



Annual NNPS Report: 2017 District Data

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Cover photo: October 2017 NNPS Leadership Institute

Pictured: Leaders from South Carolina, Texas, and Oklahoma
with NNPS Program Facilitator Marsha D. Greenfeld.

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District leaders for partnerships in NNPS have two main responsibilities: (1) take leadership for improving family and community engagement throughout the district and in all schools and (2) guide every school to have a well-functioning, site-based Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) that engages all families and community partners in activities to ensure a welcoming school environment and to increase students' success in school.

As members of NNPS, district leaders know that students' education is a shared responsibility of home, school, and community. They, then, take action to improve their own and their schools' programs of family and community engagement. NNPS guides district leaders to facilitate schools' ATPs to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their goal-linked programs and practices of family and community engagement. Every school can strengthen its capacities to engage family and community partners in ways that help increase student achievement, attendance, good behavior, health, successful transitions to new schools, plans for postsecondary education, and other indicators of success in school.

The *Annual NNPS Report: 2017 District Data* documents how district leaders across the country are working to fulfill these responsibilities for more effective and more equitable partnership programs. This report enables NNPS members, researchers, and the public learn about accomplishments in the past year and identify areas for improvement.

2017 NOTABLE NUMBERS

- The 28 district leaders for partnerships in this sample assisted over **540 schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs)** to strengthen their programs of family and community engagement.
- These district leaders estimated that their activities at the district level and in assisting their schools engaged over **143,000 families** in partnership activities.
- Districts in NNPS serve very diverse populations. This sample includes districts with families who spoke from 1 to over 120 languages, had from 1% to 54% students who were English Language Learners (ELL), and had from 15% to 100% of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

These factors were not predictors of the quality of partnership programs. Rather, regardless of demographics, districts with strong leaders who actively facilitated schools' Action Teams for Partnerships were more likely to have high-quality programs of family and community engagement.

- The special topic on *UPDATE* this year was *family engagement with students on homework*. Over 75% of the district leaders for partnerships reported that most parents do not know how to help their child at home. About 60% of the district leaders agreed that their teachers and principals needed professional development on designing good homework assignments and communicating with parents on how to help with homework.

DISTRICTS IN THIS SAMPLE

Twenty-nine district leaders for partnerships in highly diverse communities in 17 states provided data on their work and progress in the 2016-17 school year. These districts also renewed membership in NNPS for the next year to continue their partnership agendas.¹

- In 2017, districts were located in central cities (24%), small cities (28%), suburban (28%), and rural (21%) areas. The districts varied in size from just a few schools to over 200 schools.
- Districts in the sample had been members of NNPS for from 1 to 21 years. About 10% joined NNPS in the past year. Districts join NNPS with diverse histories of family and community engagement. Some have advanced programs and are seeking support for scaling up the number of schools with successful programs, whereas others are just starting to work with teams on goal-linked partnerships. NNPS helps districts move forward from their individual starting points.
- Districts served populations of students and families who spoke from 1 to over 120 languages and dialects at home, with an average of 38 languages spoken by students and their families across districts. The districts averaged 10% students who were English Language Learners (ELL), ranging from under 1% to 54% of enrolled students.
- On average, 59% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, ranging from 15% to 100% of students across districts.
- District leaders for partnerships worked about 25 hours per week on partnership program development—a little over half-time. In some large districts, teams of full- and part-time facilitators worked together to guide clusters of school ATPs with their partnership programs.
- Most district Key Contacts to NNPS (90%) expected to continue in their positions in the 17-18 school year. Studies indicate that stable leadership contributes to more progress on partnerships from year to year at the district and school levels.

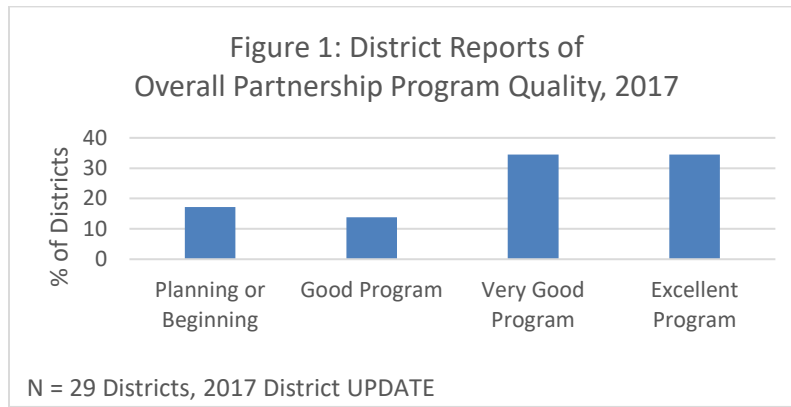
Summary. NNPS districts serve socioeconomically, culturally, racially, linguistically, and geographically diverse students, families, and communities. On average, districts in NNPS closely match districts across the U.S. in the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals and students classified as English Language Learners. The diversity of districts in NNPS is important for learning whether, where, and how research-based approaches are useful for improving leadership on partnerships and goal-linked school-based programs.

Despite their diversity, all districts in NNPS aim to improve family and community engagement to ensure welcoming schools with plans for partnerships that help improve student attendance, achievement, attitudes, behavior, and other important outcomes, with long term goals to reduce dropouts, increase graduation rates, and prepare students for college and careers. NNPS provides guidelines, tools, and training to help district leaders meet these goals, as described in the next sections of this report.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP ON PARTNERSHIPS

NNPS's mission is to “grow leaders” who will be experts on partnerships in their districts and who will be viewed by school principals and ATPs as knowledgeable and helpful guides on partnership program development. NNPS communications and resources help district leaders organize their offices and facilitate schools' ATPs to work well with their own students' families. The *UPDATE* survey asks district leaders to rate the overall quality of their partnership programs by painting a “portrait” of their progress to date.

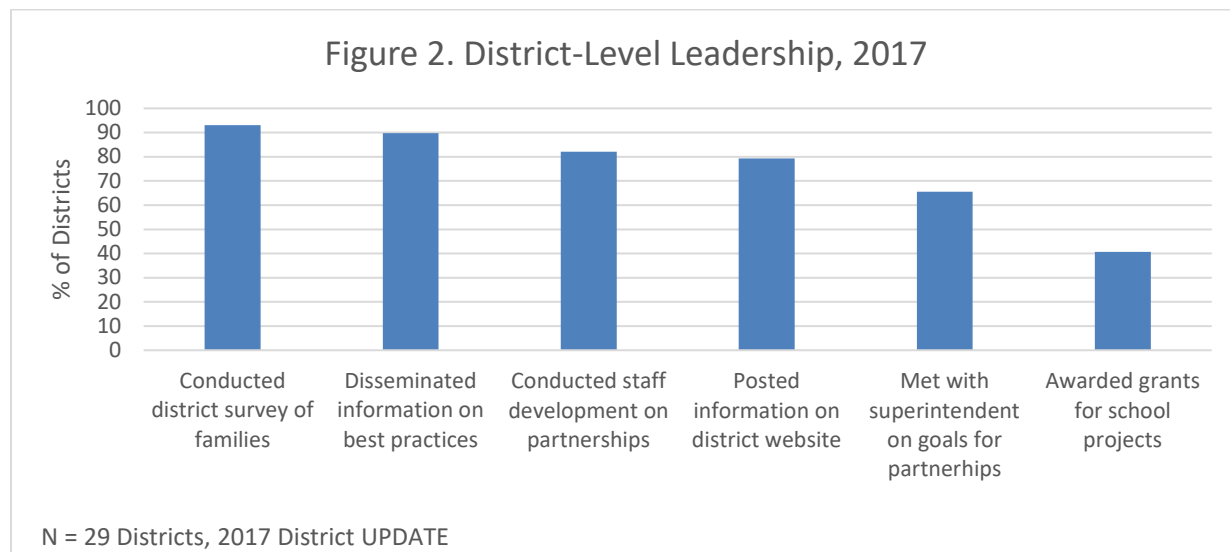
Figure 1 shows that some districts in NNPS (17.2%) were in a “planning or beginning” phase of their work on partnerships. They rated their program quality *low*, agreeing that their programs need “a great deal of work” to move forward. Others reported that their districts had a *good* (13.8%), *very good* (35%), or *excellent* (35%) program.



Continuing an upward trend from last year, there was an increase in the number of district leaders who reported excellent programs. The portrait of an excellent program includes fulfilling both major responsibilities of leading the district and facilitating schools’ ATPs, and agreeing that their offices would be “*permanent*, even if leaders changed.” The growth in very good and excellent programs suggests that the district leaders in this sample were confident that their work on partnerships was becoming a “regular” part of district organization and strategic planning.

DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Leaders reported their district-level partnership activities on a 15-item *Leadership Scale* ($\alpha = .86$)². Figure 2 shows that in 2017, almost all district leaders conducted some kind of survey of families (93%) to learn their views about their schools and their children’s experiences, and disseminated examples of best partnership practices (90%) to their school ATPs. A large majority conducted staff development on partnerships for others in the district (82%), posted information about partnerships on the district website (79%), and met with the Superintendent about district goals for good partnerships (66%).



Fewer district leaders (41%) awarded monetary grants to their schools to support family engagement activities. Most of these were small grants from \$250 to \$5000 to school-based ATPs for work on family and community engagement, with one exception of a school that received a large grant (\$100+K) from an external funder for school improvement including family engagement. Over the years, NNPS has learned that even small grants from \$50 up are incentives for ATPs. Such awards indicate that the district supports specific activities in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships.

In 2017, district leaders for partnerships conducted an average of 10.9 leadership activities of the 15 listed in this measure. The data show that these leaders were serious about fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in organizing their office and building a strong rationale for work on family and community engagement.

COMMENTS ON LEADERSHIP

In open-ended comments, just about all district leaders described how their work on partnerships improved in the past school year, as in these examples.³

- We now have knowledge and research on which to base our strategies. We were equipped to defend the importance of this work and to develop standards for the family and community engagement work in schools.
- This year we focused on communication through a district wide newsletter and by meeting with each chairperson in the fall and each principal in the spring.
- Our website links to more information on the Parental Engagement page.
- Our strategic plan includes key indicators to measure the growth and success of community partnerships.
- We got school, family and community partnerships [included] in the district's 5-year Strategic Plan.
- A district-wide Family & Community Engagement Empowerment Center was established for all Pre-K – 12th grade families with a focus on the six types of involvement.
- We implemented attendance initiatives to improve attendance district wide.

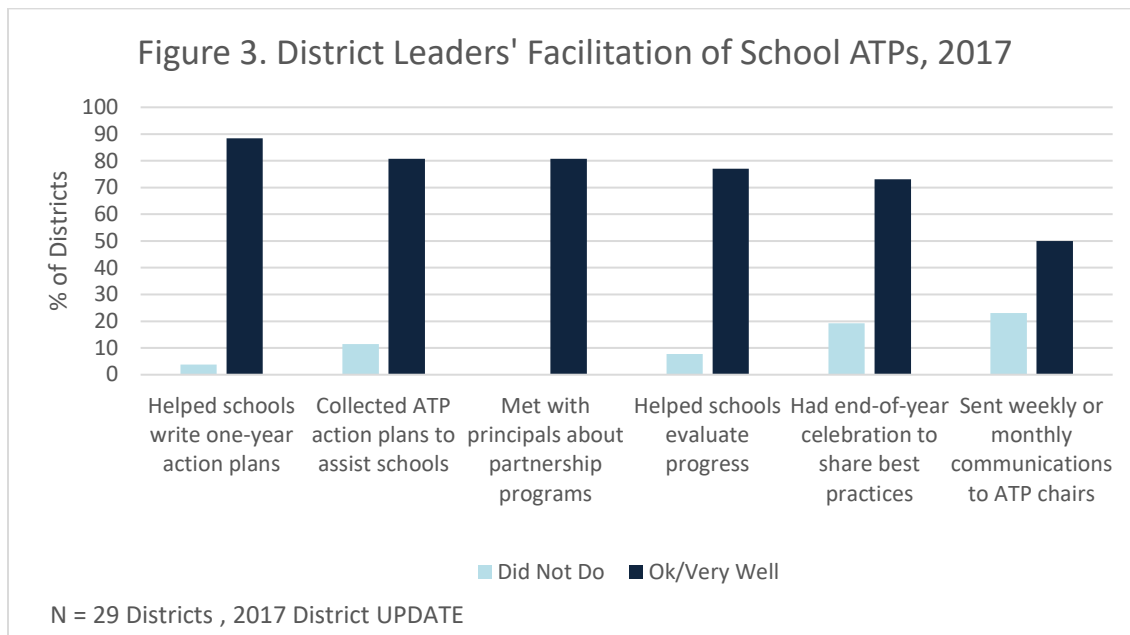
FACILITATION OF SCHOOL ATPs

In NNPS, the most important activity of district leaders for partnerships is to facilitate school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). Schools must be able to work in age-appropriate and goal-linked ways with their own students' families at the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Figure 3 illustrates a few actions from the 18-item *Facilitation Scale* ($\alpha = .94$). The scale measures how actively district leaders guided school-based ATPs to write plans and implement practices of family and community engagement in the past school year. District leaders for partnerships conducted an average of 13.7 facilitative actions *OK* or *very well*, ranging from 0 (not started yet) to 18 activities. Figure 3 reports the percentages of district leaders doing *OK* and *very well* compared with those who *do not do* the activity.

Over 96% of district leaders in 2017 facilitated their schools' ATPs to help them improve their programs. Figure 3 shows that most district leaders guided schools to write action plans (88%) and collected the plans (81%) to keep track of progress. Most met with the school principal to discuss ways to support the ATP (81%) and hosted end-of-year celebrations to share best practices and plan for the next school year (73%). Most district leaders also helped the ATPs evaluate progress (77%). Fewer district leaders (50%) communicated weekly or monthly with their ATPs with a systematic communication (e.g., e-mail, Skype meeting, Twitter, etc.).

Interestingly, all of the percentages reported in Figure 3 increased this year compared to last year, indicating that the reporting district leaders are working to actively facilitate their schools' ATPs. This is a good trend. Studies conducted by NNPS researchers show that when district leaders for partnerships actively facilitate school ATPs, the schools have higher quality of partnership programs and involve more families. Further, schools with more parents involved reported higher student attendance (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). To continue to improve active facilitation of school ATPs, NNPS advises all district leaders to (a) continue the good work reported this year, and (b) conduct weekly or monthly connections with ATPs using helpful technologies in the next school year.



¹ Percentages do not add to 100%. Some districts reported that they “need to improve” these facilitative actions. These district leaders are not confident that they are doing OK or very well.

COMMENTS ON FACILITATION

In open-ended comments, district leaders explained how they facilitated school ATPs to help them improve their programs.³ The following are a few examples of how facilitation helped schools improve activities in 2017.

- The connections between our schools have changed for the better and our schools are now taking on tougher issues for families.
- Schools gained a better understanding of how their Action Plans for Partnerships align with their School Improvement Plans.
- [We increased] schools’ focus on academic activities to engage parents with student learning.
- [This year we had] stronger Action Teams that were outcome driven, more active involvement among teachers and staff with family engagement activities, and more opportunities to share best practices.
- We created a rubric for teams to use during planning and evaluation of all partnership activities.
- I met with new chairs needing additional support.
- [We increased] the number of parent participants in school activities.
- [We focused on] culturally responsive practices to guide parent engagement activities.
- Schools and families gained more and better access to community resources.

SUPPORT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

When district leaders have collegial support for the partnership agenda, they know their work is valued. Collegial support is not automatic. It is developed over time as district leaders for partnership share their plans, invite participation in activities, report progress, discuss challenges, and improve their services to the district and the schools. On the 2017 *UPDATE*, district leaders reported the extent of collegial support from district and school colleagues, parents, and the community. The 13-item *Support Scale* ($\alpha = .93$) was scored 1-4 for *no support*, *a little*, *some*, and *a lot of support*. District leaders had an average scale-score of 3.4, indicating some-to-strong support from most colleagues, as shown in Figure 4.

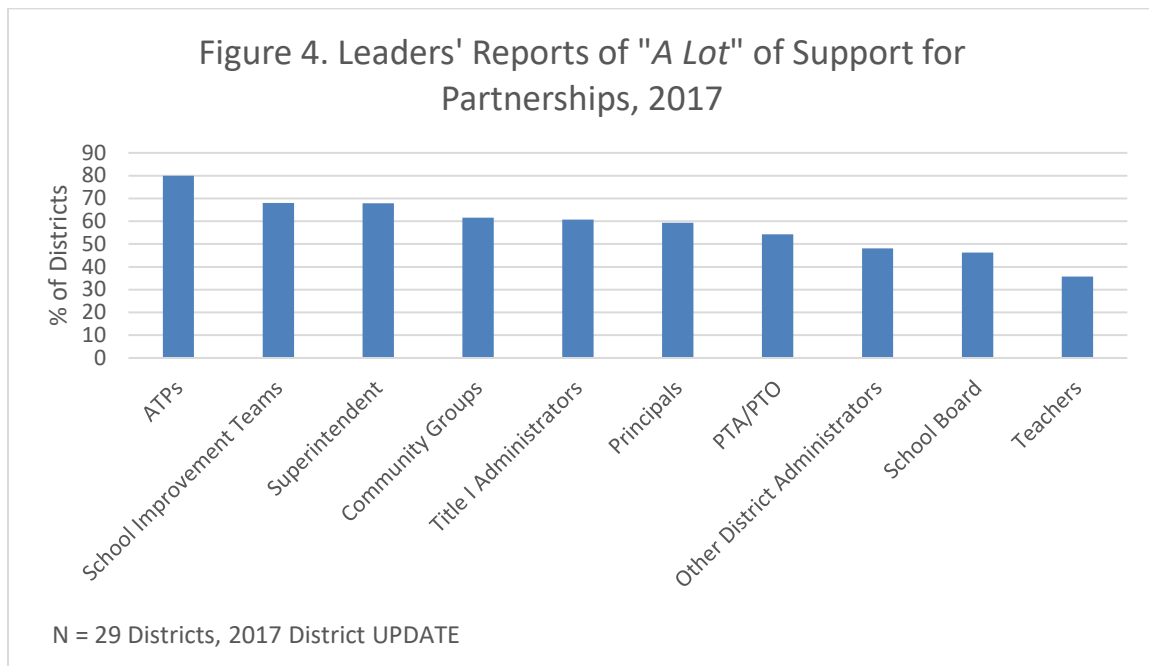


Figure 4 shows that 80% of district leaders in 2017 reported *a lot* of support from their schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). This was a sizable increase in percentages from last year, and reflects the active facilitation reported in Figure 3. Over (or near) 60% of the district leaders reported *a lot* of support from the Superintendent, Title I Administrators, School Improvement Teams, Community Groups, and Principals. This indicates the district leaders' communications and connections with these leaders and groups. Fewer district leaders reported *a lot* of support from the School Board, the school PTA or PTO, and teachers. These data indicate that district leaders for partnerships still have work to do to help all major stakeholders understand how their work helps enact the district's policy and priorities for school, family, and community partnerships.

As in prior years, district leaders for partnerships are not experiencing *a lot* of support from teachers or PTAs or PTOs. However, nearly 90% reported at least *some* support from both groups. In most districts, it mainly may be up to the school-based ATPs to communicate with their fellow teachers and parent organizations about the work of the ATP and the support provided by the district.

Not shown in Figure 4, but of interest, was an increase in the percentage of district leaders reporting *a lot* of support from their state leaders for partnerships, increasing from 30% in 2016 to 41% in 2017. This may be a function of the location of this group of districts in states that are working to improve family and community engagement as directed in the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, Section 1116)*. NNPS will follow this trend in the next *UPDATE* survey in 2018.

COMMENTS ON SUPPORT

In open-ended comments, district leaders reported how they are working to gain support for family and community engagement at the district level, in schools, with families, and in the community.³ The following are a few examples of advances in support for partnerships and steps to increase support in the future.

- [I conducted] meetings with principals to discuss individual Parent/Family Engagement Activities
- The district sought input from all schools in committee format to determine district directions for parent engagement.
- We worked to identify and promote robust employer engagement to increase opportunities for authentic student learning experiences in partnership with the business community, including field trips and engaging subject matter experts as instructional collaborators.
- I [plan to] spend more time at each school working on building relationship skills and strategies between families and teachers.

- With so much focus on business partnerships this year, I [plan to] devote more time to the school ATPs to better know the leaders and support their efforts in real time.
- [We] created a Community Partnership Council, including students, educators, and community members.

When district leaders for partnerships connect with their supervisors, collaborate with colleagues in different departments, reach out to parents and the community, and assist ATPs, they increase many stakeholders’ knowledge about their work. They also gain experience as leaders and strengthen the district’s mission to build a culture of school, family, and community partnerships in all schools and with all families.

Table 1. Constellation of Factors Associated with High-Quality District-Level Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships, 2017

	Strong District Leadership/ Organized Office of Partnerships	Active Facilitation of School ATPs	Level of Collegial Support	Emphasis on Evaluation	Teacher Grade Homework and Include in Report Card Grades	% Free or Reduced Price Meals	Number of Languages	Location (urbanicity)
Overall Quality: Portrait of Partnership Program Development	.735**	.725**	.663**	.408*	.387*	NS	NS	NS

Source: 2017 DISTRICT UPDATE
 N=29. ** p<.01, * p<.05, +p<.10, NS= Not significant

Table 1 shows that the 2017 District UPDATE data confirm prior years’ reports of a constellation of significant correlates indicating that program quality comprises strong leadership at the district level ($r=.735$, $p<.01$); active facilitation of schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships ($r=.725$, $p<.01$); broad collegial support ($r=.663$, $p<.01$); and an emphasis on evaluation ($r=.408$, $p<.05$). This year, high quality partnership programs were connected to district leaders’ reports that teachers in most schools graded students’ homework and included homework as a percentage of report card grades ($r=.387$, $p<.10$). This last connection suggests that districts that organize effective partnership programs also may treat homework as a serious part of instruction and learning across schools (see section on homework, below).

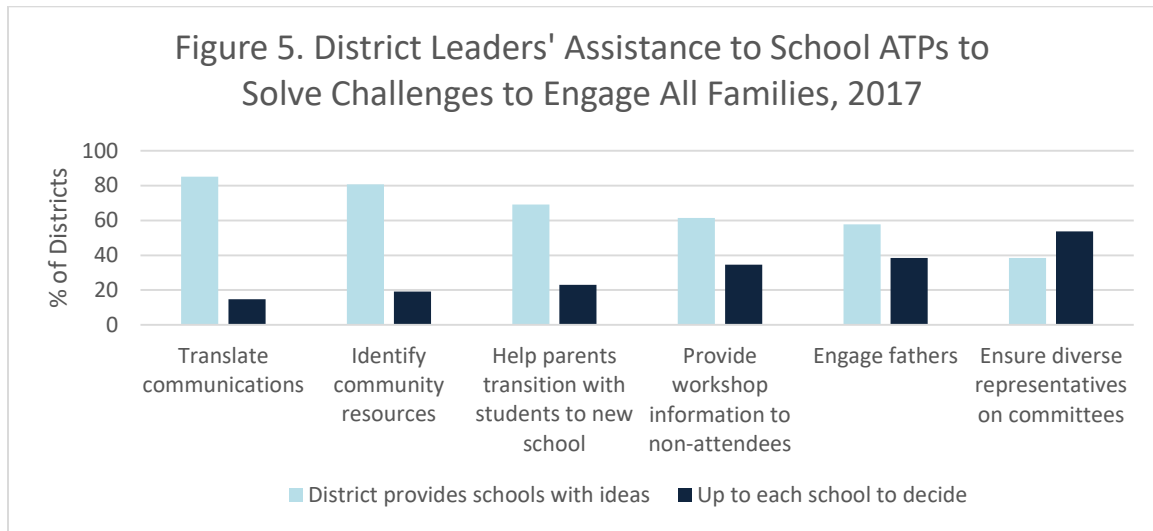
It is important to note that Table 1 shows the overall quality of districts’ partnership programs is *not* significantly related to the demographics of students served across schools. This tells NNPS that district leaders for partnerships may see the fruits of their labors on leadership, facilitation, collegial support, and evaluation, regardless of the socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic diversity of schools in the district.

SOLVE CHALLENGES TO INVOLVE ALL FAMILIES

District and school leaders face many challenges to engage all families, including those who are considered “hard to reach” or those previously uninvolved in their children’s education at school and at home. On the District UPDATE survey, NNPS asks whether district leaders work to help schools address eight common challenges, or whether they leave it up to school ATPs to solve challenges individually.

Figure 5 shows that most district leaders tend to assist schools in fulfilling expectations to translate communications so that they are available to and understood by parents who do not speak English at home (85%). Districts often have translation and interpretation services for schools to use as needed. Most district leaders also assist schools by locating community resources (81%). A majority of district leaders suggest ways to help parents make successful transitions with their children to a new school (69%), encourage practices to distribute information from meetings and workshops at school to parents who could not attend (62%), and provide ideas for engaging fathers (58%). A similar percentage of district leaders helped schools identify and train volunteers to help teachers, administrators, and students (58%). A majority of districts left it up to schools to work out how to ensure diverse representatives on their ATPs and other school committees

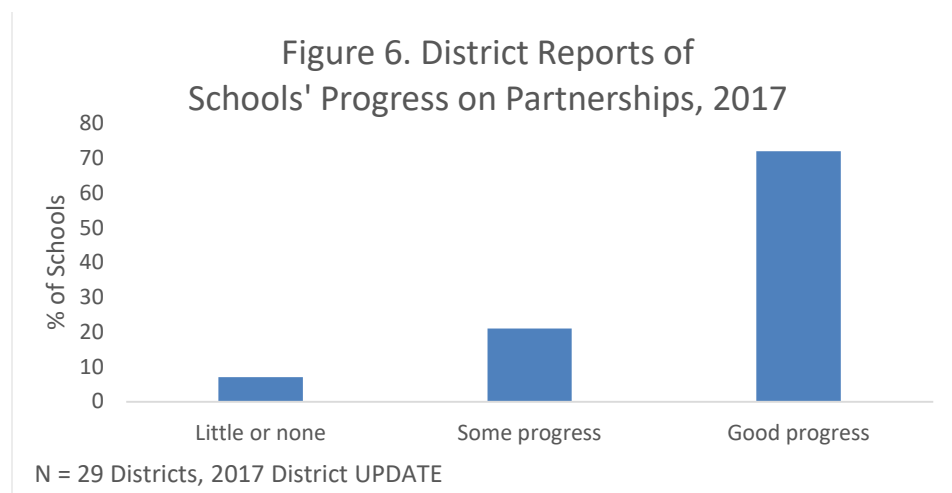
(54%). The district leaders in this sample addressed an average of 5 of the 8 challenges listed in *UPDATE*, ranging from 2 to 8, indicating that they selected which problems to help schools solve and which problems schools had to solve on their own to meet local needs and conditions.



N = 29 Districts, 2017 District *UPDATE*
 Percentages may not add to 100%. Some schools are not addressing these challenges.

SCHOOLS' PROGRESS ON PARTNERSHIPS

In 2017, district leaders for partnerships reported working with over 540 schools and rated their progress. Figure 6 shows that the leaders reported that in the past school year just over 70% of their schools were making *good progress*; 21% made *some progress*, and 7% made *little progress*.

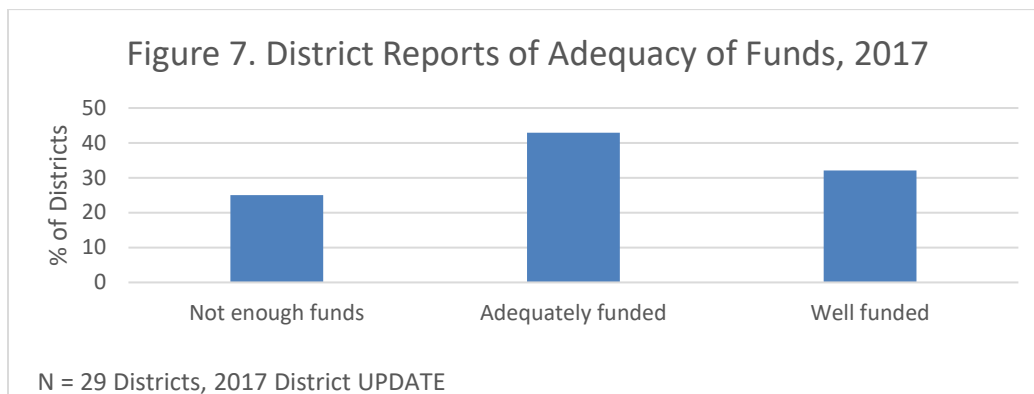


These figures confirm research findings that district leaders' active facilitation of school ATPs is a significant influence on whether their schools implement critical structures and processes to organize their partnership programs (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The studies also show that when schools are supported by district leaders, they engage more parents who were previously "hard to reach." Further, more engaged families help schools improve rates of student attendance. Still other studies show the connection between family engagement and positive student achievement, behavior, and other outcomes (Sheldon, 2009). In 2017, district leaders reported active facilitation of school teams and satisfaction with the progress their schools were making on partnerships.

ADEQUACY OF FUNDING FOR PARTNERSHIPS

District leaders for partnerships reported whether they had adequate funds for their work on partnerships. Figure 7 shows that 75% of the district leaders reported that they were *adequately-* or *well-funded*. Others (25%) noted *not enough funds* at the district level for their work on partnerships.

We ask about the *adequacy* of funds because districts in NNPS vary greatly in size, which makes it impossible to compare total budgets for personnel and program costs. This year, 84% of district leaders reported that their budgets for partnerships were a line item in the district budget, slightly higher than last year. This indicates that most Superintendents are supporting the agenda and efforts of their leaders for partnerships. In 2017, district leaders listed Title I, II, III, general funds, state funds, and grants as major sources of funds for district-level partnership programs.



For more information about the average costs and common funding sources for districts, schools, and states in NNPS, see p.245 in *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, 3rd Edition* (Epstein, et al., 2009).

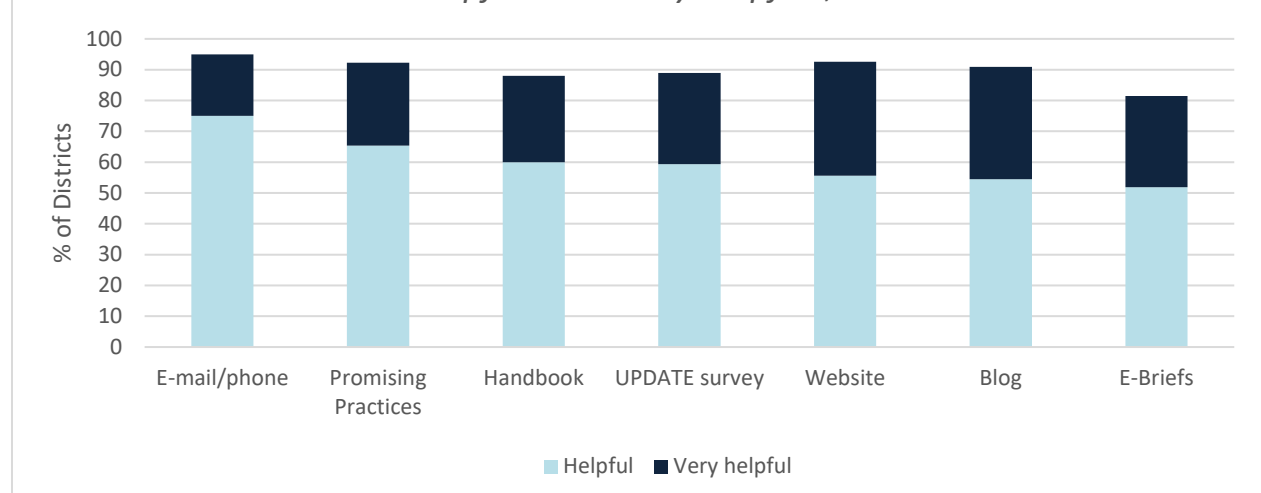
Eight district leaders for partnerships wrote proposals for extra funds in 2017. Six (75%) were funded from \$150 to \$250,000. That is a noteworthy percentage of funded proposals. NNPS's monthly *E-Brief* includes information about timely competitions for grants and prizes. We are pleased to write letters of support for district leaders who write proposals for extra funds for stronger partnership programs.

USE OF NNPS PRODUCTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Figure 8 summarizes results of a 6-item *NNPS Benefits Scale* ($\alpha = .91$) that measured how district leaders for partnerships rated the usefulness of major NNPS tools and materials that were provided to all members in 2017. Responses were coded from 1 to 4 for *not helpful* to *very helpful* to indicate whether district leaders used and valued NNPS products and services. Figure 8 shows that from 80% to 95% of the respondents rated these NNPS benefits and services as *helpful* or *very helpful*. These included the NNPS *Handbook for Action*, annual book of *Promising Partnership Practices*, NNPS website, monthly E-Briefs, quarterly Type 2 Blog, and *UPDATE* survey to evaluate progress. Between 3% and 7% of the district leaders did not use these tools and connections during the school year.

Other NNPS benefits and services are voluntary and some involve small fees. It is up to each member to register for NNPS webinars and institutes, read research reports, or personally contact NNPS Facilitators. Figure 8 includes one of the voluntary benefits—on-call consultations by phone or E-mail. Members may E-mail or phone an NNPS Facilitator at any time and at no cost to discuss questions or challenges with their programs. Over 70% of district leaders made these on-call connections in 2017 and 95% of them rated their personal contacts with NNPS as *helpful* or *very helpful*. Only some district leaders (64%) attended NNPS institutes and webinars, but just about all (90%) rated these professional development experiences as *helpful* or *very helpful*.

Figure 8. District Ratings of NNPS Resources as "Helpful" and "Very Helpful", 2017



N = 29 Districts, 2017 District *UPDATE*

Percentages do not add to 100%. A few district leaders reported that the resources were "a little helpful" or "not helpful".

See the list of NNPS benefits and services at www.partnershipschoools.org in the section *Join NNPS*. NNPS will continue to work to improve its services so that they are used regularly and are helpful to all members.

ANNUAL EVALUATIONS

As a unique benefit to members, NNPS conducts an annual evaluation of the quality and progress of their programs. To renew membership for another year, all members of NNPS—districts, schools, organizations, and states—are asked to reflect on their work and progress, and consider next steps for sustaining and continually improving their partnership programs.⁴ As an added benefit, district leaders with eight schools or more in NNPS that submit the School *UPDATE* each year also receive a customized summary of their own schools' data to compare with data from all schools in NNPS.

Historically, partnership programs were not evaluated well or were costly occasional studies by external evaluators. Some districts and schools rely only on a general survey of parents about their satisfaction with their child's school. Others use only exit surveys for reactions to meetings or workshops. Although these remain useful tools that address some questions, they do not measure how well districts and schools are implementing essential structures and processes to organize, conduct, evaluate, and improve their partnership programs from year to year. The NNPS *UPDATE* survey reinforces the importance of program evaluation, as shown in the figures and discussions throughout this report.

UPDATE items asked whether district leaders evaluated their own and their schools' programs of family and community engagement, and whether they used *UPDATE* as a tool. This year all of the district leaders (100%) reported that they evaluated their own partnership programs and 85% used *UPDATE* as a tool to gauge the quality of their work and progress. Just about all reported that they evaluate their schools' programs (96%), and 67% of the district leaders said their schools use *UPDATE* as one evaluation tool. The 2017 data indicate that district leaders are internalizing the NNPS message that it is important to assess their progress in implementing and continually improving their leadership and their schools' partnership programs.

District leaders also reported that they and their schools used sine other measures to evaluate various aspects of their programs of family and community engagement. For example, several used the *Title I Survey of Parents*. Some referred to the *Lead and Succeed Inventory* in the NNPS *Handbook for Action* as a useful tool to reflect on their present leadership activities and gather ideas for next steps.

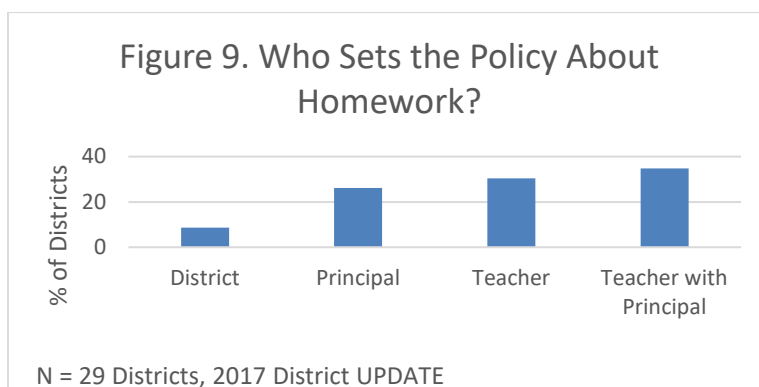
SPECIAL TOPIC 2017

Family Engagement with Homework

Each year, NNPS explores a new topic on the *UPDATE* survey. The 2017 *UPDATE* asked about homework policies, common homework problems, and whether and how families were engaged with students on homework assignments. District leaders also were asked whether their teachers and principals needed professional development to improve homework designs, assignments, and communications with parents about homework.

Homework is a natural connector of school and home. It is one important way to activate Type 4-Learning at Home in the NNPS *Framework of Six Types of Involvement*. If teachers design good homework, students will share ideas and talk about their work with a parent at home. If students complete their assignments, they will increase skills in reading, writing, social studies, and other subjects, and they will be ready for the next lesson. Because district leaders for partnerships have the specific goal of helping schools conduct family engagement activities that contribute to student achievement, they must pay attention to homework.

Homework policies. Figure 9 shows that most district leaders (65%) reported that policies on homework are mainly set by teachers or teachers with their principals. Few had district-wide policies on homework and few believed that principals, alone, set homework policies for their schools. Because homework is linked directly to teachers' lessons, it makes sense to think that teachers will design and assign homework to their students and explain the homework policy to their students' parents.

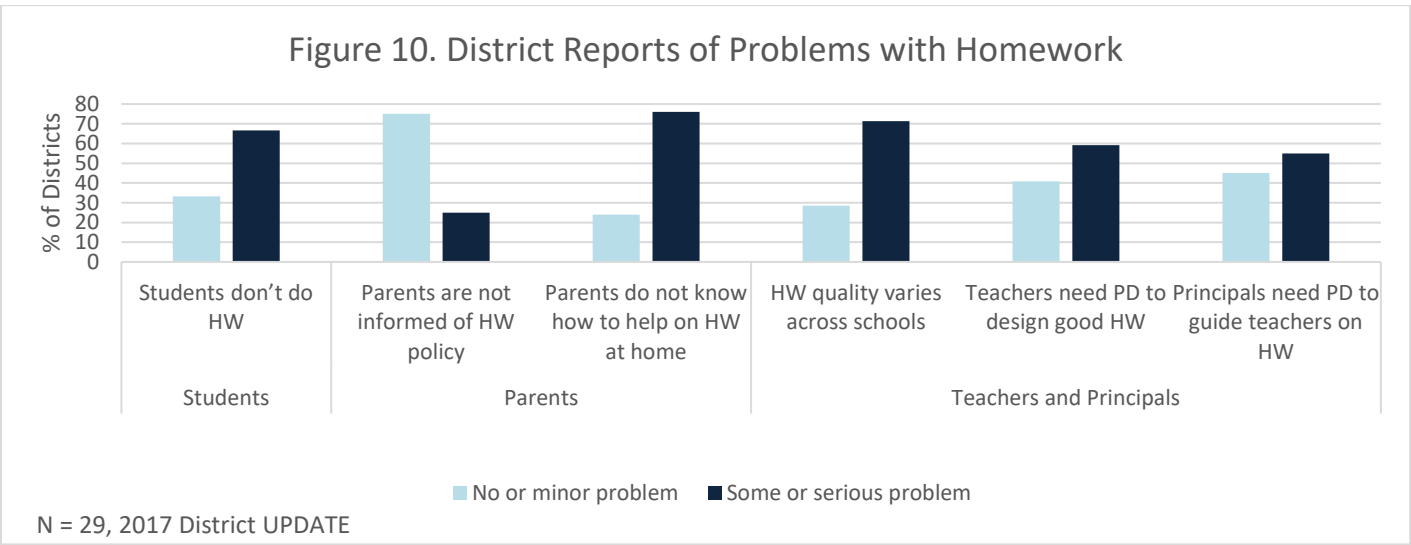


Homework requirements. About 70% of the district leaders said that “some schools” ask parents to sign their child’s homework to show they are aware of completion. About 60% said that teachers in “most or all schools” in their districts grade students’ homework, and most of these make homework part of students’ report card grades.

Homework problems. District leaders were asked to rate whether several common concerns about homework were *not a problem*, *a minor problem*, *a problem*, or *a serious problem* across schools in their district. Figure 10 shows that most district leaders (67%) reported that one *serious problem* with homework was that some students did not do their assignments.

Focusing on parents, most district leaders thought most parents know the homework policy at their child’s school (75%) and know if their child has homework (62%). These were *minor problems* in most districts. By contrast, most district leaders reported that a *serious problem* was that parents in their schools did not know how to help their child at home (76%).

Focusing on teachers and principals, close to 60% of the district leaders thought it was a *serious problem* that teachers and principals needed professional development to improve the quality of homework assignments and communications with parents.



Connections of homework variables. Additional analyses explored the connections of district leaders’ reports about homework problems and conditions. Table 2 shows that where leaders reported that parents had serious problems with homework, they saw more serious problems with students not doing their assignments ($r=.441, p<.05$). Parents’ problems with homework also were associated with variability in homework quality across schools ($r=.706, p<.01$) and teachers’ and principals’ needs for professional development to improve homework assignments ($r=.630$ to $.715, p<.01$). The results suggest that targeted professional development on homework may be needed in some districts to solve the interrelated problems that parents, students, and teachers have with the homework process.

Table 2. Connections of Parents’ Problems with Homework with District Reports of Other Homework Problems

	Students Don't Do Homework	Quality of Homework Varies Across Schools	Teachers Need Prof. Devel. On Designing HW	Principals Need Prof. Devel. On Guiding Teachers about HW	Teachers Need Prof. Devel. To Communicate with Parents on HW	% Free or Reduced Price Meals	Number of Languages	Location (urbanicity)
Measure of Parents’ Problems with Homework ¹	.441*	.706**	.630**	.630**	.715**	NS	NS	NS

¹ 3-item scale ($\alpha = .83$) of parents’ problems in knowing policy on homework, whether student has homework assignments, and how to help at home.

Source: 2017 DISTRICT UPDATE, N=29.
Zero-order correlations: ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$, + $p<.10$, NS= Not significant

Reports of parents’ problems about homework were *not* related to the demographics of the districts—location, percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch, and number of languages spoken at home. The seriousness of common homework problems for parents likely were due to problems with the quality of homework decisions, designs, and practices in specific schools.

Homework practices. UPDATE asked district leaders to share an example of one of the best homework assignments they heard about in their schools. Chart 1 shows that some assignments were conducted by students on their own, and other examples showed how students engaged parents and family partners in discussions about the homework.

Chart 1. District Leaders' Examples of "Best Homework Assignments" Conducted by a Teacher in the District¹

Reading and Literacy

- Students are asked to read [at home] every night.
- Students completed a nightly Reading Race passage that incorporated skills such as practicing reading comprehension questions.
- One teacher front-loads information regarding the next day's lesson using Google Classrooms. She is able to identify students who viewed and completed the homework.
- When reading *The Outsiders*, students identified current school cliques as they related to the *Greasers* and *Socs* [i.e., *Socials*] in the book. This provided students with an opportunity to build empathy by exploring character interactions through social emotional standards.

Social Studies

- Students interviewed an adult about life as a child when the adult was the current age of the child (e.g., a fifth grader would write and ask interview questions about life when the adult was a fifth grader). The student answered the same questions and wrote a summary of their findings.
- Students worked with their parents to create a Family Tree.
- Students were asked to create a *Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) Sugar Skull* in honor of someone in their family who died. Painted skulls were created based on interviews with surviving family members.
- High school students worked with a partner ("roommate") to build a household budget based on realistic income for recent graduates, including identifying an apartment and determining how they will allocate funding to cover all expenses.

Science

- Families were asked to design and create science projects together that were focused on STEM career paths with guidance from teachers.
- Students were asked to observe and keep a record of the phases of the moon for 28 days. They were to sketch what the moon looked like each day and write an observation.

¹ For more examples of interesting and motivating homework assignments that engage students with a parent or family partner, see the NNPS *Sampler* on homework at www.partnershipschoools.org in the section Success Stories.

Also see the *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)* interactive homework process for math, science, and language arts in the elementary and middle grades in the TIPS section of the website.

Summary on homework. It should be noted that district leaders for partnerships were drawing conclusions about homework as practiced in all schools in their districts, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Of course, even within districts some schools have more serious homework problems than others. One leader noted: "[I am] not in sufficient contact with multiple teachers about homework to properly answer this question." See parallel reports about homework from school-based ATPs in the *Annual NNPS Report: 2017 School Data* (Sheldon & Ames, 2018).⁷

Nevertheless, the district leaders' reports about conditions and problems with homework provided initial evidence that many schools face serious challenges in designing homework assignments that are "good connectors" between teachers and parents and that all students will complete.

These exploratory data suggest that each teacher must provide clear and timely information to parents on their specific homework policies and information on how to help their child at home in languages that parents understand. District leaders for partnerships in NNPS should discuss the homework process and related challenges with principals, teachers, and schools' ATPs to determine they want professional development on homework policies, designs, and communications with parents. (Contact NNPS to discuss workshops on homework and the *TIPS* interactive homework process.)

CONCLUSION

The 2017 District *UPDATE* data confirm prior years' reports showing that district leaders for partnerships in NNPS are conducting many leadership and facilitative activities to increase the quality of district-level and school-based partnership programs. Their efforts are helping many schools engage more and different families in ways that should improve student achievement, attendance, attitudes, and behavior, and other important outcomes.

One of the most important results confirmed this year is that high-quality partnership programs are not determined by district demographics. Program quality is not significantly related to district location in urban, suburban, and rural areas; the percentage of students eligible for free-or reduced-price meals; or the percent of students who are English Language Learners. Year after year, *UPDATE* data show that the quality of districts' partnership programs is determined, largely, by leaders' efforts to actively guide schools' Action Teams for Partnerships, build collegial support, and evaluate progress.

This report provides more evidence that high quality partnership programs can be conducted by leaders in any district and with schools at all levels. This should motivate other leaders to join the districts in NNPS whose actions indicate that they walk the talk on the path to partnerships.

NOTES

- 1) In 2017, data are from NNPS districts in 17 states: AR, CA, CT, GA, ID, IL, LA, MI, MN, MO, PA, SC, UT, VA, VT, WA, and WV.
- 2) The *internal reliability* (α or alpha) of a scale indicates whether the items represent a common construct. Reliability coefficients of .6 or higher indicate that the items are related and that the scale is useful.
- 3) Open-ended comments were written by district leaders in several sections of *UPDATE*. Almost all district leaders shared an example of how their program improved in the past year. Their responses tell us that they are willing to share their views, even on the last page of the survey.
- 4) States and organizations in NNPS also completed a 2017 *UPDATE*. We examine these data, but the samples are small and agendas are too varied to analyze aggregated data.
- 5) Copies of this report and summaries of prior years' *UPDATE* data are posted at www.partnershipschools.org. Click on Research and Evaluation.
- 6) See stories and photos of NNPS Partnership Award winners and books of *Promising Partnership Practices* at www.partnershipschools.org. Click on Success Stories.
- 7) For an overview of research on homework and on the TIPS interactive homework process, see Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2012.

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HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

NNPS encourages district leaders to review this report to reflect on how their work compares with others across the country.

- Check each section of the report. Ask:
 - What are you doing well now?**
 - What can you improve in the next school year?**
 - What actions are needed to improve your partnership programs over the next 3 years?**
 - What advice or professional development from NNPS will help you meet your goals?**
- Plan to retain good practices and improve weaker actions in your *Leadership Plan for Partnerships* for the rest of this year and in the 18-19 school year.
- Read the companion *Annual NNPS Report: 2017 School Data* (Sheldon & Ames, 2018).
- If your district has 8 schools or more in NNPS that completed the 2017 School *UPDATE*, you will receive a *customized report* from NNPS on your schools' data in the next week or so. Compare the graphs for your schools with the data from all schools in the *Annual NNPS Report: 2017 School Data*. Discuss these patterns with your school ATPs when you meet with them. Praise their good work and help them identify needed improvements. Decide how you can better facilitate your schools' ATPs to make improvements in the 18-19 school year.
- Contact NNPS with questions about this report or your next steps to improve district-level and school-based partnership programs.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM NNPS

- **Use the NNPS website:** www.partnershipschools.org.
- Read the monthly NNPS *E-Brief* for news and ideas. Use some information from the NNPS *E-Brief* in your own communications with school-based ATPs.
- Share this report with your supervisors to show how NNPS uses *UPDATE* data to monitor progress on partnership programs across the country. Click on Research and Evaluation for downloadable copies of this report.^{5,6}
- Register for an NNPS Leadership Institute.
 - ✓ **Spring Leadership Institute – March 22-23, 2018** – for district and organization leaders who are new to NNPS or who are ready to conduct *One-Day Team Training* workshops with their schools' Action Teams for Partnerships. To register, follow the path to the Leadership Institute from the NNPS home page.
- Find good ideas in the annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices*. On the website, click on Success Stories.
- Read the new, quarterly *Type 2 Blog* and share your views with NNPS. Follow the link to the *Blog* from the homepage, www.partnershipschools.org.
- Check into NNPS on *Facebook* and *Twitter* for photos from NNPS conferences and newsletters and photos from NNPS district and school members. LIKE NNPS on **Facebook** at: <https://www.facebook.com/partnershipschools> and follow us on **Twitter** at: https://twitter.com/NNPS_JHU.
- Scaling up? Have your next set of schools complete the *NNPS School Membership Form* on the website in the section Join NNPS.
- Want on-site professional development? Contract with NNPS Facilitators to travel to your location to provide keynote addresses, presentations, and workshops to support your work and to train your schools' ATPs with basic team training and advanced workshop topics.
- Send an E-mail to an NNPS Facilitator—Brenda Thomas, bthomas@jhu.edu or Marsha Greenfeld, mgreenfeld@jhu.edu—with questions about YOUR next steps at the district level to strengthen your program and assist your schools.



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