

Research and Practice Alignment: How Meaningful Collaboration Between Practitioners and Researchers Can Inform Equity-Centered Decision-Making

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Abstract

Large school districts across the country are faced with a monumental task - creating and managing a system that has the capacity to ensure that students can learn and grow during their time in school. School districts benefit from research that is closely aligned with their most pressing problems of practice and an efficient allocation of that research to decision-makers who will take action based on the results. All of this must be done within the constraints of the K-12 school district. In order to do this well, districts and researchers must collaborate to ensure that the end result will be useful and beneficial to both parties. The Central City Department of Education (CCDOE) is a fertile ground for research and improving school outcomes. However, improving practice across the district requires alignment between research and policy. Currently, research conducted within the district is designed independently of issues relevant to practitioners. To address this issue, a study was designed employing a mixed-methods design focused on by surveying members of the CCDOE and researchers who work with the CCDOE. Interviews with external researchers from organizations that have submitted upwards of ten proposals through the DOE's Internal Review Board in the last ten years; with individuals who were recommended to us as experts in their field when it comes to working with large, diverse school districts; and with key staff members from the Research Practice Alignment Team (RPAT) of the CCDOE. A set of recommendations have been drafted based on the findings and informed by best practices in the literature. These recommendations are particularly useful to those who work directly in partnership with researchers, policy makers and practitioners. If followed, these recommendations will allow the RPAT to produce quality and relevant research with a quick turnaround, while overcoming their limited resources and capacity.

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