

CASE STUDY BY CUEL RESEARCHERS DESCRIBES THE EVOLUTION OF LONG-STANDING DISTRICT-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN UIC AND THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In a chapter contributed to a new edited volume devoted to how district-university partnerships can drive equity-focused school improvement, CUEL affiliates and their CPS colleagues describe the twenty-year evolution of their partnership to improve principal preparation for Chicago's public schools. The chapter, titled "Preparing Principals for Urban Schools: The Challenge of Equitable Outcomes at Scale," is among the 11 partnership case studies at the heart of "[Improving America's Schools Together](#)," edited by a team of senior staff and fellows from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advance of Teaching, including CUEL's founder Dr. Steven Tozer (2023, Rowman & Littlefield). The case narratives document the diverse experiences of the current members of [Carnegie's iLEAD network](#), "a collaborative of 11 district-university partnerships from across the United States" (p. 3). The cases and accompanying analytic chapters draw heavily upon Social and Organizational Learning theory to explain how such associations can evolve into "mutual benefit partnerships" based upon an ethos, culture, and methodology of continuous improvement, deep inter-organizational trust, and "boundary-spanning" leadership at all levels of joint activity. A common "[Developmental Progressions Framework](#)" provides a theoretical spine linking the case narratives, permitting cross-case comparisons of the contexts, strengths, and challenges most notable in each partnership.

CUEL's Chicago case study (Chapter 11) makes extensive use of this Framework to explore how the UIC/CPS partnership has evolved from a contractual relationship around principal certification, into a research-practice partnership to deepen principal capacity to advance the District's ambitious equity-centered goals. This story largely involves the convergence of the right policies with the right people at the right time to catalyze new opportunities for collaboration. At the level of political context, the case summarizes the complex interactions between the emergence of NCLB and a nation-leading agenda in Illinois for standards-driven principal preparation reform. Pressures for reform at this level converged with accountability pressures at the local Chicago level to crystallize key assets for partnership in both CPS and UIC. Despite turbulence at the CEO level, the CPS central office did accrue significant capacity to translate research findings into effective improvement practices, particularly through sustained engagement with the Chicago Consortium for School Research (CCSR). Leadership from CEOs like Janice Jackson further contributed to a proclivity to experiment with continuous improvement methods and encourage a CI culture at the school, network, and central office levels.

At UIC, support from senior leaders in the College of Education yielded "a new professional education narrative" that embraced ownership of its graduates' impacts on public school improvement. This led to a complete re-design of school leadership preparation from a conventional academic Masters structure to a highly selective EdD format with a longer arc of preparation, practice-focused leadership coaching, and a commitment to staffing CPS schools. The hiring of "boundary-spanning" senior staff with deep ties to CPS further cemented this partnership, and paved the way for UIC to influence emerging CPS leadership pipeline strategies. Involvement in national partnerships like iLEAD further clarified the partners' mutual commitment to Improvement Science approaches, allowing them to define "next edges of growth" that continue to inform the partnership. Several useful tables summarize the arcs of change and growth in terms of the Developmental Progressions Framework for the partnership and each of the partner organizations.

As the authors emphasize, this story is not one of “uninterrupted progress or complete success” (p. 263). Instead, the partnership grew up through the deliberate commitment of key personnel to change practices and policies at key junctures. Thus, the writing benefits from the combined memories and perspectives of several CUEL participant authors, including Dr. Tozer, Dr. Cynthia Barron, CUEL Director Shelby Cosner, Dr. David Mayrowetz, Research Director Sam Whalen, and Paul Zavitkovsky. Also contributing was Peter Martinez, co-founder of CUEL and the UIC EdD Program in Urban Education Leadership, and an original member of the Chicago Consortium for Schools Research. The CPS perspective on the partnership was contributed by recent CPS CEO Janice Jackson and former CPS Executive Director of Principal Quality Zipporah Hightower (now Superintendent of Skokie School District 73.5 in Illinois).

Tozer, S., Martinez, P., Barron, C.K., Cosner, S., Hightower, Z., Jackson, J., Mayrowetz, D., Whalen, S., & Zavitkovsky, P. (2023). Preparing principals for urban schools: The challenge of equitable outcomes at scale. University of Illinois Chicago and Chicago Public Schools. In Gomez, L., et al., *Improving America's Schools Together: How District-University Partnerships and Continuous Improvement Can Transform Education*. Rowman & Littlefield.