EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL COLLECTIVE IMPACT PARTNERSHIPS: WHAT MADE THEM SUCCESSFUL?

by

REBECCA PARSHALL

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth DeBray)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how collective impact partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their actions toward raising community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. The researcher sought to understand the collective impact partners' perceptions of the conditions and processes that contributed to these regional outcomes gains over multiple years. This study traced the history of federal policies and growth of intermediary organizations within the educational landscape that has resulted in collective impact as a model for cross-sector collaboration toward commonly identified outcomes. This study was theoretically framed through regional civic capacity, which examines cross-sector actors' ability to influence population-level changes within their policy and political contexts. This study used a process tracing methodology to develop a model for how collective impact partners described their contributions to the postsecondary outcomes while taking into account other regional factors that may have influenced the outcomes, including other programs, policies, and political drivers. Five regions with StriveTogether collective impact partnerships were identified through these selection

criteria: improving regional postsecondary enrollment and completion for Black and Latino students over multiple years leading up to 2019. This study found seven pre-conditions and value adds of participating in collective impact; cross-sector collaboration, data capacity, an equity focus, support from StriveTogether, a cradle to career approach, investment from regional leadership, and leveraged funding all contributed to collective impact partners' capacity to improve postsecondary outcomes. The process through which effective collective impact partnerships influenced postsecondary outcomes followed seven steps: 1) convening cross-sector partners, 2) reviewing disaggregated data, 3) reviewing predictive research factors, 4) conducting landscape analyses, 5) developing or scaling strategies, 6) testing effectiveness of strategies, and 7) repeating process steps as necessary. These findings have significant implications for other collective impact initiatives seeking to raise regional outcomes, school districts and higher education institutions seeking to improve student outcomes, funders seeking to invest in successful collective impact, the business community seeking to close the gap between educational attainment and labor market demands, and researchers studying the role of collective impact in educational policy.

INDEX WORDS: collective impact, racial equity, postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary completion, regional civic capacity, process tracing

REGIONAL POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES GAINS: THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT, POLICY, AND POLITICS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The educational attainment demands placed on the American workforce have been steadily increasing over the past several decades, with the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (2013) reporting that as of 2020 about 65% of jobs require a postsecondary degree. However, by 2018, only 47% of Americans had attained a postsecondary degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This nearly 20-point gap has significant economic implications: the unemployment rate for those without postsecondary degrees is three times higher than it is for those with high school diplomas; and, average earnings for those with postsecondary degrees are more than double than of those without (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Additional individual and societal benefits of postsecondary attainment include higher levels of health, voting and volunteerism, and lower rates of incarceration and utilization of social services (Baum & Payea, 2005).

While overall postsecondary attainment is lower than the labor market demands, the gaps are even wider for traditionally underserved student populations, including low-income students and students of color. For example, “only 35% of low-income high school students obtain a postsecondary credential by age 26, compared to 72% of high-income students” (National College Attainment Network, 2022). Equity gaps exist across racial groups, as well, with 21% of Black Americans and 15% of Latino Americans

holding a bachelor's degree or higher as compared with 35% of White Americans and 54% of Asian Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

In an effort to increase educational attainment to meet workforce demands, states track postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, which measure the percent of each high school graduating cohort enrolling in and completing postsecondary programs within specified amounts of time, rather than the general population's educational attainment levels. In 2019, 22.5% of students who graduated high school completed a four year degree within 5 years (U.S Census Bureau, 2020). Because school districts and institutions of higher education develop action plans based on cohort trends, this study will examine postsecondary enrollment and completion rates rather than attainment rates.

The gap between postsecondary enrollment and completion is the subject of much concern, since the workforce's required 65% postsecondary attainment rate would be met if more of the students who enroll in postsecondary degree programs completed them. Many of the factors that predict postsecondary completion fall under the purview of high school preparation before students enroll in postsecondary institutions. These factors include rigorous academic preparation (Goodwin, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2017), advanced course-taking (Smith, Hurwitz, & Avery, 2017), financial aid information and aid application assistance (Bettinger et al, 2012), and college entrance exam preparation (Hurwitz et al, 2015).

However, while these preparations for postsecondary success should happen during students' high school years, school districts are generally not held accountable for these postsecondary predictive measures. School districts are instead held accountable for other outcomes that can be measured before high school graduation, such as math and

reading assessment scores, and school culture indicators like attendance and discipline rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This lack of connection between the k-12 education system and the postsecondary education system likely contributes to the nation's low postsecondary completion rate. Rather than function as a continuous system, American k-12 education and higher education operate separately (Rippner, 2013). In response to this silo effect in education, multiple collaborative efforts have developed within the past several decades. These collaborative efforts can be defined under the umbrella term 'intermediary organizations.'

Intermediary organizations (IOs) are extra-governmental organizations that seek to influence agendas and outcomes within public education (Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray, 2011; DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Brand, 2015). IOs can take different organizational forms, including advocacy groups, think tanks, nonprofits, interested industry partners, and foundations. While the scope of this paper covers education, IOs operate within fields other than education, such as housing, transportation, healthcare, and child and family welfare. As early as 2001, for example, Pravetti et al. documented the various forms and functions of IOs within welfare administration. In one of the first studies on IOs within education, Honig (2004) highlighted the need for IOs: "School district central administrators, school principals, and other education leaders face contemporary policy demands that exceed their traditional capacity for action and, increasingly, they call on 'intermediary organizations' to help with implementation" (p. 65). It is in helping to meet these increased demands on educational systems that IOs justify their funding and contributions.

A defining feature of IOs is how they broker between multiple organizations, including between k-12 school systems and postsecondary institutions. Drawing on Berger & Neuhas' 1977 research, Honig (2004) provides the following IO definition: "Intermediaries are organizations that occupy the space in between at least two other parties... [and] operate independently of these two parties and provide distinct value beyond what the parties alone would be able to develop or to amass by themselves" (p. 68). Honig (2004) further identifies five dimensions of IOs: they operate between various levels of government; the composition of each IO varies; the location of each IO varies; the scope of each IO's work ranges; and IOs have differing funding sources. In this sense, while IOs broker relationships and outcomes that single organizations may struggle to do, IO is a broad term that can take many forms. Similarly, Biebel et al. (2013) broadly defines features of effective IOs, including the ability to build trust, maintain neutrality and transparency, and facilitate collegiality and enthusiasm amongst partnering organizations.

Collective impact organizations, which are a type of intermediary organization, are the focus of this study. As coined by Kania and Kramer in 2011, collective impact is a "commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" (p. 36). Within education, collective impact can bridge k-12 education with postsecondary and workforce development outcomes through a "cradle to career" approach (StriveTogether, 2022). Many of these collective impact partnerships identify and work toward improving key indicators along the cradle to career pipeline, such as kindergarten readiness, third grade reading proficiency, eighth grade

math proficiency, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary completion, and workforce readiness (StriveTogether, 2022).

As regional collective impact partnerships have developed over the past decade, researchers and practitioners have identified similar, evolving key components of what constitutes collective impact. Kania and Kramer (2011) identified the management conditions necessary: a "common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, [and a] backbone" organization. Cabaj and Weaver (2016) describe how collective impact movements are built: through "community aspiration, strategic learning, high leverage activities, inclusive community engagement, [and as] containers for change." And StriveTogether, the national umbrella organization for collective impact education partnerships, has a theory of action with these elements: "shared community vision, evidence-based decision making, collaborative action, [and] investment and sustainability" (2019).

Collective impact practitioners often aim to bridge gaps within systems, such as the transition from k-12 to postsecondary education, in recognition that there are many outside factors and pre-conditions that affect school systems' ability to deliver on the promise of equitable outcomes for all students. These outside factors, which include family and community dynamics, student health, and access to resources, often fall under the purview of other sectors. Collective impact partners, then, purport to share the responsibility for educational outcomes within a community across school systems, governmental agencies, non-profits, philanthropy, and business. The collective impact partnerships seeking to increase postsecondary attainment attempt to do so by creating common regional agendas that support school districts and postsecondary institutions in

meeting key outcomes. Collective impact partnerships operate through multiple means, including by studying local data, reviewing national research, and listening to community voice to build and implement action plans to improve key outcomes such as postsecondary enrollment and completion (StriveTogether, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

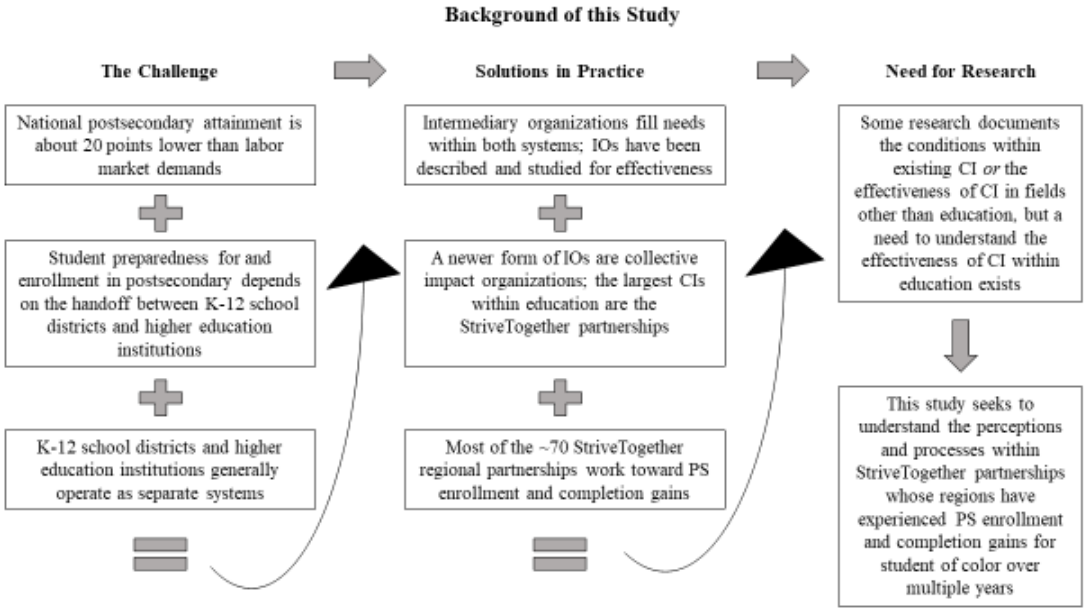
The purpose of this study was to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. While there is some research about collective impact as a model for social change (ORS Impact, 2018; Jolin, Schmitz & Seldon, 2012; Schoenberger, 2018; FSG, 2016; Cabaj, 2016), there are many opportunities for studying collective impact's role within education. This study contributes to the literature on intermediary organizations in education by describing how collective impact partners organize and drive outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study explored collective impact partners' perceptions of the specific activities and efforts associated with postsecondary success measures. The sites selected for study have experienced regional growth in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color over multiple years, which provided a lens into understanding whether and to what extent the collective impact approach may have contributed to these outcomes. There is currently very little published literature examining collective impact within education, and no known studies have sought to understand partners' perceptions of their efforts in relation to regional outcomes improvements. Additionally, by studying

sites that have experienced outcomes gains specifically for students of color as opposed to overall, aggregated gains, this study contributes to the literature on racial equity within education. This study also contributes to an understanding about the politics of cross-sector efforts by examining the civic capacity of each region. Finally, this study holds practical implications for collective impact partners and policymakers as they seek to improve outcomes along the cradle to career continuum, from early childhood education to k-12 systems to postsecondary institutions. The background of this study is summarized in figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 *Background of this Study*



Research Questions

How do the StriveTogether collective impact partnerships with the highest year over year gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color through the 2018-2019 school year perceive the conditions that contributed to their regions' growth in these outcomes?

a) To what extent and under what conditions do partners perceive the collective impact approach to contribute to population level outcomes? What evidence exists in support of these conditions?
b) How do partners perceive whether systems changes in programs, policies, politics, and governance structures have contributed to the population level outcomes being achieved?
c) What are the other perceived positive or negative impacts of the collective impact approach, intended or unintended, on the community and system?

Overview of Methodology: Qualitative Design and Process Tracing

This study used a qualitative research design to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. This study used a process tracing methodology to construct an implicit and explicit theory of change within each selected collective impact region, and to trace the roles of collective impact partners as well as the other policies and politics at play within their regions. Process tracing is "the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 7).

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks: Regional Civic Capacity and Implementation

Two theoretical frameworks supported the conceptualization and analysis of this study: regional civic capacity and implementation. In its initial iteration, civic capacity described the development and sustainability of diverse coalitions across political, social,

and industry sectors of urban communities in pursuit of common goals (Stone et al., 2001). Civic capacity was developed as a concept by Stone in 1998, and "includes the active participation of educators and non-educators in pursuit of a change agenda for the public schools" (Shipps, 2003, p. 844). Shipps (2003) posits two perspectives for building civic capacity within urban school reform efforts:

> "One views reform as a long, steady process of improving our empirical knowledge about the changes required to meet the needs of disadvantaged children. The other situates urban schools in big city politics and focuses on the civic capacity necessary to generate and sustain change... A deeper theoretical understanding... is needed to resolve the 'going to scale' problem that frustrates education reformers" (p. 841).

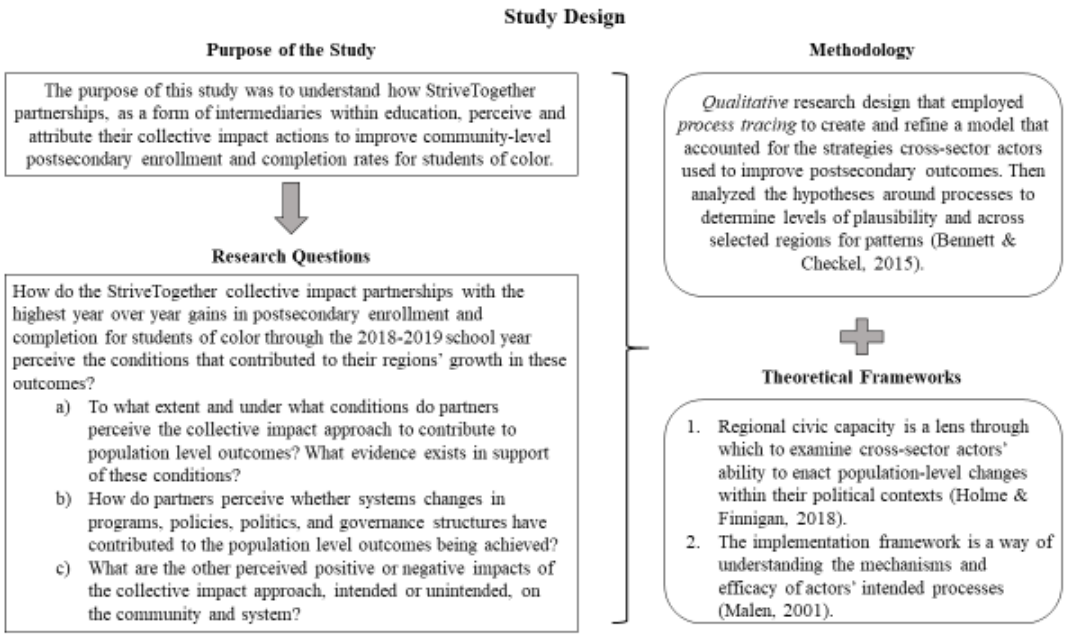
It is this 'going to scale' problem that many IOs seek to address, by building coalitions that either directly create educational programs or affect change indirectly through advocacy, research, policy, and funding. This very closely mirrors the organization and stated purpose of StriveTogether partnerships. A later version of the civic capacity framework, developed by Holme & Finnigan (2018), framed this study's focus on regional politics and policies, and cross-sector actors' perceptions of their ability to affect changes to them.

Another theoretical lens through which the advocacy and policymaking of IOs can be understood is Malen's politics of implementation framework (2001), which situates interest groups as key actors in the success or failure of district initiatives and educational reform strategies. In this light, IOs

> "May develop platforms, recruit spokespersons, disseminate information, seek out sympathetic allies, form strategic alliances to advance their programmatic preferences, develop linkages with organizations that might enhance their access to and credibility with policy makers, and otherwise work to influence the definition and resolution of education policy issues" (Malen, 2001, p. 176).

Malen's implementation framework has been used in many subsequent studies, including Honig's 2009 research on how external organizations influence the implementation of school-level and central-office reform strategies. This implementation framework helped the researcher frame participants' descriptions of their processes and perceived impact on regional postsecondary outcomes. This study's design, including the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and theoretical frameworks, is summarized in figure 1.2 below.

Figure 1.2 *Study Design*



Definition of Key Terms

Backbone. The support infrastructure for a collective impact initiative (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Collaboration. A process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can explore constructively their differences and search for (and implement)

solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Collective Impact. A commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Evaluation. Systematic inquiry to inform decision-making, judgements and learning. Systematic implies that the evaluation is a thoughtful process of asking critical questions, collecting appropriate information, and then analyzing and interpreting the information for a specific use and purpose (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Impact. The ultimate, social, economic and/or environmental effects or consequences of the collaborative. Impacts tend to be more comprehensive and longer-term achievements. They may be positive, negative, and/or neutral (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Indicator. An expression of what is/will be measured or described; evidence which signals achievements, what you wish to measure. Answers the question, "how will I know it?" (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Input. Resources, including staff, time, materials, money, equipment, facilities, volunteer time etc. that go into a collaborative or its programs. Resources include investments made by an organization, the community, governmental unit, staff, volunteers, collaborative members, and/or participants (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Intermediary Organizations. Extra-governmental organizations that seek to influence agendas and outcomes within public education (Lubienski, Scott, & DeBray,

2011; DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014; Scott & Jabbar, 2014; Brand, 2015)

Output. What comes out of a collaborative or its programs. The activities, events, services, relationships, products generated by the collaborative (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Outcome. The end result; the effect of the collaborative effort. Outcomes answer the questions "so what?" What difference has the collaborative made in people's lives? Whose lives? Outcomes may be intended or unintended, positive and negative. Outcomes fall along a continuum from immediate to intermediate to final outcomes, often synonymous with impact (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

Partnership. The group of cross-sector actors convened by the backbone organization.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Roadmap

The purpose of this study was to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improvements in community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. To this end, it is necessary to understand the policy and administrative contexts in which collective impact initiatives have arisen and the legal contexts under which they comply. The first section of this literature review describes federal education policies from the last half-century and the effect they have had on collaborative initiatives within education. The second section details the administrative and legal requirements involved in collecting and sharing student data, and the role of student data in collective impact efforts. The third section describes how intermediaries have been described and have grown over time, as well as the primary roles intermediaries play in education: advocacy and policymaking, research production and utilization, and funding. The fourth section explains how collective impact organizations function as a form of intermediary, and includes information about StriveTogether, the collective impact organization that is the subject of this study. The fifth section details how collective impact has been previously studied and measured. The final section reviews how several previous studies have applied the theoretical frameworks used in this study.

Federal Policies

Federal education policies have the ability to support or detract from the growth of intermediary organizations, either directly through mandates or indirectly through the ecosystems they influence. A review of these policies shows a general upward trend in the growth of intermediaries in response to the increasing demands placed on school districts to provide more equitable education for all student subgroups. Intermediary organizations, defined as non-governmental actors such as nonprofits, advocacy groups, and industry partners, among others, can fill roles that fall outside of the capacity of school districts (Lubienski et al., 2011; Scott & Jabbar, 2014). To be successful and sustainable, these partnerships must be mutually beneficial to all parties involved, and work toward the goal of improving student achievement. This section includes a review of the following policies: Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind Act, Race To The Top, Every Student Succeeds Act, Common Core State Standards (impactful on IOs, though not federal policy), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The first major federal policy to influence public education was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, signed into law by President Johnson as a part of his 'war on poverty.' The purpose of the original ESEA was to provide equal educational opportunities to all students. To ensure equal opportunities for all students, ESEA established a funding mechanism, Title I, to federally supplement state and local governments' costs of educating low-income students. As a result of multiple

amendments to the act, there are now seven ways in which Title funding supports the implementation of federal mandates:

Table 2.1 *ESEA Title Funding Provisions*

Title	Provision
I	Education for the disadvantaged
II	Staff professional development
III	English language acquisition
IV	21st century community learning centers
V	Flexibility and accountability
VI	Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native education
VII	Impact aid

School districts need to provide justification for pulling down these federal funds, and they can do so by either expanding their internal staff capacity or by contracting with outside providers. For example, under Title II, a school district could either build internal capacity by creating positions for instructional coaches or it could contract with outside professional development providers. Similarly, Title IV funding might be used to create a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) coordinator position within a school, or a school might hire an outside provider to bring hands-on STEM learning experiences into the school on a regular basis. Outside providers make themselves more marketable by navigating the federal funding sources that may be used to pay for their services. In this sense, Title funding has encouraged the growth of intermediaries that contract with school districts by providing funding sources that can be spent on external vendors.

The ESEA's influence on intermediary growth extends beyond just vendors providing Title-related services to schools, however. Because the purpose of Title I is "to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (ESEA), many educational policy and advocacy organizations have been established in the decades following the original ESEA, in part to lobby on behalf of their interpretations of what constitutes "a fair, equitable, and high-quality education." These organizations span the political spectrum, from Democrats for Education Reform, which supports "elected Democrats and Democratic candidates who will put student interests first and pursue the bold and innovative changes necessary to give every child in America—especially students from low-income families and students of color—a high-quality public education" (Democrats for Education Reform, 2020), to the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute, which "encourages personal responsibility; empowers parents, communities, and educators; overhauls outdated institutions; battles one-size-fits-all bureaucracy; and promotes the values that help fuel America's astonishing success" (American Enterprise Institute, 2020). These advocacy groups exist on the national, state, and local levels, and can take broad forms, such as the Aspen Institute, which targets more issues than just education, conducts original research, and provides leadership development (Aspen Institute, 2020), to narrowly focused groups, such as Girls Who Code, whose "mission to close the gender gap in technology and to change the image of what a programmer looks like and does" through educational reforms (Girls Who Code, 2020). Thousands of these organizations now exist, and their growth can at least partly be attributed to the ESEA's codification of "fair" and "high-quality" language as the national expectation for public education.

No Child Left Behind Act

Signed into law by President G.W. Bush, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was the 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA. The NCLB dramatically shifted the dynamic of public education by implementing sweeping accountability measures for states and school systems seeking to receive their federal funding. Prior to NCLB, each state had the authority to implement as few or as many assessments as it deemed appropriate. The NCLB required that states develop student assessments, administer them, record student performance, and develop plans to ensure that all students were proficient (NCLB, 2001). Furthermore, student data could not be reported simply in the aggregate, as it oftentimes previously had been. Rather, NCLB required that student subgroup data be reported as well, prompting a serious examination of achievement gaps across gender, socio-economic status, race, and disability status. Subgroup reporting also facilitated comparisons across schools and districts, which has allowed for highlighting and learning from schools that are performing well with traditionally underserved subgroups, and also allowed for public scrutiny into schools that are performing well below the mean with those same subgroups. As it relates to intermediary organizations, NCLB's increased emphasis on standardized testing accelerated not only the growth of advocacy groups that gained access to new and disaggregated data sources, but also the growth of companies that develop and administer student assessments.

In addition to requiring state assessments and increased student data reporting, the NCLB also implemented more stringent requirements on teacher qualifications, with expectations that all teachers be "highly qualified," as defined by valid state certification in the content areas they teach (United States Department of Education, 2020). Increasing

teacher certification requirements spurred the need for providers who could train, certify, and recertify teachers. While some school districts have created their own certification programs, many teachers have to seek certification through agencies outside of their employers, such as Regional Education Service Agencies, university programs, or alternative certification programs such as Teach For America (TFA) or TNTP Teaching Fellows. Besides providing certification programs, organizations such as TFA and TNTP play other intermediary roles, including advocacy and policy lobbying, and through their own research production. These alternative certification programs have grown quickly in the past two decades. In fact, in the 2015-2016 school year, about 18% of teachers were alternatively certified (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Race to the Top

While NCLB facilitated the growth of assessment companies, teacher certification program providers, and advocacy groups interested in newly available data sources, these areas continued to grow under President Obama's 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) program. RTTT was a competitive grant program funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to the tune of $4.35 billion (United States Department of Education, 2020). While NCLB's accountability measures were largely unpopular with educators (Dee & Jacob, 2010), RTTT built upon these accountability measures, but made them optional by offering incentive funding to states that chose to implement them. In order for states to earn this grant funding, they had to submit plans for building comprehensive teacher evaluation systems, adopting common curriculum standards, creating data collection systems, and addressing chronically underperforming schools (United States Department of Education, 2020). Only 19 states received RTTT funding (United States

Department of Education, 2020), and those states implemented significant overhauls in their curriculum standards and standardized assessments, school turnaround mechanisms, including charter school effectiveness measures, and educator effectiveness evaluation programs (Dragoset, 2016). All of these target areas allowed for hosts of new intermediary organizations to offer programs and services. However, states that did not receive funding were just as likely as states that did receive funding to build out their data collection systems (Dragoset et al., 2016). It is significant that RTTT did not necessarily influence the growth of data systems because these systems are large, expensive, and require quite a bit of infrastructure and maintenance (Anagnostopoulus et al., 2013).

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, NCLB was replaced by the ESEA, which was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This bill marked the movement of external accountability measures away from the United States Department of Education and back toward states. States still need to meet many of the student achievement expectations established over the past several decades, but have more autonomy in determining what constitutes success and how to reach those success metrics (ESSA, 2015). Although there is flexibility under ESSA, states still have to implement "evidence-based" practices, and ESSA "highlights the role of intermediaries in advancing the use of research in our nation's schools" (McLaughlin, 2016). In fact, McLaughlin (2016) posits that "the law's authors anticipated this concern, which is why they specifically called out the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) to serve as intermediary organizations to assist states and districts in sorting through the available evidence and applying it to their contexts" (p. 3). These RELs have designated staff to help states determine what constitutes

"scientific evidence," and this support goes beyond just referencing strategies contained in the What Works Clearinghouse database. In addition to these "built-in" intermediary supports, many knowledge brokers, of various stripes, have also positioned themselves as interpreters of research, further growing the intermediary information ecosystem.

Common Core State Standards

While NCLB, RTT, and ESSA are federal accountability policies that incentivize and sanction states based on their student achievement data, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are not federally required accountability measures. To the contrary, The CCSS were initiated in 2009 when governors and state education commissioners from 48 states collaborated to standardize the k-12 academic standards that individual states were using (Core Standards, 2020). Prior to 2009, each state had its own set of standards, which made comparing data across states nearly impossible. Additionally, there was wide variability in the rigor of states' standards, as states that reported some of the highest internal proficiency levels were also some of the lowest performing states on the standardized National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests (Core Standards, 2020). So, the CCSS allow for more accurate student achievement comparisons amongst states.

The CCSS adoption began in 2011, when "states began voluntarily adopting the Common Core State Standards based on their existing process for education standard adoption. In most states, the state school board members formally adopted the standards. In others, the decision was made or ratified by the state superintendent of education, State Legislature, or governor" (Core Standards, 2020). As of 2020, 41 states now use the CCSS (Core Standards, 2020). The CCSS are currently developed for just mathematics

and English-language arts (ELA), so states still use their own science, social studies, and other content standards. The CCSS are only standards, not assessments, so states have either purchased tests that companies, such as Smarter Balanced, New Meridian, or PARCC, have made, or created their own (Core Standards, 2020). The CCSS have facilitated the growth of intermediaries that develop assessments, and in some cases, test preparation materials and tutoring services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, reauthorized in 2004, and amended with ESSA's passage in 2015. The original law

> "guaranteed access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to every child with a disability. Subsequent amendments, as reflected in the IDEA, have led to an increased emphasis on access to the general education curriculum, the provision of services for young children from birth through five, transition planning, and accountability for the achievement of students with disabilities" (IDEA, 2020).

The IDEA authorizes both formula grants for special education services to states, as well as discretionary grants to "state educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and other nonprofit organizations to support research, demonstrations, technical assistance and dissemination, technology development, personnel preparation and development, and parent-training and information centers" (IDEA, 2020). These discretionary grants have facilitated the growth of intermediaries providing services in the designated funding areas. Additionally, the implementation of students' IDEA rights can become litigious, opening opportunities for families to retain external advocates and attorneys to represent their children's rights through their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) – another area of growth within intermediaries in the educational sector.

Educational Data and Collective Impact

Data Collection: Privacy and Infrastructure

A common thread that runs through each of the major federal education policies is the increasing requirements they place on the collection and usage of student data. Inherent in the basis of Title I funding in the original ESEA, for example, is that for "disadvantaged" students to receive additional educational resources, they must be identified. In a more granular example, states and school districts use economic status to determine which students qualify for free and reduced-price school lunch (FRPL), and percentages of FRPL students become publicly available data. Following ESEA, NCLB's mandates around the standardized measurement of student performance and educator effectiveness necessitated the growth of data systems that have the capacity to collect, track, and use those data sources. Similarly, the IDEA requires a massive amount of data collection on individual students' progress to inform educational service provisions.

This individual student data that schools, school districts, and states collect must be kept confidential, according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a federal law which stipulates that:

> "Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school... the right to request that a school correct records which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading... [and that] generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record" (FERPA, 2020).

FERPA applies to individual or otherwise identifiable student data, so schools may still report achievement data in aggregate, such as how English learners scored on 3rd grade reading proficiency, or how low-income students scored on 8th grade math proficiency.

However, even the collection and sharing of de-identified student data involves significant ethical questions:

> "Determining what kind of information about the nation's students, teachers, and schools is collected and how it is processed, disseminated, and used, by whom, in what form, and for what purposes involve questions of power. They also reflect and privilege particular ways of thinking, particular values, and particular notions of worth" (Anagnostopoulos et al., p. 7, 2013).

Anagnostopoulos et al. (2013) argues that "the information infrastructure of accountability has given rise to a type of *informatic* power that combines strategic uses of incentives with measurement and computing technologies" (p. 7). The danger of this informatic power is that

> "as large-scale information systems produce increasingly precise measurements of student, teacher, and school performance, they risk substituting precision for validity and distracting from important issues, such as educational equity, diversity, and social justice, that are not easily reduced to or redressed by standardized metrics" (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013, p. 16).

It is within the context of this important and nuanced understanding of standardized data that the researcher studied regional collective efforts in raising two standardized outcomes: postsecondary enrollment and completion.

Collective Impact and Data

This study sought to understand the processes and perceptions of collective impact partnerships within education that have experienced strong, year over year, regional gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color. The researcher selected these partnerships, in part, from data provided by StriveTogether, a national organization for 68 regional collective impact partnerships in education. To this end, it is necessary to understand the role data plays in StriveTogether's mission and operations.

StriveTogether's "Theory of Action" is predicated upon the use of "data to illuminate obstacles facing children of color and those living in poverty" (StriveTogether, 2022). Communities that implement StriveTogether's collective impact model measure progress along "cradle to career" outcomes such as Kindergarten readiness, early literacy proficiency, middle grade math proficiency, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and workforce readiness. One of StriveTogether's pillars is "evidence-based decision making," which requires partnerships to "align on outcomes and metrics for success, as well as the processes needed to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data regularly" (StriveTogether, 2021). This centrality in the usage of student data to drive community action required an analysis of this study's findings against Anagnostopoulos et al.'s (2013) cautions around informatic power within the infrastructure of educational accountability and change efforts. Data was a major theme across interview participants, with descriptions about the importance of data-sharing and the democratization of data, as opposed to secretive data practices.

Growth of Intermediary Organizations

Before the term intermediary organization was used in the education literature, there were other ways of describing similar phenomena of people and organizations that operate outside of providing direct education to students by instead influencing agendas and outcomes within education. Understanding the evolution of non-governmental actors in education is helpful in understanding the present context of intermediaries and collective impact partnerships. Below are some of the ways in which these actors have been categorized and studied.

Interest Groups

Interest groups, as defined by Malen (2001), can be composed of anyone invested in educational programs and outcomes, including teachers, administrators, school board associations, parent and citizen groups, business, foundations, research centers, policy institutes, think tanks, reform organizations, academicians, and consultants. Within her framework, Malen posited that, up until her 2001 article, interest groups in education had only "received sporadic attention" (p. 169), but that some interest groups had been gaining significant power in setting educational agendas. Arguably wielding the most interest group power, Malen found that "foundations are in a position to frame and fund research and to filter and funnel the findings... they can shape what constitutes the relevant expertise on issues... foundations can also exert influence through the politics of networking" (pp. 175-176). In a way that predicts the later goals of collective impact organizations, Malen (2001) argued that "the potential power of interest groups, like that of other actors, is contingent on how they link to and interact with each other... Thus, knowledge of the alignments and allegiances, connections and communications within and across actor groups becomes critical" (p. 177). The importance of these connections and communications is also apparent throughout other, earlier and alternative descriptions of IOs, including reform support organizations.

Reform Support Organizations

In 2002, the Annenberg Institute's National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts entitled 'School Communities That Work' issued a statement in support of outside organizations helping school districts educate students:

> "School districts currently *cannot* and, indeed, *should not*, provide all the educational and social supports children and youth need to achieve both results

> and equity. Many different individuals and organizations—including schools, parents and families, civic groups, research groups, nonprofits, community and faith-based organizations, private-sector companies, and city agencies—must work together to support and sustain the healthy learning and development of children and youth" (Kronley, 2003, p. 5).

This Annenberg task force prompted the creation, funding, and research of what came to be called Reform Support Organizations (RFOs). In the 1990s, the 'Annenberg Challenge' was a "multiyear, multisite systemic reform initiative" to the tune of $500 million (Kronley, 2003, p. 9). Kronley's (2003) study of RFOs references the term intermediaries, but notes that "what they mediate and whom they come between...is not always clear" (p. 9), indicating a lack of clarity around the constitution and purpose of IOs.

Reform support organizations' efforts around equity across racial and socioeconomic subgroups were not without controversy: "powerful remnants of racial discrimination significantly influence aspects of the educational issues that districts face but are often only indirectly addressed in the district/RSO relationships and the reform strategies that they embrace" (Kronley, 2003, p. 7). While many IOs today have stated goals about closing equity gaps, their actual outcomes remain undocumented in the literature or mixed, at best.

Portfolio Management Model

Another way in which early IOs have been classified is the Portfolio Management Model (PMM), which is a type of school governance model that involves actors beyond the traditional school system (Bulkley et al., 2010). As school governance models that involve non-education actors, PMMs have generally fallen within the context of school choice and market-driven education reforms, with philanthropic foundations playing a

significant role in their development and funding (Bulkley et al., 2010). Because of the three fundamental principles through which PMMs operate—individual school autonomy, accountability measures, and school closures or management changes—they have generally been fraught with multiple levels of political wrestling (Bulkley et al., 2010). PMMs facilitated the growth of non-educators with management acumen moving into the public education sphere, again growing the IO ecosystem.

Education Reform Advocacy Organizations

While the term 'advocacy organization' is generic in nature, a specific form of advocacy organization, which has impacted the politics of education, has been defined in the literature: education reform advocacy organization (ERAO). Typically in opposition to teachers unions, and in support of federal reform policies such as NCLB and RTTT, "these national ERAOs and their counterparts at the state level are focused on enacting sweeping education policy changes to increase accountability for student achievement, improve teacher quality, turn around failing schools, and expand school choice" (McGuinn, 2012, p. 25). The Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) network, which is composed of more than 100 state and national advocacy organizations and represents 31 states, is one of the first and largest ERAOs (PIE Network, 2020). The PIE network lobbies for legislative action on reform issues, including "high standards, aligned assessments, data transparency, and school accountability" (PIE Network, 2020). In addition to developing relationships with legislators to influence reform policy, "the critical first page in the playbook for reform groups is to increase the amount of information available about school system performance" (McGuinn, 2012, p. 26); this serves as a hallmark of ERAOs such as the PIE network and others including 50CAN,

StudentsFirst, Teach Plus, and Educators 4 Excellence. ERAOs, like other intermediaries that operate within public education such as interest groups, Reform Support Organizations, and the Portfolio Management Model, expand the number of actors influencing public education, as well as the amount and direction of funding toward desired outcomes. The next section describes the various functions IOs can play.

Roles of Intermediary Organizations

In his seminal text "The End of Exceptionalism in American Education" (2013), Jeffrey Henig argues that a significant shift in control of schools has occurred in the last several decades—from locally and singly controlled to decentralized, privatized, and broadly influenced systems. While Henig focuses primarily on changes to school governance structures, he makes frequent reference to the role of non-education actors in this new landscape. While these new influencers bring hazards, Henig also writes of the positive potential of intermediaries, including:

> "a more broadly conceptualized understanding of education that incorporates schools and teachers into a multisector approach to improving learning and narrowing learning gaps, and a more inclusive constituency to project and protect the collective interest in public education and sustain those efforts over time" (Henig, 2013, p. 164).

In this vein, educational IO's currently play multiple roles, including advocacy and policymaking, research production and utilization, and funding.

Advocacy and policymaking

Advocacy and policymaking within IOs is a specialized role, specific to the scope of each organization's agenda. For example, some national IOs advocate for broad policy areas such as for traditional district school teachers and funding (American Federation of Teachers, 2022), whereas others advocate for school choice and charter school policies

(Center for Education Reform, 2022; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2022). Some IOs, however, operate under general visions for broad social issues, and education is just one of many focus areas (Urban Institute, 2022). Other IOs are more narrowly focused on a specific areas of practice within education, such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2022).

Intermediaries that engage in policy and advocacy often function at the state or local level, as well. In Georgia, for example, an education policy organization is GeorgiaCAN, whose mission is to "identify and advance common-sense policies that put the needs of students first [by] engag[ing] local stakeholders—from community members to policy makers—to advocate for student success throughout the entire public education system" (GeorgiaCAN, 2022). GeorgiaCAN lobbies for policy changes on a handful of issues at a time, including universal ACT/SAT testing and Advanced Placement student exam policies (GeorgiaCAN, 2022). Another statewide policy organization is the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE), which lobbies the state legislature for education policy changes, releases an annual "Top Ten Issues" in Georgia education report, as well as other research briefs, and builds capacity in cross-sector leaders through an "Education Policy Fellowship Program" (GPEE, 2022). IOs such as these seek to bridge the divide between policy and educators' practice. Coburn's early research on the interplay between these system and nonsystem actors highlights the "crucial role" outside organizations have in influencing how teachers understand and implement research and policy (Coburn, 2005, p. 32).

Research Production and Utilization

Another way in which IOs function is through research production and utilization. As is true in many other sectors, there exists a research-practice divide in education, and some IOs attempt to bridge that gap. However, defining research and research utilization can be difficult, due, in part, to limited studies on the topic (Tseng, 2015). The W.T. Grant Foundation, which funds research grants that reduce inequality and which improve the use of research evidence, defines the use of research evidence as that which "can happen in many ways and may involve the direct application of research evidence to decision making, conceptual influences on how decision makers think about problems and potential solutions, strategic uses of research to justify existing stances or positions, or imposed uses that require decision makers to engage with research" (W.T. Grant Foundation, 2022). Another definition of research communication activities comes from Nutley et al. (2009): tailored dissemination, interaction, social influence, facilitation, and reminders and incentives. Alternatively, Klein & Gwaltney (1991) describe three types of research dissemination: spread, which is one-way communication; choice, which provides multiple options; and exchange, which is multidirectional amongst stakeholders. Finally, Qui & Levin (2013) present three, interactive forces within knowledge production, which is their definition of research production and utilization: production (by universities and research organizations), use (by policymakers and practitioners), and mediation (by individuals, organizations, and processes). These definitions encompass the wide-ranging ways in which researchers discuss research production and utilization.

To further define the transfer of knowledge and information between producers and consumers, Lavis et al. (2003) posit five questions that help guide the process: "What

should be transferred to decision makers? To whom should research knowledge be transferred? By whom? How? With what effect?" (p. 244). Lavis et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of building a "two-way 'exchange' process" between researchers and decision makers (p. 227), as well as "moving beyond measuring *whether* research knowledge is used in decision making to measuring *how* research knowledge is used becomes important" (p. 228). This vision for two-way information sharing is only sometimes realized, however, as Tseng (2012), who argues that "connecting research and practice should be more of a two-way street than is implied in research-to-practice approaches" (p. 5), finds significant gaps between research and practice. Rather, Tseng (2012) finds that the ways in which different people and organizations interpret and use research vary widely, and is based on their relationships with the research producer, as well as their organizational, political, and policy contexts. Furthermore, the terms evidence, research, and evidence-based are sometimes used interchangeably, and need to be defined in each context (Tseng, 2012).

As it pertains to IOs, Tseng (2012) finds that "there is considerable variability across intermediaries in their research expertise, but there is little denying their significant roles in leveraging research to shape policy and practice" (p. 5). Furthermore, some "contend that intermediaries are better transitioned as translators [of research] because their jobs focus on influencing policy and practice, and they already have trusted relationships with decision-makers" (Tseng, 2012, p. 12). However, another "option is for intermediary organizations to be relationship brokers, bringing researchers and decision-makers together to focus on core problems of practice or policy" (p. 12). Some IOs bridge multiple roles in research production and utilization, including Education First and

Bellwether Education Partners, both national organizations that produce original research, repackage others' research for their clients' understanding and implementation, and broker relationships amongst researchers and research consumers, in addition and in service to their education consulting services. For example, Education First (2022) offers toolkits that include research and policy briefs, as well as implementation resources, on a variety of topics, including district teacher preparation programs and social-emotional learning. Several of Bellwether's (2022) service areas include policy analysis and research, and implementation support, in addition to their original research and opinion publications. Tseng (2015) finds that IOs, which include Education First and Bellwether, as well as other "advocacy groups; membership associations for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; think tanks; news organizations; and funders" play an important role in the research production and utilization process, by "interpreting, packaging, and distributing research evidence for policymakers and practitioners" (p. 18).

Other research IOs exist more solidly in the research production space, such as the American Educational Research Association, which "strives to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good" (AERA, 2022), and the American Institutes for Research, which encompasses more than just educational research, but whose education research "spans the learning lifespan—from pre-K to postsecondary education, career readiness, and adult education—and focuses on a wide range of topics, including STEM, social and emotional learning, and state and federal education policies" (AIR, 2022).

Debray et. al's (2014) study on how New Orleans intermediaries use research to drive charter school policy provides a case study on research utilization within IOs. Importantly, DeBray et. al (2014) defines "intermediaries not simply as organizations that are contained solely between knowledge producers and consumers, but also as larger, more comprehensive organizations that exhibit some function of influencing what and how research is promoted to policymakers—that is, they serve an intermediary function, but may be researchers, producers, and/or consumers as well" (p. 176). In the New Orleans educational landscape, "claims about the need for 'research evidence' may have less to do with the research, and more to do with the need to get the 'right' evidence to policymakers" (p. 179). This call for research evidence is fraught with conflicts because "...there are in fact many perspectives and interests offering very different, and often conflicting, answers as to what evidence should count for demonstrating evidentiary support for policy alternatives and which alternatives should be discarded" (p. 182). This has led to the understanding that "there is much of a rational process of exchange between IOs and policymakers at the state and local levels" (DeBray et al., 2014, p. 195).

Funding

While foundations do not provide direct educational programming, they are, through their funding influence, an important type of IO. Foundations have been playing an increasingly significant role in shaping educational programs and policy by offering funding as an incentive for prioritized outcomes (Ferris, 2008; Scott, 2009; Scott & Jabar, 2014). At a national level, "education accounts for 20% of grant dollars and of that, 35% goes to K-12 education philanthropy" (Ferris, et al., 2008, p. 706). This funding does not come without strings attached. Foundations have agendas, and research from the last

decade illuminates that philanthropic agendas are often in the reform camp. Ferrare (2017), for example, analyzed the flow of foundation dollars to Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) between 2009-2014, and found that philanthropic foundations prefer to fund national-level advocacy and charter management organizations (CMOs) to advance charter school reform" (p. 35). These "results reveal substantial geographic inequality in how foundations fund charter school reform and provide insight into the potential ways public policy and research can shape how these funds are distributed in the future" (Ferrare, 2017, p. 35). On a more granular level, within the context of education reform initiatives, "foundations tend to gravitate toward professional development and school governance and management" (Ferris, 2008, p. 726). The process of foundations setting funding and policy agendas involves multiple dimensions, including determining the level of political engagement that will advance the foundation's goals, identifying partners such as other funders, advocacy groups, or other community organizations, and defining problems and metrics for success (Ferris, 2008).

Scott et al.'s (2015) research provides a case study into the intermediary role funders have been playing within the public education landscape in Denver, where the growth of philanthropists there has been significantly shifting education policy toward reform initiatives by offering funding incentives to organizations that implement market-based approaches. In this sense,

> "Foundations are therefore not just funders—they are also investors and private policy makers. They view their financial support as an investment in realizing the adoption and implementation of incentivist reforms. In this sense, we argue that they are the 'hub' that moves the 'spokes' in a local IO coalition. Research production, use, and dissemination are the key strategies that philanthropists use to fund, launch, and protect their investments in educational reform" (Scott et al., 2015, p. 15)."

This interplay between research production and utilization and funding has led to a complicated definition of IOs and relationship between various IOs. For while "these foundations generally did not conduct their own research or fund research directly, but rather funded the *dissemination* of research findings" (Scott et al., 2015, p. 14), they are operating in and oftentimes creating "ideologically charged environments" (p. 15). Tomkins-Stange (2016) explores this tension between funding and agenda-setting in 'Policy Patrons: Philanthropy, Education Reform, and the Politics of Influence' by examining the funding practices of four major foundations: the Ford Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. Tomkins-Stange (2016) argues that the Gates and Broad foundations use venture philanthropy, which is a managerial skill like those taught in business schools, to influence reform policies, whereas the Kellogg and Ford foundations use a scientific, or research-based approach, to investing in projects that support research, universities/professors, and think tanks. The former try to influence policy through an outcomes-based approach, and the latter attempt to influence policy through research, but both are ways of exerting intermediary influence into education.

The venture philanthropy funding approach taken by the Gates and Broad foundations, as well as many smaller foundations, lays bare several fundamental tensions:

> "Venture philanthropy distills the notion of where educational expertise rests, away from schools of education within universities and the teachers and leaders they prepare and toward alternative structures that draw on nontraditional educational reformers, many of who come from business, law, or advocacy. These shifts in philosophy and practice, if widely implemented, pose significant changes for the way poor students of color are educated" (Scott, 2009, p. 132).

In addition to questions about who constitutes an educational "expert" and who gets to set the policy agenda, venture philanthropy overwhelmingly favors market-based reforms

that oftentimes financially benefit new philanthropists because "they often believe that educational reform could greatly benefit from the strategies and principles that contributed to their financial successes in the private sector" (Scott, 2009, p. 107). This level of wealth also allows for philanthropists to benefit from "tax shelters on their endowments" (Scott, 2009, p. 109) without the accountability or transparency built into democratic processes such as school board governance. Additionally, race and class inequities within philanthropy persist, with wealthy and predominantly white philanthropists maintaining undue influence over programs and policies that disproportionately affect the poor and racial minorities, all while using new funding language: "grants become investments, programs are ventures, and measures of impact generally involve the ability to scale up an initiative" (Scott, 2009, p. 115). Ultimately, Scott (2009) posits:

> "Wealth that comes largely from favorable public policies is now directed into mostly tax-exempt foundations, where trustees and philanthropists directly shape public policy for the poor, without the public deliberative process that might have been invoked over school reform policies were that money in the public coffers" (p. 128).

This major shift in how IOs influence public education through funding has significant implications for whether and how collective impact organizations coalesce to influence educational outcomes.

Collective Impact as Intermediaries

This section of the literature review describes how collective impact developed as a form of intermediary, including the history and definitions of collective impact and a review of the largest educational collective impact organization, StriveTogether.

History and Definition of Collective Impact

As a framework that functions both inside and outside of education, collective impact is a form of IO, and is a way for communities to collaboratively pursue solutions to challenges such as graduation rates, homelessness, and healthcare. As coined by Kania and Kramer in 2011, collective impact is a "commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" (p. 36). Within education, collective impact attempts to bridge k-12 education with postsecondary and workforce development outcomes through a "cradle to career" approach (StriveTogether, 2022). Collective impact organizations are often called partnerships. These partnerships identify and work toward improving key indicators along the "cradle to career" pipeline, such as kindergarten readiness, third grade reading proficiency, eighth grade math proficiency, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary completion and workforce readiness (StriveTogether, 2022).

As regional collective impact partnerships have developed over the past decade, researchers and practitioners have identified similar, evolving key components of what constitutes collective impact. Kania and Kramer (2011) identified the management conditions necessary for effective collective impact to take place: a "common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, [and a] backbone" organization (p. 10). Under this definition, collective impact can focus on a variety of content and outcomes, as long as these common conditions are established. Similarly, Cabaj and Weaver (2016) describe how collective impact movements are built: through "community aspiration, strategic learning, high leverage activities, inclusive community engagement, [and as] containers for change" (p. 3). And in another, similar

definition of collective impact, StriveTogether, the national umbrella organization for many collective impact education partnerships, has a Theory of Action with these elements: "shared community vision, evidence-based decision making, collaborative action, [and] investment and sustainability." Table 2.2 summarizes these three models of collective impact.

Table 2.2 *Collective Impact Definitions*

Source	Kania & Cramer (2011)	Cabaj & Weaver (2016)	StriveTogether (2019)
Key Components	"Management Conditions" • Common agenda • Shared measurement • Mutually reinforcing activities • Continuous communication • Backbone	"Movement Building" • Community aspiration • Strategic learning • High leverage activities • Inclusive community engagement • Containers for change	"Theory of Action" • Shared community vision • Evidence-based decision making • Collaborative action • Investment and sustainability

Collective impact practitioners often aim to bridge gaps within systems, such as the transition from k-12 to postsecondary education, in recognition that there are many outside factors and pre-conditions that affect school systems' ability to deliver on the promise of equitable outcomes for all students. These outside factors, which include family and community dynamics, student health, and access to resources, often fall under the purview of other sectors. Collective impact partners, then, purport to share the responsibility for educational outcomes within a community across school systems, governmental agencies, non-profits, philanthropy, and business. The collective impact

partnerships seeking to increase postsecondary attainment attempt to do so by creating common regional agendas that support school districts and postsecondary institutions in meeting key outcomes. Collective impact partnerships operate through multiple means, including by studying local data, reviewing national research, and listening to community voice to build and implement action plans to improve key outcomes such as postsecondary enrollment and completion (StriveTogether, 2022).

StriveTogether Partnerships

While not all educational collective impact initiatives work with StriveTogether, it is currently the largest umbrella organization for educational collective impact within the United States. This study examined how several regions with StriveTogether partnerships achieved strong postsecondary enrollment and completion gains for students of color, so it is necessary to understand StriveTogether's vision and operating principles. The national organization supports 68 partnerships across the country, with the mission of partnering "with communities to ensure every child has every chance to succeed because race, ethnicity, poverty and circumstance should not determine opportunity or outcome" (StriveTogether, 2022). StriveTogether's methodology emphasizes "An explicit focus on racial and ethnic equity for youth living in poverty," and the use of the Results Count leadership program and human-centered design principles to drive continuous improvement through data collection and small, frequent tests and changes in practice (StriveTogether, 2022). StriveTogether's annual report states that of their partnerships, the following number are improving outcomes in each of these cradle to career indicators. These improvements are in aggregate, not disaggregated by student demographics, as this study did, which is why StriveTogether's numbers are higher than

the sites selected in this dissertation. It is also important to note that "improved" is StriveTogether's language, but there are no known peer-reviewed studies that correlate or show causation between the partnerships' collective impact actions and the outcomes that improved across the region.

Table 2.3 *StriveTogether Regions with Improved Outcomes in 2019*

Indicator	Number of Partnerships with Improved Regional Outcomes in 2019 (total n = 68)
Kindergarten Readiness	31
Early grade reading	37
Middle grade math	43
High school graduation	54
Postsecondary enrollment	17
Postsecondary completion	27
Employment ready	15

Adapted from StriveTogether (2019)

Approaches to Evaluating Collective Impact

To understand approaches to measuring collective impact initiatives in education, it is necessary to understand how the field of education, in general, measures success. In most fields of inquiry, levels of research evidence begin with information from experts or single, qualitative case studies, then move into descriptive/quantitative studies or cohort studies, then quasi-experimental studies, with the gold standard being randomized controlled trials (RCTs), or better, meta-analyses of RCTs. Within education, as with many social sciences, however, it is difficult to conduct studies that fall within the highest scientific standards of evidence. As Nutley et al. (2002) summarize, "In contrast to the

hierarchical approach in health care, other sectors such as education, criminal justice and social care are riven with disputes as to what constitutes appropriate evidence, there is relatively little experimentation... and divisions between qualitative and quantitative paradigms run deep" (p. 3). While these research challenges are present when measuring the success of discrete singular educational initiatives, such as a reading intervention or an instructional strategy, the challenges are magnified when studying collaborative efforts with cross-sector actors.

In one of the first studies describing collective impact, Kania & Kramer (2011) outlined five conditions for collective impact: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations. While these five conditions provide a container for the work, "Collective Impact initiatives tend to be sprawling efforts with multiple moving parts" (Cabaj, 2014, p. 118). As a result, "Conventional evaluation frameworks fail to account for, or effectively speak to, the complexity of collaborative efforts, especially those that aim to influence policies, systems, and environments and to promote equity" (Hilgendorf et al., 2017, p. 91). Another challenge of measuring collective impact's efficacy is that

> "traditional program evaluation approaches seek to understand the efficacy of individual programs and focus on assessing relatively discrete and fixed interventions. Large-scale collaborative efforts, in contrast, are emergent and steadily adapting, are context-dependent and responsive, and include multiple programs and activities working in mutually reinforcing ways" (Stachowiak et al., 2020, p. 30).

In response to this complexity, researchers studying collective impact have employed various, innovative methodologies to understand how collective impact functions and to evaluate whether collective impact initiatives deliver on their goals of improving population-level outcomes.

Most of the peer-reviewed literature on collective impact evaluation is in community health, a field that has largely pioneered collective impact. This final portion of the literature review first summarizes a recent meta-review of the evaluation approaches used within community health collective impact initiatives, then reviews the methodologies employed in fifteen individual studies of collective impact, ranging in topics including maternal health, childhood obesity, and agricultural practices. While the meta-review (Kegler et al., 2020) provides a strong overview of the ways in which collective impact has been studied, a review of some of these individual studies provides a deeper understanding of how some of them have been employed. Next, because an assessment of educational collective impact initiatives are largely missing in the peer-reviewed literature, the researcher reviews some of the practitioner publications that seek to assess the impact of educational collective impact initiatives, including from groups that work in collective impact such as StriveTogether, Bridgespan, and the Collective Impact Forum. The researcher then reviews the Spark Policy Institute/ORS (2019) study that most closely aligns with the methodological design used in this dissertation. This qualitative study design includes process tracing, which is a way of understanding whether the actions of the collective impact initiative contributed to population-level changes in outcomes.

Meta-review of Community Health Collective Impact

In a meta-review of evaluation approaches used within community health collective impact initiatives, Kegler et al. (2020) identify a primary collective impact assessment challenge: “Evaluations of coalitions can, and often do, focus on the internal functioning of the group, “ (p. 140) without evaluating whether the coalition contributed

to improving the outcomes they are working toward. This challenge has been documented in the several previous meta-analyses of public health coalitions (Anderson et al., 2015, Foster-Fishman et al., 2001, Zakocs & Edwards, 2006), in which "effectiveness was defined broadly and included member perceptions of effectiveness and coalition functioning" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 140). Herein lies the evaluation challenge this dissertation seeks to address: without population-level outcome data that is, through some methodology, connected to the actions of the collective impact, members' perception of implementation is of little value. For example, many of the collective impact evaluation studies examine to what degree Kania & Kramer's (2011) five conditions of collective impact are being implemented; however, it is possible to perceive strong implementation of the conditions, but not positively affect outcomes, or vice versa. Consequently, "the imperative for evaluation of coalition efforts is to provide evidence of impact and outcomes and improve the process by which collaborations operate" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 142).

To differentiate between processes and outcomes, Kegler et al. (2020) reviewed the extant literature in PubMed from 2008-2018 to "examine the range of evaluation methods used to examine coalition outcomes... The paper also reports on whether and how attribution to the coalition was assessed, and whether studies examined associations between coalition characteristics and outcomes" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 142). Notably, "Exclusion criteria included: process evaluation only, community-based participatory research, community–academic partnership, review articles, or national- or state- level coalitions" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 143).

Kegler et al.'s (2020) categorization of data collection methods, description of coalitions and evaluation design, and outcomes assessed was an informative framework for guiding this dissertation. For the 55 included studies, the research team categorized the number of coalitions within each study, the topics addressed by the coalitions (such as asthma or youth development), the framework or theory used to frame the studies, the study design types, the data collection methods used, the temporality of the studies, and the types of outcomes assessed (such as new or strengthened programs or policy and systems changes). Through an analysis of these descriptions, Kegler et al. (2020) posit two findings for researchers studying collective impact to consider. First, "Systematic documentation of community changes combined with population-based pre and post surveys may be an appropriate study design as long as intervention reach and intensity and the time between baseline and follow-up are sufficient" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 152). Second, another

> "Viable design is to develop a logic or conceptual model to guide the evaluation, ideally with empirical support for the various linkages in the model. The evaluation can focus on indicators for short-term and intermediate outcomes in the model and document the roles of the coalition in achieving these outcomes" (Kegler et al., 2020, p. 152).

These two implications guided this dissertation's research design, which developed site inclusion criteria that identified partnerships whose regions had experienced population-level outcomes gains, and included a conceptual model through the use of process tracing.

Collective Impact Assessment within Community Health

Readiness. While some of the collective impact effectiveness literature focuses on outcomes evaluation, which is a way of constructing meaning and possible correlation

after the work has been done, there is also need to assess the conditions that lead to the effective formation of collective impact. To this end, Hajjar et al. (2020), address "gaps in the literature by using evaluative tools to assess the readiness for collaborations within the context of coalition formation" (p. 106). The authors analyze two evidence-based frameworks and evaluation tools for collaborative relationships, which could be applied to collective impact. The first framework, readiness, "refers to the willingness and ability of an organization, community, or coalition to implement an innovation" (Hajjar et al., 2020, p. 106). The researchers develop a framework that examines three components of readiness: "overall capacity, motivation, and innovation-specific capacity" (Hajjar et al., 2020, p. 106), and caution that "readiness is dynamic and changes over time, is specific to a setting, and a particular innovation is relevant across system levels and can be improved through capacity and motivation-building efforts" (p. 107). The second framework, relational coordination, "is a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for task integration through shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, supported by communication that is frequent, timely, accurate, and focused on problem-solving" (Hajjar et al., 2020, p. 108). This definition of relational coordination matches closely with Kania & Kramer's (2011) five conditions for collective impact. Hajjar et al. (2020) combine the readiness and relational coordination frameworks to evaluate organizational readiness for collaboration in a collective impact effort in South Carolina working to improve community-level health outcomes. This readiness approach is useful to consider in that most other evaluations of collective impact examine implementation or outcomes.

Implementation and policymaking. Landry et al. (2020) studied eight communities that were participating in the Collective Impact Learning Collaborative (CILC) as a way of improving maternal and child health by employing a pre/post survey to assess communities' levels of implementation of the five conditions of collective impact. They did not assess for maternal or child health outcomes. Rather, this study, like many, examined the implementation fidelity of collective impact, which assumes that effective implementation of collective impact will lead to the desired community-level outcomes.

On the governance, advocacy, and policy levels, Michaud-Leternou et al. (2018) study maternal and child health through one large case study of the joint initiative between Alive & Thrive (A&T) and UNICEF in seven Southeastern Asian countries. While Michaud-Leternou et al. (2018) also analyze the practices of these countries against their implementation of the five conditions of collective impact, they do so in light of how collective impact can play advocacy and policy roles, something many other papers do not examine. They attribute the minimal focus on policy within collective impact to the community setting in which many collective impact efforts exist, rather than the state or country level, which more easily lends itself to advocacy and policymaking. Additionally, the original collective impact framework "does not incorporate an explicit and practical way to carry out advocacy for policy change" (p. 9). At the country-level, however, Michaud-Leternou (2018) found that "actors began to advocate and engage policymakers early in the process and pursued their advocacy efforts during the whole initiative in order to keep the issue on the agenda at all stages of the policy cycle" (p. 7).

Microtrials. Mircrotrials are a rapid, iterative way of determining whether, how, why, and for whom an intervention works. Schindler et al. (2017) studied a collective impact initiative through microtrials, which assessed, in short time periods, the effectiveness of interventions designed to combat toxic stress in children. To address the high levels of toxic stress children experience, an inter-disciplinary team created the Washington Innovation cluster, which does the following: "(a) cocreation of new strategies by researchers, practitioners, and parents; (b) collective pilot testing of diverse approaches linked by a common goal; and (c) a research and evaluation hub that facilitates rapid cycle learning and continuous feedback, with an eye toward scaling" (Schindler et al., 2017, p. 1436). The Innovation Cluster's Theory of Change (TOC) "serves as a tool to help researcher–practitioner teams replace the question 'does it work?' with queries about how, why, and for whom does an intervention work or not" (Schindler et al., 2017, p. 1438). This approach was helpful in guiding this dissertation by providing a framework for asking whether, how, why, and for whom collective impact was effective in raising regional postsecondary outcomes. Within the Innovation Cluster, each working team created and evaluated its own TOC for their focus area within childhood development. The teams then developed microtrials to inform fast continuous improvement: "The assumption underlying this approach is that an initial series of microtrials iterating specific intervention components is likely to yield more valuable information than one large-scale trial" (Schindler et al., 2017, p. 1439). Schindler et al. (2017) conducted several of these microtrials, including one that measured low-income fathers' interactions with their children before and after receiving a training intervention from one of the teams at the Innovation Cluster. Outcomes examined included incidence

of children's behavior problems, and the presence of fathers' responsive parenting skills. While this study positioned the Innovation Cluster as the cause for positive outcomes in fathering and children's development, it does not directly study the independent work of the collaborative. There is a difference between the self-directed work of each team and the intervention Schindler et al. (2017) developed and then studied. A limitation of this approach is the lost connection between the function of the collaborative and the achieved outcomes in any given intervention. A single agency, for example, could implement similar interventions as what Schindler et al. (2017) did and achieve similar results. The remaining challenge is parsing out and assessing cross-sector actors' roles during microtrials to determine whether and to what extent the collaborative approach advanced the desired outcomes.

Systems thinking. Jenkins et al. (2020) studied collective impact approaches to addressing childhood obesity in Australia. The lens through which they examined collective impact is systems thinking, which "analyses meaning attached to actions and power relations between actors, assisting projects to obtain a more sustainable reach" (Jenkins et al., 2020, p. 2). The researchers applied systems thinking evaluation to

> "Sustainable Eating Activity Change Portland (SEA Change Portland)... [which] utilises local community resources and connects stakeholders for collaboration with the aim of delivering sustained change of weight status in children aged 7–12 years, through implementation of community generated and led changes to environments in which children live learn and play" (p. Jenkins, 2020, p. 2).

Researchers interviewed SEA Change Portland Steering committee members and used a protocol to determine their understanding and implementation of systems thinking into their collective impact work in the following phases: initial lead up, process development, establishing community ownership, and community action. A strength of this study is that

it directly examined the role of collective impact in reducing childhood obesity – the intended population-level outcome. However, a weakness is that the researchers only take respondents at face value without linking their responses to this actual outcome.

Capacity building. Complementary to systems thinking, capacity building is a way of increasing collective impact partners' ability to reach shared outcomes. In 2017, Bradley et al. studied Healthy Start's ability to increase capacity through collective impact implementation. Healthy Start is a federally funded program that supports communities in reducing infant mortality and improving maternal and infant health. While Healthy Start has encouraged collaboration within its thirty years of existence,

> "in 2014 it was decided that changing the name of these collaborative bodies from the consortia to "Community Action Network" (CAN), would better describe the commitment to action... [and] adopted Collective Impact as a more structured framework for large-scale change, [representing]...the first time within the US that CI has been used by a federally funded program at this scale" (Bradley et al., 2017, p. 33).

Bradley et al. (2017) examined the perception of early implementation of collective impact within Healthy Start programs as way of understanding collective impact's ability to increase capacity within grantee communities. Data collected included participation rates in collective impact, interviews about grantees' experiences, and surveys "examining changes in knowledge and practices regarding collective impact" (Bradley et al., 2017, p. 36). The researchers did not measure actual outcomes, such as infant mortality rates, nor do they link collective impact to those outcomes. Bradley et al. (2017) acknowledge this limitation, which runs through many collective impact studies: "Intention is different from actual practice. Though grantees reported changes in practices, it remains to be seen if lessons learned fully translate into practice" (p. 38).

Community engagement. Another lens through which collective impact has been studied is in its relation to community engagement efforts. Schultz et al. (2020) position collaborative action and community engagement as ways of improving the "social determinants of health inequities" (p. 152), and provide a framework for collaborative action within community health efforts that includes four main phases: 1) assessment and mobilization, 2) planning, intervention, evaluation and sustainability, 3) and assessment and mobilization, with 4) community engagement remaining constant in every phase. This framework has been used in several other case examples of community health efforts including promoting "maternal and child health (MCH) and to prevent chronic disease, violence, and substance abuse" (Schultz et al., 2020, p. 153). Of interest to this dissertation is the final phase:

> "In the fourth phase, participatory evaluation and sustainability, community partners identify key evaluation questions and related indicators, and engage in sense-making and program improvement. Sustainability of community/system changes over the long term helps assure enduring effects with community health and development outcomes" (Schultz et al., 2020, p. 154).

Additionally, Schultz et al. (2020) established a list of core processes in their toolkit for community health initiatives seeking to implement collaborative action. Some of the assessment-related tasks are to "evaluate the implementation of the intervention and its contributions toward improving outcomes [and to] use information on implementation to celebrate, make adjustments, and assure effectiveness of the intervention (p. 155). How to operationalize these assessment recommendations, however, is not included in this study. While this study provides an overview of how community health collaboratives may engage in collaborative action, it does not directly evaluate the impact of using these steps beyond synthesizing reported information from case studies.

Multi-stakeholder input. Some food and beverage companies have funded collective impact efforts at city, county, and state levels to promote healthy eating and active living, with the aim of reducing obesity. To evaluate these collective impact efforts, "the Collective Impact Community Assessment Scale was designed... to evaluate inputs, resource management, and individual and community outcomes from a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder perspective" (Barata-Cavalcanti et al., 2020, p. 78). Similar to several other assessment models, this tool evaluates desired outcomes, such as changes in professional and systems practices resulting in community reductions in obesity, against fidelity of implementation of the five conditions for collective impact. In this regard, Barata-Cavalcanti et al. (2020) assume that strong execution of the five conditions for collective impact will result in population-level changes.

Translating evaluation tools used for single organizations to collective impact. The RE-AIM framework is used to assess the reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of a public health intervention. Shaw et al. (2019) apply this public health framework which had previously only "been used by researchers to assess the impact of a single research intervention in achieving behaviour change at the individual level" (p. 2) to collective impact initiatives supporting Canadians healing from spinal cord injuries. Shaw et al. (2019) collected qualitative and quantitative data from nine community efforts in each of the five areas of the RE-AIM framework. They found that the primary challenge of using the RE-AIM framework was around data collection and analysis, including standardization across organizations, and adequate funding for its collection, disaggregation, review, and usage for continuous improvement; and these challenges were "exacerbated when using [RE-AIM] to evaluate the collective impact of

multiple autonomous community-based programs delivered by separate organizations" (Shaw et al., 2019, p. 3). Another challenge was that "determining universal indicators that were appropriate to evaluate all nine different programs proved to be difficult... this lack of program standardization affected the way we conceptualized the indicators for all five RE-AIM dimensions and demonstrates a challenge of using RE-AIM to evaluate more than a single autonomous community-based program" (Shaw et al, 2019, p. 9). This standardization challenge also presented in this dissertation study, given the regional and operational differences of the selected StriveTogether partnerships.

Other Fields

While the majority of collective impact evaluation studies are in the community/public health field, there are also several examples within the sciences. In one of these studies, researchers reviewed sustainable agricultural practices in Nigeria. This study examined to what extent "'collective action,' as expressed in terms of social participation, social networks, reciprocity and especially trustworthiness potentially enhances the ability of individuals to cooperate within a social system [could] bring about the necessary development in agrarian settings, including adoption of improved farming activities" (Olawuye & Mushunje, 2019, p. 1310). The researchers collected data on the adoption of collective action farming practices in several states in Nigeria by surveying for participation in any form of collective action, and reviewing for the presence of these sustainability practices. Methodologically, "the study used frequency counts, percentages and means to profile the sampled farmers into adopters and non-adopters based on personal and farm level characteristics" (Olawuye & Mushunje, 2019, p. 1312). Beyond determining whether participation in collective action resulted in an increase in general

sustainability practices, “heterogeneous treatment effects as a function of the treatment propensity was applied to estimate the impact of participation in collective actions on adoption of climate-smart farming technologies in the study area” (Olawuye & Mushunje, 2019, p. 1312). While this study is novel in its field, a design weakness is the broad definition of collective action, which essentially includes any form of formal or informal collaboration rather than a defined collective impact process. This is understandable, given the dispersed nature of agricultural practices in a rural, developing setting, but it does call into question the validity of the findings.

In addition to agricultural practices, collective impact has been studied as a way of combatting invasive species, as documented in Graham et al.’s (2018) article in the journal ‘Conservation Biology.’ Because managing invasive species is a complex problem that requires the coordination of many actors, sectors and policies, the authors examined to what extent collective impact efforts have been used and been successful in addressing this challenge. The authors define collective action as collaborative work “oriented toward subnational strategies that encourage coordination, cooperation, and joint action, rather than concurrent unilateral action” (Graham et al., 2018, p. 287). They identified 32 articles that both fit this definition and addressed invasive species management. It is notable that the authors use a much broader definition of collective impact than is typically used in public health; this is similar to the agricultural study in Nigeria, though slightly more defined. Graham et al. (2018) then subcategorized the collective action approaches from the 32 identified articles into four areas: externally led, community led, comanaged, and organizational coalitions. Developing these four categories allowed the authors to describe the collaborative practices in each setting, as

well as identify the unique challenges each approach faced in managing invasive species. They acknowledged that collective action studies within this field are nascent, so while this study does not evaluate collective action against actual outcomes, it helps by establishing definitions, a framework, and areas of need for future studies. In this sense, Graham et al. (2018) establish a descriptive landscape of collective impact within invasive species management.

Another article within the science fields examines the role of collective impact in engineering education. This paper discusses "how a collective impact approach was utilized to guide the programmatic and evaluation design of Pathways," which is a program designed to integrate innovation and entrepreneurship into undergraduate engineering education (Matthew & Monroe-Wright, 2020, p. 2). Pathways was formed as a collective impact response to the challenges of delivering engineering education that meets the complex and adaptive demands of engineering education. Matthew & Monroe-Wright's (2020) evaluation design involved three key components: "(1) Collaboration of the evaluation team and program staff, (2) The creation of a logic model and (3) alignment of the findings to the initiative's stages of development..." (p. 10). The authors evaluated nine case studies about the implementation of this collective impact model against two outcomes: student exposure and engagement, and institutional change. Their "goal was to optimize and accelerate the outcomes for each of these institutions beyond what would happen on campuses without these interventions," (Matthew & Monroe-Wright, 2020, p. 4) and they evaluated success in each of the five conditions for collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011), outlined here in table 2.4:

Table 2.4 *Application of Kania & Kramer's Five Conditions for Collective Impact*

Condition	Matthew & Monroe-Wright's 2020 Application
1. Common Agenda	Teams used a "landscape analysis tool, the strategic doing process and [Ruth] Graham's 5 success factors... [to] encourage teams to adopt a systemic approach to developing their context specific strategic plan" (p. 5).
2. Mutually reinforcing activities	"Teams developed their own custom strategic plan that leveraged the assets and filled the gaps identified using the landscape analysis tool" (p. 5).
3. Continuous communication	Teams established regular check in calls, webinars, peer group advising, topical work groups, conferences, and workshops.
4. Backbone structures	Structures were built at both the program and institutional levels, and shared measurement systems
5. Shared measurement systems	Share measurement systems were implemented at both the program and institutional levels.

Adapted from Kania & Kramer (2011) and Matthew & Monroe-Wright (2020)

Matthew & Monroe-Wright assume that strong implementation of Kania & Kramer's (2011) five conditions for collective impact will result in the desired outcomes of student exposure and engagement, and institutional change, and thus the study design reflects that assumption. This dissertation did not assume that the five conditions necessarily lead to positive changes in outcomes.

Equity

In 2016, Wolff et al. authored a significant critique of collective impact on the basis that the original five conditions for collective impact established by Kania & Kramer (2011) do not inherently or directly address equity. Wolff et al. (2016) propose that for a collective impact initiative to be successful, there must be an intentional focus

on improving outcomes for traditionally underserved subgroups, which in many regions include Black, Latino, and low-income populations. To this end, Wolff et al. (2016) developed a framework for collective impact partners to use. Their six principles of Collaborating for Equity and Justice (CEJ) are summarized in table 2.5.

Table 2.5 *Equity Framework for Collective Impact*

Principle
1. Explicitly address issues of social and economic injustice and structural racism.
2. Employ a community development approach in which community stakeholders have equal power in determining the coalition's or collaborative's agenda and resource allocation.
3. Employ community organizing as an intentional strategy and as part of the process. Work to build resident leadership and power.
4. Focus on policy, systems, and structural change.
5. Build on the extensive community-engaged scholarship and research over the last four decades that show what works, that acknowledges the complexities, and that evaluates appropriately.
6. Construct core functions for the collaborative based on equity and justice that provide basic facilitating structures and build member ownership and leadership.

Adapted from Wolff et al., 2016; p. 51.

In 2020, Wolfe et al. elaborated on Wolff et al.'s (2016) critique by defining equity as "a lens applied to actions and behavior and a state where outcomes are no longer predictable by identity or demographic markers" (p. 46). Wolfe et al. (2020) provide guidance to collective impact partners as to how to conduct CEJ-centered evaluations. There are several CEJ evaluation frameworks, including a trauma-informed

approach and participatory evaluation, both of which emphasize building racial literacy amongst cross-sector members, and the co-development and co-implementation of strategies with community members who are directly affected at all stages of collective impact efforts and during the evaluation of collective impact's effectiveness.

Similarly, Hilgendorf et al. (2017) "developed an evaluation framework that combines both systems thinking and equity principles and guides the assessment of changes in policies, systems, and environments" (p. 92). Hilgendorf et al. (2017) worked through three layers of questions to develop this systems and equity framework, which they co-developed with a community health coalition in Wisconsin. The first layer focused on the "coalition's theory of change," (p. 94), the second layer sought to define and create metrics for equity, and in the third layer they worked to "define the boundaries, capture relationships, and explore multiple perspectives in each priority system" (p. 96).

Because equity is a lens for this dissertation—by focusing on partnerships with improved outcomes for Black and Latino students—Wolff et al.'s (2016) six principles, as well as contributions from Wolfe et al (2016) and Hilgendorf (2017) provide a framework for understanding the role of racial equity in partnerships' collective impact work.

Practitioner Approaches to Evaluating Collective Impact in Education

While some peer-reviewed research journals have published studies measuring the impact of collective impact, assessment studies also exist in practitioner publications.

These organizations (appendix A) represent much of the practitioner thought leadership within collective impact efforts.

StriveTogether: Theory of Action and Case Studies

As the umbrella organization for 68 regional educational partnerships, StriveTogether provides a Theory of Action and implementation resources to its collective impact partnerships (StriveTogether, 2022). A summary of StriveTogether's work, along with how they measure progress with their partnerships, is published in their annual report. The most recent StriveTogether annual report (2019) includes partnership data, financials, stories of impact from selected partnerships, and network characteristics. It is largely against these network characteristics that StriveTogether measures its success. Two progress measures, the percent of partnerships with outcomes along the seven cradle to career outcomes improving, and the percent of partnerships with disparity gaps across race and socioeconomic status closing, are summarized in table 2.6.

Table 2.6 *StriveTogether Partnership Outcomes*

Outcome	% improving overall outcomes	% closing disparity gaps
Kindergarten readiness	46%	15%
Early grade reading	54%	28%
Middle grade math	63%	28%
High school graduation	79%	50%
Postsecondary enrollment	25%	10%
Postsecondary completion	40%	15%
Employment	22%	13%

Adapted from StriveTogether (2019)

StriveTogether seeks to understand partnerships' progress in improving overall outcomes and in closing disparity gaps through its Theory of Action, which includes gateways, pillars, and principles, summarized in table 2.7.

Table 2.7 *Components in StriveTogether's Theory of Action*

Component	Description
Gateways	"Sets of milestones that a community moves through during its effort to build and strengthen civic infrastructure." There are six gateways under which a partnership may be categorized, from "exploring" to the "systems transformation" level. Each year, partnerships submit a "civic infrastructure assessment" with regional educational data and progress narratives for each indicator; StriveTogether uses this information to label partnerships within the gateways.
Pillars	"Categories of work that are necessary for better, more equitable outcomes for kids and families." The four pillars are evidence-based decision-making, collaborative action, a shared community vision, and investment and sustainability.
Principles	These undergird StriveTogether's collective impact approach; they are to: engage the community, advance equity, develop a culture of continuous improvement, and leverage existing resources.

Adapted from StriveTogether (2019)

In addition to its annual report data, StriveTogether also compiles case studies of partnerships that show success in a given area through highlighted processes, such as using the 'plan, do, study, act' (PDSA) continuous improvement cycle to raise early literacy outcomes, leveraging cross-sector lobbying to increase state education funding, and creating more regional seats for quality-rated early childhood education. StriveTogether's case studies are a mixture of promotional material, regional quantitative data, and qualitative analyses. The case study from partnership 'Seeding Success' in Memphis, Tennessee, for example, highlighted a severe deficit in early childhood

education seats, especially for students of color, which led Seeding Success to develop this plan (p. 6):

> "Seeding Success got the city of Memphis and Shelby County Government to provide $40 million to increase the number of classroom seats for 4-year-old pre-K for the students most in need over the next three years. The plan leverages public sector dollars and a partnership with Maycomb Capital, thanks to an introduction from StriveTogether, which was critical to creating a pay for success model."

Seeding Success and StriveTogether attributed this plan with the following regional successes over the next six years: 5,500 pre-K seats were made available, there was a 5% increase in third grade reading proficiency, and "the percentage of former pre-K students who were kindergarten ready rose from 42% in 2017 to 59% in 2018" (StriveTogether, 2019, p. 7). Seeding Success staff explains its implementation of strategies through StriveTogether's Theory of Action. The report includes anecdotes about how Seeding Success facilitated community engagement, focused on equity and continuous improvement, and leveraged existing assets to bring about these changes. Underpinning everything, Seeding Success prioritized the collection, review, and usage of data to improve their focus indicators. Their Kindergarten readiness data strategy "includes knowing how often children go to school, the types of supports they are receiving and how prepared students are after preschool" (StriveTogether, 2019, p. 10). Seeding Success then used this information to develop, implement, and adjust their action plans, including how to use the investment for early childhood education seats from Maycomb Capital and the city and county governments.

While this dissertation analyzed the processes and perceptions of partnerships whose regions experienced gains, case studies such as the Seeding Success story provide examples of how to conceptualize the StriveTogether Theory of Action, which multiple

interview participants referenced. However, there are two simple, yet significant limitations in the way StriveTogether reports much of their partnerships' successes. First, correlation is not causation; if a region's eighth grade math grade scores improve, we cannot conclusively attribute that growth to the actions of the partnership. Second, outputs are not equal substitutes for outcomes. For example, even if Seeding Success can attribute their funding win to more early childhood education seats, seats are simply an output. The outcome goal is to ensure children are "Kindergarten ready," which, as a standard, is much harder to accomplish and prove than simply offering families with seats in a center, which may or not adequately prepare those children for Kindergarten.

Seminal Manual for Evaluating Collaboratives

Before StriveTogether existed and before the term 'intermediary organization' was coined and studied in the educational literature, Taylor-Powell et al. (1998) published an extensive manual on evaluating coalitions and collaboratives, which until that point were generally being evaluated via traditional program evaluation methods. Importantly, and something many later publications do not include, Taylor-Powell et al. provide a detailed definitions of key terms, including evaluation, impact, indicator, input, outputs, and outcomes which are referenced in this dissertation. The definition of "collaboration, as a process, demonstrates the potential to re-energize and reconnect fragmented systems and to empower participating actors" (Taylor-Powell et al., 1998, p. 1). Further, collaboration occurs in response to complex problems, hard-pressed resources, social fragmentation, disengaged citizens, and rapid, sweeping change (Taylor-Powell et al., 1998, pp. 1-2). This definition is still highly relevant in establishing the need for research on collective impact and its outcomes. Similarly, the context through

which the authors situate the term 'evaluation' is helpful: "in this manual, evaluation is seen as a process of inquiry that facilitates learning rather than merely a tool to determine success or failure. We are advocating an evaluation process that supports and aids the successful development of the collaborative" (Taylor-Powell et al., 1998, p. 2). This form of evaluation may not follow the "goals-based, rational, logical mode of thinking to evaluation" that many "funders demand" (Taylor-Powell et al., 1998, p. 9), but effective evaluation serves many purposes, including as a "process for answering critical questions as well as a way to build capacities in such areas as critical thinking, data collection and analysis, and decision making" (Taylor-Powell et al., 1998, p. 16). While Taylor-Powell et al. (1998) do not directly evaluate a given collaborative, their manual details the life cycle, practices, and processes collaboratives can employ to approach and conduct evaluation.

Bridgespan: Needle Moving Community Collaboratives

In their 2012 Bridgespan publication, Jolin et al. identified one of the most pressing challenges in measuring collective impact efforts: that because "individual nonprofit services are fragmented and dispersed, with each organization typically serving a limited population with specific interventions, funders then measure success at the organizational level, not for the broader community" (2012, p. 2). In response to this sporadic approach to measuring community-level success, the Bridgespan group reviewed more than 100 community collaboratives from across the country and found twelve that were "achieving needle-moving change," as defined by a "10 percent-plus progress on a key community-wide indicator" such as high school graduation or teen pregnancy rates (Jolin et al., 2012, p. 3).

The Bridgespan Group then conducted interviews with these twelve collaboratives to understand the factors that facilitated their success, and reported findings in three areas—core principles, characteristics of success, and supportive resources. They found that all collaboratives had these four operating principles in common: "commitment to long-term involvement; involvement of key stakeholders across sectors; use of shared data to set the agenda and improve over time; [and] engagement of community members as substantive partners" (Jolin et al., 2012, p. 4). Additionally, these successful collaboratives shared the following characteristics of success: a shared vision and agenda; effective leadership and governance; deliberate alignment of resources, programs and advocacy toward what works; and sufficient resources. Finally, the resources these collaboratives needed to succeed included knowledge, tools, technical assistance from peers and experts, policy changes, and sufficient funding.

A significant limitation of this Bridgespan study is that the researchers take at face value the assumption that growth on the community indicator is attributed to the actions of the collaborative. It is possible that the collaborative's actions had nothing to do with the community's growth and that success was actually due to factors outside of their control. Or, even worse, it is possible that the collaborative's actions hindered growth on the indicator. This dissertation seeks to address this limitation found in many collective impact studies by differentiating between the intended and unintended negative, positive, and neutral results of collective impact partners' actions.

Global Development Incubator: Making Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives Work

There are several key differences between the Global Development Incubator's (GDI) 2015 study and the other studies in this literature review, but these differences also serve as reasons for inclusion—to provide a broader perspective of collective impact evaluation. First, because GDI's focus is international, the collective impact efforts that GDI reviews are oftentimes larger in scope and scale than many of those studied by other researchers. Second, GDI uses the term 'multi-stakeholder initiative' (MSI) rather than 'collaborative' or 'partnership.' GDI defines MSIs as

> "organizations (1) focused on bringing about collective action solutions for global public benefit, (2) comprised of actors across the public and private sectors (both for-profit and philanthropic), and (3) whose governance bodies and capabilities are wholly new, rather than simply reliant on those of the constituent actors" (Stern et al., 2015, p. 7).

Because this definition is similar to how others have defined collective impact organizations, if even in smaller, and oftentimes North American contexts (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Cabaj & Weaver, 2016), there are valuable lessons to be learned from GDI's analysis.

The GDI report examined 17 MSIs through this research question: "When is an MSI the best-suited solution to address a global development problem, and what can an MSI do in its early days to be most effective?" GDI defines a successful MSI as "a collective action effort [that] can achieve more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts results in global development" (Stern et al., 2015, p. 5), but it does not define what constitutes successful results. This is a serious limitation of the study because while GDI offers well-detailed themes from the MSIs it studied, we do not know whether or how their guidelines are

correlated with actual quantitative gains in the MSI's desired outcomes. GDI asks three questions about MSIs (Stern et al., 2015, p. 11):

1. Alignment: Can an MSI address the mandate [to meet a community objective]?
2. Suitability: Is a new MSI the best kind of intervention to address this mandate?
3. Prospects: Is the MSI likely to succeed? Determine whether key conditions are in place.

GDI summarizes its findings on these three questions for two user groups—donors of MSIs and implementers of MSIs. Key findings for donors include funding "as if you are supporting a start-up," being "prepared for longer-term engagement," and avoiding "over-involvement in areas that might weaken the MSI's agency" (Stern et al., 2015, p. 40). Key findings for implementers of MSIs fall along four time periods—initiation, design, launch, and start-up—and include advice for financial resourcing, leadership and staff development, and governance and stakeholder engagement.

Collective Impact Forum & FSG: Backbone Starter Guide

Similar to how the GDI study provides a detailed analysis of the conditions necessary for successful funding and implementation of MSIs, the Collective Impact Forum's 'Backbone Starter Guide' (2014) outlines the infrastructure needed to "achieve population-level systems change in the area of focus" (p. 8). This infrastructure is implemented through a backbone organization, which should serve six essential functions: "guiding vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement activities, cultivating community engagement and ownership, advancing policy, [and] mobilizing resources" (FSG, 2014). The backbone organizations that should play these roles can take many different forms, including as existing or new nonprofits, as

funders or governmental entities, or be shared across multiple organizations (Collective Impact Forum & FSG, 2014). Effective backbones also prioritize equity through staffing diversity, community involvement, and funding initiatives that will close unequal outcomes and achievement gaps (Collective Impact Forum & FSG, 2014). FSG also provides recommendations for funders who support backbones, including using their "convening power to draw key stakeholders to the table," funding "research on evidence-based practices," and aligning "strategy with other funders" (Collective Impact Forum & FSG, 2014, p. 18).

Lacking in this report is a clear definition of what constitutes successful systems change and a methodology for selecting successful collective impact efforts to learn how they structured their backbones. The explanation provided for selection relies upon FSG and the Collective Impact Forum's practitioner and consultative experiences and studies since 2011, which have shaped "perspectives and recommendations regarding the purpose, function, structure, leadership, and selection process required for backbone supports to be effective" (Collective Impact Forum & FSG, 2014, p. 4). Despite this limitation, the report provides a framework through which to evaluate backbones with its list of six essential functions.

Evaluating Impact: Five Simple Rules

Mark Cabaj, who is one of the original authors of the 2011 paper outlining the five conditions of CI, and who has been practicing and evaluating collective impact for several decades, summarized key learnings for collective impact evaluation in these five rules, summarized in table 2.8:

Table 2.8 *Five Rules for Evaluating Collective Impact*

Rule	Description
1. Use evaluation to enable—rather than limit—strategic learning	"Embracing a complexity lens...begs participants to eschew simplistic judgements of success and failure and instead seeks to track progress towards ambitious goals, uncover new insights about the nature of the problem they seek to solve, and figure out what does and does not work in addressing it" (p. 112).
2. Employ multiple designs for multiple users	Evaluation is not simply a summative reporting tool; it should be created to provide multiple end users real-time information.
3. Shared measurement if necessary, but not necessarily shared measurement	"It is important that we not oversell the benefits, underestimate the costs, or ignore the perverse consequences of creating shared measurement systems" (p. 116).
4. Seek out intended and unintended consequences	While most people are conditioned to identify and track the intended consequences of their programs, it is equally necessary to evaluate 'what is' rather than apply a narrow lens in looking for what should have been.
5. Seek out contribution—not attribution—to community changes	"Acknowledge that multiple factors are likely behind an observed change or changes and seek instead to understand the contribution of the Collective Impact effort activities to the change" (p. 119).

Adapted from Cabaj (2011)

Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact: Process Tracing in a Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives

While each of the above studies in both the peer-reviewed literature and the practitioner publications provide a helpful framework and/or set of definitions for this dissertation, the methodology this researcher replicated most closely is found in the Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact 2018 study. This study "looked across 25 collective impact initiatives and then explored eight of those sites in more depth via site visits and

deep analysis of the degree to which collective impact implementation and outcomes contributed to demonstrated population changes" (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 3). The researchers make clear that the study does not accomplish: to "compare collective impact to other approaches," to "prove the relationship between collective impact and population change," or to "prove the relationship between an equity approach and population change" (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 5).

The methodology used here is process tracing, which "explores competing hypotheses about plausible explanations of the causes of a given outcome (in this case, population change). The hypotheses include both the contribution of collective impact as well as other types of drivers identified and prioritized" by the partnerships (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 10). A strength of process tracing is that it does not assume correlation between population level changes and the efforts of the collective impact initiative. As a methodology, it assumes neutrality around attribution, and seeks to "identify salient, plausible explanations for the outcomes and uses 'process verification' to assess the extent to which each of the explanations identified are supported or not supported by the available evidence" (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 10). Process tracing "is a rigorous qualitative method that explores competing hypotheses reflecting different plausible explanations of the causes of a given outcome (e.g., a population change) and rates each hypothesis' level of inferential strength" (Stachowiak et al., 2020, p. 37). The authors of this study collected data from "interviews, focus groups, reviews of initiative-related systems changes, materials from the initiatives, and facilitated dialogues with groups of stakeholders at each site visit" (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 10). Process tracing follows the

following steps: “create a model, refine the model, analyze the hypotheses, [and] analyze across sites” (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 20).

In 2020, the authors of the Spark & ORS (2018) study published a peer-reviewed article providing more detail into the study’s methodology. In addition to process tracing, the researchers used rubrics to evaluate impact in “the five conditions of collective impact, population change, and equity” (Stachowiak et al., 2020, p. 32). They also conducted deeper investigations into sites with a stated focus on improving more equitable outcomes, and developed a rubric specifically around equity. The researchers:

> “Collected comparable qualitative data across other variables beyond the rubrics, including coding the data into quantitative categories for types of systems changes (i.e., changes to core institutions), early changes (i.e., changes that lay the foundation for systems and policy changes, including increasing partnerships or community engagement), barriers, and facilitators. As our goal was to generate multivariate informed themes across cases and types of variables, not summarize individual variables or tell the story of a specific site, we needed methods that facilitated pattern finding in a large volume of qualitative data across many sites” (Stachowiak et al., 2020, p. 35).

Key findings in this Spark & ORS (2018) study are that sites had differing levels of evidence that “collective impact had been a necessary element of the population change story” (p. 27), and that sites with the tightest connections between collective impact inputs and positive population level changes focused on using data to drive frequent changes, leveraged existing resources and reallocated them when necessary, and prioritized political relationship-building and policy advocacy work. Recommendations for future studies are that using rubrics, especially the collective impact conditions rubric, is helpful for framing the questions, but that the equity rubric could use further refinement (Stachowiak et al., 2020). Furthermore, the researchers found that process tracing added rigor to the study: “The process tracing depended on in-depth and specific

qualitative data, captured across multiple perspectives, to build triangulation and confidence in the findings that fed into the process tracing analysis" (Stachowiak et al., 2020, p. 42).

While this dissertation narrowly examines StriveTogether collective impact partnerships whose regions experienced improved postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes for students of color over multiple years, the authors of this study cast a wider net, examining initiatives that responded to online postings, had "clear evidence of implementing at least two collective impact conditions," and had "been in operation for at least three years" (Spark & ORS, 2018, p. 6). This difference in study participant inclusion highlights a difference in starting assumptions; rather than beginning with any collective impact partnerships that agree to participate, the researcher in this dissertation started with partnerships whose regions experienced growth on a two specific population-level outcomes and applied a process tracing methodology from there.

Review of Selected Theoretical Frameworks

The primary theoretical framework through which the researcher evaluated findings in this dissertation was regional civic capacity. While civic capacity provides a lens through which to view the ability of cross-sector actors to collaborate to enact changes, adding a layer of regionalism to civic capacity is a way of studying "coordination rather than competition across jurisdictions in a region and to address the underlying inequities" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 69). In their 2018 book, Holme & Finnigan describe a case for regional approaches to solving structural inequalities such as segregation and disparate funding, including within and across school districts. This approach addresses "one of the defining features of American political geography

[which] is the relatively large number of autonomous governmental units, such as municipalities, townships, and local school districts within metropolitan areas" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 71). This feature holds true in the selected regions for this dissertation, with between 7 and 19 separate school districts included in each selected partnership's region. Holme & Finnigan (2018) found "evidence that geopolitical fragmentation comes with serious social and political costs, contributing to fiscal disparities between locales and exacerbating racial and economic segregation across metropolitan areas" (p. 71), and they share case studies of regions that have come together in cross-sector approaches to solve for these challenges. This regionalism approach provided a framework for this dissertation as it is a stated purpose of StriveTogether partnerships to improve equity across economically and racially segregated regions.

One application of Holme & Finnigan's (2018) regional civic capacity framework is DeBray's (2021) study which examined the relationship between affordable housing and educational opportunity in Atlanta. DeBray's (2021) study analyzed the roles of cross-sector actors and politics, and the effect they have on housing policies and school segregation. DeBray's (2021) study examined housing policies and politics in the city of Atlanta most closely, but also included the surrounding suburbs, which created a regional lens. The study addressed the "silo effect" that occurs when housing and education policymakers, advocates, and practitioners do not communicate, and framed a snapshot of time in which actors across government, non-profits, philanthropy, and the private sector coalesced around concerns about the relationship between housing and education systems in metro Atlanta. DeBray (2021) found "that numerous policy and organizational actors during this period in Atlanta readily recognized the interconnections between housing

stability and education" (p. 21). This study applied a regional, cross-sector lens and found a "more nuanced picture of the politics of the coalitions of many kinds of actors—across governmental, non-profit, and private sectors—who may define how policies are designed and solutions proposed" (DeBray, 2021, p. 4). The regional approach to civic capacity applied by Holme & Finnigan (2018) and DeBray (2021) applied well in this dissertation since each of the selected StriveTogether partnerships represents multiple school districts and some spread across more than one city. Regional civic capacity and Malen's (2001) implementation framework overlap in their emphasis on cross-sector actors and the politics and policies that undergird the successes and/or failures of collective impact initiatives.

While Holme & Finnigan's (2018) study examined regional efforts that involved "the creation of a governance structure consisting of representatives of localities across a region" (p. 73), StriveTogether partnerships rarely, if ever, engage in formal shared governance of a region. Holme & Finnigan (2018) provided case studies in shared governance. A case study in regional governance changes is found in the Minnesota state legislature's efforts to address the disparities in local tax rates by creating "the nation's first tax-base sharing plan in the Twin Cities…which sought to address economic inequity between cities and suburbs in the area by ensuring that any growth in commercial and industrial tax base was shared across the region" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 79). This action required coordination across multiple local governmental agencies and the state government, and needed advocacy from the business community, which had to be invested in the mutually beneficial outcomes of wealth redistribution across the region. Similarly, the city of Omaha sought to address a shrinking inner city

tax base and racial segregation in its schools as compared with the surrounding suburban school districts by creating a Learning Community with "four key elements: a tax-base-sharing plan, an interdistrict integration plan to address the segregation in the region, a redistributive tax, and a regional governing council" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 92). A review of this dissertation's selected regions shows that elected officials are seldom, if ever, represented on regional StriveTogether partnerships' leadership tables or boards, which is one way of predicting whether these partnerships are engaged in governmental efforts. The sectors most heavily represented in partnerships' boards are nonprofits, school districts, higher education, business, and philanthropy. As a result of this representation within their leadership, the researcher predicts that these partnerships will report less formal policy work and more work to influence the adoption of identified best practices on a programmatic, place-based level.

Holme & Finnigan's (2018) provide "five core pillars of a regional equity framework: tax-base sharing, place-based policies, mobility policies, regional governance, and cross-sector approaches" (p. 96). The researcher hypothesizes that partnerships will report little or no activity in tax-base sharing, mobility policies, and regional governance, moderate activity in place-based policies, and high activity in cross-sector approaches. Given Holme & Finnigan's (2018) findings of regional approaches that address structural inequality, which led to the development of these pillars, questions remain about the efficacy of StriveTogether's heavy emphasis on cross-sector and place-based policy approaches to the (likely) neglect of the governance pillars. As an interesting counter-example, however, DeBray's (2021) Atlanta housing study finds "that the majority of efforts to define and address the link between housing and education, for

the most part, did not emanate from governmental actors" (p. 22). Sorting out the perceived and actual roles in influencing local or state government policy is an important part of this dissertation's analysis.

Another aspect of this dissertation is an analysis of the unique nature of postsecondary enrollment through a regional civic capacity lens. Because postsecondary enrollment sits in a sort of no-man's land between k-12 school districts and higher education, with no clear accountability falling on either sector, it seems to be in need of the type of ownership that could be situated within the five regional pillars. While p-20 pipelines, in which education is viewed as one contiguous line from early childhood through postsecondary (Rippner, 2018), have not yet gained considerable traction, the framework they provide may overlay well with Holme & Finnigan's (2018) regional pillars. Partnerships may perceive their earlier emphases on, say, eighth grade math proficiency or high school graduation, as playing a positive role in improving their region's postsecondary enrollment rates.

A common thread the researcher hypothesizes to run throughout the dissertation findings is the role of politics in influencing which initiatives partnerships attempt, and which of those initiatives ultimately fail or succeed. Because the dissertation examines the partnerships' perceptions of their contribution, or lack thereof, to regional outcomes for Black and Latino students, they may report perceived challenges and successes in navigating the political will of their regions.

Finally and related to the role of politics, while regional civic capacity was the primary theoretical lens through which the researcher interpreted findings, understanding the details of implementation is also important. Through process tracing, the researcher,

in essence, conducted a post-mortem of partnerships' perceptions of their contribution to the outcomes. The interview protocol asked participants to retrace the actions they took in implementing strategies, and then to evaluate to what extent they believe their implementation led to any changes in regional outcomes. Malen's (2001) implementation framework is grounded in the critical role cross-sector actors play in the rollout of initiatives; this dissertation provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of these relationship mechanics within collective impact work.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter summarizes the research methodology used in this study, and includes the following sections: purpose of the study, research questions, research design and case setting rationale, process tracing overview, data collection, data analysis, application of theoretical frameworks, validity, reliability, and limitations.

Purpose of the Study

This study used a qualitative research design to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color.

Research Questions

How do the StriveTogether collective impact partnerships with the highest year over year gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color through the 2018-2019 school year perceive the conditions that contributed to their regions' growth in these outcomes?

a. To what extent and under what conditions do partners perceive the collective impact approach to contribute to population level outcomes? What evidence exists in support of these conditions?

b. How do partners perceive whether systems changes in programs, policies, politics, and governance structures have contributed to the population level outcomes being achieved?
c. What are the other perceived positive or negative impacts of the collective impact approach, intended or unintended, on the community and system?

Research Design & Rationale

The extant literature on collective impact focuses heavily on the conditions or processes associated with collective impact, often with the purpose of defining how collective impact operates within and across focus areas (ie, education or public health) or population-level outcomes (ie, 6th grade reading proficiency or teen pregnancy rates). Few peer-reviewed studies examine regions that have experienced population-level outcomes gains that collective impact actors were seeking to improve. Further, disentangling contribution, attribution, correlation, and/or causation of cross-sector actors' inputs within their region's politics, politics, and other programs is complex. Defining the conditions of collective impact sans actual outcomes gains, however, is not necessarily useful to practitioners and funders seeking to effectively implement collective impact or to policymakers aiming to replicate collective impact successfully. This study sought to describe the perceptions and processes of collective impact actors whose regions had experienced gains in their intended population-level outcome. This study used a process tracing methodology to construct an implicit and explicit theory of change at play across the selected regions, and to trace the roles of collective impact partners as well as the other policies and politics at play within their regions. This study examined findings through two conceptual frameworks: regional civic capacity (Holme & Finnigan,

2018) accounts for the complexity of regional policy, politics, and governance, and Malen's (2001) implementation framework, which helps frame the mechanisms of each region's strategies.

The Case Setting

The collective impact regions considered for selection in this study were all regional partnerships of the StriveTogether national organization. StriveTogether is the largest umbrella organization of collective impact partnerships in the United States, and the only organization to have a formalized Theory of Action to guide its work. Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was employed to develop criteria that would include partnerships whose regions had experienced the strongest postsecondary enrollment and completion gains for students of color over multiple years. This purposeful sampling is predicated on the goal of selecting sample sites from which the researcher can learn the most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because the researcher aimed to understand the perceptions and processes within collective impact organizations whose regions had experienced their stated goals of improving postsecondary outcomes, purposeful sampling was an appropriate selection method.

To select partnerships that met participation criteria, the researcher began with the full list of 68 partnerships, and requested the names of partnerships improving postsecondary enrollment and completion. StriveTogether's Director of Data Analytics provided the names of the 27 partnerships whose regions experienced postsecondary enrollment gains for students of color and the names of 20 partnerships whose regions experienced postsecondary completion for students of color. Seventeen of those partnerships were on both lists for enrollment and completion. The researcher then

searched the publicly available websites, data dashboards, and annual reports of those 17 partnerships while applying the additional inclusion criteria of gains in those outcomes for multiple (2+) years leading up to the 2018-2019 school year. This selection process is summarized in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 *Partnership Inclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria (number of)	Number of Sites
StriveTogether partnerships	68
Improving postsecondary enrollment for students of color	27
Improving postsecondary completion for students of color	20
Improving both enrollment and completion	17
Improving enrollment and completion for students of color (in at least three of these four categories) in year over year data through 2019	5

The researcher identified five partnerships that met at least three of the four inclusion criteria: improved postsecondary enrollment and/or completion for Black and/or Latino students over multiple years. Table 3.2 shows disaggregated regional postsecondary enrollment data for the selected sites.

Table 3.2 *Selected Partnerships: Regional Postsecondary Enrollment Data*

Partnership	Black Student Enrollment	Percent Change	Latino Student Enrollment	Percent Change	Years of Data
All Hands Raised	72.0%	-0.9%	68.7%	+16.1%	2010-2016
Building Our Future	33%	+2%	36%	+2%	2005-2017

Higher Expectations	35%	-7%	46%	+9%	2013-2019
Marin Promise Partnership	65%	-5%	71%	+15%	2013-2019
UP Partnership	48%	+1%	51%	+2%	2017-2019

Table 3.3 shows disaggregated regional postsecondary completion data for the selected sites.

Table 3.3 *Selected Partnerships: Regional Postsecondary Completion Data*

Partnership	Black Student Completion	Percent Change	Latino Student Completion	Percent Change	Years of Data
All Hands Raised	24.5%	+0.9%	25.7%	+12.8%	HS c/o 2005-2011
Building Our Future	23%	+7%	31%	+10%	HS c/o 2007-2011
Higher Expectations	32%	+16%	25%	+4%	HS c/o 2007-2013
Marin Promise Partnership	26%	+6%	30%	+5%	2013-2019
UP Partnership	45%	+2%	50%	+5%	2017-2019

**HS c/o = high school graduating class of listed years*

While tables 3.2 and 3.3 show the postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for Black and Latino students in the regions selected for inclusion in this study, it is helpful to contextualize these regions' recent improvements against historical and larger data sets. Researcher Raj Chetty's Opportunity Insights data dashboard utilizes census data to present college attainment rates for children who grew up low-income and high-

income households. Table 3.4 summarizes college attainment rates for Black, Latino, and white students from low-income and high-income homes in the county seats of the regions selected for this study.

Table 3.4 *College Outcomes for Children Born in Selected Counties*

County (Partnership)	Black Low-Income	Latino Low-Income	White Low-Income	Black High-Income	Latino High-Income	White High-Income
Multnomah County, OR (All Hands Raised)	21%	9%	20%	30%	32%	43%
Kenosha County, WI (Building Our Future)	13%	9%	15%	21%	19%	41%
Racine County, WI (Higher Expectations)	11%	5%	16%	12%	17%	42%
Marin County, CA (Marin Promise Partnership)	26%	24%	47%	47%	35%	62%
Bexar County, TX (UP Partnership)	17%	12%	25%	47%	40%	48%

[1]Adapted from Opportunity Insights (2022)

The selected partnerships represent regions in four states. Each region spans across at least one county and multiple school districts, with the number of Kindergarten through grade 12 students served in the region varying from ~20,000 to more than 200,000. All Hands Raised is in Portland, Oregon, and serves students across Multnomah County. Building Our Future and Higher Expectations are in adjacent counties in the

[1] College Graduation Rate: Fraction of children who grew up in this area who hold a 4-year college degree. Estimates have a margin of error; for example, standard error at county level for children with parents at 25th percentile is 2% pooling race and gender groups and 2% for black men. This outcome is available only at the county (not tract) level due to small sample sizes. (Source: American Community Survey).

metro Milwaukee region of Wisconsin. Marin Promise Partnership is in Marin County, just north of San Francisco, California. UP Partnership is in San Antonio, Texas, and serves students across the greater Bexar County area. The variation in regions across the United States, as well as their differing demographics, size, and focus areas, led to strong representative data. Table 3.5 summarizes descriptive data about the five selected partnership regions.

Table 3.5 *Selected Partnerships: Regional Demographic Data*

Partnership	Location	# Full Time Staff	# School Districts	# K-12 Students
All Hands Raised	Multnomah County, OR	11	7	220,000
Building Our Future	Kenosha County, WI	4	12	26,052
Higher Expectations	Racine County, WI	9	13	19,455
Marin Promise Partnership	Marin County, CA	11	19	51,170
UP Partnership	Bexar County, TX	25	20	424,500

While the selected partnerships all work toward regional postsecondary enrollment and completion gains, the table below lists all of the indicators the partnerships are engaged in. StriveTogether's Theory of Action is predicated upon a "cradle to career" approach and is built upon the assumption that no single point along the continuum can fully describe the educational health or progress of a region. Rather, taken as a whole, the cradle to career indicators, show how children within a region are being served and faring in key outcomes. By sharing regional data and engaging in strategies to improve a variety of indicators from early childhood through employment,

partnerships develop regional narratives about how the community is doing, as well as what is working to improve each indicator. Table 3.6 shows which indicators the five selected partnerships are engaged in.

Table 3.6 *Selected Partnerships: Community-Wide Focus Indicators*

Indicator	All Hands Raised	Building Our Future	Higher Expect-ations	Marin Promise Partnership	UP Partnership
Birth Weight	x				
Clinical Care Ranking		x			
Kindergarten Readiness	x		x	x	x
Kindergarten Attendance	x				
Early Grade Reading	x	x	x	x	x
Children Living with Food Insecurity		x			
Middle Grade Math	x	x		x	x
Sixth Grade Attendance	x				
English Language Learners' Progress	x				
Equity in School Discipline	x				
Ninth Grade Attendance	x				
Ninth Grade Credit Attainment	x				
High School Graduation	x	x	x		
College / Career Readiness				x	x
Postsecondary Enrollment	x	x	x	x	x
Postsecondary Completion	x	x	x	x	x

Connected with a Career Track	x	
Employment		x

Process Tracing Methodology

The process tracing methodology replicated most closely in this study was used in a Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact 2018 study. This study "looked across 25 collective impact initiatives and then explored eight of those sites in more depth via site visits and deep analysis of the degree to which collective impact implementation and outcomes contributed to demonstrated population changes" (p. 3). The primary research questions in that study were:

> 1) To what extent and under what conditions does the collective impact approach contribute to population level outcomes? 2) What are the other positive or negative impacts, intended or unintended, on the community and system? 3) What systems changes have contributed to the population level outcomes being achieved? 4) What evidence is there that the collective impact effort has contributed to these systems and population changes? 5) What evidence is there that the population changes would not have been achieved if the collective impact approach hadn't been used? (Spark Policy Institute, 2018, p. 4).

Five secondary questions follow from those questions (Spark Policy Institute, 2018), and the researchers make clear that the study did not accomplish: to "compare collective impact to other approaches," to "prove the relationship between collective impact and population change," or to "prove the relationship between an equity approach and population change" (p. 5). Similarly, this research study did not attempt to prove correlation or causation between collective impact and the regional postsecondary gains, but rather to understand the collective impact partners' perceptions of their contribution,

or lack thereof, to those population changes, and to describe the processes of their contributions. Given the complexity of regional programs, policies, and politics, in which collective impact backbones seek to influence population level outcomes in partnership with cross-sector actors from school districts, nonprofits, higher education, and more, it would be nearly impossible to design a study that could prove what role collective impact had in those outcomes. As a methodology, process tracing is arguably one of the best ways through which to understand the role of collective impact in context of regional population gains. This study built upon the Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact (2018) study by more narrowly examining postsecondary outcomes within the StriveTogether's network of collective impact partnerships.

Process tracing "explores competing hypotheses about plausible explanations of the causes of a given outcome... The hypotheses include both the contribution of collective impact as well as other types of drivers identified and prioritized" by the backbone partnerships (Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact, 2018, p. 10). Process tracing does not assume correlation between population level changes and the efforts of the collective impact efforts. As a methodology, it assumes neutrality around attribution, and seeks to "identify salient, plausible explanations for the outcomes and uses 'process verification' to assess the extent to which each of the explanations identified are supported or not supported by the available evidence" (Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact, 2018, p.10). Table 3.7 summarizes the research steps conducted in process tracing.

Table 3.7 *Process Tracing Steps*

Process Tracing Step	Description (p. 20)

1. Create a model	"Start with the population-level changes that occurred and connect them to strategies and other early systems changes."
2. Refine the model	"Identify and prioritize the most important contributions to population change."
3. Analyze the hypotheses	"Determine the level of strength for each hypothesis."
4. Analyze across sites	"Look for patterns."

Adapted from Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact Study (2018)

In this study, the researcher applied process tracing methodology through the steps summarized in table 3.8.

Table 3.8 *Process Tracing Methodology Applied to this Study*

Process Tracing Step	Application to this Study
1. Create a model	Identify StriveTogether partnership regions that experienced postsecondary enrollment and completion gains over multiple years for students of color. Interview stakeholders to understand the strategies employed that were intended to improve these outcomes. Account for any other programs, policies, or regional politics that could have contributed to the outcomes.
2. Refine the model	Within each of the five selected regions, create logic models that explain stakeholder perceptions of what contributed to outcomes gains.
3. Analyze the hypotheses	Compare each explanation and posit levels of strength toward influencing outcomes.
4. Analyze across sites	Identify themes and patterns across sites.

Adapted from Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact Study (2018)

Data Collection

In conducting the literature review and preliminary research for this study, the researcher followed these processes. The researcher used the University of Georgia library databases to search for books and peer-reviewed journal articles. Generally, searches were conducted for publication dates ranging from 2000 to present, with several exceptions if the article was particularly helpful in framing an understanding of the collective impact or/or postsecondary access and/or completion. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included in the literature review. Because this study is about the efforts, experiences, political dynamics and relationships, and outcomes of collective impact partnerships, the researcher also used Google and Google scholar to search for practitioner articles and for information on the websites of intermediary organizations. Frequently used search terms across include collective impact, intermediary organizations, educational equity, and postsecondary outcomes.

Data for this study was collected through a variety of methods, in keeping with best practices for qualitative research. The majority of data were collected through interviews, and data was also collected through the review of documents and through observations. Table 3.9 summarizes data sources for this study.

Table 3.9 *Data Sources for this Study*

Data Sources	Description
Interviews	Individual or small group online (Zoom) face to face interviews based on the semi-structured interview guide which included open-ended and follow up questions
Documents	StriveTogether partnership data dashboards, websites, strategic plans, theory of action plans, programmatic documents outlining strategies to increase postsecondary enrollment and completion

Observations	Observations of collective impact working group meetings in which cross-sector actors collaborated toward regional postsecondary goals

Sample selection. The researcher sent initial email requests for interviews to each of the five selected StriveTogether partnerships. Emails were sent to the Executive Directors of the partnerships, and provided them with the option of directing the researcher to another staff person who is best suited to speak to the partnership's postsecondary work, such as a Director of Postsecondary Networks, for example. The recruiting emails described who the researcher is, the research request for an interview, what would be required to participate in the study, and a consent form. When the researcher was unable to reach an Executive Director, emails were sent to additional staff members. Because the researcher is both a doctoral student and works for a StriveTogether partnership, the researcher introduced and clarified the dual roles. In some cases, the researcher was more easily able to obtain interviews because of her role working for a StriveTogether partnership. After interviews with partnership backbone staff were conducted, follow up emails were sent that included thanks for participating in the study, and requests to connect to cross-sector partners associated with the partnership's postsecondary work. Through this snowballing technique, additional interviews were scheduled. Table 3.10 lists the interview participants.

Table 3.10 *Interview Participants*

Participant	Title	Organization	Interview Date
Tatjana Bicanan	Executive Director	Building Our Future	12-9-21
Jeff Neubauer	Executive Director	Higher Expectations	12-9-21

DeAnn Possehl	Post Secondary Education and Network Facilitator	Higher Expectations	12-9-21
Ryan Lugalia-Hollon	Executive Director	UP Partnership	1-5-22
Ann Mathieson	CEO	Marin Promise Partnership	1-6-22
Rob Ducoffe	Provost & Vice Chancellor	University of Wisconsin-Parkside	1-7-22
John Thibodeau	Assistant Provost / Vice Chancellor, Institutional Effectiveness	Gateway Technical College	1-7-22
Debbie Ford	Chancellor	University of Wisconsin-Parkside	1-12-22
Heidi Black	Director, Collaborative Improvement	StriveTogether	1-24-22
Ginger Walker	Senior Data Capacity Specialist (current)	StriveTogether (current)	1-24-22
	Director of Data (former)	UP Partnership (former, during years of this study's data selection criteria)	
Jeanine Fukuda	Vice President, Impact & Improvement	All Hands Raised	1-27-22
Amber Klingner	Associate Director, Partnership & Data Management	All Hands Raised	1-27-22
Erin Flanagan	Manager, Partnership & Stewardship	All Hands Raised	1-27-22

Interviews. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with StriveTogether regional partnership staff, as well as cross-sector partners within the collective impact regions, and with StriveTogether national office staff. The interview protocol was related to the study's research questions, and was aimed at learning how interview participants perceived their collective impact role in their region's postsecondary gains, which could be a negative, neutral, or positive role, as well as their understanding of the other programmatic, policy-related, and political dynamics affecting their partnerships' work. The questions were semi-structured and open-ended to encourage genuine responses. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed, with permission from each participant. The average time for each interview was 45 minutes, and ranged from 32 minutes to 59 minutes. Throughout each interview, the researcher took detailed notes which highlighted sections and ideas to focus on when re-reading the interview transcripts. Table 3.11 shows sample interview questions, and Appendix B provides the complete interview protocol.

Table 3.11 *Sample Interview Questions*

Sample Interview Questions
1. What is your partnerships' approach to collective impact? What is your theory of change?
2. What work does your partnership do around postsecondary outcomes?
a. What strategies have you applied specifically for your Black and Latino students?
3. What have your region's postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes looked like over the past XX years?
a. To what extent do you believe your partnerships' work influenced these outcomes?

b. Were there any other programs, policies, or politics at play during these years that could have influenced the outcomes?

Interview analysis began with reading the interview transcripts while simultaneously "writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these...analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices" to understand, at a high level, the interview data collected (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). Transcripts were read at least three times each, and preliminary codes and categories were created and recreated multiple times with each reading before final themes were identified.

Documents. The researcher began the document analysis process by fully reviewing each partnership's website. Because the partnerships were selected for inclusion in this study based upon their publicly available data dashboards and/or data reports, the researcher included those data in this study. Additionally, all pages and documents that addressed the partnership's overall approach to collective impact and/or their approach to supporting postsecondary outcomes were included in this study. Finally, when interview participants referenced documents during their interviews, the researcher requested that they share those documents via email, if possible.

Observations. According to interview participants, much of the "work" of collective impact happens during cross-sector working groups meetings. While each StriveTogether regional partnership titles these groups differently (ie, "Change Action Networks" – CANs, or "Postsecondary Collaborative" or "Diplomas" etc.) each of the five selected sites holds some type of regular, cross-sector convening. The researcher

asked interview participants whether it would be possible to observe their partnerships' postsecondary collaborative meetings. Three partnerships invited the researcher to observe these collaborations virtually. The researcher silently observed, and collected observation notes; see table 3.12 for a sample.

Table 3.12 *Observation Notes Sample*

Date	Meeting	Partnership	Researcher Notes
1-11-21	Higher Education Regional Alliance Goal 1 Monthly Convening	Building Our Future *and* Higher Expectations	• Attendees were higher education partners (deans, provosts, VPs, chancellors, etc.) from 7 county Milwaukee region, representing 18 institutions • Facilitated by DeAnn Possehl, who serves dual role with backbone and UWP • Whole group norming on goals and regional data, then split into smaller discussion groups to identify institutional artifacts that can be shared with other colleges at next meeting for shared learning • Small group discussions focused on retention strategies to share with other institutions • Goals of collaboration: "increasing access to postsecondary education…increasing credential and degree completion…aligning program offerings to meet workforce gaps to streamlining the processes of matching our region's talent with our region's opportunities" (HERA, 2022)
2-10-22	Equitable Enrollment Collaborative	UP Partnership	• Attendees (n ~ 50) represented three sectors: K-12 districts, higher education, and community-based organizations (CBOs) • Co-facilitated by UP Partnership staff and National Postsecondary Strategy Institute (NPSI)

	• Whole group intro on purpose and goals, then split into two different break out groups to discuss enrollment strategies • Focus was on tests required for enrollment, especially TSI • Data emphasis on strategies for Dreamers (DACA status) and boys and young mean of color • "The purpose of the EEC is to provide a tailored space where professionals from institutions across San Antonio and Bexar County can convene to build formal and actionable strategies for increasing our students' postsecondary success" (UP Partnership)

These observations facilitated a deeper understanding of the processes and explanations interview participants provided about the work their collaborations were facilitating to affect outcomes gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion. This helped the researcher triangulate a theory of attribution within process tracing.

Data Analysis

This study's data analysis followed guidance from Creswell & Creswell (2018) to conduct "simultaneous procedures," such that the researcher may be collecting, reviewing, and writing about data at overlapping times; and to "winnow the data" to review by "focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it" (p. 192). The researcher was reading and re-reading interview transcripts while still conducting interviews and observations and reviewing documents with the purpose of developing preliminary codes, categories, and themes. Over time, additional reviews, and multiple

reorganizations, these codes, categories, and themes were finalized and nested within process tracing, resulting in the study's findings.

Coding. The researcher followed guidance from Saldana (2021) to construct meaning from collected data first through "analysis—taking things apart," and then through "synthesis—putting thing together into new assemblages of meaning" (Saldana, 2021, p. 6). In this way, "coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis and synthesis" (Saldana, 2021, p. 8). In line with qualitative research principles, the researcher's goal was to capture the "essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (i.e., a pattern), actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (Saldana, 2021, p. 13). The researcher employed the following coding advice from Saldana (2021), summarized in table 3.13.

Table 3.13 *Application of Saldana's Coding Principles*

Principle	Application in this Study
"Code only the most essential parts of your data corpus."	Not every line of every transcript was coded. Only data that was deemed relevant in answering the research questions of this study was coded.
"Code as a 'lumper' not a 'splitter.'"	After the first read of transcripts, several initial codes emerged quite obviously, such as "equity" and "data." These codes, rather than a variety of possible synonyms, were used to lump data together for ease of later categorization and theme-making.
"Use selected codes repeatedly."	The researcher deliberately searched for patterns in the data while reading and re-reading, and applied the 'lump codes' intentionally. While this was not always possible, as single-case outlier codes also emerged, it was applied as appropriate.

"Subsume codes into broader codes or categories as you continue coding."	When possible, the researcher identified categories and themes that emerged from the codes (see table 3.15 for this process).
"Let analytic memoing do some if not most of the work for you."	The researcher read and re-read transcripts and other data to write codes in the margins simultaneously with writing memos about what meaning the data was revealing.

Adapted from Saldana, 2021, p. 36

To view an example of how the researcher approached coding and employed the "lumping" and "repetition" strategies from Saldana (2021), see table 3.14, which summarizes how first round codes were applied to portions of interview transcripts.

Table 3.14 *Sample of Initial Coding Process*

Text from Transcript	First Round Codes
"The systems leaders that we work with, we're not trying to make change happen to them. They want change to happen in their systems and they need partnership to expand their capacity, to implement and actuate that change. Um, so that is, that's a big deal for this kind of organizing. And I think in collective impact or organizing in general, you're working with institutions that want to evolve to effectuate that evolution."	Systems changes Role of collective impact Collaboration
"Once we identify, usually through these collaborative action groups, something that's actually working and it's actually moving the needle on outcomes for black and brown kids, then our, our goal is to scale that and encourage institutionalization of it so that it can go on in perpetuity and the good result can stick, if you will."	Collaboration Equity Scale strategies
"A lot of the African American people that came up and built families were redlined into communities where their main source of wealth, their homes, uh, evaporated because of, uh, you, you know, racist policy. And so, uh, they were stuck and no jobs, no wealth and that's [our region], and that's a lot of the, the towns and regions in the, where these [postsecondary] gaps are, are, you know, the worst."	Political context Equity Data

"One of the things that makes it difficult for these collective action networks is not just bringing people to the table, but then getting those people out of their own, uh, silos, you know, and saying, okay, yes, you're doing good work for yourself, but, but what can we all do? What that sort of thing, what can we do together that you're not already all doing separately? You know, how can we make that impact? And I think that we've had, um, you know, we've kind of gotten moving in that direction, but I don't know that in the postsecondary space we've done as well."	Role of collective impact Collaboration Impact
"And so I think what StriveTogether has brought is a framework that can be that as adaptable and flexible enough to help, um, folks not only lead on behalf of their community, but be a convener. And that's the other outcome here, is we have greater relationships with our business and industry partners have a better understanding of what we do and what we don't do. And I think that would've been missing without the sort of leadership table and the collaboratives, um, that have come together. I think that would've been missing. It may have happened not with, um, maybe the word is intensity, with the same level of intensity."	Role of StriveTogether Collaboration Business/industry connection
"I think another thing that the StriveTogether organizations have brought to the community is the whole racial equity, the REI trainings that, um, they have brought to the community. And specifically speaking about bringing that to the postsecondaries and really thinking about systemic structures that have created the inequities that exist within our communities… To think more deeply about their structural issues and how they're contributing to the racial inequities that exist within our communities. And those experiences were incredibly powerful. I think that they changed the frame of thinking, for the individuals that participated, which is transformational. Um, it doesn't mean that like it's not slow to make progress, but it really starts to change the frame of thinking at the leadership level."	Role of StriveTogether Equity Collaboration Leadership
"On a capacity lens, nobody else is doing the behind the scenes work to make sure that those relationships can build and form. And the other piece, uh, for me, is the data piece, nobody else is aggregating all of the schools in our collective six districts to come together to get that snapshot."	Convening Data
"We were working with, you know, partnerships that were working with one high school or, you know, very small populations where they could actually test something, put a line on a graph and see what the data did. And it was the first time that we could, it ever actually really point to impact, um, which was game	Data

changing, um, for folks to be able, cause I feel like particularly in like nonprofit land, you do something, you can measure the inputs and the outputs, but getting to that like, but what difference are we making and who is better off and what impact factor are we having is just an enormous challenge. And so I think, you know, getting partnerships to think really deeply and critically about how, what populations are we working with, and what's the data that we can track and get small enough so that when we do try something, we can actually measure the impact that it's having."	Scale strategies Impact

Throughout the data analysis process, codes led to categories, which led to themes (Saldana, 2021). Table 3.15 summarizes one example of how the researcher used codes to create categories, which eventually led to the identification of themes.

Table 3.15 *Codes to Categories to Themes Example*

Initial codes	…led to categories	…which led to themes
• Data-sharing agreements • Data review • Data walks • Data MOU's • Data trust building • Disaggregation of data by subgroups	1. Disaggregating and sharing ***data*** is essential to collective impact efforts	Two of the most necessary conditions which effective collective impact backbones facilitate are ***data*** sharing and ***collaboration*** across sectors.
• Collaboration • Convening • Cross-sector • Change Action Networks • Shared goals	2. ***Convening*** cross-sector actors around a common goal is essential to collective impact efforts	

Process tracing. The qualitative coding methods described above worked in tandem with the process tracing methodology of this study. Process tracing is "the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case

for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 7). Describing the inputs and processes of cross-sector, collective impact actors lends itself well to process tracing because "we do not get to observe causality" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 11). Rather, it is the researcher's role to construct a narrative with as much evidence as possible to explain what most likely happened leading up to a population-level outcome. Bennett & Checkel (2015) propose a "three-part standard for what counts as a good application of process tracing" (p. 21). Table 3.16 summarizes Bennett & Checkel's (2015) three standards along with how the researcher applied these standards to this study.

Table 3.16 *Standards for Process Tracing and Application to this Study*

Standards for Process Tracing	Application to this Study
1. "*Meta-theoretically*, it will be grounded in a philosophical base that is ontologically consistent with mechanism-based understandings of social reality and methodologically plural."	This study was predicated on the assumption that inputs lead to outputs and outcomes, and that tracing those patterns is possible with a reasonable level of certainty. It also included best practices from qualitative research design to increase its rigor.
2. *"Contextually,* it will utilize this pluralism both to reconstruct carefully hypothesized causal processes and keep sight of broader structural-discursive contexts."	This study reconstructed the steps interview participants described as reasons postsecondary outcomes increased while also inquiring into other possible political, policy, and programmatic drivers of outcomes outside of the collective impact's control.
3. "*Methodologically*, it will take equifinality seriously and consider the alternative causal pathways through which the outcome of interest might have occurred."	The concept of equifinality—that many, if not infinite, inputs could have caused an outcome—was embedded into this study's design from how questions were asked in the interview protocol about possible alternative drivers to the researcher's additional research about the political context of each region.

Adapted from Bennett & Checkel (2015)

From study design to data collection and data analysis, the researcher adhered to Bennett & Checkel's (2015) process tracing best practices, which the authors synthesized from process tracing studies across different disciplines and from the contributors to their volume on process tracing. A summary of these best practices and how the researcher applied them to this study is found in table 3.17.

Table 3.17 *Process Tracing Best Practices and Application to this Study*

Process Tracing Best Practice	Application to this Study
1. Cast the net widely for alternative explanations	In addition to the researcher's search for alternative explanations for the postsecondary outcomes gains, interview questions directly asked participants what else they believe could have accounted for the region's gains.
2. Be equally tough on the alternative explanations	The researcher strove to begin with a neutral posture toward both backbone-related reasons and alternative explanations for regional gains, if and until multiple sources of evidence generated a strong process explanation.
3. Consider the potential biases of evidentiary sources	It is assumed that anyone associated with the efforts of the backbone *wanted* for the collective impact efforts to work, which is a form of bias the researcher took into account when building process explanations.
4. Take into account whether the case is most or least likely for alternative explanations	As the researcher constructed possible processes that led to outcomes, each was weighed for degrees of evidence and potential impact.
5. Make a justifiable decision on when to start	This study's inclusion criteria is based on the "starting point at which a key actor or agent enters the scene" (p. 27) – in this case, when StriveTogether partnerships begin collecting data on and working toward postsecondary outcomes gains, and up through 2019.

6. Be relentless in gathering diverse and relevant evidence, but make a justifiable decision on when to stop	Because not evidence is equal in value, the researcher began data collection by casting a wide net and then narrowed it as processes and patterns emerged.
7. Combine process tracing with case comparisons when useful for the research goal and feasible	This study includes five regional sites, which increase the generalizability of findings.
8. Be open to inductive insights	At multiple points during data collection and analysis, the researcher reorganized process frameworks and findings as a result of new insights.
9. Use deduction to ask 'if my explanation is true, what will be the specific process leading to the outcome?'	This study is predicated upon reconstructing the processes that cross-sector actors describe as the reasons that led to regional outcomes. Care is taken to detail the mechanisms and contextual differences across sites.
10. Remember that conclusive process tracing is good, but not all good process tracing is conclusive	Transparency around other possible explanations and degrees of certainty in the proposed processes provides credibility to this study.

Adapted from Bennett & Checkel (2015)

While the researcher adhered as closely as possible to the process tracing best practices above, it was in tandem with the recognition, slowly and over the course of data collection and analysis, that this study sometimes also fit under the methodology of 'practice tracing,' a sibling of process tracing that:

> "Rests on two relatively simple tenets: social causality is to be established locally, but with an eye to producing analytically general insights. The first tenet, drawn primarily from interpretivism, posits the singularity of causal accounts: it is meaningful contexts that give practices their social effectiveness and generative power in and on the world. The second tenet, in tune with process analytics, holds that no social relationships and practices are so unique as to foreclose the possibility of theorization or categorization. Practice tracing seeks to occupy a

> methodological middle ground where patterns of meaningful action may be abstracted away from local contexts in the form of social mechanisms that can travel across cases." (Pouliot, V., 2015, in Bennett & Checkel, pp 237-238).

The major difference between process tracing and practice tracing is that process tracing asserts "that social mechanisms are out there, as ontological entities in the world," and practice tracing adds onto that assumption by combining an "inductive (and interpretive) sensibility with a commitment to analytic generality" (Pouliot in Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 239). The researcher acknowledges some philosophical and practical crossover throughout this study between these two, similar approaches.

Validity and Reliability

This study sought to uphold Maxwell's definition of validity: "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 2013, p.122). One way the researcher worked toward validity is awareness of her own personal and professional experiences and preconceptions around the topic. Another way of ensuring validity was by conducting interviews that were as open-ended and free of the researcher's own reactivity as possible (Maxwell, 2013). While "the researcher is part of the world he or she studies" and is therefore always a reactive presence, the researcher strove to mitigate reactivity by not asking leading questions and by minimizing personal presence (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125).

This study also employed several other strategies to maximize validity. First, by asking for respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013), which the researcher did by asking interviewees directly what their perception of the research questions were and to what extent they perceived their impact on the outcomes. Next, by searching for discrepant evidence (Maxwell, 2013), the researcher continually considered what else could have

led to a region's postsecondary outcome gains. Third, by triangulating multiple sources of information (Maxwell, 2013) about the collective impact regions through interviews, data reviews, observations, and document analysis, the researcher secured a breadth of sources during data collection.

To maximize the reliability of this study—or the extent to which another researcher, using the same methodology, would come to the same or very similar conclusions—the researcher developed and adhered to protocols around data collection and analysis such that they could be replicated.

Limitations

This study had several inherent limitations. First, regional politics can differ dramatically, making it difficult to perfectly generalize the findings from this study to other regions with collective impact efforts. While purposive site selection was employed to identify regions with collective impact partnerships that had experienced postsecondary enrollment and completion gains, findings should be applied within a region's unique context. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic affected regional data and collective impact strategies over the last several years. The researcher intentionally used 2019 as the final year of outcomes data for inclusion in this study to avoid 2020 or 2021 when pandemic data reporting and reliability was disrupted and inconsistent. While the researcher told interview participants that questions applied up through 2019, participants invariably discussed both pre-pandemic strategies and pandemic response strategies. The researcher attempted to keep the years and strategies separate, but there was some inevitable crossover. This may not be inherently problematic, as partnerships' general approaches remained similar, but it is possible that if the selection criteria were applied

through 2021, different regions may have been selected. Finally, this study sought to understand the perceptions of collective impact partners on their contribution, or lack thereof, to regional outcomes. While the qualitative design and process tracing methodology led to reasonable levels of certainty about the contributions of cross-sector actors, further similar research will help refine the mechanisms of these processes.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. While there is some research about collective impact as a model for social change (ORS Impact, 2018; Jolin, Schmitz & Seldon, 2012; Schoenberger, 2018; FSG, 2016; Cabaj, 2016), there are many opportunities for studying collective impact's role within education. This study contributes to the literature on intermediary organizations in education by describing how collective impact partners perceive the processes that drive regional outcomes.

Research Questions

How do the StriveTogether collective impact partnerships with the highest year over year gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color through the 2018-2019 school year perceive the conditions that contributed to their regions' growth in these outcomes?

a. To what extent and under what conditions do partners perceive the collective impact approach to contribute to population level outcomes? What evidence exists in support of these conditions?

b. How do partners perceive whether systems changes in programs, policies, politics, and governance structures have contributed to the population level outcomes being achieved?
c. What are the other perceived positive or negative impacts of the collective impact approach, intended or unintended, on the community and system?

Research Design & Rationale

The extant literature on collective impact focuses heavily on the conditions or processes associated with collective impact, often with the purpose of defining how collective impact operates within and across focus areas (ie, education or public health) or population-level outcomes (ie, 6th grade reading proficiency or teen pregnancy rates). Few peer-reviewed studies examine regions that have experienced the population-level outcomes gains that collective impact actors were seeking to improve. Further, disentangling contribution, attribution, correlation, and/or causation of cross-sector actors' inputs within their region's politics, politics, and other programs is complex. Defining the conditions of collective impact sans actual outcomes gains, however, is not necessarily useful to practitioners and funders seeking to effectively implement collective impact or to policymakers aiming to replicate collective impact successfully. This study sought to describe the perceptions and processes of collective impact actors whose regions had experienced gains in their intended population-level outcome. This study used a process tracing methodology to construct an implicit and explicit theory of change at play across the selected regions, and to trace the roles of collective impact partners as well as the other policies and politics at play within their regions. This study examined findings through two conceptual frameworks: regional civic capacity (Holme & Finnigan,

2018) accounts for the complexity of regional policy, politics, and governance, and Malen's (2001) politics of implementation framework, which helps frame the mechanisms of the partnerships' strategies.

The Case Setting

The collective impact regions included for selection in this study are all regional partnerships of the StriveTogether national organization. StriveTogether is the largest umbrella organization of collective impact partnerships in the United States, and the only educational collective impact organization to have a formalized Theory of Action to guide its work. Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was employed to develop criteria that would include partnerships whose regions had experienced the strongest postsecondary enrollment and completion gains for students of color over multiple years. The researcher identified five partnerships that met at least three of the four inclusion criteria: improved postsecondary enrollment and/or completion for Black and/or Latino students over multiple years leading up to 2019. The site inclusion selection process is summarized in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Site Selection Inclusion Criteria*

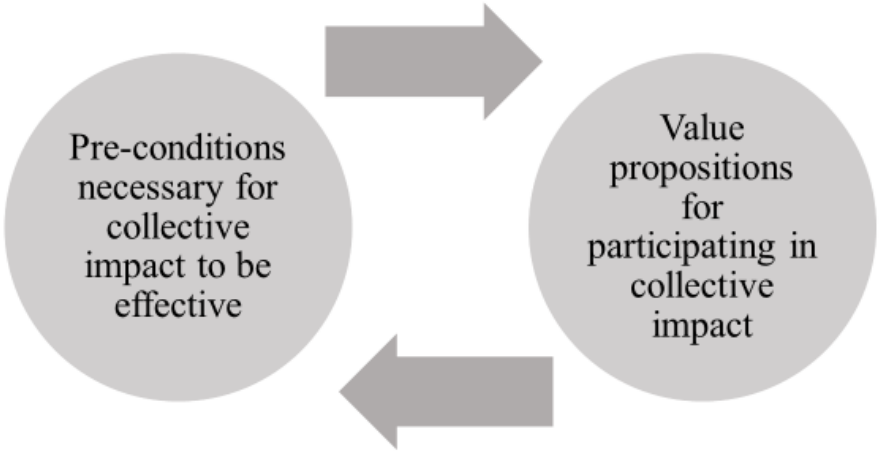
Inclusion Criteria	Number of Sites
StriveTogether partnerships	68
Improving postsecondary enrollment for students of color	27
Improving postsecondary completion for students of color	20
Improving both enrollment and completion	17
Improving enrollment and completion for students of color (in at least three of these four categories) in year over year data through 2019	**5**

This chapter presents findings from the study, and is organized by 1) the conditions actors perceive as necessary for collective impact to occur, 2) the processes backbone organizations facilitate to affect outcomes, 3) and the regional and political and policy factors at play.

Conditions for Collective Impact

When asked about the conditions that enabled "effective" collective impact to drive regional postsecondary outcomes, interview participants described an interplay between each of the below described necessary pre-conditions for collective impact to function, and the value adds that collective impact backbones provide. This distinction between a pre-condition for participation and a value-add of participating is worth parsing; while backbones facilitate both the necessary conditions and provide value for cross-sector actors' voluntary participation, the former sets the container for collective impact, and the latter is the result of participating in collective impact. These pre-conditions and benefits of participation operate in a cycle, however, and over the course of time that a backbone convenes stakeholders, it can become difficult to distinguish them. Figure 4.1 displays this cyclical relationship between the pre-conditions of collective impact and the value of participating in collective impact.

Figure 4.1. *Relationship between Collective Impact Pre-Conditions and Value Propositions*



Within these revolving pre-conditions and value propositions, this study found seven major themes, as evidenced by at least 10 of 13 interview participants referencing discussing each of them: 1) cross-sector collaboration, 2) data capacity and usage amongst partners, 3) a commitment to equity for traditionally underserved students, 4) StriveTogether providing critical support to partnerships, 5) the cradle to career approach playing an important role in preparing students for postsecondary success, 6) the importance of regional leadership investment in collective impact, and 7) collective impact leveraging additional funding to implement strategies that improve postsecondary outcomes. These findings are summarized in table 4.2 and each is described in greater detail below.

Table 4.2 *Pre-Conditions for and Benefits of Participating in Collective Impact*

1. **Cross-sector collaboration** enables partnerships that may not otherwise have formed and can facilitate increases in postsecondary outcomes.

2. **Data** capacity within partners that serve students and data sharing across those partners can lead to improved postsecondary outcomes.

3. An **equity** focus on traditionally underserved subgroups mobilizes regional leadership to improve postsecondary outcomes for these student groups.

4. **StriveTogether's** Theory of Action and professional development opportunities support regional collective impact work.

5. The **cradle to career approach** may better prepare students for postsecondary outcomes, and can help organizations that serve children at different ages to align on priorities and strategies.

6. Investment in collective impact by regional **leadership** is necessary.

7. Collective impact can leverage **funding** to develop or implement postsecondary strategies.

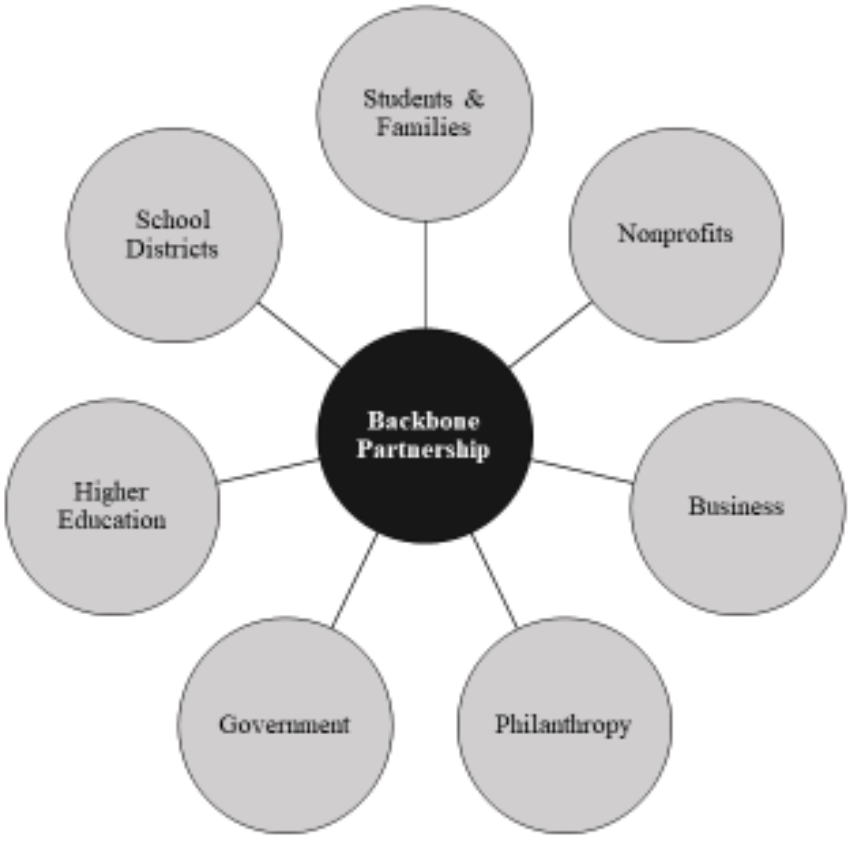
1. Cross-sector collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration enables partnerships that may not otherwise have formed and can facilitate increases in postsecondary outcomes.

The necessary pre-condition for any other collective impact action to occur is the convening of cross-sector actors. StriveTogether backbones bring together partners in business, philanthropy, government, higher education, school districts, as well as students and families, to collaborate on common goals: "We're a vehicle for people to build relationships outside of the silos of their districts or their institutions…I just think that web of relationships is so much richer because we exist and because we're bringing people together outside of their usual places" (E. Flanagan, personal communication, 1/27/22). The collaborations facilitate work toward shared postsecondary outcomes, but

also allow for participants to say, “Because of this partnership, I have relationships with people in different sectors, in different parts of education that I wouldn’t have had. And as a result of that, we were able to do X, Y, Z” (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/22). For example, from a higher education institution’s perspective, a benefit of participating in the collaborative is introductions to “non-educational partners” who can partner to support college students (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22). These sectors interview participants reported collaborating with are illustrated in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 *Collaboration Facilitated Across Sectors by Backbone Partnerships*



An organizational predisposition toward collective impact is evident in the partners who sign on to collaborate with backbone partnerships. One university chancellor put it this way: Because "community engagement is in our DNA at Parkside…we don't just see it as an initiative. This is just part of what we do" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). This orientation toward partnership allows for productive working group sessions in which challenges are openly addressed:

> "We had agreed to the things we were working on, whether they always progressed in the way we wanted it to, we had a roadmap for the work. We met on a regular basis, like every month, to share and provide updates. And we had some not always pleasant conversations, but I think in that process of meeting regularly the relationships deepened and the trust deepened between the individuals that were a part of this work" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

School district partnerships were referenced as centrally important within the collaborative ecosystem. Because school districts directly serve students, "It was through those deep relationships with school districts that [backbones] were able to really develop those strong strategies and implement with students" (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/ 22). Connecting school districts with other community-based organizations, and with higher education is a valuable role for backbones to play:

> "There are silos between the community-based organizations that serve and know and understand and have relationships with our BIPOC communities and the districts that are still pretty steeped in whiteness and you know, really driven by dominant white culture…so we're a trusted convener and leader…and create those safe spaces for people to come together and share their true vulnerabilities and challenges, and then work together to solve them. I think all of our partners would say that there's very few places where superintendents can actually share their truths because it's politically unsafe to do that" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

One way the partnerships in this study built trust with school districts was to uplift the schools that were doing well in a particular outcome or with a certain student group. An

approach that All Hands Raised took was to learn from schools that are doing well in a particular strategy: "We started working with two high schools to identify effective practices for FAFSA completion" (E. Flanagan, personal communication, 1/27/22). The schools within the All Hands Raised Region were identified, in part, because they "had strong equity leadership there" as well as the "time and capacity to do this kind of strategic work" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22). Those schools became the exemplar sites for other schools within that district and from other districts to learn from.

Similarly, the backbones in this study also developed partnerships with nonprofits and helped connect those nonprofits with school districts. One of Marin Promise Partnership's key partnerships is with 10,000 Degrees, a college access nonprofit whose mission is educational equity by "supporting students from low-income backgrounds to and through college and beyond "through financial aid support, academic advising, college planning and applications, and more" (10,000 Degrees). Marin Promise Partnership supported 10,000 Degrees' postsecondary programmatic work by helping to define which students would most benefit from receiving scholarships, and by making introductions to the school districts for 10,000 Degrees to host FAFSA completion workshops. Marin Promise Partnership also "created the data system and the accountability structure" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22) for FAFSA completion so that school counselors and 10,000 Degrees staff knew which students still needed support to complete their FAFSAs. As a result of this partnership with a "willing nonprofit partner…the FAFSA completion rate has gone up even higher…and I think that may have contributed dramatically to [postsecondary] enrollment being better" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22).

Determining the role a backbone should play in facilitating cross-sector convenings and working groups is an area most interview participants discussed. One way in which UP Partnership approached collaboration toward postsecondary outcomes was through a framework for determining when the backbone was leading, partnering, supporting, or applauding an initiative. Through these various levels of collaboration, UP Partnership was able to clarify its role as a backbone. In context of attributing roles and responsibility for outcomes, the executive director shared:

> "There's obviously the student level and the campus level within the community level, which sets the student context. Then there's the system that oversees the campus or the multiple systems that exist within the community. Then there's the partnership structure, like the network or collaborative that's helping to support change, which are located within the backbone organization" (R. Lugalia-Hollon, personal communication, 1/5/22).

Each backbone approaches collaborative facilitation with slightly different degrees of responsibility. In some regions, the backbone strongly directs the collaborative postsecondary working group, whereas in others the backbone plays only a container setting role so that other, cross-sector members of the group can drive the postsecondary strategies forward.

Regardless of the degree of backbone facilitation of the working groups, dedicating staff capacity to facilitating the collaboration was an essential component of partnerships' descriptions of how they convened cross-sector partners. In the Wisconsin case, the postsecondary facilitator is a role that is funded by one of the local universities and the role's time is split between the university and one of the backbones. This dual role between the backbone and higher education contributed to the region's postsecondary gains, according to multiple interview participants: "It's very good and powerful to have a subject matter expert who is very persistent" (J. Neubauer, personal

communication, 12/9/21). The dual role is perceived as "an incredible gift to our university and to Higher Expectations…an employee whose perspective on the work is broader and more community-focused" than if she were working for just one organization (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). This split role is "where the magic happens" because it allows for a constant reminder of the interconnectedness of K-12 and higher education (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). Dedicating staff capacity to the convening role, however structured, was reported by all five backbones as necessary for their postsecondary collaborations.

2. Data

Data capacity within partners that serve students and data sharing across those partners can lead to improved postsecondary outcomes.

In addition to convening cross-sector partners, the backbones in this study served a critical role in presenting data and facilitating discussion and action around that data. Three phases of data work were identified, and were discussed by 11 of the 13 interview participants: data level-setting, data review, and data usage. These phases are summarized in table 4.3 and described below.

Table 4.3 *Phases of Data Capacity within Collective Impact*

Phase	Key Components
1. Data Level-Setting	a) Making publicly available data accessible through summary reports or interactive data dashboards b) Building trust across partners through relationships and shared purpose in order to develop data sharing agreements for any non-publicly available data that is needed for the shared work to occur

2. Data Review	a) Approaching data reviews as opportunities to highlight successes, not to shame low-performing subgroups, schools, or districts b) Disaggregating data with the purpose of identifying and implementing strategies to support traditionally underserved student subgroups
3. Data Usage	a) Analyzing data in as close to "real time" as possible b) Adjusting strategies based on data analyses

1. Data level-setting: a) Making publicly available data accessible through summary reports or interactive data dashboards and b) building trust across partners through relationships and shared purpose in order to develop data-sharing agreements for any non-publicly available data that is needed for the work to occur.

Backbones played a key role in presenting data on population-level outcomes, leading indicators, and strategies in an accessible manner to their cross-sector partners: "We were told, over and over again, when we would provide this data, by the schools themselves, actually, that we were the only source for that information" (A. Klingner, personal communication, 1/27/22). This sentiment was repeated across different regions: "Prior to StriveTogether organizations existing, you could have found this data because it was publicly accessible, but you'd really have to work hard to get it" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21). While relevant postsecondary enrollment and completion data sometimes existed before backbones began convening partners, "nobody else is aggregating all of the schools in our collective six districts to get that snapshot" of progress (A. Klingner, personal communication, 1/27/22).

Sharing student data involved high levels of trust-building. As one executive director noted, "This partnership moves at the speed of trust" (T. Bicanin, personal communication, 12/9/21). Backbones were cognizant of the importance of using data productively, in a way that advances the working group's goals toward postsecondary gains:

> "We don't want to use data to shame and blame…and so we were navigating the politics of what that would look like to send out [FAFSA completion reports] countywide…who do we need to check with at the districts first to make sure it clears the process? Because we were providing them to the teams that we were working with directly, but it was a matter of how do we scale this and roll this out to schools?" (A. Klinger, personal communication, 1/27/22).

One college chancellor discussed framing data for positive use in this way: "One of the key strategies that StriveTogether talks about is you have to use data as a flashlight, right? You use the light to focus on the bright spots and not the end of flashlight as a club" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

2. Data Review: *a) approaching data reviews as opportunities to highlight successes, not to shame low-performing subgroups, schools, or districts, and b) disaggregating data with the purpose of identifying and implementing strategies to support traditionally underserved student subgroups.*

Once trust was developed across partners, backbones convened partners to review their local postsecondary data, with an emphasis on understanding how student groups were doing and what was working to support outcomes. Collectively reviewing data could be a vulnerable, challenging experience:

> "When we first systematically disaggregated the data on persistence and looked at it by race and ethnicity, a lot of jaws hit the table. We knew it wasn't good, but we had no idea how bad it was. That was an enormous motivator for all the institutional leaders in education, employment, government, the United Way, and

> others to say, holy smokes, we've got to do this work" (J. Neubauer, personal communication, 12/9/21).

This experience was common among partnerships after reviewing disaggregated data, and often created group motivation for building action steps: "It's all about accountability…and being transparent about what the data is saying and what it isn't saying is a way for us to remind people what problems we need to be solving" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

3. Data Usage: a) analyzing data in as close to "real time" as possible and b) adjusting strategies based on data analyses.

Once partnerships level-set on data uses, built trust, and reviewed disaggregated data, they implemented strategies and then reviewed the data that showed how the strategies were working. At All Hands Raised, for example, the FAFSA completion strategies depended on frequent data checks:

> "We tried to put out the FAFSA dashboard every two weeks and it showed the new completions that week and the completion percentages and it compared all the high schools to each other. And we sent to a list of almost 300 people. So high school administrators and superintendents and counselors and community partners. That made it really visible and that generated focus and conversation about FAFSA completion, too" (E. Flanagan, personal communication, 1/27/22).

The benefit of this backbone creating an online FAFSA data dashboard was that schools and partnering organizations could use the data to make changes to strategies. Before All Hands Raised began compiling and providing regular, accessible FAFSA reports, "one school's tracking it in Google sheets, another school's using paper that they're writing on and turning in to the assistant principal. So the data collection methods, were really grassroots and not systematized" (A. Klingner, personal communication, 1/27/22).

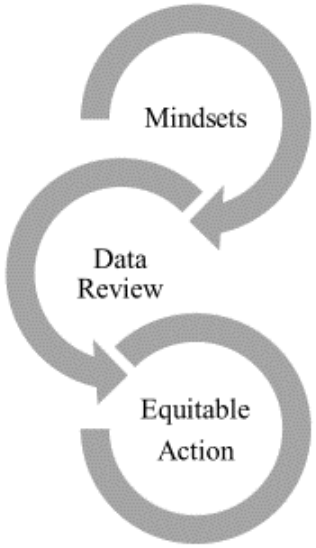
Systematizing the data approach allowed for partners to understand progress and adjust strategies to better support students in completing the FAFSA.

3. Equity

An equity focus on traditionally underserved subgroups mobilizes regional leadership to improve postsecondary outcomes for these student groups.

Cross-sector partners' capacity to apply an equity lens to postsecondary strategies within the partnerships' regions generally followed a three-part process which began with mindset shifts toward equity, including learning and commitment to understanding equity gaps, was followed by reviewing data through this lens, and finally was followed by action. These phases are depicted in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 *Equity Processes within Partnerships*



A regional commitment to more equitable postsecondary outcomes for these five regions began with beliefs and mindsets about the nature of equity work. One college

vice president described leadership conversations after reviewing disaggregated postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion data:

> "The first reaction is if we improve services for all students, then all the boats will rise…and that's true to an extent, but it doesn't really eliminate the gaps, you know? And so I think we've made some improvements, but we haven't necessarily narrowed the gaps…as a college we really need to figure out the different impact our services have on different populations" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22).

The belief that "all boats rising" is insufficient to close equity gaps was apparent across other partners, as well, and was further encouraged by backbone staff:

> "Another thing that the StriveTogether [partnerships] have brought to the community is the whole racial equity focus…And specifically bringing that to the postsecondaries and really thinking about systemic structures that have created the inequities that exist within our communities…I think [the partnerships] changed the frame of thinking for the individuals that participated, which is transformational. It doesn't mean that we're not slow to make progress, but it really starts to change the frame of thinking at the leadership level" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

This commitment to equitable outcomes was evident in the two institutions of higher education that serve students in Racine and Kenosha counties in Wisconsin. At the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, "the average six year graduation rate over the last 53 years was a little over 26%, and for most of those 53 years nobody cared" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). In the last 13 years, however, with a commitment to closing racial equity gaps from the chancellor, student success has become a major focus area for the institution. The chancellor described the first time she disaggregated and reviewed student data while interviewing for her current role: "Retention for first to second year first time, full-time students was below 60%. That's unacceptable. I mean, that's a moral imperative for me" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). Once this commitment to improving student outcomes was solidified at the leadership level, these

colleges began taking action. One way these Wisconsin higher education institutions took action was to find colleges that had improved outcomes for traditionally underserved student groups. For example, they found that "Georgia State is the exemplar in the United States for improving student success and grad rates among students of color. And they went from the low 20's in grad rates to the high 50s, over a 15 year period. We're halfway along that journey now" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

Another driver behind a focus on equity for traditionally underserved student groups are the demographic changes occurring in many regions across the country. As the percent of students of color increases, institutions have to improve strategies and supports for those students in order to keep overall, institutional outcomes up. Demographic shifts often converge with moral imperative mindset:

> "Even though you serve poor students, even though you serve first gen students, even though a lot of your students are of groups that historically haven't gone to university, or haven't done as well…even if the majority of our students work 30 or more hours a week, all sorts of excuses for why students don't graduate…you either say, 'this isn't acceptable and we have got to become more student-centered and figure out how to get this done.' Or you don't at some level, right?" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22)

The backbones in this study provided the cross-sector convening space and data capacity to partners who were interested in regional postsecondary work that would advance more equitable outcomes. Backbones often did this by focusing postsecondary data conversations on key outcomes. For example, "Our partnership is laser-focused on improving outcomes for Black and Brown children in Marin County" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22). To this end, Marin Promise Partnership set three regional postsecondary goals: "The goals in Marin County are for "80% of all kids—kids of color, white kids, low income, all income levels to 1) graduate high school having passed all of the courses required for

admission to a state college, 2) enroll in postsecondary, and 3) earn a postsecondary degree within six years" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22) If achieved, these goals would eliminate achievement disparities across student subgroups.

Leadership buy-in was described as requisite to implementing regional postsecondary strategies that emphasized equitable postsecondary outcomes for students of color. Despite the greater political context in Texas, which includes uphill policy battles around racial equity, UP Partnership was able to facilitate toward equitable postsecondary outcomes because "the leaders we work with have unwavering commitment" to equity; "their commitment was there before equity was popular and it's still there when there is political pushback" (R. Lugalia-Hollon, personal communication, 1/5/22).

4. StriveTogether

StriveTogether's Theory of Action and professional development opportunities support regional work.

StriveTogether functions as the national collective impact organization under which most of the current 68 regional partnerships initially formed, and the partnerships in this study reported relying on StriveTogether for a collective impact template and ongoing professional development opportunities. One executive director tells his backbone organization's origin story in this way:

> "Our approach to collective impact at Higher Expectations really started with exposure to the StriveTogether network…and also the Stanford Innovation Review article [Kania & Kramer, 2011]…so we used that as our framework, and then we followed the guidance of the StriveTogether staff in terms of what collective impact really is, how it works, how it ought to be done. We built our vision and our mission with their facilitation and a broad group of institutional leaders in our community" (J. Neubauer, personal communication, December 9, 2021).

StriveTogether staff described this study's five partnerships with the strongest postsecondary outcomes growth as "some of the most engaged communities, meaning they are leaning into the resources and the supports that StriveTogether is providing, whether it's participating in a cohort…or signing up for a two day training" (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/22). The StriveTogether supports that partnerships perceive as integral in supporting their regions' postsecondary outcomes are summarized in table 4.4 and described below.

Table 4.4 *Support Partnerships Receive from StriveTogether*

Support Partnerships Receive from StriveTogether

• A codified framework for implementing collective impact in the Theory of Action, with the following being most helpful:
  o Systems approach to change
  o Racial equity focus
  o Data capacity
  o Cradle to career approach
  o Continuous improvement process
• Peer learning networks with other partnerships
• Professional development and coaching
• Funding – either directly from StriveTogether to partnerships or facilitated because of partnerships' affiliation with StriveTogether

Backbones described the StriveTogether Theory of Action as a necessary framework for convening partners around postsecondary outcomes. For example, at Marin Promise Partnership, "We apply the StriveTogether Theory of Action. And the way we think about that is we align stakeholders around common outcomes for kids, from cradle to career" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22). Additionally, from a higher education perspective: "The StriveTogether framework helps with change management.

We all have great intention, but if we don't integrate what it really means to lead change and have some tools to use, it will be more difficult to succeed" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). The components of StriveTogether's Theory of Action are summarized in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 *Elements of StriveTogether's Theory of Action*

Principles	Pillars
1. Engage the community	1. Shared community vision
2. Advance equity	2. Evidence-based decision making
3. Develop a culture of continuous improvement	3. Collaborative action
4. Leverage existing resources	4. Investment and sustainability

Adapted from StriveTogether (2019)

As a self-described "learning organization," StriveTogether staff report: "We've gotten better and better at codifying knowledge and really getting clear so that network members could quickly learn from each other, and starting in 2015 was when we really started to codify our collaborative improvement process" (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/22).

In addition to providing a template for collective impact through the Theory of Action, StriveTogether offers numerous networking and professional development opportunities to its partnerships. UP Partnership, for example, participated in a StriveTogether Impact and Improvement Network for postsecondary outcomes, which was comprised of backbone staff as well as school district and other regional partners. In this network, the Bexar County regional partners were all "learning together and practicing together" (G. Walker, personal communication, 1/24/22).

Through these Impact and Improvement networks, StriveTogether supported:

> "Partnerships that were working with one high school or very small populations where they could actually test something—put a line on a graph and see what the data did. It was the first time that we could actually really point to impact, which was game changing because I feel like, particularly in nonprofit land, you can measure the inputs and the outputs, but getting to that 'who is better off and what impact are we having' factor is just an enormous challenge" (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/22).

UP Partnership, along with other backbones, also participates in "role-alikes" which are collaboratives for backbone staff members holding similar roles to learn from each other and share resources.

Another StriveTogether offering is a program to learn how better to facilitate toward regional outcomes. Among others, All Hands Raised participated in this Results-Based Facilitation training, which was co-led by StriveTogether and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

> "We all attended RBF trainings and so we used that process to complete factor analyses based on the data. And so what that really led to was schools setting what we call universal targets. So if they saw that, for example, Black student postsecondary enrollment rates were lagging behind other groups in the building, they would set conscious targets to improve that metric" (A. Klinger, personal communication, 1/27/22).

All Hands Raised also participated in StriveTogether's Postsecondary Action Community, founded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to "not just look at the data, but to draw on the expertise of practitioners in postsecondary to do a key driver diagram or a factor analysis on why it is" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22). While StriveTogether's professional learning offerings have changed over the years of this study's selection criteria (leading up to 2019), the five partnerships whose regions experienced postsecondary gains reported consistently engaging in these StriveTogether learning opportunities.

5. Cradle to Career Approach

The cradle to career approach may better prepare students for postsecondary outcomes, and can help organizations that serve children at different ages to align on priorities and strategies.

Interview participants also credited the cradle to career approach with supporting their regions' improvements in postsecondary outcomes. The cradle to career approach, as coined by StriveTogether, is a way of understanding the educational health and progress of a region along a child's life cycle, from early childhood through career attainment. While this study selected five partnerships because of their regions' postsecondary outcomes, these partnerships all take a cradle to career approach to educational outcomes. The indicators each partnership tracks and works to improve are summarized in table 4.6.

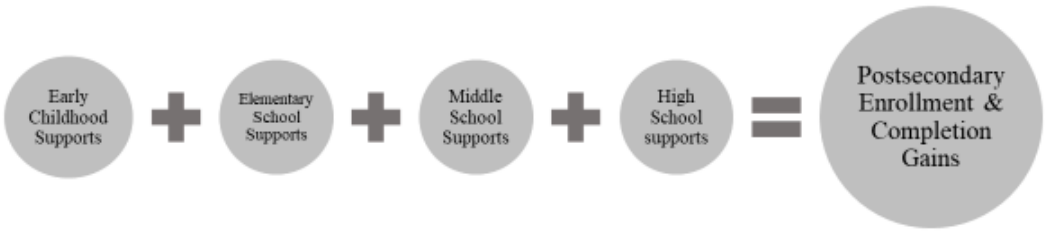
Table 4.6 *Partnerships' Community-Wide Indicators*

Indicator	All Hands Raised	Building Our Future	Higher Expect-ations	Marin Promise Partnership	UP Partnership
Birth Weight	x				
Clinical Care Ranking		x			
Kindergarten Readiness	x		x	x	x
Kindergarten Attendance	x				
Early Grade Reading	x	x	x	x	x
Children Living with Food Insecurity		x			
Middle Grade Math	x	x		x	x
Sixth Grade Attendance	x				

English Language Learners' Progress	x				
Equity in School Discipline	x				
Ninth Grade Attendance	x				
Ninth Grade Credit Attainment	x				
High School Graduation	x	x	x		
College / Career Readiness				x	x
Postsecondary Enrollment	x	x	x	x	x
Postsecondary Completion	x	x	x	x	x
Connected with a Career Track	x				
Employment			x		

Partnerships credit this cradle to career approach with preparing students for postsecondary success well before they are college-going age. Figure 4.4 illustrates how partnerships attribute the cradle to career approach in supporting postsecondary enrollment and completion gains.

Figure 4.4 *Cradle to Career through Postsecondary*



For example, All Hands Raised staff believe a program called Ninth Grade Counts—in which incoming ninth grade students receive transition support, advising around the importance of credit accrual for graduation, and credit for taking the course—may have increased participating students' postsecondary enrollment rates four years later.

> "We haven't had the capacity to do any internal analysis on this yet, but I think that early focus and the sheer number of students participating had an impact in how many students saw themselves as potentially college going…almost every high school in our whole county had Ninth Grade Counts programs happening" (E. Flanagan, personal communication, 1/27/22).

Similarly, in Marin County, by supporting students in completing the A-G coursework requirements for California state college admission during their high school years, Marin Promise Partnership is backwards planning for postsecondary readiness at the start of students' freshman year of high school.

In addition to early supports for students paying off in the later postsecondary years, partners report the value of aligning cross-sector partners around the cradle to career approach. For example:

> "All the postsecondary folks look at their postsecondary data, but many of them have not looked at third grade reading or sixth grade math scores. And so when we started to unpack some of the factors as to why Black students were not succeeding in postsecondary, one of the key challenges is math competency…and we showed the postsecondary folks our countywide math and reading data, where less than 20% of Black students can read by third grade in the county" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

The value of taking a regional, cradle to career approach is affirmed by a college chancellor: "Because of the various initiatives along the StriveTogether cradle to career milestones…we're leading the effort to focus on what happens after each step…what happens in your career" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

6. Leadership

Investment in collective impact by regional leadership is necessary when implementing postsecondary strategies.

Interview participants from all five partnerships referenced the importance of their region's leaders' investment in the collective impact work. Leaders with decision-making power and the ability to allocate resources to ensure strategies can be implemented were cited as necessary in partnerships' success stories. While regional leader investment in collective impact was sometimes circumstantial or informal, all five partnerships are formally composed of cross-sector leadership tables.

> "Representation on the leadership table is critical because that is where all of the cross-sector, interdisciplinary folks are saying, 'yes, we want to be part of the solution related to the StriveTogether framework. And we're going to commit resources of both time and money and alignment here at the leadership table" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

This cross-sector leadership investment in collective impact serves to strengthen "knowledge of the alignments and allegiances, connections and communications within and across actor groups" (Malen, 2011, p. 177) this is central to interest group success. While interview participants referenced their work as collective impact, it stems from a historical lineage of interest groups and intermediaries within education, all of which includes actors outside of school systems and postsecondary institutions. Table 4.7 summarizes this cross-sector representation on each partnerships' board of directors.

Table 4.7 *Sector Representation on Collective Impact Partnerships' Leadership Tables*

Sector Represented	All Hands Raised	Building Our Future	Higher Expectations	Marin Promise Partnership	UP Partnership
K-12 School Districts		x	x		x

Higher Education		x	x	x	x
Business	x	x	x	x	x
Philanthropy	x	x	x	x	x
Nonprofit	x	x	x	x	x
Government		x	x	x	x

School district leaders include superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors or coordinators of departments. Higher education leaders include college presidents, vice presidents, deans, and provosts. Business leaders are often CEOs or Vice Presidents of large corporations and represent diverse industries including healthcare, utilities, finance, retail, and manufacturing; a number of business chambers and economic development organizations are also represented. Philanthropic leaders represent local family foundations as well as regional offices of national organizations such as the United Way. Nonprofit leaders are the most heavily represented on partnerships' boards, on average, and include direct service providers such as after-school programs, as well as nonprofits that engage in policy and advocacy work. The smallest represented sector on partnerships' boards includes other branches of local government; these positions include a police department, library system, local elected officials including a mayor and a county commissioner, health and human services, and the regional branch of the state department of education. In addition to representation from these sectors, one partnership lists high school and college students on its board, and the other partnerships have ways

of representing youth voice within their governance structures, including separate youth councils or youth leadership teams.

Investing cross-sector regional leadership in collective impact was reported as a driver toward more equitable postsecondary outcomes. In Wisconsin, for example, the backbone partnered with the Racial Equity Institute as part of its commitment to supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kenosha County:

> "We had the chancellor from University of Wisconsin-Parkside, president from Carthage College, president at Herzing University, the Executive Vice President/Provost at Gateway Technical College, alongside 40 other community leaders for two full days, understanding how institutions and systems are producing inequitable outcomes. And since then, Building Our Future has trained over a hundred community partners to really understand our structural systems in order to advance sustainable systems change. Our commitment to equity is not about new programs, but about alleviating systemic barriers that prevent every young person from seizing opportunity to realize their full potential" (T. Bicanin, personal communication, 12/9/21).

As a result of participating in this cross-sector Racial Equity Institute, local leaders reported a clearer understanding of how to implement equitable practices within their organizations, which backbone staff attribute to improving postsecondary outcomes.

Similarly, the backbone in Portland convenes its region's leaders around equity. After successful strategies are identified across the region, All Hands Raised shares with their Racial Educational Equity Leadership group, which is:

> "Comprised of all the superintendents in [our county's] footprint, as well as the executive directors of all the largest culturally specific community based organizations...and superintendents are encouraged to either mandate or adopt system-wide within their organizations" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

While executive leadership engagement was described as critical, All Hands Raised also discussed the importance of engaging mid-level leaders within partnering organizations:

> "It's one thing to share and ask the leaders to implement, and it's another to bring together the actual practitioners in each of the buildings and convince them to implement with urgency. And that's what we do, and I think that's one of the strengths of our model" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22)

UP Partnership also discussed the importance of investing mid-level leaders to implement postsecondary success strategies: "We had folks closest to our students…we weren't just talking to their superintendent. We were talking to their curriculum and instruction [department], and we were ultimately talking to counselors who were interacting with students in a daily basis" (G. Walker, personal communication, 1/24/22). In Bexar County, the backbone convenes equity champions in positions of leadership by "coming together in very specific, targeted ways to drive change, but at other times, keeping those folks connected to a larger equity movement that gives them more wind for their sails" (R. Lugalia-Hollon, personal communication, 1/5/22).

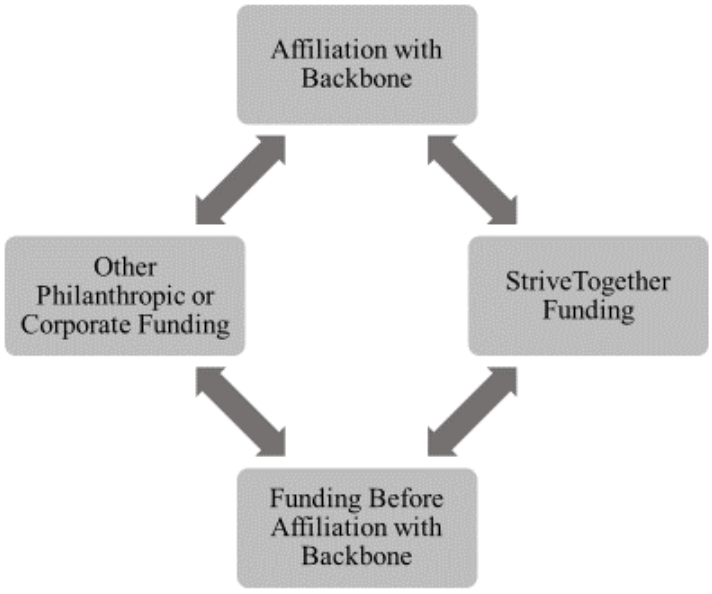
The role of business leaders, specifically, was also reported as significant by interview participants. In Wisconsin, regional business leaders were influential and initial drivers in establishing both collective impact partnerships. Higher Expectations in Racine County was founded shortly after the county implemented a strategic plan to ensure all students graduate from high college and core career ready. In its founding, "there was great alignment and good discussions between higher ed, K-12, the business community, and government entities" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). In Kenosha County, conversations between higher education leaders and business leaders about student preparation to enter the workforce resulted in community leaders saying, "the StriveTogether framework appears to be what will help us achieve the goals we have from cradle to career" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22) and consequently founding Building Our Future.

7. Funding

Collective impact can leverage additional funding to develop or implement postsecondary strategies.

There are several ways in which interview participants discussed the role of funding in improving regional postsecondary outcomes. First, StriveTogether sometimes provided funding directly to a backbone for a specific purpose. Second, backbones perceived they were sometimes more likely to receive funding from other foundations or corporations because of their affiliation with StriveTogether. Third, cross-sector partners may also have been more likely to receive funding as a result of their affiliation with the regional backbone. This interplay of funding influence and relationships is depicted in figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 *Funding for Organizations Partnering with Backbone*



Funding that StriveTogether provided directly to backbones included small grants, such as one that allowed All Hands Raised to provide FAFSA completion incentives to schools, as well as large grants to fund staff positions and engage in learning cohorts.

StriveTogether also facilitated introductions between regional backbones and other funding or cohort opportunities. For example, StriveTogether made introductions between the Lumina Foundation and the two Wisconsin partnerships - Building Our Future and Higher Expectations. As a result of this connection, the partnerships were rewarded with Lumina Talent Hub funding for postsecondary work. In the application, the two partnerships were:

> "Working collaboratively to find commonalities of things we could work on together. One, to improve the individual experience at the institution, but also to start to lay the groundwork to think about what we could do together that we couldn't do alone. And so that is the frame under which we build the Talent Hub application" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

As a result, "the Talent Hub structure provided what the group needed to be able to start sharing data on a regular basis" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21). Other partners on the Lumina Talent Hub grant expressed similar sentiments around the importance of beginning to work together and build postsecondary data infrastructure, while also reflecting that shared strategies were not fully identified or collaborated on during the grant period, but that the structure built relationships that advanced postsecondary work in the region:

> "We'd get together monthly, [and ask] 'What are you doing?' 'What are you doing?' And then we'd go back to our campuses and mostly work by ourselves, and then we'd come back and talk about how things were going, and that's the way it went for a few years, and we'd collect data. As the grant period was ending, that was the moment where I felt we made the biggest step forward in terms of collective impact" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

That next step forward in Wisconsin was identifying problems in the transfer patterns between the technical college and the university, which resulted in policy changes to how students matriculate from the technical college to the four-year college through the creation of pathways that are expected to result in student graduation rates increasing by "40%, even if nothing else changes" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). The Lumina Talent Hub grant allowed for Racine and Kenosha to "punch above our weight with communities five times our size" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

In Portland, UP Partnership reported that "it was helpful to have some national level investment in local work" which included both grant funding from StriveTogether and other funders, as well as a deepening of relationships by being able to "take our partners to Washington DC to speak at the white house about our FAFSA efforts and what was working and we wanted to see" (G. Walker, personal communication, 1/24/22).

The regional presence of StriveTogether partnerships may also help facilitate funding connections for cross-sector partners. An organization's participation in a StriveTogether partnership can help facilitate a snowball funding effect for donors who are seeking to donate to collaborative efforts. In Wisconsin, for example, the executive director of Building Our Future describes this example of the local college receiving a large grant, in part because of the college's engagement in collective impact:

> "In October 2021, Parkside received one of the biggest gifts, the second largest donation, and that came from one of our executive board members, the Callahan family….to develop a scholarship program…and it comes with success coaches and offers engagement opportunities to support student success. The creation of the Callahan Scholars program continues UW-Parkside's progress in strengthening student outcomes." (T. Bicanin, personal communication, 12/9/21).

Also in Wisconsin, the Racial Equity Institute that many regional leaders participated in was funded through these collaborations. The University of Wisconsin-Parkside was able to "work with the United Way to bring the Racial Equity Institute to our community" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22) as a result of the relationship both partnership backbones—Higher Expectations and Building Our Future have with the United Way.

Processes for Affecting Postsecondary Outcomes

The above section detailed how partnerships perceive the *conditions* that enabled their regions' improvements in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color. Those conditions also served as participation benefits for cross-sector partners engaging in collective impact.

Within the context of those conditions, this section of the findings describes the *processes* through which partners reported they acted to improve postsecondary outcomes. In accordance with Bennett & Checkel's (2015) guidance for process tracing, the researcher developed early drafts of this process and revised it multiple times over the course of interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure it was comprehensive of all of the partnerships' reported processes for raising postsecondary outcomes. The resulting process summarizes the general approach all five partnerships whose regions experienced postsecondary enrollment and completion increases for students of color over multiple years leading up to 2019 took to influence those outcomes. An overview of these process steps are provided in table 4.8.

Table 4.8 *Backbone Process for Driving Postsecondary Outcomes*

Process Steps
1. Convene cross-sector partners with ability to change programs and/or policies and/or bring resources to bear
2. Review regional postsecondary enrollment, persistence, completion data, disaggregated by student subgroups
3. Review predictive research factors and leading indicators of postsecondary outcomes
4. Conduct landscape analysis of current strategies
5. Either develop new strategies or scale existing, working strategies
6. Test effectiveness of strategies through frequent data analysis
7. Repeat as needed

While the process steps remained constant, the specific strategies that partnerships ultimately identified and implemented varied, with some crossover across regions. One strategy identified across three of the partnerships for improving postsecondary outcomes is providing support to students to complete the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) form. UP Partnership shared:

> "We put a lot of eggs in [the FAFSA completion] basket because we looked at what we could influence in the short term to reach our longer term goals…and FAFSA was something we were well positioned to influence, especially with the public data that was available…We were getting biweekly, so like rapid cycle, data on FAFSA completion rates. And so with that information we were able to run continuous improvement cycles and experiment with new strategies" (G. Walker, personal communication, 1/24/22).

All Hands Raised found that students needed one-one-one assistance to complete the FAFSA, but that "turned out to be pretty expensive…so the idea was that volunteers

could be trained…so we partnered with some people to develop and give a training" (E. Flanagan, personal communication, 1/27/22). Table 4.9 summarizes how this collective impact process was employed by partnerships that adopted FAFSA completion strategies across their regions.

Table 4.9 *Application of Collective Impact Process to FAFSA Completion Strategy*

Process Steps	Application to FAFSA Completion Strategy
1. Convene cross-sector partners with ability to change programs and/or policies and/or bring resources to bear	Backbone convened school districts, higher education partners, and local college access nonprofits
2. Review regional postsecondary enrollment, persistence, completion data, disaggregated by student subgroups	Group reviewed data and found postsecondary equity gaps across race and class
3. Review predictive research factors and leading indicators of postsecondary outcomes	Group reviewed what predicts postsecondary enrollment and found FAFSA completion
4. Conduct landscape analysis of current strategies	Group catalogued the existing FAFSA strategies within the region being employed by all partners and analyzed the data indicating their effectiveness
5. Either develop new strategies or scale existing, working strategies	If a FAFSA completion strategy was working, the group scaled it to more students. If FAFSA completion was an overall regional gap, the group developed new FAFSA completion strategies.
6. Test effectiveness of strategies through frequent data analysis	Group continued meeting regularly to check FAFSA completion data and tracked it against enrollment and persistence rates
7. Repeat as needed	As long as FAFSA completion continued to correlate with improved enrollment and

	persistence, the group continued the initiative. If and when another strategy was needed, the group repeated the above process

FAFSA completion is just one of many strategies that partnerships identified to improve postsecondary outcomes. Table 4.10 lists the strategies interview participants reported as focus areas for their collaborative networks.

Table 4.10 *Strategies Identified by Partnerships for Improving Postsecondary Outcomes*

Partnership	Identified Postsecondary Strategies
All Hands Raised	a) FAFSA completion b) 9th grade counts c) ESL strategies
Building Our Future and Higher Expectations	a) Math coursework b) Transfer patterns c) Proactive advising d) High School credit accrual
Marin Promise Partnership	a) FAFSA completion b) Academic college readiness c) Student success advising networks d) Summer bridge program e) Scholarship program
UP Partnership	a) FAFSA completion b) Dual credit intervention c) Chronic absenteeism intervention

	d) Equitable enrollment initiative

The Wisconsin partnerships have focused on postsecondary math coursework strategies because they found that math coursework completion often acts as a barrier to postsecondary outcomes. When reviewing predictive data, the collaboration found that "Students fall off everywhere along the math pipeline where there's a chance for a student to fall off…so we created math pathways. We looked at multiple measures – co-requisite remediation, and ultimately alignment between the technical college and the university" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21). Since identifying the challenges associated with college math course completion, the collaboration has been

> "Working with our K-12 partners because we want to make sure our K-12 partners understand what our postsecondaries are doing because there's such a feeder there. A lot of their students go on to these two institutions. And so we've been doing joint professional development together with the largest K-12 in Racine county and the largest K-12 in Kenosha county" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

The partnership was able to advise the K-12 districts against offering remedial math classes because their research and data showed that only taking a remedial math class is ineffective at preparing high school students for postsecondary math. The math focus that began in postsecondary and then backed into high schools has now extended to support middle schools improve "teacher skill sets on fractions because the data shows that that's one of the things that really trips up our [postsecondary] students" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

While the Wisconsin partnerships have focused heavily on math pathways, Marin Promise Partnership has "focused on whether kids graduate from high school with the A-

G requirements, which are requirements to get into a state college. And you need these classes with a C or better grade" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22). Marin Promise Partnership works to support students in passing their A-G requirements by forming Student Success Networks. These networks are formed by "bringing together community partners, counselors, teachers, and administrators as a team to look at data to concentrate on the specific kids who need interventions. The Success Networks also look for trends across all the data that would inform systemic changes" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22). The process within Marin's postsecondary collaborative action groups is summarized in this way:

> "Once we identify something that's actually working, usually through these collaborative action groups, and it's actually moving the needle on outcomes for Black and Brown kids, then our goal is to scale that and encourage institutionalization of it so it can go on in perpetuity, so the good result can stick, if you will" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22).

Many interview participants referenced an overall sense of urgency in closing racial achievement gaps throughout all of the collaborative action process steps. Despite making progress, multiple interview participants shared that they still have not met their goals. From a college leader: "African American grade rates are at a historic high, Hispanic grad rates are at a historic high. But there's still gaps with white students, and all the rates are low. Have we made progress? Yes. Are we anywhere near where we need to be? No." (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). Backbone staff echo similar sentiments:

> "I do think it's important to celebrate improvement, but the completion rates to me are still depressing and concerning because when you have that many students enroll, we've seen this increase, but completion rates are pretty much remain flat, that means we have more students taking on debt and then getting nothing for it" (A. Klingner, personal communication, 1/27/22)

This sense of needing to do more, despite progress, is why interview participants explained they kept reengaging in the collective impact process.

Political and Policy Factors

The above sections described the conditions and processes cross-sector actors perceived to improve regional postsecondary outcomes. This section details the political contexts of the regions, as well as some of the policies that interact with the programmatic processes, to influence postsecondary outcomes.

Political Context

Each of the partnership regions reported unique regional politics that affected their postsecondary work. In this sense, "If you've seen one StriveTogether network, you've seen one" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). Yet, while these partnership regions are different, there are applicable lessons across sites and for other, similarly situated regions that are seeking to implement collective impact.

1. All Hands Raised – Multnomah County, Oregon

All Hands Raised is in Portland, a city with democratic and progressive politics. For example, Portland Public Schools was the first school district in the nation to adopt a racial equity policy, in 2010. Surrounding school districts within Multnomah County were also early in working with "culturally specific partners to leverage partnerships to figure out how to best engage and support BIPOC families and students" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22). In addition to the school systems' commitment to racial equity, Multnomah County Health Department has been a national leader as an early adopter in explicitly equity-focused approaches to public health. In this sense, the Portland political context was welcoming to equity-focused postsecondary strategies

because the "entire community was building capacity and muscle to focus on our students of color, versus in other cities, I think they're just starting the work" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

2. Building Our Future — Kenosha County, Wisconsin and Higher Expectations — Racine County, Wisconsin

In contrast with Portland, the metro Milwaukee area, which includes Racine and Kenosha counties, is what multiple interview participants described as "one of the worst places in the country to grow up Black." One higher education leader provided the following context:

> "When Blacks came up from the South to get jobs, there were unions, they got decent jobs, and there was some progress being made. But all those manufacturing jobs have left, and a lot of the unions left with them. A lot of the African Americans that came up and built families were redlined into communities where their main source of wealth, their homes, evaporated because of racist policy. As so they were stuck with no jobs, no wealth" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

This historical context, at least in part, explains why racial inequities in Racine and Kenosha are so stark, and why leaders across sectors have mobilized to engage in collective impact to raise postsecondary outcomes for students of color. Evidence of broad community support existed when both backbone organizations were formed, and continued growth and funding shows that continued support exists to close these equity gaps.

Another political factor present in the Wisconsin communities is a heavy emphasis on workforce development, which was a driver in the creation of both backbone organizations and continues to inform the postsecondary networks. As one higher education leader described: "All of the data was showing we did not adequately prepare

students for the current or future workforce demands, and we needed to plan and work differently, and work more collaboratively in order to prepare for those projections" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22). Workforce development has brought business leaders to the collective impact table, and focuses these conversations on labor market goals.

3. Marin Promise Partnership — Marin County, California

Marin County, situated north of San Francisco, has wide gaps between very wealthy residents and residents living in poverty. Marin County also has high levels of local control, with 18 school districts serving just 37,000 K-12 students. This large number of small school districts has significant implications for the allocation of per pupil funding. Some districts are very well-funded; others are severely under-resourced. The Executive Director of Marin Promise Partnership described the reasons for the funding disparities across school districts:

> "The way it works is that if your taxes for your district are more than what the state has allocated to you on a per pupil basis, you get to keep the difference. So if you are in a really expensive neighborhood with really high-priced homes, or have lots of businesses and high business taxes, your kids and your district are going to have more…if you're in one of these wealthier districts, the parents often raise money through a school foundation, and that goes directly to that school…On top of that, sometimes the whole community, because their property values are affected by the quality of the schools, will pass a parcel tax. They'll tax their own community for the good of their own school. So in many schools in our county, about a third of the overall budget comes from local sources, either foundation or parcel taxes" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22).

Wide disparities exist across Marin County's 18 small school districts, with most districts fitting the above description of well-resourced on multiple fronts. It is the remaining school districts that are the focus districts for Marin Promise Partnership.

These districts have the "highest percentage of low-income and kids of color" (A. Mathieson, personal communication, 1/6/22).

4. UP Partnership — Bexar County, Texas

UP Partnership operates in San Antonio, which is seated within one of just a dozen or so counties in Texas that voted democratic in the 2020 elections. Backbone staff describe San Antonio as a city that collaborates:

> "At the time, we kind of attributed some of our success to the collaborative nature of our partners, kind of a culture of collaboration in the city…and so this narrative that we collaborate is just part of how we do our work. Even at separate institutions they're used to sitting on councils together and used to, you know, being able to pick up the phone and solve problems together" (G. Walker, personal communication, 1/24/22).

This predisposition to collaborate from the city's leaders may help explain why collective impact has helped improve postsecondary outcomes in the region:

> "The systems leaders we work with, we're not trying to make change happen to them. They want change to happen in their systems and they need partnership to expand their capacity, to implement and actuate that change…I think in collective impact or organizing in general, you're working with institutions that want to effectuate that evolution" (R. Lugalia-Hollon, personal communication, 1/5/22).

Policy Context

Kingdon's (1995) foundational framework situates persuasion over actual power in policy dynamics, and that holds true in some of the policy shifts that have resulted from the work of the StriveTogether partnerships. During interviews, no participants shared that policy change was a primary driver for participation in collective impact, or even the goal within the postsecondary collaborations. Rather, if and when policy change emerged within the collective impact process, it was a result of other conversations and relationships that were formed by participating in collective impact. Further, no participants identified external policy that would have influenced their regions'

postsecondary gains. While policy can take a formal, legislative role, policy changes can also include how individual institutions operate, or how organizations engage with each other. In this regard, collective impact influenced two policies within the Wisconsin partnerships: 1) the creation of new transfer patterns between a technical college and a 4-year college, and 2) the creation of a 'Higher Education Regional Alliance' across 18 institutions in metro Milwaukee.

1. Transfer patterns. A policy change that resulted from the collaborations facilitated by the two Wisconsin backbones, Building Our Future and Higher Expectations, is the identification of a leaky pipeline between the technical college and the university. Through data analysis and collaborative conversations, the group found that students transferring from Gateway Technical College to University of Wisconsin-Parkside were "dropping out and discontinuing their studies and graduating at much lower rates than transfers between other colleges" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). As a result, Gateway Technical College decided to expand its "program portfolio to include traditional two year associates' degrees…that are intended to be pathways into four year bachelor's degrees" that can be earned at University of Wisconsin-Parkside (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). Changing the transfer pattern options is:

> "Not without some risk because what we're essentially doing is we're saying to an institution five minutes down the road to offer a duplicative degree program for the first two years of the undergrad degree program that we offer, but at less cost…But the data was so compelling that we ended up being able to move forward…and that wouldn't have happened, in my belief, in the same way, if we hadn't had the opportunity to work together and build relationships and build trust over the grant [Lumina Talent Hub] period" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

While this transfer credit pattern shift is underway, the team discussed other policy shifts that did not ultimately make it off the ground, including a reverse transfer option. From the Gateway Technical College perspective,

> "We did some data analysis of the success rates of our students when they went to Parkside. That was very helpful. We started some conversations about reverse transfer, whether students who left Gateway having not completed a degree and went to Parkside, if they might be able to use some of their Parkside work to basically count it back to getting their associate degree. That really didn't go anywhere because of the nature of the courses that our students likely had taken here versus there…" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22).

This example illustrates what interview participants described as the slow and sometimes cyclical nature of collaborative work and its effects on policy; not every option the partnership explored resulted in programmatic or policy changes.

2. Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA). Developing a partnership across metro Milwaukee's 18 institutions of higher education was not an initial goal of the postsecondary working group convened by the two backbones, but it is, by multiple accounts, a win:

> "One of the outcomes, it's not specifically related to completion, but its connected, is that the postsecondary completion work expanded to the greater M-7 region…we continue to focus on how to take some of the things we were doing with Talent Hub, credit accrual, proactive advising, math, and take things to scale and offer supports in the greater M-7 region" (D. Possehl, personal communication, 12/9/21).

The formation of the HERA in metro Milwaukee addresses three areas:

> "First, educational attainment. If we focus on equity, particularly for Black and Brown students, where the gaps are significant, Milwaukee and Racine are in a national hole. That was a driver. The second goal was to align our academic programs, to make sure they meet the ongoing needs. And then third was to build a stronger bridge between higher ed and industry. There are 150,000-160,000 students enrolled in postsecondary every year across those 18 institutions. All we heard from employers is, 'I can't find talent.' So how do we build that bridge?" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

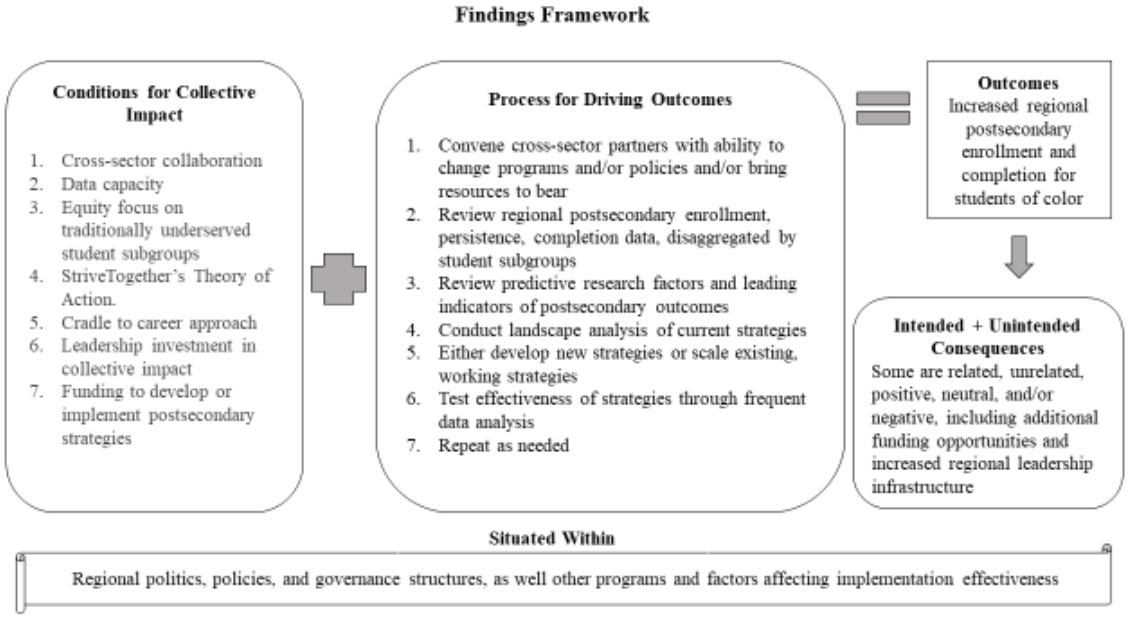
While the HERA convenes to align on goals and collaborate toward outcomes, its greatest potential and full benefits are yet to be realized due to resource constraints:

> "We get together and talk about things, but there's very little central infrastructure to organize the work…very little resources are being devoted by individual institutions to move the collective work forward. Apart from the time that's being spent, there's no supportive policy or statute at the city, regional, or state level, and so the collective impact work is still something that's being done on the side mostly. And so it's tough" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

HERA holds promise as a convening structure for advancing more equitable postsecondary outcomes across the greater Milwaukee region beyond Racine and Kenosha counties and beyond the several institutions of higher education that have been most heavily engaged in collective impact to date. If, for example, HERA is able to transfer learnings about math coursework to all 18 institutions, it is possible that postsecondary outcomes may continue to increase in the region.

The findings described in this chapter are summarized in figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6 Findings Framework



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

Roadmap

This chapter begins with the purpose and significance of the study, is followed by a discussion of the findings, next provides cross walks of these findings to other collective impact frameworks, then shares methodological and theoretical reflections, and concludes with implications for practitioners of collective impact, including backbones, school districts, higher education, funders, the business community, policymakers, and researchers and evaluators.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. While there is some research about collective impact as a model for social change (ORS Impact, 2018; Jolin, Schmitz & Seldon, 2012; Schoenberger, 2018; FSG, 2016; Cabaj, 2016), there are many opportunities for studying collective impact's role within education. This study contributed to the literature on intermediary organizations in education by describing the conditions and processes through which collective impact partners influence population-level outcomes.

This study explored collective impact partners' perceptions of the specific activities and efforts associated with postsecondary success measures. The sites selected

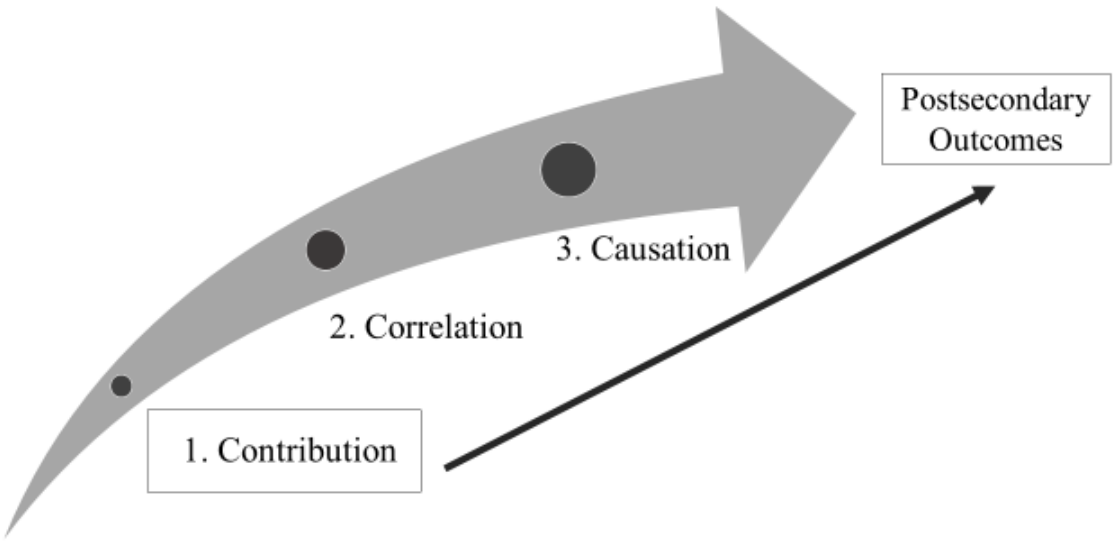
for study experienced regional growth in postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color over multiple years, which provided a lens into understanding whether and to what extent the collective impact approach may have contributed to these outcomes. While there are studies that examine collective impact's effectiveness in other fields (Kegler et al., 2020; Hajjar et al., 2020; Landry et al., 2020; Schindler et al., 2017; Jenkins et al., 2020; Schulz et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2019), most of these studies are in public or community health. There is currently very little published literature examining collective impact's role in educational outcomes. Additionally, most of the existing literature leans heavily on describing the conditions and processes of collective impact initiatives, regardless of whether those collective impact regions experienced the population-level outcomes gains they worked toward. The implications from studies that cast a wide net for selection criteria (ie, simply studying a local collective impact initiative) are not very helpful for practitioners and policymakers who want to implement or replicate *effective* collective impact. Only one known study sought to understand partners' perceptions of their efforts within regions that had actually experienced outcomes improvements (ORS, 2018). By purposefully selecting study sites (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that had experienced multi-year gains in their intended outcomes, this study filled a gap in the educational collective impact literature, and in the collective impact effectiveness literature more broadly. Additionally, by studying regions that experienced outcomes gains specifically for students of color as opposed to overall, aggregated gains, this study contributed to the literature on racial equity within education. This study also contributed to an understanding of the politics of cross-sector efforts by

examining the civic capacity of each region to implement change efforts toward population-level outcomes.

Discussion of Overall Collective Impact Outcomes

The purpose of this study was to get closer to disentangling the contribution of cross-sector actors' actions in regions with increased population-level outcomes gains in the target area of postsecondary enrollment and completion for students of color. Contribution refers to what *helped* cause the outcomes. Given the complex nature of evaluating the contributions of dozens of cross-sector actors, including K-12 school districts, higher education, nonprofits, business and philanthropic partners, and situating those contributions within a region's political and policy context, this study stops at contribution and does not seek to claim correlation or causation. Figure 5.1 illustrates these levels of certainty toward outcomes.

Figure 5.1 *Contribution, Attribution, Correlation, & Causation toward Outcomes*



Having a clearer answer to this question of collective impact's contribution toward postsecondary outcomes can help inform better implementation of strategies by practitioners, and support funders and policymakers seeking to invest in collective impact.

There is evidence that the individual organizations affiliated with the StriveTogether backbones in this study possessed a predisposition to conducting collaborative, equity-driven postsecondary strategy work, which led to their participation in collective impact, which contributed to their regions' increased postsecondary enrollment and completion improvements for students of color in the years leading up to 2019. As an example of organizational predisposition for collaborative, equity-focused work, University of Wisconsin-Parkside secured Title III grant funding to advance student success initiatives toward equitable outcomes before it began partnering with the two backbones in its catchment region. It is, at least in part, this selection bias that likely led UW-P to collective impact, and participating in the collective impact partnership then increased UW-P's capacity for implementing strategies that raised postsecondary outcomes. Given the cyclical nature of the type of organizations that willingly sign on to collective impact and the organizations that are in collective impact commitments, fully disentangling the contribution each organization would have made individually—as opposed to working together—on postsecondary gains is not entirely possible. However, evidence exists showing that engaging in collective impact only made individual organizations more effective at positively influencing postsecondary outcomes. This revolving relationship between organizational predispositions toward collaboration,

participation in collective impact, and regional improvements in postsecondary outcomes is depicted in figure 5.2

Figure 5.2 *Relationship amongst Organizational Predispositions toward Collaboration, Organizational, Participation in Collective Impact, and Progress toward Postsecondary Outcomes*

While organizational predispositions toward collaboration are present in many of the partners in this study's regions, partners report the value of joining forces with other organizations in other sectors to build a regional plan: "The most important thing is for us to own it, that this is something we needed to do and to see some kind of pathway to do it. And then, to have some way to actually do the work. And so [our StriveTogether partnership] helped facilitate that work for us" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22).

While evidence exists of collective impact's role in improving regional postsecondary outcomes—especially through the process steps articulated by the

practitioners of collective impact across multiple and diverse regions—when responding to the question of collective impact's role in raising regional outcomes, participants shared a range of responses. These responses indicate differing levels of certainty in claiming collective impact's role in the region's postsecondary outcomes. An anonymized sample of these candid responses is represented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 *Responses to 'Role of Collective Impact in Raising Postsecondary Outcomes' Question*

Interview participant responses to the question: *"To what extent do you believe the collective impact partnership played a role in raising regional postsecondary outcomes?"*
• "The backbone set the conditions, but I have no idea."
• "The backbone had a significant role."
• "We're still almost completely doing things on our own."
• "It would not have happened without the community's work with [our backbone]."
• "Sometimes it's two steps forward and one step backward, but we keep ultimately working toward those common goals of systems transformation."
• "The ability to prove something beyond a shadow of a doubt is just not part of our day to day reality."
• "What you can say is that we start to do the work that is really cutting edge and innovative before other people do."

The wide range of confidence in claiming contribution toward outcomes affirms the need for this study in documenting the collective impact processes that regions with improved outcomes implemented. It is also important to situate these responses within the full conversations in which interview participants described, in detail, the collective impact actions they took to improve postsecondary outcomes. Holding the responses that are

hesitant to claim contribution toward outcomes in context with the processes described consistently across regions only serves to bolster confidence in the role of collective impact; no one claimed full or sole attribution, and no one was quick to claim their actions were *the* reason regional postsecondary outcomes improved. As one college chancellor shared about the role of backbones convening collective impact partners:

> "They have been beneficial to our community. Are they going to solve all the ills? No. And can you measure with great certainty everything they're doing? No. But in terms of progress, I do think they have been very value added for our region and for our success at UW-Parkside. I think we would've had success, but we have greater success because of these partners" (D. Ford, personal communication, 1/12/22).

This "greater success" that collective impact brings to regions manifests in several ways, including through an emphasis on systems change rather than a programmatic approach to improving population-level outcomes. As one executive director framed the challenge of increasing postsecondary outcomes: "We weren't gonna program our way out of this one small pilot at a time" (J. Neubauer, personal communication, 12/9/21). A promise of collective impact, when implemented effectively, is for cross-sector actors to identify strategies that will fundamentally shift the region's landscape, as opposed to a scattershot programmatic approach with each sector working within their own silos. Inherent in this promise is also the challenge of shifting individuals and organizations from thinking about programs to collectively examining the systems that produce the outcomes they were designed to produce:

> "One of the biggest challenges I see in collective impact is people still think very programmatically. They think about programs, you know, 'what program can we bring in to fix this problem?' And they oftentimes think about fixing people, right? 'If we can just get them to fit into the system better, their lives will be better.' What collective impact, what the StriveTogether Theory of Action helps you start doing is to take a systems lens and to start thinking about what it is about

> the system that's not working and how do we shift the system" (H. Black, personal communication, 1/24/22).

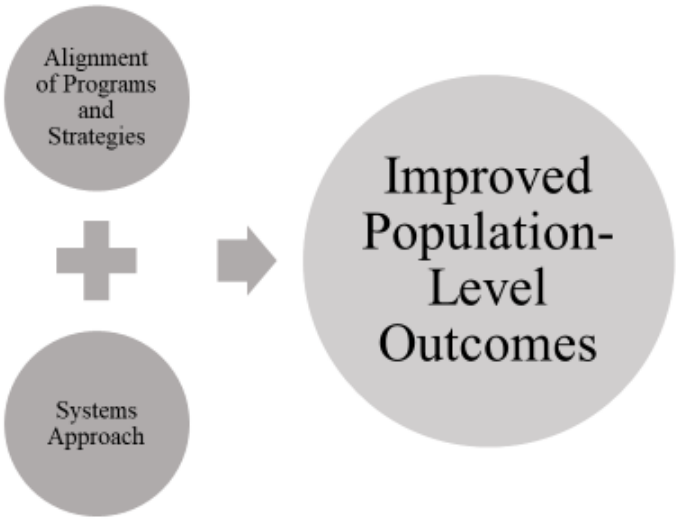
A systematic approach to improving regional outcomes, such as postsecondary enrollment and completion, allows for the partners within collective impact to focus on what is strategic and important, rather than just what is responsive and urgent: "We brought postsecondary folks together just this month and they said, 'it's so great to be in a space where we can be strategic and not responsive" (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22). A former school district leader and current backbone leader describes the opportunity of systematized collective impact as the mechanism that allows school systems to work more strategically toward the outcomes they are already invested in:

> "After years of slogging through a resource strapped environment, like a school district, you learn that people know what needs to happen. Just, their hands are tied, and they're not able to actually make those things happen. And sometimes you need an outside organization to help elevate those voices. You know, make connections at the highest levels of leadership in order to shift systems so that the good people in the system can just do the jobs they were hired to do." (J. Fukuda, personal communication, 1/27/22).

Systematic, strategic regional change facilitated by the backbone is often enabled through coordination and alignment of efforts. For example, one of the Wisconsin colleges attributes its involvement with Complete College America to its relationship with the backbone Higher Expectations: "There's a set of strategies that Complete College America was articulating that was pretty prescriptive, you know, these game changer strategies…that was sort of a strategic template for us" (R. Ducoffe, personal communication, 1/7/22). Using Complete College America's "strategic template" was one of the ways in which the Wisconsin colleges aligned efforts to improve

postsecondary enrollment and completion. Another way in which the Wisconsin backbones aligned strategies is through participating in Moonshot for Equity, which has an "objective to get a number of regions across the country to embrace eliminating disparities by having the same outcomes for all of the students on a campus, regardless of their race, ethnicity, income, or gender by the year 2030" (J. Neubauer, 12/9/21). Four colleges that collaborate with the two backbones are in a Moonshot for Equity cohort together. Additionally, the backbone facilitated learning visits with its higher education partners to other colleges that have been successfully implementing student success initiatives. Rather than viewing these strategies as separate initiatives, partners report high levels of alignment in driving improved outcomes. In this way, the backbone's role is to provide alignment around strategies and programs through a systems lens. This relationship is depicted in figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 *Backbone Role: Alignment of Strategies toward Systems Change*



This regional alignment of programs and strategies through a systematic approach is evident in Marin Promise Partnership's operating model. First, the backbone provides a proof of concept for research-supported, data-driven strategies that have worked in raising outcomes in one school or small district. This is critical for school district administrator buy in as administrators are constantly approached with requests to implement new programs or policies. Second, the backbone coordinates implementation of the new strategy through two key roles that small school districts often do not have staff for, or do not have time to dedicate capacity toward: a facilitator and a data analyst. The facilitator invests the time and effort that's required to hold effective meetings with cross-sector partners, and the data analyst develops trust with school district partners by protecting student data and sharing it in ways that drive the shared work forward. Marin Promise Partnership's goal is to initially scale and coordinate the implementation of proven strategies, and then to transfer ownership of the strategy back to school districts to ensure the strategy is sustainable and embedded within the districts' priorities.

Alignment around strategies to produce systems change was present in every region in this study. Similar to Marin Promise Partnership, the Wisconsin partnerships helped create alignment across strategies. Gateway Technical College, for example, had, at one point, "four or five different student success initiatives that were being led from different corners of the college" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22). The benefit, then, of participating in the collaborative, is in sorting through which strategies align with partners' initiatives and which strategies are actually effective at improving common outcomes. Determining strategy effectiveness is a key function of the partnership, so the collaborative partners ask: "What kind of information do we want to

track at all of our institutions? Identifying some of those metrics helped us keep focused because otherwise data can get really scattered and too broad" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22). Common data usage improves not just strategy alignment, but also organizational accountability in driving toward shared outcomes: "When you have to show your numbers to somebody, it makes you take a little more ownership over them" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22).

Ultimately, a partnership's success in aligning and coordinating toward systems change rests in being able to build a case for shared action over individual action. If backbones can effectively argue that the outcomes individual organizations are working toward will be met quicker if they collaborate, then silo removal can begin. This is no small lift, as organizations seek to balance "our self-interests and the collective interest…It's difficult to identify what's that common work that we should all be contributing to versus saying, 'well, if we all just do our own work separately, you know, something good will happen for the community.' But that's not always the case" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22). Initial buy-in to collective impact is a necessary first step, but sustaining collective impact can be challenging: "You always have that sort of entropy, you always have that tendency of people wanting to say, 'okay, we all agree to this, but we're all going to go off now and do our own work.'" (J. Thibodeau, personal communication, 1/7/22). This is the promise and challenge of collective impact.

Application of Theoretical Frameworks

This study was framed through two theoretical frameworks: regional civic capacity and the politics of implementation. Applications and reflections of these frameworks are discussed in this section.

Holme & Finnigan's regional civic capacity framework (2018) provides a theoretical lens for understanding collective impact initiatives. The authors posit:

> "To address the problems of segregation and resource inequality, as well as the underlying dynamic of competition between cities and suburbs that drives regional inequities, regional policy solutions must have a strong, common vision among a diverse group of stakeholders as well as strong alignment across sectors (p. 86).

The collective impact partnerships in this study all sought to address inequitable postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes in their regions by creating an aligned, common agenda across multiple sectors. While these partnerships did not specifically reference strategies to address neighborhood segregation, they did discuss the historical and present role of racist policies in contributing to resource inequality and inequitable postsecondary outcomes for students of color, such as the history of redlining in metro Milwaukee and unequal school district funding across Marin County's many small school districts. The partnerships whose regions increased postsecondary outcomes for students of color created the conditions necessary to work toward systems change, and employed a clear process for convening partners around data to build or scale strategies that have proven success in raising outcomes.

The partnerships in this study have not, however, built strong coalitions for policy change in their regions. In this sense, their work is aligned and strategic, but still largely programmatic. The "five core pillars of a regional equity framework" that Holme &

Finnigan (2018) developed are grounded in policy change: "tax-base sharing, place-based policies, mobility policies, regional governance, and cross-sector approaches" (p. 96). Levels of evidence of these five pillars within the five regions of this study are summarized in table 5.2 and described below.

Table 5.2 *Five Pillars of Regional Equity Framework Applied*

Pillar	Evidence within Five Selected Regions	Partnerships
1. Tax-base sharing	None	None
2. Place-based policies	Minimal	Minimal across all partnerships
3. Mobility policies	None	None
4. Regional governance	Minimal	Minimal in one partnership
5. Cross-sector approaches	Moderate	All five partnerships

Adapted from Holme & Finnigan (2018)

1. Tax-base sharing. None of the studied regions attribute their success in raising postsecondary outcomes to resource redistribution through tax-base sharing policies. Tax-base sharing "involves pooling and then redistributing taxes across a metro area" and "is based on the premise that all residents in a metro area should benefit from regional growth, rather than just a select and elite few" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 98). While wide disparities exist in the five regions in this study, which contribute to inequitable postsecondary outcomes across racial and socioeconomic groups, the partnerships did not report collective efforts to shift local tax policy across their catchment counties and school districts.

2. Place-based policies. Placed-based policies are "policies that are focused on directing investment and resources into high poverty and traditionally marginalized communities. These are aimed at ensuring that communities that have been historically deprived of investment…receive resources and support" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 101). All five partnerships have a strong equity focus which results in strategic cross-sector alignment around programs that support low-income students and students of color. However, the partnership approach in these five regions is often to build and/or scale programs that target traditionally underserved students, not to enact formal policy changes that permanently re-route resources. The distinction between programs and policies has a blurred line, admittedly: if a partnership influences large-scale, programmatic shifts, those shifts can result in the formal adoption of those programs by school districts and higher education, resulting in institutional policy changes. In this sense, the partnerships in this study do engage in a specific kind of place-based policymaking, but somewhat unintentionally and oftentimes through a side door.

3. Mobility policies. In recognition of the "patterns of racial and economic segregation in both housing and schools," mobility strategies "seek to improve opportunities by moving people across boundary lines and 'toward opportunity'" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 104). One mobility strategy that affects educational outcomes is inter- and/or intra-district student assignment policies to evenly distribute student subgroups across schools and/or across districts within a region. With high levels of racial and economic segregation across the nation's schools (Rooks, 2017), supreme court rulings that make it difficult to use race as a factor in student assignment (PICS, 2006), and plenty of evidence that 'separate' has never been 'equal' in K-12 education

(Goldsmith, 2011; Valencia, 2015; Welsh, 2018), some regions have employed innovative ways to decrease school segregation. Another way to decrease school segregation is to approach it from the housing angle by "changing the geographic distribution of affordable housing" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 106) so neighborhoods, and consequently the children who feeds into locally zoned schools, are more diverse. While none of the partnerships in this study reported work in student assignment or housing policy as a way of improving postsecondary outcomes, San Antonio ISD, one of the school districts in UP Partnership's region, has employed an innovative approach to desegregating its schools through student assignment policies that move beyond default neighborhood assignment (Chalkbeat, 2018). While UP Partnership was not a primary driver of this district's policy change, it operates with the Bexar County ecosystem that is affected by the resulting lessened segregation in that school district.

4. Regional governance. This strategy is the "oversight of implementation [of tax-base sharing, place-based policies, and mobility policies] through a regional governing body consisting of elected representatives from across the entire region" (Holme & Finnigan, 2018, p. 108). Because the studied partnerships minimally, if at all, engage in the first three approaches, it follows that they do not engage in shared regional governance. However, the creation of the Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA) which resulted from the partnership convenings across the two Wisconsin backbones, is close to an example of regional governance. While HERA does not have formal governing power, and the representatives are not elected officials, it is a regional "decision-making body" with a "commitment to equity project" across 18 higher education institutions.

5. Cross-sector approaches. While it may appear that collective impact partnerships would demonstrate very strong evidence of cross-sector approaches, the evidence against Holme & Finnigan's (2018) description is moderate within the five regions of this study. Under this framework, cross-sector approaches occur when "educational policy is not pursued in isolation from other strategies but in tandem with housing, transit, health, economic development, etc." (p. 111). On one hand, the five studied regions only show minimal attention to strategies in other sectors. UP Partnership, for example, partners with the youth criminal justice system through a student data-sharing agreement. And within the cradle to career continuum, partnerships track several outcomes that fall outside education. Within health outcomes, All Hands Raised tracks birth weight across its county. Building Our Future tracks its county's clinical care ranking, and the percent of children living with food insecurity. In workforce development, High Expectations tracks employment rates. These indicators have implications for educational outcomes. Beyond these examples, partners did not report active involvement in other programmatic or policy work such as housing or transit. On the other hand, and *within* education, however, all five partnerships demonstrate strong levels of cross-sector collaboration, with engagement toward postsecondary outcomes from school districts, higher education, business, nonprofits, philanthropy, and government.

In addition to examining this study's findings through Holme & Finnigan's (2018) regional civic capacity, it is also important to re-ground collective impact actors as intermediaries within the educational landscape. That is to say, while strong evidence—through conditions and processes—exists in support of collective impact's role in raising

regional postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color, outside of K-12 and higher education actors, the partners in this study, including StriveTogther backbone staff, occupy intermediary roles, and as such, are working toward student outcomes indirectly, if even effectively and/or justifiably.

Situating collective impact within the rise of intermediaries helps describe its purpose and current role. Beginning with Malen's (2001) description of 'interest groups' as players within education who exercise power over research agendas, programs, policies, and political will, the growth of intermediaries within education has expanded exponentially over the past two decades, as documented in this study's literature review (Bulkley, et al., 2010; Coburn, 2005; Henig, 2013; Kronley, 2003; McGuinn, 2012; Tomkins-Stange, 2016). Malen's (2001) foundational framework for intermediary organizations within education laid the groundwork for an understanding of intermediaries as drivers of research agendas, research agendas, and research utilization (DeBray, 2014; Lavis, et al., 2003; Nutley et al., 2009; Tseng, 2012; Tseng, 2015; Qui & Levin, 2013). Beyond driving research, intermediaries within education can set funding agendas (Ferris, 2009; Ferrare, 2017; Scott, 2009; Scott, 2015; Scott & Jabbar, 2014). Research and funding priorities have the ability to influence programmatic and policy approaches, and all of these mechanisms help partnerships determine where to focus their efforts.

Finally, the collaborative postsecondary work the five regions in this study engage in address the perennial challenge of effective *implementation* of educational change efforts. As Fullan detailed more than two decades ago in his seminal text, "A large part of the problem of educational change may be less a question of dogmatic resistance and bad

intentions…and more a question of the difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multilevel social process involving thousands of people" (Fullan, 2001, p. 69). The implementation challenge holds true today, as evidenced by a multitude of ever-changing initiatives to improve educational outcomes, yet persistently low outcomes and large disparities in key indicators such as postsecondary enrollment and completion—and at the national level, nonetheless. Collective impact, as implemented by the five partnerships in this study, provides a template for effective implementation of educational change efforts, particularly through the process steps detailed in the findings.

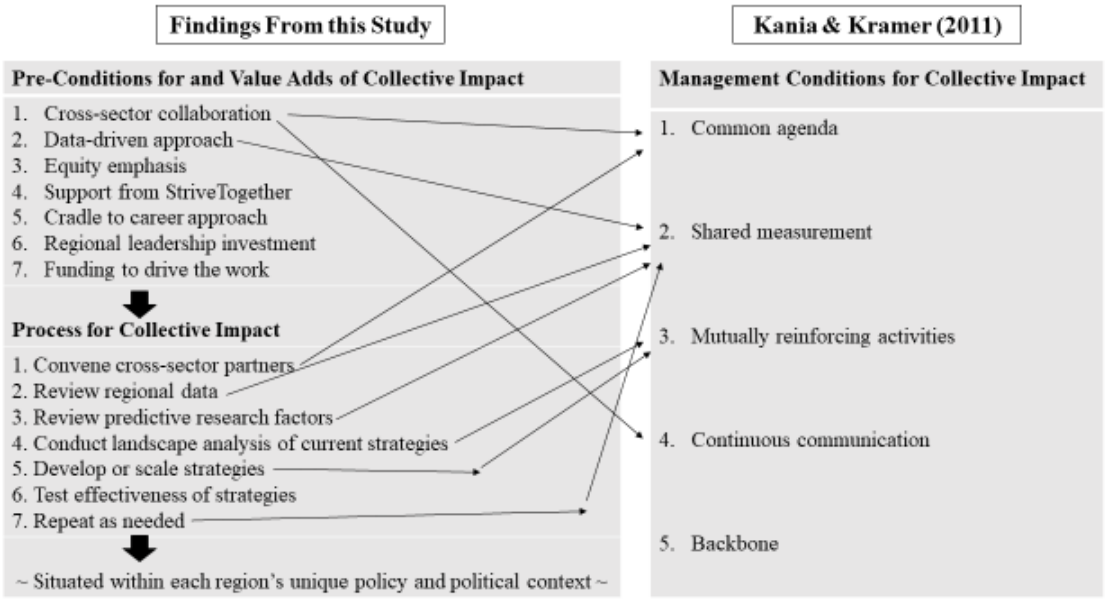
Findings Cross Walks with other Frameworks

Because this study sought to understand the collective impact conditions and processes at play within regions that had experienced multi-year postsecondary enrollment and completion gains for students of color, the researcher did not presuppose any existing frameworks for collective impact would necessarily explain the findings. While some existing studies have documented how a collective impact initiative implemented Kania & Kramer's (2011) five conditions for collective impact, the researcher in this study did not code data to compare it against an existing framework. Rather, the researcher employed In Vivo coding to make meaning from interview participants' perceptions of the conditions and processes that facilitated their region's growth in postsecondary outcomes. In Vivo coding uses the "actual language in the quantitative data record" (Saldana, 2021, p. 137) to initially generate large numbers of codes that the researcher refined to categories and themes over multiple rounds of coding and re-reading interview transcripts. In Vivo coding resulted in the seven pre-conditions

and value adds for participating in collective impact. This coding approach also led to the formulation of the seven-step process interview participants described for "doing" collective impact. The process steps were developed through a sequential lens (ie, "What did your group do to work toward these outcomes? Then what? How did that work? And then what") and compared across regions to create process steps that were mutually exclusive and representative of all five region's descriptions.

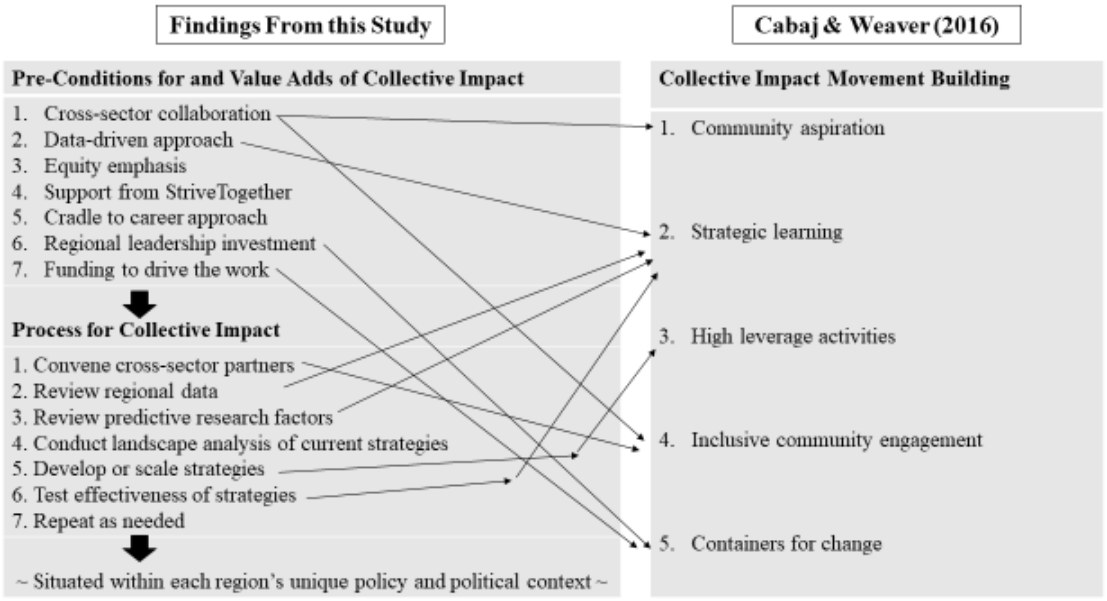
Despite this "ground up" methodological approach, the researcher was aware of several seminal collective impact frameworks that have been applied in the literature and that interview participants referenced as their own source material for implementing collective impact. Because these frameworks have previously informed collective impact researchers and practitioners, it is helpful to compare this study's findings against them. The original framework for collective impact is Kania & Kramer's (2011) management conditions. The relationship between this study's findings and Kania & Kramer's (2011) management conditions for collective impact is depicted in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 *Findings Cross-Walk with Kania & Kramer's (2011) Management Conditions for Collective Impact*



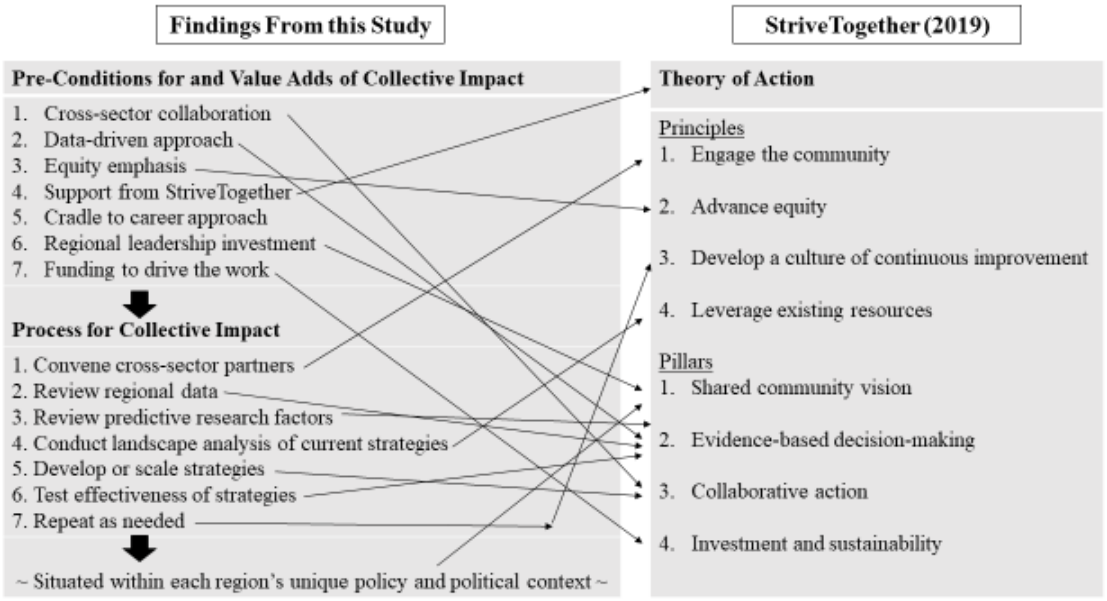
Another foundational framework for collective impact is Cabaj & Weaver's (2016) movement building conditions. The relationship between this study's findings and Cabaj & Weaver's (2016) movement building conditions for collective impact is depicted in figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 *Findings Cross-Walk with Cabaj & Weaver's (2016) Conditions for Collective Impact Movement Building*



Finally, as the umbrella organization under which the collective impact partners in this study learned how to implement collective impact, StriveTogether's (2019) practitioner Theory of Change was heavily referenced by interview participants. The relationship between this study's findings and StriveTogether's (2019) Theory of Action is depicted in figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 *Findings Cross-Walk with StriveTogether's (2019) Theory of Action for Collective Impact*



In all three findings cross walks with existing collective impact frameworks, there are some notable differences across focus areas and language used to describe the collective work, but overall high levels of crossover, which affirms both this study's findings and the three compared frameworks. The crossover serves the reliability of findings by confirming there is consistency across frameworks. The crossover also strengthens the validity of findings by confirming this study asked research questions that helped to accurately describe the conditions and processes of collective impact in regions with population-level growth.

Methodological Reflections

As part of an overall qualitative research design, this study used process tracing to analyze "evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of…developing or testing hypotheses of causal mechanisms that might

causally explain the case" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 7). This study sought to understand whether, to what extent, and how collective impact played a role in raising five region's postsecondary outcomes for students of color over multiple years. Process tracing was employed to develop a working hypotheses about how the collective impact partners would describe their actions and contributions, and that model was refined multiple times over the course of interviews, observations, and document review. The resulting seven-step process partners took to influence postsecondary actions represents the general actions of all five regions. Because cross-sector partners across five regions consistently described roughly the same process, even when the content or focus area of their strategies differed, the reliability of these findings is strong.

Process tracing, however, does not stop at the self-reported description of processes as the final causal explanation. As a methodology, process tracing takes equifinality seriously: "that is, multiple paths to the same outcomes could threaten inferences based on comparisons of small numbers of cases. Process tracing can address this by affirming particular paths as viable explanations in individual cases, even if the paths differ from one case to another" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 19). While the process paths across regions in this study did not vary greatly, the particular strategies they implemented to raise postsecondary outcomes ranged from FAFSA completion to math coursework to student mentoring networks and more. Beyond constructing the process model, the researcher also accounted for equifinality by exploring what else could have contributed to the regions' postsecondary gains. The researcher asked interview participants what other policies or political factors may have affected postsecondary outcomes, and about participants' perceptions of the collective impact in

contributing to outcomes. To triangulate responses, the researcher also searched for policy changes during these regions during the years leading up to 2019 that could have contributed to postsecondary outcomes gains. While the policy and political landscape served as a unique container for each region to navigate, there were no drivers or factors more compelling for postsecondary outcomes gains other than the efforts of the collective impact. In fact, the contextual differences across regions only serves to strengthen the validity of this study's findings in that regions reported very similar conditions for and processes through which collective impact contributed to their regional outcomes.

Process tracing holds strong promise for future studies on the effectiveness of collective impact initiatives. In this study, the majority of interview participants work directly for backbone organizations; future studies benefit from more heavily relying on the perspectives of collective impact's cross-sector actors. Future studies may also consider the fine line between process and practice tracing, which only became apparent to this study's researcher midway through the study. To distinguish process and practice tracing, Pouliot argues that "causal analysis requires that practices be embedded in their social context through the interpretation of meanings. What renders a pattern of action causal, that is, what makes it produce social effects, are the practical logics that are bound up in it and intersubjectively negotiated" (in Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 240). Because this study examined practices embedded within social contexts, and not just processes, this study may have unintentionally oscillated between process and practice tracing. An awareness of these subtle differences would tighten up future studies using similar methodology.

Theoretical Reflections

This study situated collective impact within the historical lineage of intermediary growth in education. A string of federal education policies over the past several decades have encouraged, if not directly invited, non-educational actors into the educational landscape through increased funding mechanisms for outside actors, and have placed increased demands on school systems to meet standardized metrics while also providing more wraparound services for an increasingly diverse student population. To build capacity to meet these expectations and mandates, school systems have partnered with organizations in other sectors. These intermediaries have taken different shapes over time, and through this evolution collective impact emerged as a model to address population-level challenges in the 2000s. The educational policy literature has documented the presence of and analyzed the effects of many forms of intermediaries, but is nascent in exploring the role of collective impact. This study sought to fill this gap in the educational policy literature by examining the role of collective impact through a regional civic capacity lens.

As conceptualized by Stone (1998) and Shipps (2003), civic capacity describes the role and ability of non-educational actors to influence educational agendas and outcomes. Holme & Finnigan (2018) expand the original civic capacity framework to include both a regional approach and an equity focus. While the regions in this study take a cross-sector, regional approach to ensuring more equitable educational outcomes across racial and socioeconomic subgroups, they do not meet many of the policy and governance standards set forth in Holme & Finnigan's (2018) framework for regional equity (see table 4.13 for an analysis). In this regard, the current approach employed by

StriveTogether partnerships for cross-sector solutions to improving population-level outcomes is more programmatic and grounded in influencing institutional policies through relationships than policy-oriented. Future studies may consider the role collective impact has on indirectly influencing policy by scaling programmatic changes until it becomes institutionalized policy across a region.

Implications

Because the role of collective impact in contributing to educational outcomes is relatively young in practice, and only minimally addressed in the current literature, the implications for multiple stakeholder groups are both broad and deep. While there is strong potential for applying the findings of this study to other collective impact contexts, it is also important to situate these implications within the five study regions and their postsecondary work. Generalizability is possible, but with caution to regional context. Implications are discussed for practitioners of collective impact, school districts, higher education, funders, the business community, policymakers, researchers, and the practitioner evaluation community.

Practitioners of Collective Impact

Five of the 68 StriveTogether partnerships met the selection criteria for inclusion in this study, which was for region to experience increases in postsecondary enrollment and completion for Black and Latino students over multiple years leading up to 2019 (in at least three of those four areas). Because only five regions experienced those gains, they serve as model regions to learn from. Backbone organizations may benefit from comparing their operating models against the conditions and processes reported by these

partnerships and documented in this study's findings. StriveTogether, as the parent organization supporting the 68 partnerships, may compare these findings against its Theory of Action to identify synergies and areas for refining its model and professional learning opportunities.

School Districts

The demands placed on school districts to not only equitably deliver on K-12 academic outcomes, but also to support students' holistic development, and to guide their enrollment in postsecondary, are a tall order, and even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. To increase their capacity in these non-academic areas, school districts often look to community partners to support their efforts, but these partnerships may lack cohesiveness with district or overall community strategy and goals. Collective impact can create alignment across the many initiatives, programs, and policy initiatives within a region by identifying key regional outcomes that leaders commit to, and then using a data-driven approach to ensuring inputs and outputs across various cross-sector actors align with those outcomes.

Higher Education

K-12 school systems and higher education generally operate in separate silos, resulting in a scattershot and oftentimes unsuccessful handoff of students between their senior year of high school and first year of college. While it is easy for higher education to blame school systems for inadequately preparing students for the rigors of postsecondary, collective impact breaks down this cycle of disconnection and blame by placing both systems in the same collaborative. The higher education leaders in this study reported much stronger connections to their local school systems as a result of

participating in collective impact. By reviewing data together and creating shared action plans, school district and higher education can create better alignment in the education pipeline. Additionally, all of the higher education leaders in this study referenced the 'student success' initiatives that are trending across the nation; for them, the collective helped to identify which key student success initiatives to prioritize, and helped create alignment with other institutions of higher education with the region.

Funders

This study has significant implications for foundations and corporate funders. While collective impact initiatives have grown exponentially over the past decade, in large part due to the funding which facilitates their operations, there is currently shockingly little peer-reviewed literature detailing what constitutes 'effective' collective impact. The conditions and processes of successful collective impact regions documented in this study will help funders evaluate which initiatives to invest in. Most importantly, funders should ask for evidence of a process through which the collective impact seeks to influence community-level outcomes, and that process should align closely with the steps these five, successful regions shared. Given limited resources, allocation matters. As funders determine whether to fund collective impact and/or programs that provide direct services to target populations, they should consider the ecosystem as a whole. While direct service programs are necessary, and can participate in the collective impact, investing in a backbone to align services and priorities across a region is also important.

Funders play an integral role in any educational reform effort, including collective impact, and often act as the 'hub' that organizes other sectors and actors as 'spokes' (Scott & Jabbar, 2014). As such, they "are in a position to frame and fund research and to

filter and funnel the findings, they can shape what constitutes the relevant expertise on issues" (Malen, 2011, p. 175). This responsibility also situates funders with the ability to "exert influence by organizing interest groups and by creating networks among interest groups and other powerful policy actors" (Malen, 2001, p. 175). Funders with influence over research agendas and the ability to convene cross-sector actors should use templates for effective collective impact, such as this study's findings.

Business Community

As business leaders seek to remedy the 20-point gap between educational attainment and labor market demands (Georgetown, 2013; NCES, 2018), they should consider implementing regional collective impact initiatives. The regions documented in this study have been successful in increasing postsecondary enrollment and completion, which leads to a workforce better prepared for the current job market.

Policymakers

While the collective impact initiatives in this study did not take an explicit policy approach to raising regional postsecondary outcomes, policymakers may be wise to leverage existing collective impact initiatives to drive policy changes related to the collective impacts' intended outcomes. In regions with established collective impact initiatives, cross-sector relationship infrastructure, which took time and trust to build, may enable the adoption of policy more easily than starting from scratch at coalition-building.

Researchers

Collective impact—especially within education, policy, and evaluation of outcomes—is ripe for research. Future studies could use the conditions and processes

identified by this study to examine regional outcomes in other indicators along the cradle to career continuum such as reading proficiency or high school graduation rates. Future studies could more directly examine the role of policy and politics in collective impact. Given the significant implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on every area of shared life, future studies could also examine the role collective impact played in response to the pandemic.

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APPENDIX A

Collective Impact Practitioner Groups

The Bridgespan Group: social impact consultant and advisor to nonprofits and NGOs, philanthropists, and investors.

Collective Impact Forum, an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions: a resource for people and organizations using the collective impact approach to address large-scale social and environmental problems. They aim to increase the effectiveness and adoption of collective impact by providing practitioners with access to the tools, training opportunities, and peer networks they need to be successful in their work.

Global Development Incubators: an incubator for transformational development ventures, working to build and scale the next generation of social impact solutions. These concepts originate from sector experts, or are developed and tested by GBI.

ORS Impact: delivers consultations that provide insights and support confident action, specializing in the complicated, messy, and complex that characterizes so much of the meaningful work of social change.

Spark Insight Partners (formerly Spark Policy Institute): Spark provides actionable insight through consulting, evaluation, and facilitation across complex systems.

StriveTogether: guides collective action partnerships along actionable milestones to transform systems for more equitable results by convening, coaching, codifying, investing, and influencing.

The Tamarack Institute: develops and supports collaborative strategies that engage citizens and institutions to solve major community issues across Canada and beyond.

APPENDIX B

Research Instruments

Instrument #1: Interview Protocol

Interview for up to 30 local policymakers, representatives of local organizations, and philanthropies in selected StriveTogether Partnership regions

NOTE: Verbal consent script MUST be read first

1. What is your partnerships' [or organization's] approach to collective impact? What is your theory of change?
2. What work does your partnership/organization do around postsecondary outcomes?
3. What have your region's postsecondary outcomes trends looked like over the past [X – since partnership started] years?
    a. To what extent do you believe your partnerships' work influenced these outcomes?
    b. Were there any other programs, policies, or politics at play during these years that could have influenced the outcomes?
4. What strategies have you applied specifically for your Black and Latino student population?
5. Is there anything you think I am missing or do you have anything further to add?
6. Who else would you recommend that I talk with about these issues?
7. If I have any further questions, may I follow-up with you by phone or email?

Thank you for your time.

Instrument #2: Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear :

[Greeting]

I am Rebecca Parshall, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a dissertation research study entitled *Regional Postsecondary Outcomes Gains: The Role of Collective Impact, Policy, and Politics.* The purposes of this study are to describe how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color.

Because of your role within a StriveTogether partnership whose region who has experienced postsecondary gains for students of color over multiple years, I would like to interview you by Zoom or phone at your convenience in the next four weeks. Your participation should only take about 45 minutes and the conversation will be recorded.

The results of the research study may be published and, as a public official or representative of an organization, your name may be used in the final report. While there are no personal benefits to you, the study's findings will contribute to the body of research on the role of collective impact efforts to improve regional postsecondary outcomes.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email me at XX. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu. The principal investigator for this research project is Dr. Elizabeth DeBray, Professor in the department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at University of Georgia; email address XX.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in this project and when you are available for a Zoom or phone interview.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Parshall
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Instrument #3: Interview Confirmation Email

Date

Dear Participant:

[Greeting]

I am Rebecca Parshall, doctoral student in the Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my dissertation research study. I am writing to confirm our interview and provide you with more information about the study itself.

The Study: My study is entitled *Regional Postsecondary Outcomes Gains: The Role of Collective Impact, Policy, and Politics.* The purposes of this study are to describe how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. The findings from this project may provide information on the conditions that contribute to regional postsecondary outcomes gains. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research and there are no direct benefits to you. By participating in the interview, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

The Interview: I look forward to meeting with you via the Zoom link in this calendar invitation at XX on XX. With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. I am broadly interested in your organization's role in within the collective impact partnership and your perception of what has contributed to your region's postsecondary enrollment and completion rate increases.

Your involvement: Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The results of the research study may be published and, as a representative of your organization, your name and title may be used in the final report. You will have a chance to review a written draft of the article before publication. Only the researcher will have access to the audio-tapes and, after they have been analyzed and within 36 months, the audio-tapes will be destroyed.

This letter serves as your consent document. Please print and keep this letter for your records. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX; or to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 212 Tucker Hall, 310 E. Campus Rd. Athens, GA 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Attached is the consent form for your review and signature.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project and I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Parshall
(EMAIL: XX)
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Instrument #4: Consent Form

Consent Form

My name is Rebecca Parshall, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia. Through this interview, you are participating in a research study entitled *Regional Postsecondary Outcomes Gains: The Role of Collective Impact, Policy, and Politics*. The purposes of this study are to describe how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color.

This interview was designed to be approximately forty-five minutes in length and will be audio-recorded. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer. The purpose of audio-recording is so that I can accurately transcribe the interview after our time together.

All the individually-identified information will be kept confidential. Names and email addresses will be collected, and participants may be contacted for follow-up questions or revisions at a later date. The data will be stored in a secure place and only I, the researcher, will have access to this information; they will not be publicly disseminated. Upon completion of this project in three years (2024), recordings will be destroyed. After this research study is completed, the information gathered from this interview may be used or shared, after identifiers have been removed, with other researchers and/or future studies without additional consent from the participant.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, I wish to refuse to participate or stop the interview, I may do so at any time without having to give an explanation and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

While there are no personal benefits to me, the study's findings will contribute to the body of research on collective impact and the conditions that contribute to regional postsecondary outcomes gains. I am aware the data may be used in published journal articles and a final report. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the completion of these articles. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise below, thus minimizing or eliminating risks.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the researcher at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email me at XX. The principal investigator for this research project is Dr. Elizabeth DeBray, Professor in the department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at University of Georgia; email address XX. If I have any

questions about my rights as a research participant, I am free to contact The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board: telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

I have been offered a copy of this consent for that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

I agree to be publicly identified as a participant and to have my interview responses attributed to me. YES / NO (Please circle one.)

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Interviewer's Signature Date

Instrument #5: Verbal Consent Script

(Read to participant prior to interview)

Date of interview: [date] and [time]

Participant: [name]

Script:

I am Rebecca Parshall, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia. Through this interview, you are participating in a research study entitled *Regional Postsecondary Outcomes Gains: The Role of Collective Impact, Policy, and Politics*. The purposes of this study are to describe how StriveTogether partnerships, as a form of intermediaries within education, perceive and attribute their collective impact actions to improve community-level postsecondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color.

Because this study meets the research standards of the University of Georgia, I am required to get your verbal consent to participate. Please bear with me while I review the consent requirements:

1. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
2. The results of the research study may be published and, as a representative of your organization, your name may be used in the final report.
3. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

By participating in this interview, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Do you agree to participate?

In the final dissertation, may I use your names in direct quotes? *(Another option is to use pseudonyms or to run any quotes by you in advance.)*

Finally, I would like to audio-tape this interview for the purposes of accurate transcription. Do you agree?

Thank you.

Instrument #6: Thank you email

[Email to participants following Zoom or phone interview]

Date

Dear :

Thank you so much for participating in today's interview. I appreciate your willingness to share your experience and time with me. My research will be complete in the summer of 2022.

As a reminder, your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or send an e-mail to XX. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Thank you again for your participation! Please keep this email for your records.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Parshall
(XXX) XXX-XXXX
EMAIL: XX