the liaison between the school and the university. As the liaison, I have worked to bring university resources to support the mission of the school. For the last seventeen years, I have lived much of the Penn Alexander School project. My home is across the street from the school, and my two children attend the school. My research questions are informed by wanting to contextualize my experiential knowledge, look at the project as a whole, and to be able to understand the success of these projects and the factors that
contribute to that success. As Maxwell (2013) states, I must also account for the experiential knowledge of the participants in the study – the values, beliefs and theories that have guided their actions.

**Issues of Validity**

I had four ways of addressing trustworthiness in this study. First, I have placed a priority on grounding the research in literature by using a conceptual framework that includes the theoretical proposition for my study. Second, I have included four data collection methods that supported triangulation, an established criteria for addressing validity in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013). Third, I have conducted a small pilot study of my interview protocol. Fourth, I conducted member checks of my interviews. I included member checks as part of my interview protocol (and informed consent) so that my participants were aware of my desire to focus on their responses and to keep my biases at bay. I realize that my participants were asked to give their time for my study. I left it to them to decide how much time they would like to give. I cannot control whether individuals choose to participate fully or not, but as the researcher, I have the ethical responsibility to make them fully aware of all the ways that they can participate.

I also see my positionality as a strength (Maxwell, 2013). I am a university employee but am based fulltime in the Penn Alexander School. As such, I have perspectives of both the university and school cultures. I serve as the boundary spanner, helping to connect two disparate worlds, respecting the university culture while respecting the school culture and helping each to do the same. I have established rapport with most of the key informants, which may have made it easier to gain access. I have a
solid grasp of the project, which provides for developing richer questions and analyzing the data more deeply. Since I am studying an existing project currently staffed by my peers and superiors and my conceptual framework is guided by theories that respect these people’s lived experiences, I have intentionally sought to gain “permission” to study my site. By treating my site as one that I do not take for granted or assume is open for me to study, I am also making the familiar unfamiliar, which addresses potential bias of my role as researcher. To this end, I have vetted my study with several stakeholders of my case. I have done this not by asking for literal permission, but by talking about my interests and discussing the topics with several of the people involved in the project. This has included the former associate dean at the University of Pennsylvania, who was charged with leading the process of developing the educational mission of the school; the current vice presidents for government relations and institutional affairs at Penn; and the principal of the school and the former special projects director for the president’s office at Penn. I wanted to be respectful of my case as it involved real people, real organizations and real experiences. I feel it is important to be respectful and acknowledge that I will be “invading” their space in a way that I do not typically do.

It is important to note that the participants in this study are mostly senior to me. I do not hold supervisory power over any participant and thus his or her participation or responses is not related to their job performance. This relationship to me as the researcher could have created a bias if I were in a senior leadership role. To help address my bias of excluding people, I have included people who had disparate views of the partnership and I included a question in my protocol to ask participants if there were
other people whose participation would add to my study or provide a key piece of information.

**Limitations of the Study**

The power of case study methodology lies in its exploratory nature rather than its explanatory nature. This study does not seek to explain or make generalizations in the traditional methodological sense. Case studies can be generalized to theoretical propositions, which is something this project proposed to do. The theoretical proposition is that partnerships are formed for mutual benefit or success. I further hypothesized that this success is brought by a particular amount and sequencing of success factors identified in the literature. While the case study methodology can be challenged in rigor, by following systemic procedures and triangulated data, rigor can be achieved. Furthermore, case study methodology is naturally defined to a specific context. In this case, the context is the University of Pennsylvania, which as a private institution represents only a small portion of higher education institutions.
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY

Overview

Conceptual Phase: 1996-2000

The conceptual phase examines the context and formation of the collaboration between Penn, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers; the conditions that were in place at the time that gave rise to the collaboration, what led to the creation of a new school and how the partnership was formed. This phase examines the impetus for the university to create a school by examining the previous partnership and community renewal efforts by the University in West Philadelphia, along with the School District’s reform agenda. The efforts include the Spruce Hill Community Association Renewal Plan, Penn Faculty and Staff for Neighborhood Issues’ plan, the West Philadelphia Initiatives, the West Philadelphia Corporation, Penn partnership with the Lea School, the unrealized partnership to create a science themed high school north of campus (n.b. partnership school was replaced by a neighborhood high school: the University City High School), and Penn’s support of the private school-University City New School.

This phase also focuses on the official launching of the collaboration signing of the Memorandum of Understanding; the per student financial contribution; the Graduate School of Education as a leader of a university-wide, trustee oversight initiative; community-based partnership planning process; and the design and building phase of the school facility.
Once the partnership was formed, this phase also focuses on the type of school that ultimately was selected and how. Type of school refers to categories such as existing, new, public, private, charter, grade configuration, enrollment, size, mission, and vision-three parts (rigor academic program, center for community activities, professional development hub). The process by which these decisions were made and the implications for each decision are key points of this phase. Guiding questions included: How does the largest private employer in Philadelphia learn to work in its neighborhood when it has not always been a good neighbor? How does a partnership support reform in one community when it cannot do the same in every community?

**Operational Phase: 2001-2014**

The operational phase focuses on the role of the partners (SDP, PFT, Penn) once the school opened as well as the school’s role in the partnership. An Operating Agreement was signed that stipulated the responsibilities of each partner for implementing the vision. The principal and initial staff were hired, curriculum decisions were made and students were enrolled. Prior to this phase, staff members from the school had not been involved in the planning of the school. This is the first phase that included the principal and teachers who were charged with implementing the vision on a daily basis. A key focus of this phase examined the school’s role in the partnership. Guiding questions included: What is the role of the principal in the partnership? How does the role of the principal affect the way the partnership works?

This phase also examined the impact of leadership on the partnership, especially since projects that lose their champions often dissolve (Goodlad, 1988; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996; Maurasse, 2001). The founding principal remained as head of school and
the PFT leadership has not changed, but there were four leadership changes to the School District of Philadelphia, a state governing board replaced an appointed local school board, and Penn installed a new president.

Finally, I examine partnership objectives and accomplishments in this phase. School-university partnerships are formed to solve a problem or obtain a goal that an individual organization cannot accomplish alone (Goodlad, 1988; Maurrasse, 2001; Rodin, 2007; Tushnet, 1993). Guiding questions included: How is partnership success defined and determined? How does the partnership change once a partnership creates a school? Has the goal been obtained? Can the partnership be dissolved without undermining the obtained success? Can the partners declare success and go their separate ways? What challenges does sustainability present? What unintended consequences have resulted by achieving the goal?

**What is the Penn Alexander School Partnership?**

**Institutional Context**

In 1996, then-President Judith Rodin announced a bold comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan, called the West Philadelphia Initiatives (WPI). WPI had five components: (1) improve neighborhood safety, services and capacities; (2) provide high-quality, diverse housing choices; (3) revive commercial activity; (4) accelerate economic development; and (5) enhance local public school options (Rodin, 2007). This was intentionally a holistic plan to embrace the surrounding community towards growth and revitalization. The health of the West Philadelphia area had become more than a concern to the university with the death of a young faculty member on Halloween night 1996, just blocks from campus and hours after the streets were filled.
with children (Rodin, 2007). During this time period, crime had risen dramatically (Rodin, 2007). The deterioration of the neighborhood west of campus was starting to impact admissions and recruitment of faculty (Rodin, 2007). Penn parents were concerned about the safety of the children (Rodin, 2007). WPI was a major policy shift for the university that grew out of a change in the way the University managed its growth and vitality, ushered in by Rodin’s predecessor Sheldon Hackney (Hackney, 1994; Puckett and Lloyd, 2015). No longer would the University base its growth through eminent domain or by razing neighborhoods to build university buildings. Judith Rodin had grown up in a vibrant West Philadelphia, but when she became president, the neighborhood she remembered had lost its vitality (Rodin, 2007). She recognized that her institution could not survive without a healthy community surrounding it. WPI was aligned with what the neighborhood civic association and area Penn employees had developed in years’ prior.

**Community Context**

In 1995, the Spruce Hill Community Association adopted the Spruce Hill Community Renewal Plan (http://www.mcgillsociety.org/shca/development/plan/introbkg.html). This plan was the result of a volunteer task force formed by Spruce Hill to guide the renewal of a community that many saw in decline. A plan was developed with the aid of students and staff of the University of Pennsylvania Office of Community Partnerships. The task force conducted research into what other similar communities had done. Town hall meetings, surveys and focus groups were conducted to gather resident input and to ensure that the plan was resident-driven. The plan was not directed by a developer, community development corporation or city agency but rather by
a group of community residents interested in directing the growth of their community. Once the plan was developed it was shared with institutional and city leaders to gather their insights and their support. The resulting plan contained eight goals listed in order of priority but considered interconnected. The eight goals were 1) increase owner-occupancy rates and diversity of housing types, 2) increase the strength of the Spruce Hill Community Association and other community-based organizations, 3) radically improve public and private education in and around Spruce Hill, 4) strengthen the social capital of Spruce Hill, 5) significantly improve retail, 6) develop formal relationships with Penn and engage Penn in Spruce Hill’s long term strategy, 7) reduce crime, and 8) increase cleanliness. (http://www.mcgillsociety.org/shca/development/plan/introbkg.html). The goals and their linkages were quite similar to WPI.

**Institutional-Community Crossover Context**

A few years earlier in 1993, Penn staff and faculty that lived in the neighborhood formed an ad hoc group of over 50 people called the Penn Faculty and Staff for Neighborhood Issues (PFSNI). They proposed the “Priorities for Neighborhood Revitalization: Goals for the Year 2000” (1993). Its goal was to call on the University to play a decisive role to “make the well-being of the communities surrounding the University among the highest priorities of the institution over the next ten years.” According to longtime Penn faculty neighborhood resident Walter Licht, the safety conditions, shuttered businesses and lack of quality education in the neighborhood surrounding the campus had become unbearable (personal communication, April 4, 2014). Penn employees wanted to live close to campus but the quality of life was quickly deteriorating and impacting the University. The group thought the University needed to
play a role in order to sustain itself. This plan had four components, one of which was to “Enhance Public Education in University City.” With the Spruce Hill and PFSNI plans, the West Philadelphia Initiatives did not seem outlandish, but it was a dramatically different approach to neighborhood revitalization than in prior decades. The plan, however, was large in scope and just as daunting as the problems that led to its creation. There was enormous work to do at the University with the launch of the plan in 1996. Senior administrators were put in place to manage the plan as well as a new trustee committee to oversee the plan (Rodin, 2007).

**West Philadelphia Initiatives: Improving Public Education and Conceptualizing a University-Assisted School**

Under the close direction of then-president Judith Rodin, the University’s Chief of Staff Stephen Schutt and Graduate School of Education Dean Susan Fuhrman took the leadership for conceptualizing what it would mean to improve public education in West Philadelphia. Susan Fuhrman is a well-known expert in applied research on school reform and Steve Schutt as a former aide to Pennsylvania Senator Wofford knew the role public education played in the growth of the city and Commonwealth (Rodin, 2007). Conceptualizing this component of the WPI would result in creating a collaborative public-private partnership to develop a new public school.

On June 18, 1998, at an impromptu press conference that resulted from a leaked story, the University of Pennsylvania, School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers announced that they had agreed to collaborate on the construction and development of a new PreK-8 university-assisted public school, along with relocating a district magnet high school and providing leadership to two area
networks of schools, called Cluster Resource Boards in West Philadelphia (Jones & O’Neill, 1998). The George Washington Carver High School for Engineering and Science, a district magnet school, would relocate to a new building at 38th and Market Streets. The school had outgrown its location in a former elementary school building at 17th and Norris Streets in North Philadelphia. The other school would be a new elementary school for grades PreKindergarten to 8th grade on a University-owned parcel bound by 42nd, 43rd, Locust and Spruce Streets. Additionally the University would play a leadership role in two “cluster resource boards” comprised of area businesses and organizations.

The partnership was outlined in a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was the result of 12 to 18 months of meetings and conversations between Penn, the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (University of Pennsylvania, 1998b). The MOU cites the rationale for this agreement as Penn’s commitment to comprehensive neighborhood revitalization in West Philadelphia under its West Philadelphia Initiative strategic plan; the School District’s reform agenda “Children Achieving,” which called for partnering with colleges to support students and teachers; and the PFT’s commitment to ensuring “a common core of knowledge for all children… and to using valid research-based programs.” This new school would be a “state of the art facility, feature a PreK-8 instructional program of superior quality, based on valid research, that meets or exceeds all of the District’s academic standards.” It would be a neighborhood school with community programs that would serve the broader community: “All parties believe that the combination of additional resources, innovation, flexibility and long term commitments from each can enable extraordinary educational
opportunities to be provided.” (Memorandum of Understanding, 1998). While each partner had worked with one another in other ways, such as providing programmatic support, they had never come together to build and create a new school.

This was plan was unprecedented in Philadelphia. Rodin cites in her book (2007) that while legislation to create charter schools (i.e., public schools freed from district regulations) in Pennsylvania was passed in 1997, charters at the time selected students citywide through a lottery system and as such, were not neighborhood-based schools.

The university-assisted school had innovation and flexibility in mind; a school that was not neighborhood-based would not attract families to move into the community. Further, this plan recognized that the University had established previous school partnerships that either had come to fruition or diminished over time. In the 1970’s, the University was to partner with the School District to build a science themed high school as part of the redevelopment of the neighborhood north of campus (Puckett and Lloyd, 2015). The residential neighborhood had been razed through eminent domain in the name of urban renewal for the Science Center corridor (Puckett and Lloyd, 2015). The partnership for a university-affiliated school never materialized although a comprehensive high school was built. In the 1960’s to 70’s, a flourishing partnership existed with the School District of Philadelphia Henry C. Lea School in West Philadelphia. Penn faculty provided programmatic support in the areas of science, math, reading and foreign language (West Philadelphia Corporation, 1964; Rodin 2007). Furthermore, the University was supporting a private school in West Philadelphia – the University City New School – which was located on the site of the proposed new public school. Again, while the news was exciting and a tremendous sign of support for public education in Philadelphia, many
of the groups that had called for more school options felt caught off guard because the announcement was made a hastily arranged press conference (W. Licht, personal communication, 2014).

The MOU outlined each partner’s responsibilities starting with several commitments by Penn. Penn would provide the land for the new school at a nominal cost; additional capital funding for the building if needed; academic support through the Graduate School of Education and other schools as appropriate; but mostly significantly, it would provide an annual contribution of up to $700,000 or $1,000 per student for a renewable term of ten years for the purpose of reducing class size and other curricular enhancements (n.b this commitment would later grow). The District committed to obtaining the maximum capital funding possible for construction of the new school. The District also agreed to work with the University on the design and construction of the school and selection of a principal. Considered equally significant was the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers’ agreement to consider the new school a Demonstration School because of its special training focus, which gave the school special status to select teachers based on classroom demonstrations and written and oral examinations. This agreement by the PFT was considered unprecedented for a neighborhood school, as its labor contract with the district used a seniority system for teacher assignments to schools (PFT-District Collective Bargaining Agreement, 1996-2000).

**Community Planning Process**

The MOU further stated “An important goal will be to involve the community, parents, residents, businesses, community groups and educational organizations so that they will develop a sense of responsibility for the endeavor” (Memorandum of
Understanding, 1998). This aligned with the University’s commitment under Rodin to be “of” and “in” the community, and it acknowledged the work of the Spruce Hill Community Association and PFSNI in their desire to directly engage in revitalizing their neighborhood. While the MOU contained this provision, many in the community and on campus were angry that they were not informed of the University’s plan to develop a university-assisted school (B. Grossbach, personal communication, December 2015).

Faculty, particularly those who did not live in the community, wondered where the funding would come from given the concern at the time of lack of funding available for increasing faculty salaries, which was considered low at the time (W. Licht, personal communication, April 4, 2014).

Four committees were formed to provide recommendations for the vision and framework of the new school. A coordinating committee comprised of Steve Schutt, Susan Fuhrman, School District Chief of Staff Germaine Ingram and PFT Vice President Jerry Jordan would lead the partnership. A community member – Penn faculty Rick Womer, who lived in the neighborhood, was added later. Under the coordinating committee, three planning committees were formed reflecting the three components of the partnership vision – rigorous instructional program for children and teachers, community programming, and a state of the art facility (Planning Committee Reports: Final Recommendations for Vision and Framework, 1999). The committees comprised over 70 representatives from the community, including the district, PFT, private and public school parents, Penn faculty and staff, landscape architects, community association representatives, and social service providers. The Educational Program Committee was led by Penn GSE Associate Dean Nancy Streim, who continued to play a
major leadership role for the development and implementation of the partnership for Susan Fuhrman. The education committee was charged with “developing frameworks for curriculum, organization, and professional development.” The Facility and Site Committee was co-chaired by Penn Real Estate Managing Director Tom Lussenhop and School District Capital Programs Director Ted Skierski and was to “develop design principles, select architects and guide design process.” The Community Programming Committee was led by West Philadelphia Partnership Director Larry Bell and Kate Ward-Gaus of Penn Student Health Educator, who lived in the neighborhood and whose children attended the Powel School, a highly desirable K-4 grades public school immediately north of campus. Their charge was to “determine nature and scope of community programming at the school site.” Penn created a website as part of its West Philadelphia Initiatives Improving Public Education to share progress of the planning (www.upenn.edu/president/westphilly/process.htm).

The committees met biweekly for ten months, usually over dinner in the deanery of the Divinity School chapel, which was an unused space on the site of the new school. Members volunteered their time to visit schools, tour newly constructed buildings in Philadelphia, talk with experts, and read school reform literature. Collectively it was estimated that over 2,000 hours were spent creating the vision and framework for the new school (www.upenn.edu/president/westphilly/process.htm). Funding for the initial planning process, including hiring myself as a coordinator and a former principal, who had opened a new school, as a practice professor, was provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts (University of Pennsylvania Grant Report, 1999). The committees released their
The Education Committee recommended a vision for the school with three components:

- The school will provide a rich academic program for the children of the neighborhood, with a curriculum that is based on the best research evidence about successful teaching and learning strategies for children of diverse strengths, backgrounds and learning needs. Second the school will be a community school that draws upon the, and contributes to the vitality of the neighborhood…. Third the school will have a unique professional development focus, which will feature a culture of continuous professional growth for staff in the school and serve as a hub for educators.

The Community Programming Committee recommended a vision for afterschool hours that would not only support the students but also their families and would further the revitalization efforts of West Philadelphia. The Site and Facilities recommendations were completed with the selection of the architect, whose plan was deemed as having many strengths: “the plan separates the school into age-based learning communities; strong, clear circulation patterns link these areas in ways that provide an appropriate level of interaction among different student age groups” (Planning Committee Reports, 1999). Additional strengths included flexible classroom spaces, generous natural lighting, accessible green space and hardscape play areas; easily accessible community and public spaces; and retention of existing trees. With these recommendations in place, the next step was to finalize the design of the school building and grounds and begin construction so the school could open as promised in 2001.

**Design and Construction of the New Public School and Grounds**

The site selected for the new school was a 4.3 acre city block bound by 42nd, 43rd, Locust and Spruce Streets, in the heart of the residential neighborhood of Spruce Hill, yet just two blocks from the Penn campus. The site was commonly referred to as the
Divinity School site. In 1917, the Philadelphia Divinity School purchased the Clark family estate, which occupied the entire square block in what was then a suburban area of Philadelphia (Van Trump, 1967). Pictures of the estate can be found in the Penn Alexander School’s main office. The architectural firm of Zantzinger, Borie, and Medary of Philadelphia was selected among competitors from Boston and New York to design an entire complex of buildings (Van Trump, 1967). Zantzinger and Borie were both Penn graduates, giving the site connection to Penn early on (Tursi, 2010). The first building of the complex was completed in 1922 (Van Trump, 1967).

The University of Pennsylvania Almanac (1998a) reprinted a description of the Divinity School buildings prepared by Cynthia Rose, a consultant to the University City Historical Society. She explained that the Philadelphia Divinity School was considered one of the most significant college plans of its time. Of the original plan, six building were built in the Collegiate Gothic Revival style, “sheathed in dressed schist with case stone trim.” The St. Andrew’s “soaring” Chapel located on the highest point of the site is “richly decorated with D’Ascenzo stained glass, Yellin wrought iron gates, Enfield ceramic tiles” (University of Pennsylvania, 1998a).

Coston Fitz-Gibbon in a 1923 Architectural Record commended the design and placement of the buildings preserving the natural beauty of the site with its sloping conditions and exceptional growth of old trees, and recognizing them “not only as a priceless accessory of natural setting but also as a sort of public trust benefit of the surrounding neighborhood” (Fitz-Gibbon, 1923). The final building completed on the site was an extension to the library in 1961.
By the 1980’s the Divinity School had closed, and in response to community pressure from the Spruce Hill Communication Association, Penn purchased the land and buildings to prevent the purchase by another group that the association opposed (B. Grossbach, personal communication, 2015; Tursi, 2010). Over time, some one-story stucco buildings were added. Two daycare centers – the Parent Infant Center and Penn Children’s Center, a social services group, and the University City New School (UCNS, a private school supported by community residents including university faculty) called the site home. UCNS was housed in the Divinity School library extension, which would eventually become the temporary space for the first year of the new university-assisted public school. The site was also home to an informal dog park and sloped green space that was perfect for wintertime sledding (Karen Falck, personal interview, December 2015).

The MOU had called for the University to transfer the parcel of land to the School District of Philadelphia, but after concerns by the neighbors and Spruce Hill Community Association regarding the District’s limited landscaping budget, which resulted in school grounds mostly covered in asphalt, the University agreed to lease the land to the District for a nominal fee of $1.00 a year for 75 years (www.upenn.edu/president/westphilly/process.html).

In addition to co-designing the innovative academic program, the University agreed to serve as a private developer for the design, implementation and completion of the construction of the school under the terms of Turnkey Development Agreement with an agreed-upon value for the sale of the property to the School District (Sehnert, 2013). The school project presented the first Turnkey Agreement for Penn with the District
The Turnkey model provided for an innovative design process not typically used in public school construction and was the first of its kind in Philadelphia. This also enabled the University to reaffirm its commitment to the community to ensure that the building would fit with a residential neighborhood (Sehnert, 2013).

With these historic stone buildings and treasured green space in mind, the Site and Facility Committee developed a Request for Proposals that was sent to several firms nationwide based on recommendations from committee members. Firms presented their ideas to the committees. These presentations were video taped and several sessions were offered so the community could see the presentations as well (Kreidl memo, 1999). Atkin, Olshin, Lawson-Bell and Associates was selected; its plan: included a new building that blends with the existing historic buildings and surrounding park-like fabric, and enables the creation of smaller communities within the larger school; easily accessible community and professional development space inside the school; and the preservation of green space for neighborhood residents (www.upenn.edu/president/westphilly/process.htm).

The building materials that were selected further complemented the architecture of the Divinity School – earth tone brick, a glass façade with a pitched roof. Metal panels dispersed between rows of windows reflect the sky and surrounding green space (Dustin, 2014). Clusters of large porch windows provide for an abundance of nature light. A central atrium serves as the center of the school surrounded by clusters of classrooms, allowing for community building across grades. The large gathering spaces such as the gym, library, and lunchroom are located at the lower end of the site to accommodate their size and the connection to the larger apartment buildings at the end of the block.
The University obtained the services of the Olin Partnership to design the landscaping (Weiler, 2014). An allée of Tulip Popular trees guides visitors to the main entrance and serves to reconnect the north and south sections of St. Mark’s Square. A distressed playground was replaced with a new playground featuring several pieces of equipment that allow for creative play. On the south side of the site, a large parking lot was reclaimed for green space. It is one of three best practice storm water management features of the site. The other two are a rain garden and a porous surface play area (http://www.phillywatersheds.org/what_were_doing/green_infrastructure/projects/penn_alexander).

The building of 85,000 square feet with capacity for 550 students and grounds were completed in 2002 at a cost of $24 million, of which $21 million was financed by the School District of Philadelphia through its capital program (Sehnert, 2013). A phase two plan that would incorporate the use of the Divinity School for additional classroom space and professional development training center were not realized due to lack of funds (Sehnert, 2013). Much of the landscaping implementation was done through a build day with City Year, along with faculty and staff from the school.

As envisioned, the building and grounds reflect the goals of the partnership to build a state of the art school in a park-like setting. The site is a manifestation of Penn’s new way of positioning itself in its neighborhood: “being of and in the community.” The building serves families in the community, affiliated to Penn and otherwise. The design honors the natural landscaping of the site and continues the tradition of serving as a nature resource for the community.
Defining Admission

With the final stages of the building design and Turnkey agreement in process, attention turned to who would attend the school. The MOU had called for a neighborhood school but did not provided further definition. Defining admission turned into a class, race and property values debate that hit the community like a bolt of lighting (Mezzacappa, 2000). Everyone either wanted to come to what was going to be an exemplary public school or recognized the increased property values the school would bring (Mezzacappa, 2000). Countless and painful conversations and meetings were held with and among community groups, city and university officials (Brakeman, 1999; B. Grossbach, personal communication, 2015; Rodin, 2007).

The initial debate centered on a lottery versus defined catchment area (Streim, personal communication, 1999) and the impact on area schools. The lottery appealed to the broader community desire to be included and was in line with the desegregation system that the district used to select students for special magnet schools. Many African Americans in the community argued against the lottery as they felt it tended to favor the white students in the system (Woodson, 1999). The Education Committee of the School Board, appointed by the mayor, took responsibility for setting the admission policy for the school.

The Board worked to turn the hearings into conversations by rearranging the room into a large hollow square for speakers to gather around. Penn was one of many community members at the table. At the first hearing on December 20, 1999, Germaine Ingram did not present a staff proposal or recommendations, but rather specifically stated that she was presenting ideas or ways for the board to think about the admission policy
The ideas were based on several objectives that reflected the varied community concerns and that the Board had stayed firm on. The objectives of the catchment area would be “to achieve a racially and economically diverse student body for the school, an attendance zone that was an appropriate size for the student capacity, that avoided destabilization of racial diversity at Powel, and that provided enrollment relief to Lea and Wilson Schools” (Board of Education Meeting Materials, 1999, pg. 1). Two approaches with their benefits and drawbacks were presented – a defined catchment area and lottery from a defined area in West Philadelphia.

The debated continued through much of 2000, two years after the announcement of the school in 1998. As it progressed, the plans started to include ways of meeting the needs of the Lea School in an attempt to address the concerns of some community groups that all the children in West Philadelphia be better served (Mezzacappa, 2000). If all the children could not attend the new school, could improvements be made to the closest school as a solution? Finally on July 24, 2000, the Board of Education approved a defined catchment area using the District objectives set forth in December 1999 (Brakeman, 2000; Board of Education Resolution, July 24, 2000; Snyder, 2000a, 2000b). Students within the specified area would be assigned to the new school. No lottery system would be used. The approval also noted several upgrades valued at $1.5 million dollars that the University would make to the Lea School, including smaller class size in grades K-2, library and academic program improvements (Board of Education Resolution, July 24, 2000). While the policy would be bring the admissions debate to official closure in 2000 and community members expressed relief that a decision had been made that
included support for more schools, it would take a while for the community to heal over
the issues that had pitted neighbor against neighbor (B. Grossbach, personal
communication, 2015).

Operating Agreement

Simultaneous with the admissions debate, the three partners were working on an
Operating Agreement that “set forth important principles of operation of the
Neighborhood School…” (Operating Agreement, 1999). The end result was a 13 page
double spaced agreement signed by each partner that assigned each a role to play. The
simplicity of the agreement is quite remarkable, given that the agreement defines the
operation of school by a triad of public-private partners, perhaps the largest triad in the
city, given the number of employees of Penn and the District. The mission of the school
appears foremost in the document:

the Neighborhood School should be designed and operated in a manner
which will maximize student achievement, enhance appreciation for racial,
ethnic, economic and other forms of diversity among students and teachers,
provide a rigorous clinical setting for professional growth and
development of preservice and in-service teachers and develop, test and
refine effective instructional and curricular programs and practices
through applied research (Operating Agreement, 1999).

Whereas the MOU had called for a Legal Entity to govern the school, which the
University touted as innovative feature for the school, the Operating Agreement no
longer contained that provision. In fact, the first principle of the agreement is that the
school would comply with Pennsylvania School Code, thus signaling an
acknowledgement by the partners that the school would operate within the boundaries of
the existing Pennsylvania school law (M. Kutler, personal interview, January 9, 2016).
With the mission and School Code clarification, the other sections include principal and teacher selection, budgeting, curriculum, and class size. The teacher selection process, which was not based on seniority, represented an innovation for a neighborhood school that would come to pass in a modified form for all schools in a future contract change between the District and PFT. Class size was capped at 18 in Kindergarten and 24 in grades 1-8, provided for by an annual contribution of the University. The size was a significant reduction in the District class size of 30 in Kindergarten and 33 in grades 1-8. The agreement served as testament to the partners’ original plan for an innovative and flexible program that they believed was necessary for student success in Philadelphia public schools. While it is a legally binding agreement, it is not filled with detailed protective legal language. The document’s simplicity of language, content and tone are quite the opposite and address the issues that the partners saw as critical for student success first and foremost. As the attorney who helped to write the agreement commented, simplicity is highly desirable with large public/private partnerships as it facilitates efficient negotiations and results in a clearer roadmap for future activities. Longer and more cumbersome agreements with numerous complicated requirements demand more attorney attention and more difficult institutional process accommodation and decision-making. This can generate extended and sometimes confrontational negotiations and can impede the important direct involvement of those who will actually implement the agreement. While it is harder to keep the agreement short and simple, this strategy worked in this case. The Operating Agreement would come to serve as an important guiding force for keeping the partnership on track as it developed over the years. This was not an agreement that was publicly shared and
debated, but it was often cited as the source of the parameters by which the partnership would operate. In other words, it did not become the center of a contentious public debate like the student admission policy.

Community Conversations

Prior to the catchment area debate, there had also been numerous community meetings, large and small. These were in addition to the committee planning process. The University committed to come to anyone’s house if four or more neighbors gathered to answer questions and gather input on the project (Rodin, 2007). It also gave updates at large public gatherings convened by the civic associations and others. These were not easy conversations and often left the University wondering “why bother” (Rodin, 2007). The University’s radical change in policy with the West Philadelphia Initiatives was significant in its own right and would require a change in communications strategy. One strategy used was to convene a monthly meeting. Each month the Office of Government and Community Affairs would convene “First Thursday” meetings, in which it updated community groups and any interested parties on upcoming initiatives and activities that may impact the community, shared information among community groups and provided a forum for questions.

Updates were also provided to the Penn community via its communication channels, such as the University of Pennsylvania Almanac, Current, Penn Gazette, and its news releases, which are also accessible to the general public. At the Fall 1999 University Council Meeting, the Rodin’s State of the University message addressed the new school initiative. This was the first meeting of the school year that followed the summer unplanned announcement of the partnership. Steve Schutt and Susan Fuhrman
each gave a presentation providing more details about the project and reinforcing its rationale. While the school was not a Penn program on campus, it was launched by Penn, and thus institutional time and effort would be put forth. Faculty had particular concerns about how this would impact the other University’s needs. Schutt cited the many faculty and staff who said they would not consider moving to University City without better school options (University of Pennsylvania, 1998c). He emphasized that the school would be a neighborhood school, not a magnet school. While the University was doing worthy projects with schools, Rodin tasked her chief of staff and education school dean to see if more could be done. He also addressed the financial contribution. The average per pupil expenditure in Philadelphia was about $2,000 less than in the five surrounding counties. The Penn contribution would cut that in half and it would go to reducing class size, which in Philadelphia was more than 30 students to one teacher. Reducing class size was seen as critically important to academic success (University of Pennsylvania, 1998c). Fuhrman emphasized that the school would not be a lab. While GSE did not have school reform model, Fuhrman had brought her applied research center (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, CPRE) with her when she became dean. The center focused on understanding what made for successful K-12 schools, such as instructional leadership, curriculum, assessment, and teacher training.

Print publications were also used to update the Penn community and neighborhood: the Almanac, newsletter of record; Penn Gazette for alumni; and Penn Current, a more topical publication that provides more in-depth articles. The student newspaper, Daily Pennsylvanian, also covered the news with regular stories and
continues to do that today. Many residents rely on it for news, yet often forget that the newspaper is written by students who are still learning the craft of journalism.

**Enrollment Plan**

As a result of the site visits conducted by the Education Committee to new schools such as the Central Park East and the KIPP School of Harlem and Mission Hill in Boston, and the guidance of Practice Professor Jeanne Vissa, who had opened a new school, the senior planners at Penn proposed phasing in the grades for the new PreK-8 school (Streim, personal communication, 2000). The planners had learned that phasing in the grades would enable a school culture aligned to the vision of the new school to be created more easily. Young students would not be bringing years of their previous school’s expectations and culture with them. If the school only phased in one grade at a time, it would take nine years to have a full complement of grades. That was deemed too lengthy. The planners proposed phasing four grades in 2001 when the school opened. They cited that the plan of beginning with a lower school of grades K-1 and an upper school with grades 4 and 5 would “allow for establishing the school’s operational systems, school culture and academic programs without the pressure of serving the full complement of students across all grades” (Streim, personal communication, 2000).

This plan would permit the staff to focus on establishing a strong literacy curriculum in the early grades, while at the same time preparing a group of children to “grow” into the middle school curriculum (Streim, personal communication, 2000).

Given the delay in construction, the school instead began with Kindergarten and first grade in a temporary space on the site. When it moved into its permanent building, grades 5 and 6 were started. In that same year, two PreK classrooms opened in the St.
Peter’s House of Divinity School, which was located at the corner of 43rd and Spruce Streets. The PreK program was a Head Start program. Locating a Head Start program on site would ensure that all students entering Kindergarten would be prepared to learn. Pennsylvania does not have universal PreK, which means that there is no public PreK program like there is for Kindergarten through high school. Parents must pay a private provider or be eligible for Head Start. The school had its full complement of grades by 2004.

**Principal Selection Process**

The process to select the principal for the new school commenced in late fall of 2000 while the enrollment plan was developing. In accordance with the Operating Agreement, a selection committee was formed and national search conducted (New York Times Careers In Education job posting, 2000). Nancy Streim, along with SDP Cluster Leader Janis Butler and the SDP Office of Human Resources led the committee. Two parents with children at area public schools were asked to join the committee along with Jeanne Vissa. The committee developed questions, rubric and multi-step process. In addition to committee interviews, Susan Fuhrman and faculty met with the final candidates, as the principal would also need to meet the requirements of being an adjunct faculty member, giving Penn additional input into the selection. Site visits were made to the candidates’ current schools.

At the May 7, 2001 Board of Education monthly meeting, the School District of Philadelphia appointed Sheila Sydnor to be a twelve month principal of the school (Board of Education, 2001). Normally principals hold nine month positions, but in accordance with the Operating Agreement to hire a principal in time to plan and open school, Sheila
Sydnor was assigned as a 12 month principal. She was selected from a pool of 60 candidates (University of Pennsylvania, 2001). The committee cited Sheila Sydnor’s “demonstrated abilities as a school leader, her commitment to building learning communities and her experience in creating conditions for high student achievement” (University of Pennsylvania, 2001). Committee member parent Amy Neukrug, who also resided directly across the street from the new school, noted Sheila Sydnor’s open door approach when the committee visited her school: “She kept the door open the entire time of our meeting with her. She clearly had nothing to hide” (A. Neukrug, personal communications, April, 2014; Richards, 2001). Sydnor brought over 25 years of experience as a teacher and principal in the District. She became principal of the M. Hall Stanton School in North Philadelphia in 1992, and prior to that had served as a teacher and assistant principal in the district (University of Pennsylvania, 2001). The press release contained the praise of each partner for the selection and noted Sheila Sydnor’s hands on approach and accomplishments on behalf of students. It also included a quote by Sheila Sydnor, which further emphasized her focus on students: “The children will be the real winners in this unique partnership with the University of Pennsylvania,” Sydnor said. “Penn’s total commitment to this venture promises diverse and exciting kinds of educational opportunities for our students, teachers, parents and the community” (University of Pennsylvania, 2001).

Sheila Sydnor personally knew the value of a Penn and SDP education. She grew up attending public schools in West Philadelphia and was a Penn graduate (CW’74). In fact, she often visited the Divinity School site as a child to see a neighbor who worked in the lunchroom of the school. In many ways, Sheila Sydnor was coming home just like
Judith Rodin, who had attended West Philadelphia public schools and graduated from Penn.

**School Opens – Partnership in Post Concept Design**

This phase focused on implementing the vision of the school. Prior to this phase, there was no actual staff from the school involved in the planning of the school. With a principal in place, staff could be hired, curriculum materials selected, and the process of implementing the vision on a daily basis at the school could begin. Penn’s role during this phase is categorized into four areas: partnership development with a Penn school or center partnership in each grade, provide subsidy, provide enhanced security, and maintain the grounds. Weekly meetings of the Graduation School of Education, president’s office and school leadership addressed transition from conception to implementation. During this phase, the University also agreed to assist three other schools under the Education Management Organization model authorized into law by the Commonwealth in 2001, when it took over the School District of Philadelphia, replaced the mayoral appointed board with a state/city appointed board called the School Reform Commission and privatized 40 lowest performing schools. Penn went from having one school that it created to providing management expertise to an additional three schools.

**Opening Day**

The Penn-assisted School as it was called opened in September 2001 in the Divinity School Library extension building, three years after the announcement of the partnership in 1998. While school opened as scheduled in the MOU, the new building was not finished yet, so a temporary space was outfitted at Penn’s expense. The original faculty and staff included 6 classroom teachers, a counselor, nurse, art and technology
teachers and an executive 12 month secretary, who were all selected through the site selection process outlined in the Operating Agreement.

School opened with three Kindergarten classes and three classes of first grade. To a few, opening day was a bit anti-climatic after all of the community debate, planning and agreements to see such a small number of children gathered to enter a renovated church space. At the time no one could have imagined the growth and development the school would make.

**School Naming Process**

The school did not have an official name until 2002, four years after the announcement of the partnership (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). Once school opened, a community-wide process was created to name the school (School Naming Binder, 2001). Criteria were established and ideas were solicited. Community members and school families offered many suggestions. In August 2002, the School Reform Commission approved the name of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School. Alexander was a pioneering African American woman who had accomplished numerous “firsts,” much like this first Penn-Assisted School would be expected to do. Alexander (1898-1989) earned five degrees at the University of Pennsylvania (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). She was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Science in Education in 1918, compiling a “clean sweep” of most distinguished grades in her senior year (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). She was the first African American in the nation to earn a Ph.D. in Economics (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). In 1927, she was the first African American woman to earn a law degree (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). While at the Law School, she was named
associate editor of the Law Review, one of the highest honors a student can earn. In 1974, she was awarded her fifth degree at the University of Pennsylvania, an honorary doctor of laws degree (University of Pennsylvania, 2002).

In addition to her academic accomplishments, Alexander was recognized for her civil rights work. President Truman named her to the President’s Committee on Civil Rights and President Carter appointed Alexander to be chair of the White House Conference on Aging (University of Pennsylvania, 2002). The community and the school both wanted the school name to include the University (Sydnor, personal communication, 2002; Grossbach, personal communication, December, 2015). It was important symbolically to the community and a statement of the University’s commitment to the project to have its name on the building. While the official name of the school is the Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School, which appears on the building, it is commonly called the Penn Alexander School.

**Operationalizing the Partnership at the School Level**

Until the selection of the principal in May 2001, no school staff had been involved in the planning of the school or in the partnership that had existed for at least three years at this point. Once the principal was hired she could represent the school in the partnership, a brand new school with only a vision as its guide. That vision included both academic and financial support from Penn, but figuring out what that would look like and how it would support the partnership mission of “maximizing student achievement; enhance appreciation for racial, ethnic, economic and other forms of diversity among students and teachers” as outlined in the Operating Agreement, would require continuous planning.
In some ways, the partnership focus shifted from Penn, PFT and SDP to Penn and the school. Now the principal of a brand new school would have the city’s largest private employer at her side (Eichel, Lowe, Visser & LeDuc, 2015). The principal established a weekly meeting with the Penn partners – Nancy Streim; Lucy Kerman, Special Projects Director from the President’s Office; and myself. In addition to the practical and logistical details of opening a new school (e.g., ordering materials and supplies, and furniture and creating schedules, rules and routines), the purpose of these meetings was for the principal to share updates on the school and to address how best the University was going to support the school to realize the vision that had been set. In addition to the weekly or biweekly meetings, which lasted for several years, the principal asked that I be housed in the new school building in the main office suite. I coordinated the partnership between the school and the university, coordinated the teacher selection process each year, and managed external affairs – monthly tours for prospective families and others, information requests, and communications.

The partnership with the school became organized into four categories: academic or center partnership in each grade, professional development, security and maintenance of the grounds, and annual contribution. A running chart of partnership activities was created and revised each year depending on the needs of the school, as identified by the principal and in agreement with Nancy Streim.

For example, grade partnerships focused on student programs. In the early years, these included partnerships such as Pennenvelopes, a Penn student group that became pen pals with the 5th grade, exchanging letters twice a month; Kelly Writers House provided a Saturday writing program for middle school students; 3rd grade students served as annual
judges for graduate student science fair projects (the purpose was to ensure that the graduate students could communicate complicated science concepts in simple terms). In more recent years, these programs included the Law School’s Street Law program and the computer programming initiative called Scratch. The purpose of these programs was to supplement the curriculum and strengthen student learning experiences in core academic subjects to support the goal of student achievement (Sydnor & Streim, 2005). As such, the partnerships were a means to an end. It was not the goal of the partnership to maximize the number of programs or student involvement from Penn. The purpose was to show how a university could support a school to realize its vision of being a high achieving urban school.

The category of professional development included not only teacher training needs, but also teacher leadership and research. On the agenda of one of the first weekly meetings, October 23, 2001, was “Principles for conducting research, professional development and other academic activity at the Penn-Assisted School.” The purpose of this agenda item would reflect the third component of the mission outlined in the Operating Agreement, “to provide a vigorous clinical setting for professional growth…..and refine effective instructional and curricular programs and practices through applied research.” The result of this discussion was a document still used by the school that outlines the purpose and process by which research would be conducted at the school. In addition to the Institution Review Board requirements of the University and the School District, a committee at the school would review each proposal to determine if it would fit with the school’s needs and the research needs. The school was not established as a lab school, so research was not going to play a primary role in the
partnership. It was, however, one of the components, so developing a protocol with input from the school would be essential to ensuring alignment to the mission and not to overwhelm the school with eager researchers from down the street who saw the school as theirs. Along with this document were several conversations and meetings for the teachers to meet and learn about Penn faculty’s work as part of determining the points of congruency for research projects that the teachers and faculty could do together.

The school has had a long-standing relationship with Caroline Ebby, who has supported the math program at the school and supported the teachers’ continuous learning. With the flexibility from the Operating Agreement, the principal and the GSE selected a different math program than what the district was using. Since the program was new to the teachers, the principal asked GSE to provide professional development. Caroline Ebby had done similar work at the Powel School during the doctoral and post doctoral fellowship at PennGSE and soon became a regular fixture at the school. In the beginning she provided more general large group workshops but transitioned to more hands on support. As new staff came on aboard the principal requested that they also be included in her support. In more recent years the support became focused on support through grade group and afterschool professional development. In addition to professional development for the teachers, the school would host student teachers from Penn GSE. While it was not the intention that the school would hire graduates of the program, several graduates have been hired.

Likewise, the School of Social Policy and Practice provided a supervisor and two social work student interns to complement the school counselor’s services. These
students could addresses issues that impact student success but for which the counselor
did not have time to address, given the full set of responsibilities assigned to the position.

While the school building was the responsibility of the School District, Penn
owned the land and maintained the grounds through its property management company
and lease terms. There was extensive landscaping, including maintaining the “historic”
trees on site, that the District did not have at its typical school properties. The school also
resided within the Penn Police zone. This enhanced security would be helpful as the City
and District police forces were spread across an entire city.

Per the Operating Agreement the annual per student financial contribution from
Penn was to be used to reduce class size and otherwise enhance the academic program.
As such, the contribution is given to directly to the District. The balance after the
reduced class size allocation is placed in a special grant account for the school. The
principal would make a yearly proposal to Penn GSE for the allocation of these funds in
accordance with the Operating Agreement and report on the expenditures. The weekly
planning meetings would also address the contribution budget. First and foremost was to
ensure that the reduced class size requirement of the agreement was met. This was
accomplished by hiring additional teachers so that there would be one teacher per 18 or
24 students. Additional funds were used to enhance the program and provide
professional development. For example, when the school added the 5th and 6th grade,
funds were used for a retreat to help orient the students who had come from a variety of
school experience to the culture and expectations of the new school and to build a
community of learners. Funds were also used to send the first faculty to Teachers
College for the Lucy Calkin’s Reading and Writing Institute. In more recent years,
remaining funds have been used to provide enrichment and remediation for middle school students conducted by the middle school teachers.

On average the contribution would support 4 to 5 teachers and one fulltime librarian. The District did not centrally fund librarians for schools, so schools had to purchase those out their budgets. The principal had a library assistant position in her previous school, which was much cheaper, but the vision of the partnership planners included a fulltime librarian, and the library had a prominent place in the heart of the building, reflecting its academic importance. In some years, there would be very little balance after meeting the class size requirement, so the principal would adjust her spending but make every attempt to continue the same or increased programmatic level or carryover the funds. For example, in the early years, she moved the annual offsite student retreat in-house to stay within budget. As an experienced principal, Sheila Sydnor was skilled at managing budgets, but she would not allow lack of funding to be an excuse for not meeting student needs. Since the contribution terms did not require the funding to be spent fully each year, the principal was able to carry over funds year to year for unexpected expenses or to fund a larger project. The ability to do this was a rare gift for any grant recipient; it also requires a skilled financial manager.

In addition to these weekly planning meetings that addressed the day to day realities of growing a school and how a school and university worked together, there were numerous conversations – some at night or on the weekends when school was not in session. These conversations would serve as ways to build trust and strength relationships that would be needed for the inevitable disagreements. Each year there
would be a welcome back picnic for school faculty and their families as another way of building community among the faculty.

**Post-Opening: Leadership Changes**

This phase focuses on the role of the new leadership at Penn – Amy Gutmann and her administration – and their relationship to a project they inherited. Often projects that lose their champions dissolve, but in the case of Penn Alexander, the new university leadership not only embraced the project by assigning two vice presidents to the project, they also renewed the financial contribution for another ten years and increased the total contribution.

In 2007, when Nancy Streim became the Vice President for Community Partnerships at Teachers College, where Susan Fuhrman had recently become president, various professors and senior staff took on the role of supporting the school. Support has always included a senior official from the president’s office and to ensure that the institutional level support of the University continued.

By the 2007-08 school year, however, the financial carryover was depleted from using it to fill the gap between the rising cost of the reduced class size and contribution amount. In six years from 2001 to 2007, the value of the contribution decreased considerably due to a 33% increase in teacher compensation across the district. As a result the proportion of the contribution funding size had grown from 75% in 2002 to 107% in 2007 (Streim, personal communication, 2007). The school cut two specialist positions, Spanish and Art, but to make further cuts would require increasing class size, one of the key tenets of the Operating Agreement. The parent association worked with the neighboring art center, University City Arts League, to provide afterschool foreign
language, but this would mean that parents had to sign up and pay for their children to attend. Art programming would eventually become fully funded through the parent association and provided during the school day to ensure that all students received arts education. To prevent further cuts, Nancy Streim, in consultation with Principal Sydnor, made a formal request to the University for an increase in the contribution from $1,000 to $1,330 per student for the remainder of the ten-year contribution period in 2011. With enrollment remaining around 500, this increase per student allotment would still meet the maximum contribution at $700,000 per year as stated in the Operating Agreement. The request was granted in December 2007 by Amy Gutmann (cited in SRC resolution of 2011) as one of the final projects at the school for Nancy Streim before her departure to Teachers College.

Within a year of the increased per student allotment, central administration was tasked with addressing the renewal of the Operating Agreement. Its first ten-year term was set to expire in 2011. The University heard both from the school and the community. In very practical terms, the agreement contained the contribution provision, which had significant budget and staffing implications for the school. If the contribution was not renewed the school would have to cut staff and increase class size. Some of the first community members to inquire about the renewal were realtors, who were enjoying a surge in sales due to the school’s success (M. Lamond personal communication, April 1, 2011). While the University fully supported the school, the other partners would also need to agree to the renewal. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers under Jerry Jordan gave his approval. However, leadership changes had occurred again in the District, and Superintendent Ackerman was fully focused on accomplishing her own agenda. Deputy
Superintendent Leroy Nunery, who had previously been at the University, prepared the resolution for the School Reform Commission. The agreement was renewed until June 2021 at the May 18, 2011 meeting (School Reform Commission, 2011). The school’s alignment with the goals of the partnership were cited as evidence of continued renewal. This included the diverse enrollment of the school, the school as an exemplar of the Penn GSE university-assisted school model, and its numerous academic accomplishments of both students and teachers.

**Continued Enrollment Growth**

Due to the school’s continued success, enrollment has always been on the rise. With the flexibility of the agreement, the principal would enroll one or two additional students per class to accommodate the increased demand of the school. It also vigorously affirmed that students resided in the catchment area. Each June, families that were suspected to not live in the area were sent requests of proof of residence. If they did not present them in the Fall, the students were not admitted (Sydnor, personal correspondence, June, 2007).

After the first few years of the school, parents would begin to queue up for registration for Kindergarten, which was main entry point for admission to the school, earlier and earlier in the morning on the first day of registration in January. This turned into families camping out overnight in subzero temperatures, which was unprecedented for a district school. Since the district conducted registration on a first come first serve basis, the line would start earlier and earlier each year. While no one enjoyed this process, families would deal with it. However, in January 2011, 75 people were already in line by day break for 60 seats in Kindergarten and this did not include the families
from Head Start who were automatically transferred from PreK to Kindergarten (Gregory, 2011). Some felt that this process was unfair to families who did not have the means or support to wait in line.

Until 2010, the school had been able to accommodate registrations in the other grades. There was never a pre-registration line like there had been for Kindergarten. At the start of the 2010 school year, when registration is held district-wide for grades 1-8, the demand kept coming. During the first week of school, five of the nine grades had enrollments that exceed the agreement by 2 to 7 students. The principal sought guidance from the district first, using the district process of leveling. The leveling process typically takes place six weeks after the start of the school year to adjust staffing levels of over or under enrolled schools. Either teachers are added or a school loses teachers. After notifying the district, the principal then informed the University, as the school was also out of compliance for the class size provision of the Operating Agreement. Several measures were implemented while the leveling process was underway – the Wilson School, a nearby school that had a different partnership with Penn and whose principal was a former teacher, accepted the Kindergarten overflow. Residency verification was conducted of new families by the district regional office. The leveling process resulted in the district assigning five additional teachers. These teachers met the state requirements as fully certified teachers, but there had been no time to conduct site selection to find teachers who would best fit with the school’s program. The principal assigned the teachers to work under the direction of the appointed teacher who had been selected through the site selection process (Sydnor, 2010).
The overcrowding also had implications for other aspects of the school’s program and operations. It meant that more materials, desks, lunchroom tables, and supplies needed to be obtained immediately. And to ensure that students did not suffer any diminished academic program experiences, it also meant increasing the number of computers in the computer lab so that each student would still have an individual computer to use. The school handled these accommodations through its budget and by borrowing furniture from other schools (S. Sydnor, personal communication, 2010).

The enrollment demands continued throughout the school year. The district would not be able to provide five additional teachers the following year, so the school was capped in the Spring of 2011. Precedence for capping a school came with the enrollment caps of the charter schools (S. Sydnor, personal communications, September, 2011). Once a charter school reached its cap, the district school nearby would have to take the overflow. The announcement of the cap at Penn Alexander came in the form of a blog post after a parent inquired about enrollment for the following year (Lyons, 2011). Families who came to register would be placed on a waitlist and assigned by the School District to a nearby school with space. Community members formed AGREE (Advocates for Great Elementary Education) and turned to the Spruce Hill Community Association for assistance. They cited that if every family who wanted to enroll their children could be not accommodated, the community renewal was in jeopardy. The progress that had been made to revitalize the community was considered to have largely been driven by the success of the school. A petition signed by 450 neighbors demanding that all children who reside in the catchment area be admitted was sent to Amy Gutmann. Additional letters were sent to School District Superintendent Ackerman and President
Gutmann, with copies to Mayor Nutter, Councilwoman Blackwell, Commonwealth Representative Roebuck and Principal Sydnor, in addition to being published in the local neighborhood newspaper.

As the school, the district and Penn worked through the issue, including the feasibility of admitting all students in the catchment area, one of the original committee members reminded the Spruce Hill Community Association that the school was originally envisioned to accommodate 700 students by using space that would be converted in the Divinity School. That plan never materialized due to cost, and now the space was occupied by the Parent Infant Center, which had expanded due to increased demand for daycare. If space were to be found, it likely had to be at Penn’s expense (Spruce Hill Meeting Minutes, November 2011). The increased demand renewed the interest in improving the nearby Lea School, which had increased its student performance dramatically from 2001 to 2007, but then declined again. By the time Kindergarten register commenced in January 2012, families were camping out overnight. The line grew to more than 94 people for the 60 slots available. While neither the University nor the school could commit to admitting every children who lived in the catchment area per the AGREE petition, the school, the District and the University worked out a compromise. Penn agreed to expand the Operating Agreement to fund an additional Kindergarten class, equip it and fund the teacher salary. The enrollment issues would not end with this expansion, however.

At the January 2013 SRC meeting, David Lapp, a parent at the school who also had a child entering Kindergarten that fall registered to speak at the SRC about the inequity of the line up for Kindergarten registration at Penn Alexander (D. Lapp, personal...
While the district had known about the line up since each year’s registration would attract front page media attention, there was a new superintendent and cabinet at the district. This year’s line started first thing the next morning, four days before registration would open. This caught Superintendent Hite’s attention. By 6:00 p.m. that night, Hite had pulled the plug. His senior cabinet officer, Karyn Lynch, consulted with each partner and the school that day. All agreed the line had gone too far. The principal and the District’s communications officer informed the families who had lined up that a lottery would be implemented. While some families were relieved, many were fraught with frustration for having the rules suddenly changed without their consultation. William Hite came to the school and met personally with the families. Karyn Lynch conducted follow up meetings with the families and with the Spruce Hill Community Association.

One outcome of the Kindergarten lottery has been that all children have been admitted each year. Sometimes this would mean going as high as 20 students in all four Kindergarten classes, or not being able to enroll a student until the school year had started. Families that registered after the lottery would be assigned to a nearby school that had space. The District can never completely end registration. It cannot deny a child entry into the system. It does not have to accommodate a child at a specific school however (S. Sydnor, personal communication, 2015). An additional outcome from the enrollment issue was the creation of a School Advisory Council. All schools would eventually be required to have such a Council. The SAC would include parents, a community organization and school leadership and faculty. The purpose of the SAC would be to advise the principal on advancing student achievement. It was also a way for the
community and school to have a mechanism and process for communication prior to
issues happening, like the change in registration systems. At this point in the partnership
of the School District, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and University of
Pennsylvania partnership that created the Penn Alexander School a new chapter is about
to begin. The founding principal’s retirement was announced for June 2016.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

Is the Partnership Successful and How Has Success Been Defined?

The conceptual framework that shaped this study and its research questions is the theoretical proposition that organizations form partnerships to resolve a problem that an individual organization cannot solve alone and the resulting benefits are attained through a certain number and quantity of success factors (Clifford, et al., 2008; Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Kanter, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Tushnet, 1993). Furthermore, these benefits and success factors are contextualized to each partnership setting (Furco, 2013). Partnerships are typically arranged to solve a problem that one institution cannot solve by itself (Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Kanter, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Tushnet, 1993). However in school-university partnership literature, outcomes or “problem solved” are too often not the focus. The literature is heavily dominated by process – how the partners worked or did not work together and what activities they conducted as partners regardless of the outcomes (Clifford, et al., 2008). Victor Rubin (2000) identifies many challenges to assessing the effectiveness of partnerships on social problems: the overlapping nature of multiple initiatives, overlapping funding and existing neighborhood expertise. If the purpose of the partnership was school renewal, has student learning improved and if so, by how much as measured by an acceptable standard of assessment? Several researchers ask these questions (Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; McNall, Reed, Brown & Allen, 2009; Rubin, 2000; Strier, 2011).
In the case of the School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania partnership that created the Penn Alexander School, were the goals realized, benefits attained, and the problem that gave rise to the partnership in the first place addressed? To determine if the goals were achieved, I analyzed hundreds of documents, conducted two site visits to the building and site, which I can see from the front porch of my house and which also has served as my office for the last 17 years, and I interviewed at least one senior individual from each of the partners as well as 19 other individuals who played a role in the process as part of these and other organizations.

The Operating Agreement (1999) stated four components to the mission of the partnership:

the Neighborhood School should be designed and operated in a manner which will maximize student achievement, enhance appreciation for racial, ethnic, economic and other forms of diversity among students and teachers, provide a rigorous clinical setting for professional growth and development of preservice and in-service teachers and develop, test and refine effective instructional and curricular programs and practices through applied research. (Operating Agreement, 1999)

Partner as well as community participants who were interviewed consistently stated that the partnership was a success, the goals had largely been obtained as defined by the mission of the partnership and that each partner had realized benefits. They defined success in primarily three ways: (1) accomplishments of the school, which included the students, teachers, and the design of the building itself, (2) neighborhood stabilization and (3) quality of the relationship of the partners. Three participants felt that although the partnership was a success in many ways, it had not achieved success fully in two areas: the last component of its mission (“test and refine effective instructional and
curricular programs and practices through applied research”) and replication of the model to other areas of West Philadelphia. It should be noted that these measures of success are primarily outcomes and not inputs. The lack of outcome measures was cited as a gap in the literature. For example, Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) studied 57 collaborations between the University of Rochester and the Rochester City School District, yet the study primarily reported inputs (e.g., number of students, number of hours of service) as outcomes. Laguardia’s 1998 study of partnerships to improve the academic outcomes of minority students was one of the few partnerships that measured success based on outcomes and not inputs.

Even before the school opened, it started to accrue accolades and these have continued throughout the duration of the partnership. The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities called it a “gold standard” when the partnership was announced (University of Pennsylvania, 1998b). Editorials in the Philadelphia Inquirer commended the University for taking on a grand vision (A noble experiment, 1999; Penn’s pal, 1998; Smith, 1999). As a public school, the academic performance of the school was measured by student performance on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA). Very little, if any, of the literature on partnerships includes even a reference to quantitative student achievement data. While the accountability era ushered in by the Nation At Risk Report and called for higher education institutions to assist schools to improve their academic performance, little is mentioned in the partnership literature of actually meeting the accountability standards. Under the No Child Left Behind federal law, students in certain grades, which eventually became every grade third and up, were required to take the yearly PSSA standardized test. If schools met the target
they were deemed to have made “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP). Schools that did not make AYP would receive increasing levels of intervention and ultimately could be reconstituted. Penn Alexander made AYP for all years that it was eligible and continued the level of performance on PSSA after the Commonwealth received a waiver to no longer use the AYP system. In 2014, 84% of the students were on grade level or higher (i.e., proficient or advanced) in reading and 90% were proficient or advanced in math. These performance levels placed the school among the top performers in the district, which includes a highly selective magnet school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015).

While the PSSA allowed the school’s performance to be placed within context of the district and Commonwealth schools, it is only one measure used to assess the school’s performance. The participants cited many other ways the school had showcased student learning achievements by referencing a list of accomplishments published by the school annually. Students regularly competed in the citywide Carver Science Fair, where they have take top honors. They also competed in the citywide and state Computer Science Fair, where students have earned high marks. Each year, a greater and greater percentage of students are recruited to selective public and private high schools in the city.

Showcasing the achievement of the school has not been limited to the students. Currently eight teachers at the school have earned National Board Certification, the highest level of certification a teacher can receive. Participants saw this accomplishment and the teacher participation in professional development programs and as hosts for student teachers as examples of the school being a place that valued adults as continuous learners. This also reflects the third component of the Operating Agreement mission. This is one area that
did have a closer link to the findings of other researchers. Professional development of teachers was often cited in the literature on the partnerships but again often as an outcome rather than as intervention to improving student achievement (Goodlad, 1998; Howey & Zimpher, 2004; Kersh & Masztal, 1998; Ravid & Handler, 2001).

The second component of the mission of the Operating Agreement was to “ensure that the student body is racially integrated and economically diverse.” Partners and community members cited that this goal had been achieved as reflected by the school’s student composition. According to School District of Philadelphia profile of 2014 for the school the student body is comprised of 24% African-American students, 39% White, 18% Asian, and 7% Latino. Nineteen percent of Penn Alexander students are international, and 30% are from families affiliated with Penn (e.g., children of University faculty, staff, and students). Although the participants stated that the diversity of the school reflected West Philadelphia’s rich ethnic diversity, partners did talk about how the ethnic composition had changed over time. When the school initially opened, the percentage of African-American students was much higher. This decrease concerned many of the participants, yet at the same time they said that the breadth of diversity was a strength that should be noted.

To measure the economic diversity of the school, one can use the District profile for the school, which shows that 39.14% are economically disadvantaged. At the school level there is not the traditional manifestation of low-income students, which used to be the completion of paperwork to qualify for reduced or free lunch. A student who was eligible for free or reduced lunch would not have to pay for lunch; whereas, students who did not qualify would pay for their lunch. That could cause a stigma for some students.
The District now participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), which provides free breakfast and lunch to all students while completely eliminating the need for paper meal applications. A couple of participants commented at the impact of the economic diversity on the school. One person cited research stating that as income increases, expectations for learning do as well, so a school with enough middle to high-income families would influence the expectations of all the students. In other words, they felt that the mixed income nature of the school had been a success in helping to ensure that all students performed well or that “rising tides raises all ships.” To some extent the student performance data bears this out. For example, African-American students at Penn Alexander are outperforming their peers across the district as well as the Commonwealth (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014).

In addition to the teacher and student accomplishments, the participants commented that the building and grounds were a success. This finding reflected the work of Roy Strickland (1994) that the physical design of schools can contribute to the renewal of a school and its community. A brand new building had been built with a design specific to its academic program, the site and neighborhood. One participant did mention that another school shared the central atrium feature and it was a disaster for managing student behavior. Students were loud and often uncontrollable. In other words, a building alone does not make for a successful school. He credited Principal Sydnor’s leadership for ensuring that a building designed to be warm and welcoming actually was when fully occupied with over 500 students. The building was sited to allow the grounds to be accessible to the community after school hours. The grounds were not covered in
asphalt but rather were an urban arboretum in a community with only one other park space. Families regularly took advantage of the play space and filled its playground on warm evenings: “It is a mini United Nations most nights,” commented several participants. In 2003, the University received the Urban Land Institute’s Award of Excellence. One of the projects noted in the award was the Penn Alexander School.

Participants also defined success of the partnership by the stabilization of the neighborhood. While this was not a stated goal in the operating agreement, the rationale for the school was the West Philadelphia Initiatives, which was a neighborhood stabilization effort. The participants measured the stabilization by the reduced crime rate, the increased number of families not only in the community but also at the school (at a time when district schools were losing enrollment to charters), and the increased number and kinds of retail businesses. They also measured it by the fact that the real estate advertisements included “house located in Penn Alexander School catchment area.” One participant commented that success is more than increased numbers of families and businesses; that “the families have grown up together. We have raised our children together.” Families see each other at the park, at the market, at the movies, at the restaurants and at school. This participant believed that these multiple ways of interacting strengthened the community against the challenges of living in a large urban city. These connections built a social capital or fabric that supported each family and helped a community to thrive. This measure of success was supported by several researchers including Cox (2000), Khadduri, Turnham, Chase & Schwartz (2003); Maurrasse (2001); Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter (2013).
The third theme of defining success was in regards to the quality of the partnership. This theme was more in line with school-university literature in which more emphasis is on the partnership itself instead of the outcome it was designed to accomplish (Myran, Crum, & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996; Wasonga, Rari & Wanzare, 2012). Participants noted that they considered the partnership a success by the mere fact that three large public and private institutions were able to come together in the first place and that they were able to renew the partnership after ten years. Despite numerous leadership changes at the District and a couple at the University (i.e., new president and new education school dean), the institutions had a solid working professional relationship. “Getting along” was noteworthy as a measure of the success, given the scope of the project. While the participants noted the remarkable nature of these institutions being able to work together, all of them said the thriving students – their academic and social development – was what mattered in the end. I did ask a few of the participants whether the partnership should be dissolved if the school had not realized these student accomplishments, but no one thought that was a reasonable step to take. This does provide a conundrum for the school-university partnership field. One could easily see why so many partnerships result in “getting along” and why the literature is heavily process oriented towards success factors (Goodlad, 1988; Myran, Crum, & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996; Wasonga, Rari & Wanzare, 2012).

In addition to these three themes of defining success, participants also mentioned a few others. The Operating Agreement was noted by several as a success, simply by the fact that there was a written document, more than a program description, but a legally binding agreement that was flexible and that outlined the mission of the partnership and
each partner’s responsibilities. The importance of written agreements was well supported in the literature (Goodlad, 1993; Kersh & Masztal, 1998; Myran, Crum & Clayton, 2010). The participants also considered the agreement as one of the success factors, which is discussed in more detail below. Another measure of success was that the partnership model attracted others to learn about it, so it was a worthy way for the school district to work with private partners to improve schools; in fact, the model had spawned similar projects in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York (Drexel University, 2012; Johns Hopkins University, 2015; Teachers College, 2011). While the university-assisted school model has not been replicated in these other cities, there may be enough similarity to conduct a comparison study or even a meta-analysis, which Clifford et al., (2008) cited as a need in a field with weak results.

In similarity to the notion mentioned above that a beautiful building alone will not make for a great school, participants felt the same way about the financial contribution. Although participants noted that the University’s ability to make a financial contribution of approximately $800,000 a year was a success in its own right, the funding alone would not make for a great school. Money mattered they said, especially for an urban district that is underfunded to begin with and is constantly challenged to stay afloat, but knowing how to put the money to good use to support students was what made the contribution a measure of success. The literature also supported this finding regarding resources (Goodlad, 1988). Finally, participants talked about longevity as playing a key role. They talked about it not only as a success factor in and of itself but also what longevity enables. In some ways, the agreement with its renewable years supports longevity of the partnership but it was also noted that the longevity of the principal, who ultimately had
responsibility for realizing the vision of the school, was a key factor in success. The consistent leadership of school enabled a continuous learner to develop and build a program over time and to adjust to student needs. Constant change in leadership often does not provide an opportunity to really develop, test and refine an agenda. It also consumes time for relationship building that could be spent on addressing needs of the school.

While none of the participants saw the partnership as unsuccessful, they did note some unintended consequences of the success. In addition to the decreased percentage of African-American students at the school, rising property values was a concern. The neighborhood has been identified as gentrifying, which is defined as the arrival of new, higher income residents and cultural changes to the neighborhood (Ding, Hwang & Divingi, 2015). As a result of gentrification, displacement occurs or poorer residents are forced out. In a 2015 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, researchers found gentrification in Philadelphia has its nuances and did not always result in displacement. Furthermore, the study found that if current residents with lower incomes can manage to stay, they would improve their quality of life. For example, current residents often gained increased credit scores, which lowers their cost of borrowing for a car loan or buying car insurance. A couple of participants warned that while it was important to monitor the unintended consequences, doing this could diffuse the focus of the partnership. In fact, one participant commented that he thought the partnership was successful because it did not try to take on more than it had resources for.
How Has the Partnership Achieved Success?

The literature states that partnerships are successful because specific success factors are in place (Clifford, et al., 2008; Essex, 2001; Goodlad, 1988; Myran, Crum & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). All partnerships, regardless of their purpose or context, share a set of success factors. I grouped them into four areas: goals, trust and respect, open and effective communication, and roles and responsibilities. I asked participants if they agreed with these four as success factors of the partnership, how they were operationalized (i.e., what does trust and respect look like in a partnership); what quantity or an amount of each was needed; and whether there was a sequence to how the factors were related to each other. The latter two questions were to address the literatures gaps identified by the Clifford et al. 2008 study, in which the researchers found a lack of specificity regarding success factors.

Student Centered Goals

Goals but specifically student centered goals were commonly cited as a key element of the partnership’s success. Goals define the parameters of the work to be done together. They drive decisions and resources. They keep everyone on the same page. They frame the expectations. Since the partnership is about creating a successful school, then the goals must be about the students. “It can’t be about us [the university]. It has to be about the kids,” commented one participant. While the partners agreed that they each had a goal to obtain and that the goal of student achievement was the commonality, the literature is not as clear. Some researchers, such Goodlad (1988), Schлектchy and Whitford (1988) argue that goals need to be mutually beneficial and authentically shared; whereas Cox (2000) and Maurrasse (2001) argue that it is self-interest goals that keep a
partnership going. Clarity in purpose or goals alone were not enough. Each participant added to this concept. For example, one participant said the goals needed to be aligned to the context in which they are set. If the partnership had a goal of creating a magnet school with citywide admission, it would not have achieved community stabilization.

The goals need to accrue benefits to all partners, but they do not need to accrue the same goals to all partners. For example, the PFT does not have community stabilization necessarily as its first priority. More often than not, the participants agreed that goals related to self-interest is what keeps partners at the table, especially during challenging times, a hallmark of a new project.

In addition to having a vested interest, the goals need to be aligned to the mission of the organization. While the Spruce Hill Community Association was not an official partner to the agreement, they were able to support the partnership and not block it because it aligned with their goal of increasing homeownership as a way to stabilize the community. Participants commented that this would not have happened unless the school was successful or had student centered goals. In the case of the University, the partnership goals aligned not only with the mission of Penn, but also with the strategic direction of the Penn Compact and Compact 2020 (University of Pennsylvania, 2013a). By aligning to the mission, an organization stays focused on the same page and prevents a “thousand flowers blooming” with no coherence or impact. While self-interest was cited more than mutually beneficial goals, one partner commented that the goals need to be mutually developed. Goals cannot be imposed on others; that contradicts what a partnership is about.
Trust and Respect

Following the success factor of student centered goals, participants stated that trust and respect were essential. While this may seem like an obvious and assumed factor for any professional organization, when it comes to partnerships between higher education and schools, it needs attention. In fact one participant said that trust and respect was all that was needed and the rest would fall into place. The school-university literature talks about overcoming the Ivory Tower and the disrespect shown to schools for the applied knowledge of classroom instruction and pedagogy. Without respect and trust of families, students and teachers, the partnership will not get off the ground, according to a veteran of university-school partnerships and one that is well documented in the literature (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Goodlad, 1998; Kersh & Masztal; Myran, Crum & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). Respect also meant having context acuity as Andrew Furco calls it (Furco, 2013). This means understanding not only one’s own organization, but also the partners, appreciating their roles, rules, rewards and culture.

What does trust and respect look like? How does one know one has it? Why is it important? Goals help to build trust by defining the parameters of the work or sphere of influence, as one participant said. Listening is also critical to building trust. Partners need to be decisive, provide help that the other partners find helpful, and follow through on their commitments. Trust will be needed to help partners get through any conflicts that arise. These are large institutions that are not always likely to agree. There needs to be give and take. Frank conversations will need to happen. Participants gave examples of curriculum debates such as including foreign language and enrollment management.
and expansion. These were areas that the partners did not agree on and no partner was willing to easily let their idea go, and often advocating for their idea whether it was in their purview of not to. In fact, if partners always agree, they may not be truly accomplishing anything. Trust means it is okay to say “no” without damaging the relationship, and sometimes saying “no” is needed for the partnership to stay on course. One participant commented that the fact that the University is pretty hands-off at the school, shows the trust and respect they have for the principal. Also the fact that two of the president’s cabinet are accessible to the community, school and partners shows the respect the university has for the project.

**Open and Effective Communication**

Participants commented that closely connected to the partnership having a high level of trust and respect was the culture of open channels of communication among the partners, which was also supported by the literature (Goodlad, 1998; Kersh & Masztal; Myran, Crum & Clayton, 2010; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1996). As one partner commented communication “is not just accepted, it is expected.” Partnership can mean different things to different people. People need to be able to talk about what partnership means to them, what their expectations are and what resources they can or cannot bring to the table. The open communication channels allow for early warning of things about to go astray. For example, when the District wanted to change the Kindergarten registration process to a lottery when families had already formed a line from the first come-first serve process that the District had used for the school for years. A senior District representative picked up the phone and had immediate access to the senior officials at the University.
Open communication did not just occur when there was an issue. Partners were regularly in touch, sometimes over other related projects or just to check-in when they had not heard from a partner in awhile. Often this involved other staff from the organization. For example, Penn GSE student teachers talked to their cooperating teacher as well as to their mentor teacher, who was in touch with the student teacher placement coordinator, who was in touch with the principal and partnership coordinator. These multiple levels of communication helped strengthen the relationships. The overall communication also included periodic face-to-face meetings. While electronic communication was a quick and easy way of staying in touch, meetings or events when people saw each other was critical to the strengthen of the partnership. External groups to the partnership that I interviewed did not always see this as the case, among the partners or to them. Although they felt that there was open and honest communication in the beginning, as the partnership matured, the communication decreased. This created a vacuum for interpretation. Reminding the broader stakeholders of the partnership focus is a constant task that may lessen after a partnership is launched, but is still necessary. Stakeholders also need to take responsibility for not using the vacuum in communication as an excuse to misinterpret. Furthermore, one group felt that they often were providing information to a partner that should have come from another partner. This perspective may be more about the challenges that partnerships face with external groups.

Participants cited the ability to listen as a key feature to the success of the partnership. Listening helps to bring people into the process and gives them a stake in the project. It enables power to be shared, which is especially important given that the partnership included three very large organizations and a small school. Listening does
not mean that a partner necessarily can do what another partner wants it to do, but it shows respect and trust for each other. It shows appreciation for a partner’s own interests. Listening, however, can be time consuming. The University noted that it took on this role with external groups to the partnership as way of supporting the principal to focus on running the school.

Participants felt that the written agreements among the partners played a key role in the success of the partnership, yet one that did not seem to be common in partnerships. The agreements are in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding, which was developed to launch the partnership and the Operating Agreement. The documents state the goals or mission of the partnership, strategies for achieving the goals, and the responsibilities of each partner with regards to the goals and strategies. They provide the parameters of the work for the partners and for external groups. A program description might do the same, but it would not have the same level of commitment that a legally binding agreement has. For example, the agreements mean that the partnership is an institutional commitment and not necessarily one leader’s particular agenda item. As leaders changed or as new staff came on board in an organization, the binding agreement served as a way of way of informing people of the commitment, goals and responsibilities. Without the agreement a new staff member could easily say that that they were under no obligation to follow a commitment made by a staff member no longer employed at the organization. The commitment was not institutional but rather individual based.

Aside from actually having written agreements, participants noted the tone, language and simplicity of the documents. The Operating Agreement is 13, double
spaced pages, yet defines a large public-private partnership. Participants noted that the
simplicity gave them flexibility that has been needed when a new model is launched. The
tone and language is largely legal or education jargon free. While it protects each
partner’s interest, it does so in way that is positive-oriented and based on the principles of
what a successful school needs, not necessarily on what a successful partnership needs or
what a more traditional contractual agreement would be. The fact that the documents
were generated by the University leadership for the partnership and not the legal
department likely played a key role in ensuring that the documents were specific to this
project and did not use boiler plate contractual language. The Operating Agreement was
something that the principal noted she carries with her in her briefcase, not only to
remind her of the parameters, but also to remind those with whom she interacted with in
the district. Another participant commented that the agreements not only gave the
principal credibility, but also added to her authority when dealing with the central office
of the district, all of whom might not be familiar with a particular school’s arrangements.

Roles and Responsibilities

A separate organization with staff and board was not created when the partnership
was formed. Rather, each partner has assigned a senior staff member to represent the
institution in the partnership. This meant that someone was designated to not only pay
attention, but also to make decisions. Ultimately, this helps both partners and external
groups know who is in charge. Howey and Zimpher (2004) and Maurrasse (2001) not the
importance of roles and responsibilities in their research, especially with regarding to
having a champion or leader who will guide the partner’s interests. With large institutions,
this can be especially important. The MOU and Operating Agreement outlined each
partner’s roles and responsibilities. Partners felt that knowing their roles and responsibilities ensured that they did not step out of their organization’s strengths and abilities. As one participant commented, the roles and responsibilities:

> help keep each person in their lane…. It is the principal’s job to run the school, not the University or the District senior leadership. She knows best what her school needs….. She will know what it will be like to implement a particular idea…..It is our job to support her.

Even though each partner had a designated role, the fact that they were in a partnership meant that they not only take ownership and responsibility for their role, but also back up the other partners’ role when they need it. For example, Penn Alexander is a public school governed primarily by the School District of Philadelphia, which sets enrollment policies for its schools. The University does not have jurisdiction over that area, just as the District does not have jurisdiction over the school property. But since the two are in partnership together with defined goals, they recognize the need to consult each other when they have to take a course of action. Another example was in 2004-05, when a group of parents addressed concern over the math program at the school. While the school had selected the program, which was the role and responsibility of the principal, she had done it in consultation with Penn GSE, who knew the program well. Rather than having the school alone address the parent concerns, the principal and GSE jointly addressed the parents. GSE could share their research and experience with the program. The principal could address the rationale for selecting it.

The literature on the school-university partnerships talks about the need for boundary spanners, people whose role it is to help connect the partners and bridge the different worlds of each partner (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Hora & Millar, 2011; Magolda,
2001, Maurrasse, 2001; Tsui & Law, 2007; Weerts, 2007). Several participants noted that Nancy Streim and I played that role. A University such as Penn has enormous human capital and knowledge to offer a school, but it that can easily overwhelm a school and take it in thousand directions. Someone on the ground at the school plays traffic cop to some degree. While Nancy Streim ensured that GSE’s urban education expertise was guiding the help from the University, I played the day to day role at the school; both of us worked in close concert with the principal. It was her job as directed by the District to implement the vision for the school and to meet or exceed the District requirements. Nancy and I would bring ideas and programs from the university and with the principal and teachers ensure that the Penn Alexander School students had a coherent learning experience reflective of the school’s vision and not simply a laundry list of university faculty and student projects. Running a school and running a partnership can be more than two fulltime jobs. In the Penn Alexander partnership, the University resources were designed to support a school to achieve the mission established in the agreement. The principal felt that the on-the-ground person was essential to ensuring that the partnership supported the school and did not overwhelm it.

**Interconnectedness of Success Factors**

In addition to asking each person to reflect on the success factors identified in the school-university literature and their application to the Penn Alexander case, they were also asked to comment on the sequencing of each factor and its quantity or amount. This was done to further clarify how success factors work in relationship to each other in the partnership, an area cited in need of further development in the research on partnerships (Clifford et al., 2008).
Participants saw the success factors as interconnected. For example, trust and respect could not develop without open and honest communication. What enabled the goals to work was that they were developed together, reflected each organization’s needs and provided common ground. Having the goals delineated upfront helped to define the relationship between the partners. When it came to quantifying each factor, participants did not seeing that having more than one or another was relevant to this partnership’s success. One participant, however, said trust and respect were necessary for the other factors to fall into place, especially given the real or imagined histories of universities being Ivory Towers and school districts as entrenched bureaucracies.

Findings & Discussion

The focus of this case study was to gain a deep understanding of the partnership between the University of Pennsylvania, School District of Philadelphia and Philadelphia Federation of Teachers partnership that was formed to develop a university-assisted school, called the Penn Alexander School. By using case study methodology and its methods of document review, site visits and interviews, the partnership, its success and factors were defined and analyzed. It should be noted that my professional role in the partnership likely enabled unique access to the data sources. It should also be noted, however, that I do not supervise any of the participants or hold any real or imagined power over them. They freely agreed to participate.

There was complete agreement upon the participants that the partnership is successful because it can be defined and measured in specific ways and that the definition and measurement were primarily related to student achievement. Participants noted themselves that there could be people external to the partnership who may not fully agree,
and they defined those disagreements as unintended consequences of success that need to be monitored. Success was defined primarily in three ways: (1) accomplishments of the school, which included the students, teachers, and the design of the building; (2) neighborhood stabilization and (3) quality of the relationship of the partners.

Accomplishments of the school were measured by the academic performance and social development of the students as evidenced by the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment, high school admissions and other awards earned by the students; awards of the teachers, notably the number of teachers with National Board Certification; and the alignment of the building and grounds to its community. Neighborhood stabilization was measured by the increased number of families, retail and service establishments, and decreased crime and housing disinvestment. Finally the quality of the relationship of the partners was measured by the partnership’s longevity (the agreement renewed in 2011) and the spawning of several similar projects in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York City.

The factors of success were consistent with the school-university partnership literature and could be specified with examples. Success factors of the Penn Alexander partnership included student centered goals, trust and respect, open and effective communication and roles and responsibilities aligned to goals. This partnership did not fully reflect the Goodlad research that goals needed to be mutually beneficial or transformative in order for a partnership to be successful. In a transformative model, the University’s reward system would be completely altered with more emphasis placed on service (and not just administrative service) but on application of research knowledge generated. A senior University official did note that the approach ushered in by President
Emeritus Sheldon Hackney of no longer “doing” to a community had been firmly cemented by University leadership of Claire Fagan, Judith Rodin and Amy Gutmann. The University’s view that it needed to be “of” the community was firmly cemented in the institution.

The Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) and Cox (2001) research was more applicable regarding purpose and goals. In other words, self-interest was what kept the partners at the table. As Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) found that as long as the goals were agreed upon not whether they transformed an organization, the partnership could be successful. It was clear that each partner had obtained its goals. The University is able to have a vibrant community surrounding it; faculty recruitment and admissions are no longer stymied by unsafe city life or lack of affordable schools. A private, elite university receives national cache from its connection to a high performing nonselective admission public school (Romano, 2006). The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers is now recognized as having the ability to be a team player and flexible when the conditions are right. In other words, the union is not always in opposition with those with which it partners (e.g., School District). The School District of Philadelphia has an additional high performing school in a portfolio of schools that are largely challenged by student achievement. It cannot be emphasized enough that the goals of the project specifically targeted improving outcomes for students, especially academic and social development outcomes. This goal was the common thread among the interests that brought each partner to the table. Furthermore the partners came to agreement around these goals (as evidenced by the Operating Agreement), which lessens the likelihood that there is
misinterpretation of the expectations by any of the partners and thus any one partner going off track.

There was more consistency with regard to the literature on the success factor of trust and respect. As one partner stated, “with trust, all less will fall into place.” This was quite consistent with the Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, and Luppescu, (2010) multi-year quantitative study of Chicago publics school reform, in which they identified a key element in partnerships that served as the glue that kept reform in place long enough for improved student learning outcomes to be realized – trust. The fact that a public neighborhood school was built and not a university building that might have replaced a blighted block but primarily service faculty and students reflected Maurasse’s description of trust: “It is one thing to be involved in service; it is another actually to be helpful.” For Maurasse, being helpful involves holding “the needs of the communities as high as those of the institutions or individual faculty, students or administrators involved.” (Maurassee, 2001). When this does not happen, trust jeopardized. The fact that the school serves a community regardless of its residents’ affiliation to the University reflects this notion. While the school has approximately 30% of families affiliated as either staff, students or faculty, only Penn families that reside in the catchment area are eligible to enroll.

Partners cited what Goodlad & Sirotnik (1988) note that building trust has as much to do with dismantling mistrust, especially of higher education institution motives. Higher education institutions seeking partners under the guise of research or convenience of field placement sites will not advance. It was clear from the University partners that they had learned this valuable trust lesson. As evidenced by the duration of the partnership and the preceding 18-month preconception phase that the partners had
learned from Maurrasse (2001), Myran, Crum and Clayton (2010), and Goodlad (1988) that developing trust takes time, so patience is essential for each partner. The partners met for 12 to 18 months to develop the agreement that was followed by another nine-month community planning process. Furthermore, the partners were well aware of Furco’s context acuity – the awareness of their own history and that of the other partner, including any prior partnerships. In other words a blighted residential block was not replaced by a university research or classroom building and the community participated in developing the vision and design of the school.

The participants cited that open and effective communication was connected to trust and respect. One way of building trust and respect is to have open and effective communication (Goodlad, 1988; Peel, Peel, & Baker, 2002; Wasonga, Rari, & Wanzare, 2011). Participant views on communication reflected the research of Essex (2001): there must be a culture that encourages open and non-judgmental expression, especially during the planning stages. Furthermore, open communications supports understanding and helps to dispel misperceptions (Essex, 2001). The culture must not only allow for free expression, but also encourage it in order for the best strategies to be developed (Goodlad, 1988; Essex, 2001). Communication should also include written agreements, which Goodlad (1994), and Verbeke and Richards (2001) cite as essential elements. The partners cited that the Operating Agreement was essential to their success. While it may not be referenced constantly or followed exactly, it served to remind everyone of the goals and roles and responsibilities, especially during leadership changes or conflicts.

The partnership reflected the research of Maurrasse (2001), Rodin (2007) and Howey and Zimpher (2004) with regard to roles and responsibilities, starting with a
committed leadership as a key element in partnership success. The Penn Alexander School partnership was an institutional partnership with a legally binding agreement. That would not have happened without each partner’s senior leadership at the table, as noted by Howey & Zimpher (2004). It is especially important for the higher education institution leadership to demonstrate to the school or community partner that they are committed to the partnership even after the semester ends, the grant expires, or the students graduate (Maurrasse, 2001). As Goodlad’s years of research on partnerships reflects roles and responsibilities aligned to goals were reflected in the Penn Alexander partnership. The Operating Agreement helped to spell out each partners’ role.

Connecting the partners was both staff with boundary-spanning experience or playing the role of boundary-spanner, such as I did. An essential element for successful higher education institution-school partnerships is “border-crossing” or “boundary spanners.” This term refers to the ability of each partner or their liaison to cross over the invisible but very real boundary that exists between higher education institutions and their partner schools and communities (Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Hora & Millar, 2011; Magolda, 2001, Maurrasse, 2001; Tsui & Law, 2007; Weerts, 2007). These people do not necessarily need to be the organizational leaders or partnership leaders. According to Goodlad and Sirotnik, “One must be able to move readily back and forth between the culture of the school and the culture of the university, to have an understanding and an appreciation of the values of both, and to be perceived as contemptuous of neither” (1988, p 220). For example, this can mean explaining to university faculty the realities of the school day or the difference between knowing one’s area of expertise but also having the ability to teach it to young children. For university students, it can mean explaining that
the school time is very precious and needs to be used wisely. Elementary school students are giving up a key concept if they are completing a survey for a university student research project. To the school partner, it can mean allowing outsiders into the classroom and making one’s instruction public and open for learning.

The analysis also revealed that the Penn Alexander partnership was very focused on outcomes for students and did not get self-absorbed or consumed by the partnership process. The partnership was about creating a great school first; as a university participant commented “It is about the kids. It can’t be about us.” Participants expressed that it was how the success factors were defined and operationalized by the participants that enabled the partnership to achieve its mission of creating a university-assisted school that enabled the students to thrive academically and socially as demonstrated by their academic awards, school spirit and service projects.
CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations for Practice and Research

This study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the partnership that created the Penn Alexander School. The conceptual framework that shaped this study and its research questions was the theoretical proposition that organizations form partnerships to resolve a problem that an individual organization cannot solve alone and benefits are attained through a certain number and amount of success factors (Clifford, et al., 2008; Das & Teng, 2001; Eckel & Hartley, 2008; Goodlad, 1988 & 1991; Kanter, 1994; Maurrasse, 2001; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2006; Tushnet, 1993). Furthermore, these benefits and success factors are contextualized to each partnership setting (Furco, 2013). Knowing how the partnership worked and the degree to which benefits were obtained within a given context can inform policy and practice in several ways. This case has demonstrated that higher education institutions can help bring about improved precollegiate public school achievement. In these financially challenging times for public education, it is recommended that school districts as well as individual public schools revisit partnerships focused on improving student outcomes with local higher education institution. Partnerships such as the Penn Alexander School are also a recommendation for city governments, higher education institutions and communities interested in pursuing community renewal. While the success factors are critical, they are only means to an end. Improving student outcomes will not result if the partnership only focuses on achieving the success factors. Further recommendations for institutions, either school districts or universities include employing the four success factors of goals focused on
student achievement, mutual trust and respect, open and effective communication and roles and responsibilities aligned to goals. Defining these factors need to be contextually-based given the partners’ strengths and abilities. The first factor of student centered goals drives the partnership so that it does not become consumed by the partnership process or the factors themselves. The other factors enable the goals to be realized. While partnership are a recommended strategy for cities, communities, higher education institutions and school districts interested in improving public school achievement as well as community renewal, the partnerships need to employ the success factors within context.

A challenge to case study methodology is that it does not provide for generalization from a sample to a large population, nor does it provide for a causal explanation. Its power lies in its exploratory nature. However, for the field to advance methodologically, at least as cited by Clifford et al. (2008) from their study of over 9,000 articles on partnerships, case studies need clearer definitions of partnerships, success and their success factors. The Penn Alexander partnership was designed specifically for a particular context, but through an in-depth study, this case helps to advance the field methodologically. The case also provides the opportunity for future research in several areas. Researchers should consider a quantitative or mixed methods study in which causal links between the partnership and student achievement could be examined, including which aspects of the partnership are most related to student achievement and a thorough understanding of student achievement by socioeconomic group. A second area would be to look at the relationship of partnership success and demographic changes in the community. Thirdly and related to the partnership components would be to study the
relationship of the financial contribution to project outcomes. With public higher education institutions outnumbering private ones, few institutions are likely to have the financial resources and flexibility of a large, research one, private institution, like Penn.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this project’s research goals is to gain a deep understanding of the Penn Alexander School partnership with the University of Pennsylvania that was formed by Penn with the School District of Philadelphia, and Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Case study methodology was be used to achieve the goals of this research project. This proposed research study is important for several reasons. The literature in this field lacks an understanding of the university-assisted school model developed at Penn, its success and the factors that brought about the success. Urban K-12 public education has evaded most attempts at increasing student achievement; yet a higher education institution-school partnership model in Philadelphia has disproved that claim for a community in dire need of school success. Understanding the fifteen years of this model will contribute to the strategies of successful urban school reform and will better clarify partnerships for success.
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Project: Penn Alexander School Partnership: Understanding Success and its Factors
Interviewee Name, Organization and Title Pseudonym:
Interview Date & Time:
Interview Location:

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the partnership between
the School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the
University of Pennsylvania that lead to the creation of the Penn Alexander School, its
success or lack there of, and the factors that support or hinder success.

Confidentiality: with your permission this interview will be recorded and stored in the
Penn Box. It will be labeled with a pseudonym and transcribed by Moorestown
Transcription Services. I anticipate the interview will take about 45 minutes.

Questions:
1. Can you tell me about your role in the partnership?
   a. How did you come to be involved and when?

2. Many people consider the partnership successful. Do you agree?
   a. How do you define success?
   b. Are there unintended consequences of success?
   c. If you don’t view the partnership as successful, why not?

3. The literature on school-university partnerships is consistent on the characteristics
   of successful partnerships (give hard copy of list):

   1. Mutually Beneficial Goals
      (purpose and goals are clearly defined; goals benefit all partners)
   2. Mutual Trust and Respect
      (context acuity - truthfulness about purpose, commitment, roles, respect for
      the other partner’s culture, norms, rules & rewards)
   3. Effective and Open Communication
      (having a culture that encourages open, free and nonjudgmental expression,
      where “agreeing to disagreeing won’t do damage to the relationship)
   4. Roles and Responsibilities Are Clearly Defined
      (leaders champion the idea and to commit resources –human, financial, social,
      political).
      a. Can we go through each one?
i. I would like to know which ones of these you view as relevant to the SDP, Penn, PFT partnership and its success or unsuccessfulness?

ii. What are examples of each?

iii. Is there a defined amount that is needed for each and how are they operationalized (e.g. what does trust look like?)

iv. Do the characteristics need to happen in a particular sequence?

v. Do you think there are other characteristics that were needed that I didn’t mention.

4. The school was not in existence when the partnership formed. How, if at all, did the partnership change once the school was up and running?

5. I know this was detailed set of questions. Thank you for your patience in going through them.

6. Can I also ask is there is anyone in particular that you think I should talk with? Is there someone in particular that you feel would be informative to speak to.

Thank you for your cooperation and time. Please be reminded that your responses are confidential. I hope that you will allow me to contact for follow-up. I also would like to ask that you review my initial findings to ensure that I have accurately captured them. Do you have any questions for me?
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