

**Stanford/SFUSD Partnership 2.0**

*The Context, Theory of Action, Impacts to Date, and Plan for 2014-2017*

**Table of Contents**

Context .....3  
 Figure 1: Overview of Stanford projects aligned with SFUSD Priorities .....4  
 Actions to date .....5  
 Figure 2: SFUSD’s Guidelines in Research, November, 2013 .....6  
 Impact to date .....6  
 Evaluation of the Quality Teacher and Education Act: .....6  
 Early Warning Indicator Project:.....7  
 The Reading Like a Historian Curriculum:.....7  
 Next Steps: Going Deeper and Broader.....7  
**Objective 1:** Stanford will engage in research that is aligned with SFUSD’s priorities and immediately useful for SFUSD policy makers and administrators.....8  
 Table 1: Budget Sources for the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership for the 2014-2017 period .....9  
 Figure 3: Actions, Personnel, and Outcomes in the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership 2014-2017.....9  
**Objective 2:** Stanford will provide a research team to work internally with SFUSD, producing results on shortened timelines that will enable administrators to do data-driven decision-making. ....9  
**Objective 3:** The management of the Stanford/SFUSD partnership will enhance events, coordination of projects, and project tracking, as well as the general knowledge management of efforts related to the Stanford/SFUSD partnership.....11  
 Future Measures of Impact .....11  
 Annual survey .....12  
 Quality standards for research between Stanford and SFUSD.....12  
 External study of the partnership.....13

## Context

Stanford Graduate School of Education is part of a world-class research university, and U.S. News and World Report consistently ranks the GSE among the top five graduate schools of education in the nation. Its faculty include some of the most well-respected researchers in the field of education, many of whom are interested in addressing research questions that relate to the day-to-day practicality of improving student achievement in an urban school district.

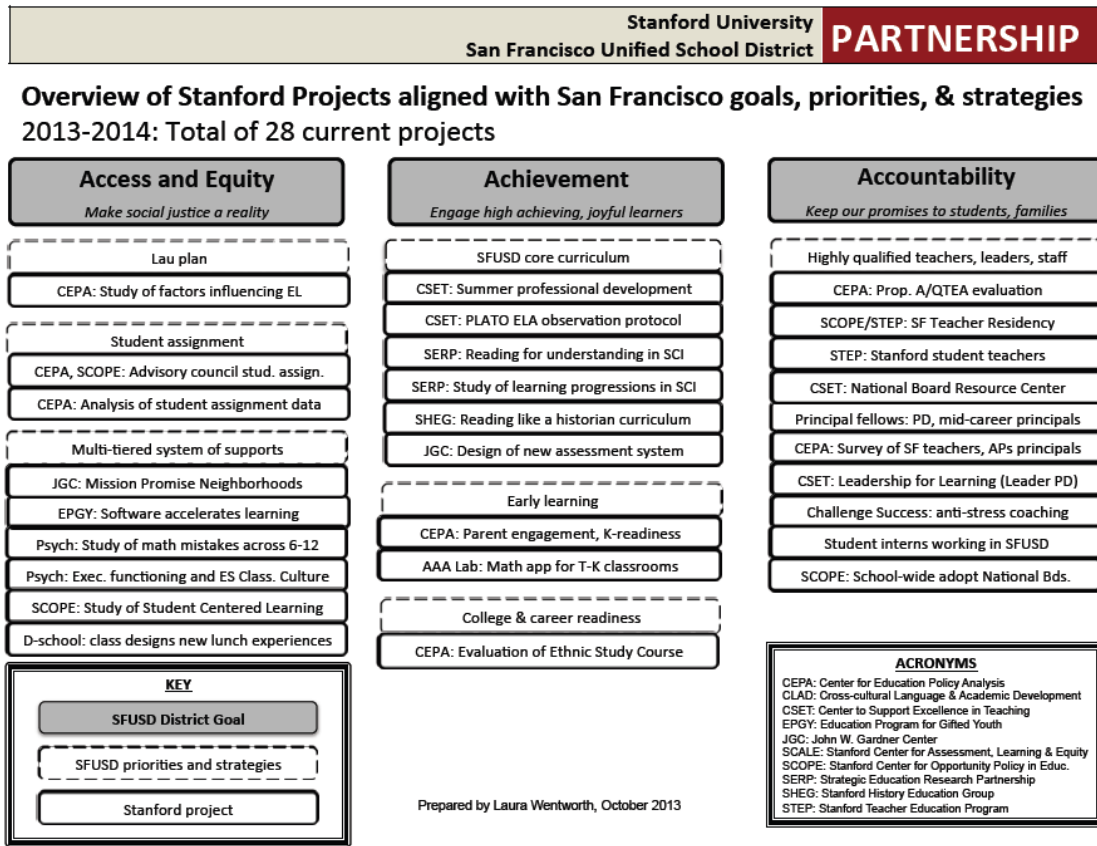
Just 37 miles north of Palo Alto, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is one of the highest performing urban school districts in California. However, it struggles with archetypal problems of practice relevant to most urban school districts, such as a persistent achievement gap and challenges with teacher retention in underserved schools. SFUSD leadership has maintained the same goals – access/equity, achievement and accountability - as part of their strategic plan for the last five years.<sup>1</sup> The superintendent, deputy superintendent of instruction, and many of the district’s cabinet leaders either have or are in the process of finishing their doctorates in education and are deeply committed to using empirical evidence to guide decision-making and practices. With its consistent and knowledgeable leadership, SFUSD can serve as an ideal model for its peers on how to apply research findings to practice in real time.

Stanford and SFUSD formalized their partnership in 2009, and the two institutions have since established strong relationships. At any given time, there are between 25-30 active Stanford projects in SFUSD, and the partnership has a library of about 60 different publications and products associated with partnership work. (See Figure 1 for a map of the Stanford projects in SFUSD at the time this plan was written.) At the same time, both Stanford and SFUSD have historic challenges that exist across their respective organizational cultures that must be overcome as they strengthen the partnership. For example, at Stanford, professors have little incentive to connect their research to practice. Professors’ priorities tend to focus on tenure and publications in academic journals that are not often read by practitioners. They are also motivated to make their research as generalizable as possible, so focusing on one site for their research can be problematic for publication. Professors receive little training on how to work with practitioners or inside a school district, and they are often not given the time and support they need to develop relationships with practitioners. Additionally, their funding timelines do not allow them to respond to district needs in a timely fashion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 2008, SFUSD has maintained three goals within its strategic plan: access & equity - make social justice a reality; achievement - engage high-achieving and joyful learners; and accountability - keep our promises to students and families. See San Francisco Unified School District. (2008). *Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child Now, Version 1*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Unified School District.

Figure 1: Overview of Stanford projects aligned with SFUSD Priorities



Similarly, SFUSD has historically had trouble establishing and articulating its research agenda to its research partners. Most districts, including SFUSD, have found it challenging to establish and maintain a culture that relies on research to inform administrators’ and teachers’ decisions as administrators have relied on anecdotal evidence and other factors to make decisions.<sup>2</sup> Similar to other districts, SFUSD has experienced relationships with researchers that have been less than ideal; researchers often come in to the district with an academic agenda that is irrelevant to the direct needs of the district or they simply collect data and leave, without sharing their findings or relating the research to district needs.

This partnership seeks to leverage the strength of existing work while introducing new elements to its shared work as a means to accelerate the impact of the research on such problems of practice as closing the achievement gap and improving early childhood education. Stanford and SFUSD leaders are developing a paradigm-changing university-district partnership in which the Stanford/SFUSD collective efforts will result in measurable gains in student achievement and other quantifiable improvements in systems performance, as well as generalizable knowledge for the field. This plan spells

<sup>2</sup> Honig and Coburn, 2007, and Kochanek and Clifford, 2010.

out the actions already accomplished towards this goal, impacts to date, and next steps that will help Stanford and SFUSD achieve this new vision.

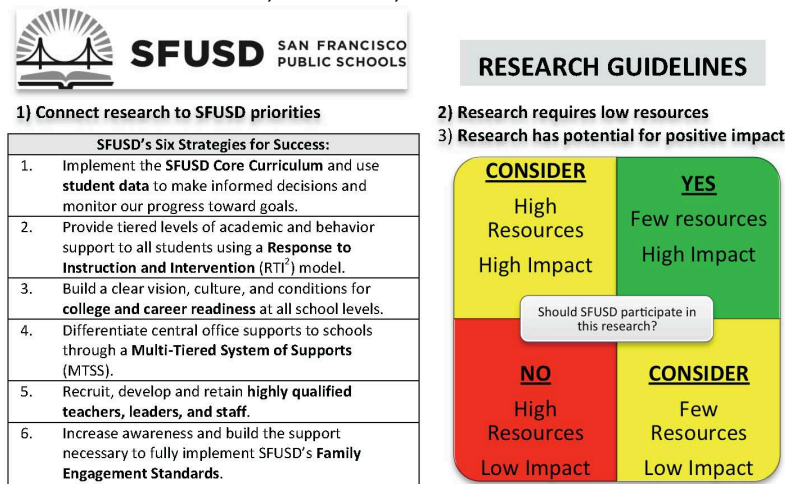
### **Actions to date**

Over the past four years, Stanford and SFUSD worked together to establish the infrastructure necessary for a productive partnership. To begin with, Stanford and SFUSD hired a director for the partnership, funded by the Silver Giving Foundation. Through the efforts of this director, people from both institutions developed trust and increased their communication. Stanford professors now regularly give presentations on research at SFUSD; monthly briefs about research are circulated via email; and the director has daily one-on-one conversations about the research with administrators as well as meetings with researchers developing or finalizing their research. In addition, the partnership now holds an annual meeting in which 100 leaders from both organizations review research findings and discuss the implications together. The annual meeting catalyzes the relationships between Stanford and SFUSD personnel by giving them specific research on relevant problems of practice and engaging researchers and practitioners in deep dialog about the work and the underlying issues. Participants in the annual meeting walk away with a better understanding of the purpose of the partnership and its potential power in solving problems of practice.

SFUSD has made many moves towards establishing a defined research agenda. SFUSD's research department now articulates its research agenda within their research application, and it spells out the district's priorities with which research is expected to be aligned. SFUSD has published this research agenda, listing six district priorities and criteria for weighing projects, including the needed resources and potential impact. (See Figure 2.) This research agenda has taken root, but it has yet to spread throughout the system.

The partnership has made substantial progress in establishing an infrastructure to facilitate research, and one system is of particular note: To provide a strong foundation for shared research, Stanford and SFUSD established an agreement that allows Stanford to house SFUSD's data on campus. The agreement says SFUSD will give annual downloads of its data on students administrative records, human resource record, and student enrollment records to Stanford. The Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA) within the Graduate School of Education devotes a full time data manager to organizing all data provided by SFUSD. The data manager then supplies data to Stanford professors who have data use agreements with SFUSD in place. The Stanford and SFUSD's legal teams negotiated a data use template that allows professors to avoid negotiating the details of every agreement project by project. The template makes establishing agreements about research and accessing data for research purposes easier both for Stanford professors and for the SFUSD research department.

Figure 2: SFUSD’s Guidelines in Research, November, 2013



**Impact to date**

In the first phase of the partnership, between January 2009 and December 2013, SFUSD and Stanford hired a partnership director, built additional channels of communication, established a research agenda, and established specific agreements about data use and research. Here are three projects briefly outlined below that exemplify the impact of the first phase of the partnership. These projects provide specific examples of how the Stanford/SFUSD partnership has improved teacher quality, influence policy decisions, and affected student achievement.

*Evaluation of the Quality Teacher and Education Act:*

In 2008, San Francisco passed the Quality Teacher and Education Act, that provided SFUSD with about \$30 million a year over 20 years through a city-wide parcel tax aimed at attracting, developing, and retaining high quality teachers in San Francisco schools. SFUSD knew it would have to go back to the voters in 20 years to renew this parcel tax, so they needed to ensure the money positively impacted teacher quality and student achievement. Consequently, they partnered with Professor Susanna Loeb at Stanford’s Center for Education Policy Analysis to systemically track the impact of the funding on teacher quality from day one. Based on Professor Loeb’s findings from the first two years of her evaluation, the district saw strong evidence that indeed the salary increasing provided by the QTEA to a subset of teachers was helping to increase the quality of teachers applying to San Francisco schools. The evaluation also alerted the district that principals and teachers received variable information about the salary incentives for teachers at hard-to-staff schools, and so changed their communication plan in Year two of implementation to increase outreach to principals and teachers about these incentives.

*Early Warning Indicator Project:*

As part of an effort to accelerate the number of students who complete a post-secondary degree and graduate career-ready, SFUSD partnered with Stanford's John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Families to perform some key data analyses meant to inform the decision-making. (The project, called the Bridge to Success, also involves the City of San Francisco and City College of San Francisco.) One step in this direction was the SFUSD's request to the Gardner Center to create an Early Warning Indicator that would provide SFUSD high schools a list of students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade at the highest risk of dropping out of high school. The Gardner Center examined other research on Early Warning Indicators developed for other school districts such as Chicago and Portland; it used those findings to test and select two indicators for San Francisco that could enable schools to concentrate limited resources — a selection of dropout prevention measures — to those students most in need of assistance. The two indicators (87.5% or less attendance rate and a Grade Point Average of 2.0 or less in the eighth grade) gave schools a way to target responses to students who were five times more likely to drop out. In a few more years, SFUSD will be able to measure the effectiveness of this program. In the meantime, the district is fine-tuning its interventions designed to help all students graduate from high school as a result of this work.

*The Reading Like a Historian Curriculum:*

In the 2008-2009 school year, Stanford Professor Sam Wineburg and then doctoral candidate Avishag Reisman piloted a new curriculum in SFUSD. The curriculum, Reading Like a Historian, was designed to develop students' historical thinking skills. Wineburg and Reisman found the SFUSD 11<sup>th</sup> grade students who participated in the curriculum not only had significant improvement in their historical thinking, but also on their reading comprehension skills. SFUSD soon adopted the curriculum across most of its 11<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms teaching U.S. history based on these findings, and SFUSD high school teachers across the district continue to use the curriculum.

These three projects are a sample from a much larger pool of work. Thus, it is exciting to imagine the collective impact of these Stanford/SFUSD projects going on at any given time in the next phase of the partnership.

**Next Steps: Going Deeper and Broader**

Stanford and SFUSD have built a strong foundation for their partnership and now are ready to enhance their focus and scope of Stanford research on SFUSD problems. Both the Stanford Graduate School of Education and SFUSD leadership believe that the progress of the partnership so far only scratches the surface of the partnership's potential impact. They want to increase the amount and quality of Stanford research and support available to SFUSD over the next three years. A key priority is to ensure a strategic district research agenda that strengthens SFUSD's understanding of the most effective practices for closing the achievement gap.

Stanford and SFUSD believe by setting a strategic research agenda and increasing the partnership's research and support for SFUSD's use of research, it will lead to specific measurable gains in student achievement and other quantifiable aspects of system performance. Each Stanford project in SFUSD will be designed to evaluate, study, and inform SFUSD's progress and developments along the way.

To actualize this paradigm-changing university-district partnership, Stanford and SFUSD have designed a new set objectives, actions, and resources needed to achieve this goal.

***Objective 1:*** *Stanford will engage in research that is aligned with SFUSD's priorities and immediately useful for SFUSD policy makers and administrators.*

Stanford professors have many incentives to pursue research that results in articles published in journals or their general academic standing. Now, the Stanford GSE wants to motivate Stanford professors to engage in research that also impacts the achievement gap and other deep-rooted problems in education. Stanford professors will need a close partnership with a practitioner in education to achieve this goal, so they can understand better problems of practice and participate closely with the practitioner during the research. Therefore, Stanford GSE will incentivize its professors to locate their research projects in SFUSD and align their research questions with the priorities of the district; it plans to provide its faculty members with financial support for their research projects in SFUSD. A joint committee between Stanford and SFUSD will make sure the Stanford projects receiving incentive funds are not only aligned with the districts' priorities but also meet standards for being generalized to other districts. By enabling faculty to by-pass traditional and lengthy funding processes, the Stanford/SFUSD partnership will provide research funding on a shortened timeline, significantly reducing the amount of time before research can begin and providing a much more timely response to district research needs. This shortened time frame will also encourage district leaders to more clearly articulate their research agenda and specific priorities to Stanford professors.

**Action Step:** Create incentives for professors to partner with SFUSD

A joint committee will award these incentives. It will be comprised of two SFUSD representatives and two Stanford representatives selected by the Dean and Deputy Superintendent. The committee will issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) that outlines the selection criteria. The criteria will be based on SFUSD's research agenda and Stanford standards for generalizability. Professors will submit a traditional SFUSD research application and data use agreement for review. In their application, they will describe how their projects are related to SFUSD's priority work and how the research will benefit SFUSD, so the committee can monitor closely the effect. The Stanford/SFUSD Partnership Director, with the support of a Partnership Program

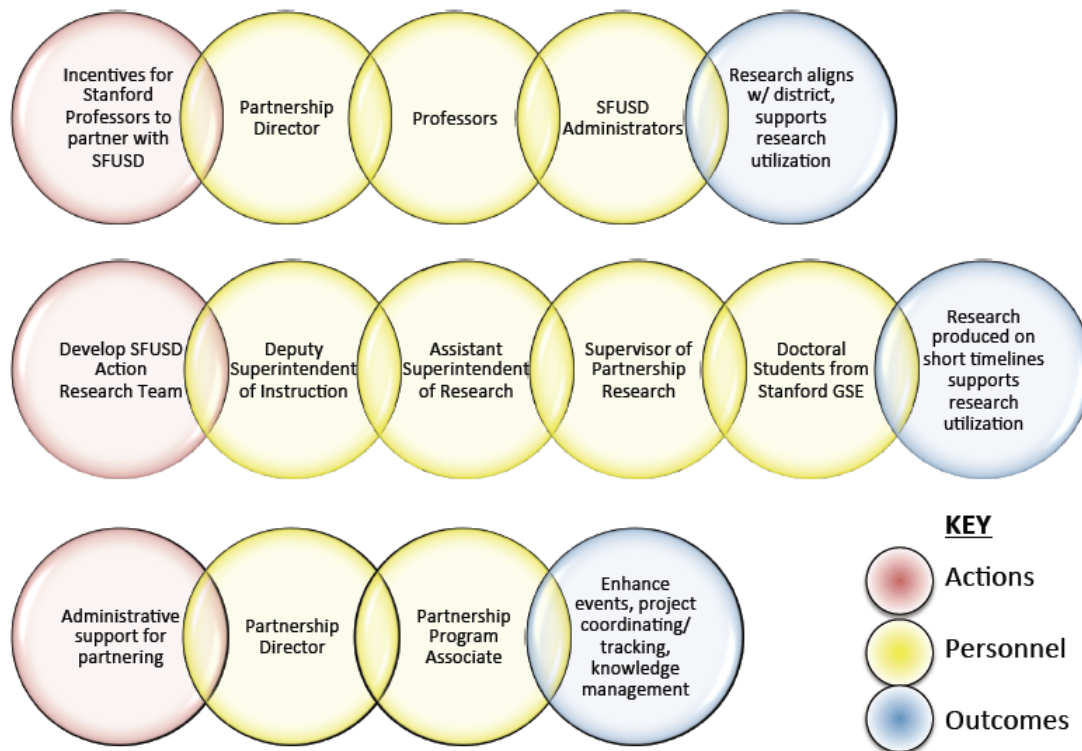


Associate, will manage the incentive committee.<sup>3</sup> The criteria articulated by this committee will also be used by the Partnership Director to articulate quality standards for research between Stanford and SFUSD across all projects, and will help guide projects as they are in development.

Table 1: Budget Sources for the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership for the 2014-2017 period

Position	Source
ST/SF Partnership Director	California Education Partners
ST/SF Partnership Supervisor	Stanford Graduate School of Education (GSE)
ST/SF Partnership Program Associate	California Education Partners
Evaluation/Impact Study	TBD
Incentives	Stanford GSE
Doctoral Students on SFUSD Action Research Team	Stanford GSE
Management of Supervisor, Action Research Team	San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)
Incentive Review Committee	SFUSD and Stanford GSE

Figure 3: Actions, Personnel, and Outcomes in the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership 2014-2017



**Objective 2:** Stanford will provide a research team to work internally with SFUSD, producing results on shortened timelines that will enable administrators to do data-driven decision-making.

<sup>3</sup> See Table 1 for an outline of the funding sources associated with the different parts of each action step. See Figure 3 for an chart outlining the personnel tied to each action and outcome proposed in this plan..

Stanford is working to prepare its doctoral students to be the next generation of educators and education researchers, capable of conducting the most innovative and advanced research methods and articulating their findings. Throughout their careers, these Stanford doctoral students will be expected to form relationships with large urban districts and other education organizations across the nation in order to gain access to research sites and large data sets. The partnership provides an ideal opportunity for them to learn how to form these important relationships, experience working closely with practitioners, and have hands-on experience working with large data sets within SFUSD. Their role within the partnership cannot be understated as they will work on the most immediate, short-term projects that will enable SFUSD personnel to use their research findings in real time to evaluate and inform decisions. This will provide a counter balance to the more methodologically complex and longer-term research conducted by Stanford professors.

**Action Step:** Establish SFUSD Action Research Team

To better prepare Stanford doctoral students and also provide SFUSD with timely research findings, the Stanford/SFUSD partnership will establish the SFUSD Action Research Team staffed with Stanford doctoral students. A Stanford/SFUSD Partnership Supervisor, who is managed by the SFUSD Assistant Superintendent of Research, will oversee the SFUSD Action Research Team, which will conduct research based on SFUSD's research agenda.

To start, at least four Stanford GSE doctoral students in at least their second year of study will form the first SFUSD Action Research Team, each serving a one-year fellowship. All of the research produced by this team will stay internal to SFUSD, except one publishable project negotiated with each doctoral student, the SFUSD research department, and the doctoral students' advisors. Again, the Partnership Supervisor will manage the SFUSD Action Research Team Team.

The Action Research Team will be guided by a team of SFUSD administrators. SFUSD's administrative team will establish the research agenda for the Action Research team, and the Partnership Supervisor will make sure the Action Research team of doctoral students understands that research agenda and the work they are tasked to do in support of that research agenda. SFUSD's administrative team will include senior administrators from across the district selected and led by the Deputy Superintendent of Instruction and Assistant Superintendent of Research. This team will articulate SFUSD's research agenda for the Action Research Team team. The Partnership Supervisor will organize and facilitate meetings for the SFUSD administrative team guiding the Action Research Team.

Additionally, the Partnership Supervisor will coordinate any new Stanford projects in SFUSD including technical support for research agreements, operations of projects in

SFUSD, and access for each project, especially with the additional projects supported by the incentive fund and the Action Research Team.

---

**Objective 3:** *The management of the Stanford/SFUSD partnership will enhance events, coordination of projects, and project tracking, as well as the general knowledge management of efforts related to the Stanford/SFUSD partnership.*

As additional personnel, structures, and research projects are part of the partnership, there will be additional infrastructure needed to ensure that partnership has its desired effects. To date, the only dedicated staff for the partnership has been the Partnership Director. These new developments in the partnership will require the Director to play more of a facilitative, leadership role. Therefore, there will be a call for more robust operational support for the partnership work.

**Action Step:** Establish administrative support

This action step would add another staff member to support the Partnership Director, providing a team of three people (The Partnership Director, the Partnership Supervisor internal to SFUSD, and the Partnership Program Associate) supporting the vision for the Stanford/SFUSD partnership. The Partnership Director, Partnership Supervisor, and Partnership Fellow will form a team that will meet weekly. While the Partnership Supervisor is an internal position to SFUSD, the Partnership Program Associate and the Partnership Director continue to be positions staffed by California Education Partners. This allows the Supervisor's work to be managed by the district, but then checked by the Director and Program Associate through their working relationship, and the Director and Program Associate remain neutral third parties between all things connected to the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership.

To get more specific, this Partnership Program Associate will help manage events including the annual meeting and monthly presentations on Stanford research at both Stanford and SFUSD. Additionally, the Partnership Program Associate would also keep track of progress by maintaining an online archive of past projects and their research findings and would help report the findings in regular communications from the partnership. This person would also help the Partnership Director with general knowledge management tasks when needed including writing of policy briefs, maintaining the partnership website and regularly updating Stanford/SFUSD partnership project map.

### **Future Measures of Impact**

A number of researchers in the field of education have discussed the challenge of studying these partnerships and specifically the impact of research on practice. Use of

research by administrators is a complex process, and sometimes leads administrators to rely only on qualitative evidence as a key evidence source.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the complexity of measuring the use of research by practitioners, it can also be complex to measure the impact of the structures and systems supporting the partnership. For example, Coburn, Penuel, and Geil, point out that it can be “difficult to measure the impact of an investment in core support or infrastructure.”<sup>5</sup>

To study the impact of the Stanford/SFUSD partnership, we will need a multiple-pronged approach. Consequently, the evaluation of the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership Plan for 2014-2017 will be tackled using three methods that will study the impact of partnering, as well as the intricacies of partnering like the resources/staffing, scope of projects, and issues related to research collaboration.

### *Annual survey*

The Stanford/SFUSD partnership is working closely with REL Northwest and the Baltimore Education Research Consortium to develop and validate an updated version of a “Research-Practitioner Partnership” survey. This survey will be used across the three institutions, which will lead to the development of comparative data. Also, the three institutions are working together to validate the measure through a number of statistical tests that will give the survey measure more validity and reliability. These survey metrics will produce outcome measures for the partnership’s impact in these areas:

- Vision of the Partnership
- Utility of the Partnership
- Quality of the Research
- Operations within the Partnership
- Access within the Partnership
- Interpretation of Research Findings
- Partnership Leadership
- Two open-ended questions about strengths and challenges

The findings from this survey will be shared in the aggregate and also capture the sentiment of Stanford and SFUSD participants. Finally, the survey data will be triangulated with two other forms of data – a new metric developed by the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership called the quality standards for partnership research as well as data collected by an external evaluator over 2014-2017. Both of these other measures are described below.

### *Quality standards for research between Stanford and SFUSD*

SFUSD and Stanford will form a joint committee to review proposed Stanford projects that wish to be funded through the incentive funds focused on the Stanford/SFUSD Partnership. Another role for this committee, mentioned briefly above, is to outline the Request For Proposal for the incentive fund to review. In that RFP, the group will spell

---

<sup>4</sup> Honig and Coburn, 2007; Kochanek, and Clifford, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Coburn, Penuel, and Geil (2012), p. 23.

out their criteria for incentive funded projects; part of their criteria will include a set of “quality standards for partnership research.” These standards will be used to judge the quality of projects applying for incentive funds, but then will also be used to rate all Stanford projects in SFUSD and guide the formation of any Stanford project in SFUSD. These ratings will help gauge the quality of the projects, and produce an outcome measure in the following areas:

- Utility of the project by SFUSD administrators
- Design of research, and involvement of SFUSD administrators and SFUSD priorities throughout the research project
- Impact of projects on student achievement, teacher practice, leadership practice, and policy improvements
- The generalizability of the potential findings
- The validity and reliability of findings based on research methods

These standards will be used in concert with the survey results and an external evaluation to triangulate results.

#### *External study of the partnership*

Part of plan for the partnership will include hiring an external research group to study 1) the alignment of Stanford research with SFUSD’s priorities, 2) the impact of the Stanford partnership on SFUSD’s decision-making, and 3) the impact of SFUSD’s priorities on the choices Stanford professors make for research topics and methods. The research methods used in this evaluation will most likely be qualitative, with researchers conducting observations and interviews two times a year during key opportunities for decision-making and research formation, as well as interviews with SFUSD administrators and Stanford researchers. The design of the study will most likely be driven by the background and expertise of the external researcher. The Partnership Director has talked with Northwestern University Professor Cynthia Coburn, who specializes in the study of research use in education, about the potential design for this study and potential researchers to work on the study. Potential outcome measures stemming from this external study might include:

- Access to research by administrators
- Interpretation of research by administrators
- Use of research in administrator decision-making
- Accessibility of district research agenda to researchers
- Influence of district research agenda on researchers questions and findings