

**Program Development within Authentic Partnerships**<sup>1</sup>Jennifer E. McGarry, <sup>2</sup>Jesse Mala, <sup>3</sup>Michael Corral**Abstract**

Campus-community partnerships utilizing sport and focused on youth participants are increasingly prevalent and have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting healthy behaviors. However, the majority of research has not analyzed the nature of collaboration, and the inherent benefits and challenges, utilizing theory and focused on management implications. The two-part study examined the development of sport-based authentic adolescent leadership program utilizing the Campus Community Partnerships for Health (CCPH) authentic partnership model in a school engaged in a turnaround process. Data included field notes from a four-month period during which participant observations of school leadership meetings, school governance council meetings, parent teacher organization (PTO) meetings, individual teacher interactions, and university program meetings occurred.

Study 1 called for the researchers to ask how community partners (school) examine programming and identify gaps. Results included two themes: the need to develop positive relationships between students and school staff and the need for consistency. Study 2 results focused on the development and implementation of a program intended to address the gaps identified in Study 1. Results included the following themes: the priority of clear and open communication, being relationship focused, building upon strengths and assets, and identifying meaningful outcomes and transformative experiences. Findings from the two studies can inform other campus-community partnerships about strategies to successfully develop and implement new programs in the midst of a demanding situation like a school turnaround. By adhering to the principles of an authentic partnership (CCPH, 2013), the school and university partners were able to identify, develop and implement a program that met the needs of both partners

Key words: university-school partnerships, youth sport programming, authentic partnership

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**Dr. McGarry** has been a part of the Sport Management program at the University of Connecticut since January of 2002. Dr. McGarry's research line has focused primarily on barriers and supports for women and those from marginalized ethnic and socio-economic groups. Dr. McGarry is also the program founder and director of Husky Sport. The program provides UConn students as co-planners of sessions at community sites in Hartford, CT that emphasize exposure and access to sport healthy lifestyles. Research has focused on individual level impacts of such a program on pre-adolescents and the reciprocal impact on the college students.

**Jesse Mala** is a fourth-year PhD student in the Learning, Leadership and Educational Policy program at UConn with a concentration in Sport Management. He has his BS in Physical Education from Central Connecticut (2008) and his master's in Exercise Science from UConn (2014). His current research is examining the role of stress on brain function in underserved and minority populations and how this impacts education through grades K-16 and within graduate education.

**Michael Corral** is a fourth-year PhD student in the Learning, Leadership and Educational Policy program at UConn with concentrations in Sport Management and Leadership and Educational Policy. He has his BS in Business Management and Marketing from Eastern Oregon (2010) and two master's, one in Teaching and Learning (Argosy University, 2011) and one in Educational Administration and Leadership (American College of Education, 2014). His current research interest lies in examining the experiences of high achieving students in under-resourced schools.

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*Recommended Citation:* McGarry, E. Jennifer, Mala, Jesse, Corral, Michael (2018). Program Development within Authentic Partnerships. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, 1(2)

### **Program Development within Authentic Partnerships**

Campus-community partnerships utilizing sport and focused on youth participants are increasingly prevalent. Additionally, such partnerships have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting healthy behaviors (Bruening, Fuller, & Percy, 2015; Cameron, Craig, Coles, & Cragg, 2003, Chew, & Tan, 2002). Since 2003, Sport Hartford, a sport-based youth development organization has connected local university students, faculty, and staff with Hartford, Connecticut children and families. Sport Hartford originates from a nearby university's school of education, specifically a sport management program and has focused its efforts on "forming and facilitating partnerships around education and health" (Bruening et al, 2015). Sport Hartford was founded, and has been sustained, on the premise that sports act as the "hook" and as the medium to foster the development of certain life skills (Perkins & Noam, 2008).

As Bruening, et al., (2015) established, the majority of research on campus-community partnerships has been descriptive. Studies have not analyzed the nature of collaboration, and the inherent benefits and challenges, utilizing theory and focused on management implications (Dotterweich, 2006; Walsh, 2006). In particular, the process of establishing new program initiatives within existing campus-community partnerships is unexplored. As such, the current study seeks to examine the development of a sport-based authentic adolescent leadership program within the structure of Sport Hartford.

Based on the research and findings from one of the nation's preeminent leaders in campus-community partnerships, the Authentic Partnership model is composed of four parts (CCPH, 2015): the guiding principles of partnership, quality processes, meaningful outcomes, and transformative experiences. Of the twelve guiding principles, the current study focused on five principles that were most essential to Sport Hartford's programming success:

- 1) The partnership forms to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time,
- 2) the relationship between partners in the partnership is characterized by mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and commitment,
- 3) the partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners,
- 4) partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority in the Partnership by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and developing a common language, and
- 5) there is feedback among all stakeholders in the partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes (CCPH, 2015).

Additionally, the other three elements of the Authentic Partnership Model (quality processes, meaningful outcomes, and transformative experiences) were integral parts in establishing and improving the partnership.

Scholars, researchers, and community members alike have come together to gain a mutual understanding that every partnership, especially one as ever-changing and dynamic as a campus-community partnership, must have a specific and intentional purpose (CCPH, 2015). Additionally, the partnership should understand and expect that transformation, change, expansion, growth, understanding, responsiveness and commitment take place on all ends of the partnership spectrum (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Seifer & Gottlieb, 2010).

Furthermore, the second principle conveys the message that the relationship dynamic of the partnership should be of the utmost importance. Within the relationship there must be, "... mutual respect of values, strategies, and actions for authentic partnership of people affiliated with or self-identified by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of the community of focus" (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Jones & Wells, 2007; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Moini, Fackler-Lowrie & Jones, 2005). The relationship component is critical. Each element of the partnership will be greatly influenced by the actions, attitudes, and perceptions that arise within the complex interactions of such a partnership (Carriere, 2006; Dumlao, & Janke, 2012; Huxham, & Vangen, 2005). Additionally, differences between the community and campus are inevitable, as well as the partners that exist in each. Ultimately, collaborations that exist along the community and university spectrum require partners to span physical, relational, psychological, structural, and cultural limitations (Hayes & Cuban, 1997;

Janke, 2008; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Further, this is often the dynamic that occurs between a campus and community as many of the faculty and college students do not come from the communities with whom they partner.

The third principle focuses on the partnership's success and is contingent upon the ability to identify and utilize its strengths and assets to attain the highest levels of impact and capacity (Achieving the Promise of Authentic Community-Higher Education Partnerships, 2007; Ahmed & Palermo, 2010). The campus-community partnership must be conceptualized and established as much more than a collection of individual actions (Maier, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Additionally, as separate entities come together in such relationships, it is also vital to ensure all lines of communication are open and utilized (4<sup>th</sup> principle).

Additionally, communication is rarely established without intentional efforts. Through strongly articulating communication as a priority, two separate entities (i.e. campus and community) can come together and understand the diverse needs and interests of one another. Growth can occur through a common language and direction. No matter what the differences may be between partners (e.g. mission, resources) it is necessary to have clear communication to be able to overcome and respond appropriately to those differences (Israel, Schulz, Parker, Becker, Allen, Guzman, 2003; Maciak, Guzman, Santiago, Villalobos & Israel, 1999; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2002, Parker, Israel, Brakefield-Caldwell, 2003; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Seifer, 2006;). In order to establish this clear and accessible line of communication between partners, Trusted advocates within the campus and community should be identified and engaged in a reciprocal awareness and knowledge-building process. These advocates should be considered equal partners in the development of the guidelines for the partnership. As partnership programs are developed, the existence of a trusting relationship will enable effective communications (Gupta & Partnerships Perspectives, 2000). As such, it is highly unlikely for a successful partnership to bloom from two or more parties coming together with only surface level knowledge of one another. A strong partnership shares many of the same components of friendship in that each partner must deeply understand what the other is about to fully trust and understand.

Finally, the fifth principle reiterates the idea that providing feedback must be common practice among all stakeholders. If growth, productivity, efficiency, and results are at the forefront of the partnership's mission, then constant and reliable feedback must be present. Through regular assessments, both formal and informal, partners can ensure that accountability is central and effectiveness is a primary goal. Further, as feedback is delivered in the form of constructive criticism, these moments of communication must be used as an opportunity to discuss and recognize positive outcomes as well (Gelmon, & Holland, 1999; Sebastian, Skelton, & West, 2006).

### **Quality Processes**

Beyond the five principles, quality processes are another vital element of an authentic partnership. According to CCPH's website and their position statement on authentic partnerships (2013), quality processes are, "relationship focused; open, honest, respectful and ethical; trust building; acknowledging of history; committed to mutual learning and sharing credit" (CCPH, 2013). Furthermore, Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, and Guzman (2001) reported results of a formative evaluation of the first four years of community-based participatory research partnership with a university, six community based organizations, a city health department, a health care system and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. A principle accomplishment of the partnership was the adoption and implementation of operating procedures and community-based participatory research principles (Lantz et al., 2001). These procedures and principles helped the partners to create an effective team of "partners with equal voices" who were "cohesive" and "candid," displaying how being open, honest, respectful and ethical are important in a partnership (Lantz et al., 2001).

Sandy and Holland (2006) examined 99 community partners across eight communities using focus groups. Among all partners, valuing and caring for the partnership relationship was deemed as the highest priority in a campus-community partnership and was emphasized as

foundational to all activities and projects (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Additionally, a theme of mutual learning was identified. Rather than a mere transactional relationship of “giving and receiving,” the partners exhibited an awareness of important “student learning outcomes for career development, civic engagement, academic course content, diversity, multicultural skills, and personal development” (Sandy & Holland, 2006, p. 35).

Furthermore, Parker and colleagues (2003) examined the partnership process of a community-based participatory research project. Committee members identified their crucial role and influence as community partners in decisions with implementing the project, and writing the grant (Parker et al., 2003). Moreover, participants noted that they were pleased to see community members involved with the dissemination process, showing the importance of the sharing of credit in authentic partnerships (Parker et al., 2003).

### **Meaningful Outcomes**

Meaningful outcomes are another element of authentic partnerships and should be tangible and relevant to communities (CCPH, 2013) and campuses. In a national collaborative involving nine U.S based organizations aimed at identifying strategies for building and sustaining community-institutional partnerships for research, Seifer (2006) found that tangible benefits to all partners were a characteristic of successful community-institutional partnerships. Successful partnerships implement interventions, provide services and build capacity in communities. The impact in communities can range from increasing knowledge of public health issues, changes in behaviors, and improved health and quality of life (Seifer, 2006).

#### **Transformational Experiences**

According to the CCPH board of directors (2013), transformation is the last element of an authentic partnership and can occur at multiple levels including personal, institutional, community, and political transformation. In Jackson, Mullis, and Hughes’ research (2010), community partners developed a theater-based nutrition and physical activity intervention for urban adolescents to combat childhood obesity. Transformation took place at an individual level with participants increasing knowledge of recommended servings of fruits and vegetables and recommended amount of daily physical activity. Furthermore, participants reported increased intentions to eat more fruits and vegetables and participate in physical activity each day. Similarly, interview and focus group research with youth organizers, (Peterson, Dolan & Hanft, 2010) studied violence and racial conflict in high schools. Participants increased their understanding of the issues causing violence and racial conflict and offered recommendations that would ameliorate both. Moreover, the youth organizers presented a summary of these recommendations with city and school leaders, causing community and systemic transformation to take place.

A study by Fuller, Evanovich, Bruening, Peachey, Coble, Percy, Mala, and Corral (2015) elucidated the impact of a sport-based service-learning course on students’ attitudes, intentions and actions toward social change. Using in-depth interviews of alumni who completed the course, the authors reported that participants gained an increased ability to recognize social inequities, shared their current involvement in initiatives that address social inequities and also reported future intentions to participate in such initiatives. These studies highlight how campus-community partnerships can facilitate transformational experiences to all individuals involved in the campus partnership.

Previous research on campus-community partnerships has demonstrated the value of the critical elements and guiding principles in achieving authentic partnerships. While there has been much research on authentic campus-community partnerships, which have addressed various health, social, and education issues (Jackson et al., 2010, Kobetz et al., 2009, Lewis et al., 2013, Mathews et al., 2013, Peterson et al., 2010) there is limited research on new program development within existing authentic campus-community partnerships. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine an existing campus community partnership, Sport Hartford. Specifically, we will examine this partnership through the lens of an authentic partnership model (CCPH, 2015) and identify key elements of an authentic partnership that were exhibited during new program development and implementation.

## Method

### Setting

Researchers have demonstrated that extreme poverty and limited educational options determine individual and community health (American Communities Survey, 2010; Hartford Health Equity Survey, 2010; Kneebone & Garr, 2010). The neighborhood in which Sport Hartford has operated has the lowest median income level in the state and less than 20% of adults have a high school diploma. As such, Sport Hartford has designed programs that utilize sport as a hook to engage youth in its four pillars: nutrition education, physical activity, life skill development and academic enrichment. Specifically, Sport Hartford has provided sport-based in school and out of school time programs to pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Sport Hartford's programming is informed and enhanced by an established service learning program where college students are engaged in regular reflection and discussion on social inequity. Through this lens, college students are trained to assist in program delivery. Sport Hartford's long-standing programs include:

1. An in-school program at a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade school that engages each classroom once a week for 45 minutes, much like an art, music, or physical education class would, around Sport Hartford's four pillars.
2. A literacy focused program at three K-8<sup>th</sup> grade schools that engages students in additional opportunities to read with an individual Husky Sport staff member, in Sport Hartford facilitated small group or classroom read alouds. Books are aligned with Sport Hartford's four pillars and collaboratively selected with teacher grade level teams.
3. After school and weekend partnership programs with four community providers where Sport Hartford supplements those organizations' staff with additional staff trained to enhance the nutrition education and physical activity opportunities at each program.
4. College credit bearing courses offered at 2 high schools and aligned with the service learning courses offered at the university to prepare students to deliver Sport Hartford programs and provide them with opportunities to practice those skills as well.

As Sport Hartford and its community partners planned for the 2014-2015 academic year, leaders agreed to focus on one particular school for new program initiation. Carson School (K-8<sup>th</sup> grade) had been the site of a turnaround process the previous year. As one of the historically lowest performing schools in the district, Carson was designated by the district to undergo significant reforms (i.e. turnaround) including having charter or magnet school leadership assume operations. Parents, teachers and community members resisted the school district's decision to redesign the school without significant input from them. After an entire year of public meetings, community conversations, and interviews with potential organizations, the district settled on a local corporation already operating multiple schools in the region. During this time, the superintendent announced her plans to resign to accept a similar position in another district effective at the end of the school year. A new superintendent was selected through a national search and began mid-summer. The magnet school organization's selection was announced close to the same time. As a result, within weeks of the opening of the 2014-2015 academic year, a new superintendent came on board, and Carson's principal and the magnet school corporation's vice president began leading the school together.

Needless to say, the beginning of the year was full of transition. New teachers, staff, and community partners came on board as part of the turnaround effort. New academic and behavioral expectations for students were instituted and the school's teachers and staff were provided with extensive professional development sessions on how to embed these expectations into the school culture.

Eventually, school operations began to fall into place. But each day continued to be a new adventure, particularly for the middle school grades. Almost all of the middle school teachers were new to Carson as part of the turnaround, and were admittedly challenged by their students'

behaviors. These challenges prompted an early December trip to the campus partner for a retreat for middle school students with Sport Hartford staff. Following this retreat, teachers and staff felt improvements were taking place with the students, but expressed their interest in developing more programming for the students in grades 6-8 with the campus partner.

### Study 1

Using the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health's "Principles of Partnership" model as a central guide, it is understood that a relationship and genuine understanding of the environment is essential and fundamental for all stakeholders. Although a partnership may have a long history, new stakeholders must still work to understand the unique dynamics of the partnership and build trust and rapport. One of the guiding partnership principles of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (2015) focuses on how the relationship between partners must include mutual respect, genuineness, and commitment. This principle served to guide two additions to the Sport Hartford and Carson School Partnership. Additionally, the initial phase of new stakeholders (student-researchers) entering the partnership necessitated an additional CCPH (2015) principle. This supplementary principle emphasizes the partners building upon identified strengths and assets while working to address the needs and capacity of all partners.

Study 1 called for the researchers to ask how partners examine current offerings, and to identify gaps. The research question for Study 1 was: What are the needs of students in a school that is undergoing a turnaround?

Table 1. Need Gap

Name	Role
Carol	School Behavioral Specialist
Keenan	School Curriculum Specialist
Jamie	Sport Hartford Director
Melachi	Sport Hartford Program Leader-student-researcher
James	Sport Hartford Program Leader/student-researcher
Mark	8th Grade Student
Dan	8th Grade Student
Gabe	8th Grade Student
Shane	8th Grade Student
Charlie	8th Grade Student
Will	8th Grade Student
Brett	8th Grade Student
Jay	7th Grade Student
Ty	6th Grade Student
Gold	6th Grade Student
Brett	6th Grade Student
Ken	6th Grade Student

### Data Collection

Data for the study were collected from multiple sources, thus allowing for triangulation (Patton, 2002). Data included field notes from a four-month period where two of the researchers spent two days a week in Carson, before the relocation. Each researcher was assigned to one classroom where he spent two half days per week assisting the teacher and building rapport with the students. Those same researchers also spent two half days per week in the physical education classroom assisting the teacher and helping to lead a pilot program focused on functional movement skill growth with selected classes. Field notes also included observations made during participation in meetings with the principal (3), school governance council (SGC) meetings (3), parent teacher

organization (PTO) meetings (2), individual teacher interactions (12-15), and internal Sport Hartford meetings (16).

### **Data Analysis**

All data (i.e., interviews, field notes, and program meeting minutes) were loaded into NVIVO 10 qualitative data software. Two members of the research team inductively coded the data independently (Patton, 2002). Following the initial round of coding of field notes from classroom and gym observations, the two researchers compared codes, refined definitions through discussion of the coding. They resolved differences in their coding choices, and continued to code the remainder of the data (i.e. field notes from meetings and teacher interactions) independently with the researchers meeting regularly to discuss any data segments that they were unsure of how to code.

### **Results**

#### **The Need to Develop Positive Relationships between Students and School Staff**

Through observation and field notes (Yin, 2003), it was revealed that the relationship dynamic between students and adults in the building, especially with grades 6-8, were generally negative. Specifically, the field notes from both researchers revealed that the language from students to students, students to teachers, and students to administrators was often negative and inappropriate for a school setting (Melachi, field notes, October, 2014; James, field notes, November, 2014). Teachers often became frustrated with student behaviors, but inconsistencies that existed with the school's discipline policies caused a rather defeated morale for teachers and a climate where students felt they could say and do whatever they wanted. This resulted in school days where a structured setting, high expectations, and learning did not consistently take place. From students fighting with one another, to getting up and walking out of classes, to cursing at teachers and administrators, the climate and culture of Carson was quite toxic. This undoubtedly contributed to the chronic low-performance and low levels of student engagement within the school. Observations confirmed that this negative climate and culture was more prevalent with the older grades. Teachers and school leaders expressed concern that if change did not occur, this negativity would become a more established culture within Carson. And, if this became the case, it seemed inevitable that the future 6-8 graders would likely act, carry themselves, and behave in the same ways.

#### **The Need for Consistency**

With a revolving door of teachers and administrators at Carson School, it was observed that many students did not feel a bond with the adults in their school. Strong and consistent leadership is necessary for positive school climate and culture (Fleming & Raptis, 2003). Additionally, many of the teachers within Carson School did not communicate with one another or work as teams to combat the behavioral issues with students. This was especially true for the 6-8 grade teams of teachers, who, not coincidentally, experienced the most student behavior challenges within the school.

Understanding the disconnectedness that occurred between the students and teachers, teachers among one another, and teachers and administrators, was key to being able to identify areas that Sport Hartford could help alleviate and improve the culture and climate of Carson. Consistency, communication, and relationships seemed to be missing components from the current Carson School culture and climate.

### **Study 2**

#### **Developing a New Program**

In the Spring 2015, two of the researchers from Sport Hartford enrolled in a graduate course that discussed current issues in sport. During the course, articles covering the topics of organizational climate and culture, adolescent leadership, mentorship, and sport-based youth development were analyzed. Articles by Whitehead (2014), Roeser, Midgley & Urda (1996),

Furrer & Skinner (2003), and Perkins & Noam (2007) were most relevant to the immediate situation of Carson School and became the foundation for an in-school intervention. These articles reported positive results in youth through mentoring, and identified how a sense of relatedness in schools can play a role in academic performance. Moreover, the literature reviewed also highlighted the theory of sport-based youth development and how sport can be used as a medium for positive youth development. Furthermore, the authentic leadership framework by Whitehead (2014) provided a way to decrease anti-social behavior and foster prosocial outcomes among adolescents. Thus, through studying the results from Study 1 and the course readings, the researchers were able to develop an authentic leadership intervention that utilized the sport-based youth development framework. The intervention aimed to engage students through sport to develop authentic leadership skills, and to provide the opportunity for students to develop positive relationships with adults in the school, which could have a positive impact on school climate and culture.

In study 2 we sought to address the following research questions regarding the partnership between Carson School and Sport Hartford:

1. What elements of an authentic partnership were exhibited during the development and implementation of a new program?
2. In what ways did the partnership identify and utilize the strengths and assets of each partner to address the needs of Carson School's middle school students?
3. What meaningful outcomes occurred within Carson School from new program implementation?

#### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were derived from observations within the school (22), meeting notes with school administration (2), emails (28), student journals (12), and individual teacher interactions with researchers (10-12) that took place throughout the Spring of 2015.

#### **Data Analysis**

The data were deductively coded independently by two members of the research team based upon the position statement of the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) elements for an authentic partnership (2013). Similar to the coding approach used in Study 1, after coding independently, the two members of the research team compared themes, and the data that supported them. Themes that were not related to the CCPH framework were omitted from this analysis. According to the CCPH framework for authentic partnerships the following themes were coded; 1) partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority in the Partnership by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and developing a common language, 2) quality processes that are relationship focused; open, honest, respectful and ethical; trust building; acknowledging history; committed to mutual learning and sharing credit, 3) the partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners, 4) meaningful outcomes that are tangible and relevant to communities, and 5) transformative experiences occurring at the personal and community level.

#### **Results**

During new program development and implementation, the partnership exhibited clear and open communication; "partners make clear and open communication an ongoing priority in the Partnership by striving to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and developing a common language (CCPH, Guiding Principle 6, 2015)

In the developmental phase of the program, the research team met with key administration and staff (Behavioral Specialist and Curriculum Specialist) to discuss the needs of the school, the prospect of an in-school program, and to identify key students who would benefit from such a program (email correspondence, February 18, 2015; email correspondence February 24, 2015). Various avenues of communication were utilized during the developmental phase including: e-mails, direct conversations with key personnel, and formal meetings. During a meeting with the two Carson representatives in the developmental phase of the intervention, both representatives freely gave their opinions concerning the needs of the students, the needs of the school and the potential of the intervention to address those needs (Corral field notes, February 26,



2015). They were also open about the various students' fit into the program and if students would benefit from it (email correspondence, February 18, 2015; Mala field notes, February 26, 2015). Sport Hartford leaders were flexible with the size, length, duration, frequency and location of the intervention to accommodate the assets and needs of Carson school.

Prior to the initiation of the program, Sport Hartford leaders also met with the 6th-8th grade teachers and distributed an informational brochure explaining the potential program to the teachers. Moreover, they met with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers and received their recommendation identifying potential students would benefit from our program (Mala field notes, March 3, 2015). An example of open communication occurred during program implementation, where teachers would consistently communicate with regarding problematic behaviors of the students in the classroom. As an example, when a student exhibited negative language towards a teacher, the teacher felt free to inform one of the program leaders about his behavior. The teacher then asked Sport Hartford to address the negative behavior within the program time (James, personal communication, April 9, 2015). Another example occurred when a student refused to complete work in the classroom. As a result the teacher approached and informed Sport Hartford of the situation and asked the coaches to address the importance of completing schoolwork during the intervention (James, personal communication, April 28, 2015). In the development and implementation of the program, open communication and understanding one another's needs was clearly exhibited between Carson School teachers and leaders and Sport Hartford.

#### **Quality Processes**

According to CCPH's position statement on authentic partnerships (2013) quality processes are "relationship focused; open, honest, respectful and ethical; trust building; acknowledging of history; committed to mutual learning and sharing credit." (CCPH, 2013). All avenues of communication were open, honest, and respectful to all the stakeholders involved in the partnership. As an example, despite repeated attempts to select a meeting date with the other partners of Carson school to identify potential program participants, communication remained respectful. An e-mail exchange that began on March 19<sup>th</sup> from the Carson curriculum specialist recommended that Sport Hartford meet with the three other school partners to avoid any scheduling conflicts with other programs. The next day, one of the school partners responded with a respectful email stating: "Please let me know if I can be of assistance to you." (email correspondence, March 19, 2015).

Since two out of the three partners did not respond to the first email, a follow-up email was sent out by the Sport Hartford Director to the three partners on March 23<sup>rd</sup> requesting a time to meet again. The director began the correspondence with: "Know Friday was a half-day so wanted to send this again in case you missed it or have not had a chance to respond yet." There were no responses from any of the school partners until March 30<sup>th</sup>, where the curriculum specialist took the initiative to speak in-person with the other school partners, setting up a tentative time during the week to meet and discuss the selection of students (email correspondence, March 30, 2015). Despite these repeated unanswered attempts to identify and select the students, communication remained open, respectful and ethical within the partnership.

In another example, a Sport Hartford leader wrote an email to the various partners and the Carson administration addressing the frustrating experience of identifying students that are participating in the various in-school programs and the consistent struggles with scheduling overlap between the various programs. The sender of the email was open and honest in sharing the frustration, and respectfully wrote it with the view to support mutual learning for all stakeholders involved (email correspondence, April, 24, 2015).

#### **Building on Strengths**

A strength of Sport Hartford is its utilization of a sport-based youth development framework throughout its programming with various community partners; "the Partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity of all partners. (CCPH, 2015).

Carson School administration also identified a strong interest in sport and physical activity in a specific group of middle school boys. During a meeting in the development of the intervention, when the sport-based framework was proposed, the curriculum and behavior specialists identified several middle school students whom they thought would enjoy and benefit the most from the sport component. These school leaders also acknowledged the students who would not be a “good fit” in the program due to the sport nature of the intervention (James field notes, February, 26, 2015). Many of the students that were identified as potential beneficiaries of the program were also students who were exhibiting consistent negative behavior in the school. These students also often displayed a lack of connectedness with Carson School teachers (Melachi, field notes, April 24, 2015). Therefore, with the strength of Sport Hartford in sport-based youth development programming and the asset of having a group of students interested in sport within Carson School, the partnership developed and implemented the sport-based program to address the various needs of Carson School.

### **Meaningful Outcomes and Transformative Experiences**

The partnership was able to develop and implement a program that focused on meaningful outcomes and transformative experiences for the individual students. The positive impacts on the selected students’ included increased knowledge of self-discipline, self-control, self-belief, and perseverance. Journal reflections from the Carson students were also evidence of these meaningful outcomes and transformative experiences. One student wrote: “For me, self-control means that I will be quiet in class, do my work, and won’t cause trouble when I get on and off the bus” (Gabe, personal communication, April 2015). This statement came from a student who was chronically in detention or suspended from school and rarely showed remorse for his lack of respect to teachers and administrators. Furthermore, this statement demonstrated how the program was able to reinforce the concept of self-control, and the application of this skill to the school setting. Practicing and applying the principle of self-control in various school settings, could have a positive impact on the learning environment in the classroom, which could become a meaningful outcome for Carson School.

A leadership trait emphasized in the program was students being able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, so that they could implement goal-setting strategies. Another student reflected on a lesson about goal-setting and wrote:

Today we lost but we still had fun and today we worked on goal setting. One of my goals is to do better in math. I’m going to do better in math by listening to instructions and by not socializing with other people. My goal outside of the classroom is making sure my room stays clean and get stronger and work harder in the gym (Gold, Personal communication, April 2015)

This young man realized one of his academic weaknesses and provided a strategy to improve on it, while also identifying goals to achieve outside of the school setting. These goals and strategies to improve were meaningful to him, and could result in transformative experiences in his academics, in-school behavior, and home life.

These examples of clear and open communication, quality processes, building upon strength and assets to address needs, and meaningful outcomes during program development and implementation were the key elements of an authentic partnership exhibited between Carson School and Sport Hartford during new program development and implementation.

## **Discussion and Implications**

### **Study 1**

Schools struggle for many reasons—individual level leadership challenges, underdeveloped or non-existent systems of support, and the socio-cultural context of poverty in our country (Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007; Rhim & Redding, 2014, Ross, Pinder, & Coles-White, 2015). Carson School is no exception. Despite the tremendous amount of resources that were dedicated to the school during the turnaround process, the principles of authentic partnership

(i.e. mutual respect, genuineness, and commitment. CCPH, 2013) were not consistently present in the planning and implementation of change.

The researchers, also members of Sport Hartford's leadership, observed the negative relationship between students and teachers, among the teachers themselves, and the overall lack of consistency in words, actions, and policies. While some of the teachers were strategically assigned to different grade levels, and some were counseled out of the school over time, the impact of the poor relationships was significant. Additionally, and not surprisingly, it was inconsistent with what successful turnaround schools demonstrate—strong teacher leadership (Herman & Huberman, 2012). Furthermore, the new partners who entered into the school to facilitate change did not necessarily focus on building upon identified strengths and assets while working to address the needs and capacity of all (Barnett & Stevenson, 2015; Le Floch, Birman, O'Day, Hurlburt, Mercado-Garcia, Goff, Angus, 2014). As research has shown, and was certainly present at Carson, interventions can be overwhelming for school leadership. They have many potential benefits, but when uncoordinated they have the tendency to challenge the capacity of the school (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011; Walsh & Backe, 2013).

The time necessary to invest in relationships was a luxury for which the turnaround process did not allow (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014, Peck, & Reitzug, 2014). The result was the stress on the adults that manifested in exchanges with each other and their students. And, the inconsistent, and even contradictory, expectations placed on students by adults in the building led to negative reactions. At the root of the issues in the school was the lack of transparent and logical communication across all constituents.

By following the principles of authentic partnership, Sport Hartford was able to identify areas that it could assist in improving—consistency, communication and relationships. And, as a result, the partnership could potentially shift the climate and culture of the middle school grades. Such a shift reinforced a stated goal of the school (i.e., positive school climate and culture was one of three areas of turnaround articulated by school leadership), the district (i.e., focus in district equity plan), and has been well supported as impactful to school improvement by the research (Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, & Young, 2011; Owens & Johnson, 2009).

In the second study, Sport Hartford leaders mobilized the principles of authentic partnership to develop and implement a new program responding to the results of Study 1.

First and foremost, the Sport Hartford personnel practiced clear and open communication with the Carson leadership, the Carson teachers, and the Carson students. This communication existed through the planning, as well as continuing during program implementation. Electronic communication, individual in-person conversations, and formal group meetings were all utilized to establish a pattern of transparent sharing of information (CCPH, 2013). As a result, Sport Hartford strengthened its relationships with the Carson community, and developed a better understanding of the challenges the leadership, teachers and students were facing through the turnaround (Jones & Wells, 2007; Moini, Fackler-Lowrie & Jones, 2005).

Working to establish, and re-establish, communication patterns, is a direct example of Sport Hartford engaging in quality processes. Despite the challenges of connecting across multiple groups, Sport Hartford maintained its commitment to the process. At times, it would have been more simple and less frustrating to operate the new program without engaging the other partners at the school. But, by understanding the perspectives of the leaders, teachers, and students, Sport Hartford personnel appreciated the need to avoid becoming another program competing for classroom time without clearly establishing how its purpose and schedule aligned with the school's goals. The efforts of Sport Hartford, as a university partner, spoke to the potential role for campus-community partnerships in school turnaround. While not the purpose of the study, it became clear that the approach taken by Sport Hartford leveraged access to resources, particularly human capital, and the time and funds to develop that human capital to impact the surrounding communities (Harkavy & Zuckermann, 1999; Kronick, Lester, & Luter, 2013).

A significant implication from Study 2 was how Sport Hartford built upon strengths and assets to address needs. Sport Hartford operated differently than the other support programs at Carson in that the needs of the school, not the needs of the organization, drove the partnership

(Walsh & Backe, 2013). Sport Hartford created a boys' leadership program in response to the observations and conversations during Study 1. The program did not use pre-existing curriculum or deliver a program that was already being delivered at another site, but was evidence-based and built specifically for Carson's middle school boys (Walston, Proto, & Brown, 2013).

Finally, the meaningful outcomes during program development and implementation demonstrated the authentic partnership between Carson School and Sport Hartford. The students in the boys' leadership program spoke to, and demonstrated, their growth in self-discipline, self-control, self-belief, and perseverance (Perkins & Noam, 2007).

Overall, following the authentic partnership framework served both Sport Hartford and Carson School well. The boys' leadership program was thoughtfully and collaboratively developed and implemented. Findings from this study can help inform other campus-community partnerships with strategies to successfully develop and implement new programs, particularly in the midst of a demanding situation like a school turnaround. The partnership between Carson School and Sport Hartford was still able to effectively develop a mutually meaningful program. By adhering to the principles of an authentic partnership (CCPH, 2015), Carson School and Sport Hartford were able to identify, develop and implement a program that met the needs of both partners.

While the purpose of the current study was to examine new program development within an existing campus-community partnership using the authentic partnership, the researchers also realized a need in future research in school reform. Future research should focus on the role of universities, and in particular university partnerships (Walsh & Backe, 2013) focused on the whole school, whole child (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2017). School reform efforts often neglect to direct attention to student health despite support that demonstrates: students with better physical, social, and emotional health demonstrate superior educational outcomes including achievement, attendance, problem-solving skills, and behavior (Shields, Gilchrist, Nixon, Holland, & Thompson, 2013, p. 611)

We also know that students lacking physical activity opportunities and the ability to make connections with others, are more likely to be absent, do poorly in school and eventually dropout (Walker, Kerns, Lyon, Bruns, & Cosgrove, 2009). A positive school climate and culture can be built through consistent and intentional integration of physical activity. What is critical to examine moving forward is the sustainability of such a physical activity focused program across the turnaround lifespan, which inevitably includes changes in the constituents (i.e., school leaders, teachers, students) and revisions in the goals and direction of the school..

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