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THE EMERGENCE OF UNIVERSITY–SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS AS STRATEGIES  
FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN DISTRESSED CITIES: LESSONS FROM  
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY–CAMDEN AND  
CLARK UNIVERSITY

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Emergence of University–School Partnerships as Strategies for Community  
Development in Distressed Cities: Lessons from a Comparative Case Study of Rutgers  
University–Camden and Clark University

by MATTHEW K. CLOSTER

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Using a qualitative case study methodology, this dissertation examines the emergence, formation, implementation, and sustainability of two university–school partnerships designed by university faculty and leaders as strategies to rebuild communities and build an educational college access pipeline. Both cases—Rutgers University–Camden and LEAP Academy University Charter School in Camden, NJ, and Clark University and the University Park Campus School in Worcester, MA—influenced policy outcomes and state legislation to create new categories of public schools—charter schools in New Jersey and innovation schools in Massachusetts—that transformed the educational landscape in their communities. The research question addressed in this dissertation is: How did two small-city universities develop and sustain an educational pipeline as a community development strategy to provide access to college for students and families and to revitalize distressed neighborhoods?

I use Herbert Blumer’s sociological theory of collective definition for solving social problems as a theoretical framework and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a methodological framework to contribute to growing attention to university–school

partnerships as a community development concept when planning and designing new urban schools in small cities while focusing on marginalized families and children to elucidate the connection between vulnerability and resilience. To address the research question, I interviewed senior university officials, school officials, and parents who were active during the emergence of the partnerships, analyzed census data of socioeconomic indicators, analyzed historical documents of strategic plans and newspaper archives, and observed students, teachers, and physical school facilities and their neighborhood conditions. The interviews, analyses, and observations produced data on the conditions, qualities, and characteristics that supported creation of the two partnerships.

Results suggest that university partnerships emerge when committed faculty and community leaders cooperate in inclusive planning that is driven by collective participation in building solidarity, shared meaning, and common purpose with a community such that the community builds the agency and capacity to sustain the partnership for an extended period. LEAP Academy University School was developed and driven by Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, a Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor, and University Park Campus School was developed and guided by Clark President Richard Traina, his senior leadership team, and faculty from the Clark Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice. I demonstrate that the models were different regarding their approaches to engaging stakeholders and producing a community-based school, but that a comprehensive community development approach from a university is required for families and children to be empowered and excel in an urban school pipeline built on channeling students to college.

## Acknowledgments

I am indebted to numerous people who guided me on this journey. My interest in community development was sparked at the age of 16 when I volunteered in Oaxaca, Mexico with Amigos de las Américas, which conducted asset-based projects in the small town of San Mateo de Cojonos. Since then, I kept the community development mindset and field close to my heart, in which I can learn about other cultures and people, and identify strengths and opportunities to empower those who are less fortunate economically. In reality, I am the one constantly being empowered by the people who teach me about the most important values in life—family, community, education, hard work, social justice, and the hope and determination that all children and adults deserve an equal and fair chance in life no matter what circumstances they face.

Never had this mindset been more apparent to me than when Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago became my professor, advisor, supervisor, and mentor. Dr. Santiago has the greatest tenacity, passion, determination, and commitment to the families and children of Camden through LEAP Academy. Among many things about her, I am incredibly impressed by her steadfastness in leading the LEAP Enterprise from a small, yet powerful, idea into a force to be reckoned with along Cooper Street in Camden. She taught me to never give up, never take no for an answer, and seek the partners, allies, and champions who will support your mission and cause. She constantly challenged me to expand my way of thinking about leadership, politics, management, and research. I am forever grateful for her faith and belief in me that I can carry her vision forward through this dissertation and throughout my career. Her heart, mind, and soul are an inspiration to me and to the LEAP community.

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I recognize all of my interview subjects at LEAP and Rutgers University, those still involved in the school, and those who have moved on. I enjoyed the stories and sense of optimism and hope they all expressed, along with admiration for Dr. Santiago and her commitment to the community. I thank my colleague Wanda Garcia, Associate Director of the Community Leadership Center, who offered advice and gave me helpful tips and pointers to keep me grounded.

From Clark University and University Park Campus School, I thank Jack Foley, Clark Vice President for Government and Community Affairs, for embracing me into the Clark and UPCS community and sharing his time, wisdom, and contacts to ensure that my interviews and observations were meaningful and informative. UPCS is a treat to visit and explore its intricacies. I appreciate all of the time and focus given to me by the principals, teachers, staff, and Clark faculty who shaped the UPCS story.

I recognize my aunt, Gale Nigrosh, for introducing me to Jack, since Gale was a faculty member at Clark many decades ago and maintained close contact with him, Jim Caradonio, and Tom Del Prete. Gale's passion for education and Worcester, and seeing Clark connect and build stronger pathways for students, is unmatched. This dissertation is symbolic of her dedication to her community. She died in October 2018 as I wrote.

I thank the remainder of my family—my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws—and my friends from childhood, college, former jobs, and neighborhoods, who motivated, inspired, and pushed me to excel and succeed in my work. They are a wonderful source of strength and I am constantly envious of their own life paths and careers that they have all molded for themselves.

My parents, Harold and Betsi Closter, are an unbelievable power couple who nurtured my initial interest in community development and shaped my morals, ethics, and purpose. I have always looked up to them for their passion for their own work (my dad in history, museums, and folklore, my mom in early childhood development), and their pure enjoyment being with their family and friends. I know I make them proud in whatever I do, but I am truly grateful for their unwavering love and support.

My wife, Julie, and toddler daughter, Sadie, give me purpose to strive to make our world a better place. Julie is my moral compass for finding my direction. As an educator and school counselor, she is my perfect intellectual partner with whom to seek the true causes of society's challenges and find solutions to make them better. We set our over-zealous determination to right the wrongs and just enjoy a picnic in the park, saying "hi" to our neighbors from our porch, or plopping on the couch with a good book or TV show. The most fun is mentoring and coaching Sadie as she finds her place in the world, touches everything she can see, and wanders off to explore. It's frightening how much her personality and budding interests resemble ours. We are anxious to teach her to be the change she wishes to see in the world, to be kind and humble to people, and to recognize that she cannot take everything for granted in life, including wanting multiple bananas each morning. And we're thrilled to welcome a son and brother into the family this June.

I am reminded of Margaret Mead’s quote to which I was exposed in Mexico—  
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;  
indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” This dissertation is dedicated to those who  
stand up for good and strive to make our world just, fair, and safe—the world I want my  
children, and many others, to live in.



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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Research consistently suggests that stratification in society results in disproportionate influences across populations because economic, social, and political inequalities, based on race, economic status, gender, citizenship, disability, age, etc., are exacerbated in communities that are poor and experience high school dropout rates and other difficult situations (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Putnam, 2016; Chetty et. al, 2017; Wilson, 1987). The achievement gap in education has been worsened by inequalities in not just the quality of education, but lack of a continuum of educational services that span a child's educational lifeline from birth to college. This dissertation explores two case studies of university-school partnerships that redefine the educational pipeline model in public education that directly connects students in struggling neighborhoods with adjacent university partners—LEAP Academy University School and Rutgers University in Camden, NJ, and University Park Campus School and Clark University in Worcester, MA. I define a pipeline as a cohort model of schooling in which students start as early as infancy, remain in one school entity through high school, and proceed to an anchoring university. Using Herbert Blumer's sociological framework of collective definition for solving social problems, I address a research question regarding how two universities in small cities developed and sustained an educational pipeline as a community development strategy to provide access to college for students and families and to revitalize distressed neighborhoods.

Using a comparative case study methodology (Lijphart, 1971) and an Appreciative Inquiry framework (Flint, 2012), I examine the emergence, formation, implementation, and sustainability of two university-school partnerships designed by university faculty and leaders as strategies to rebuild communities and build an

educational college access pipeline. Committed faculty, administrators, parents, and community leaders changed the trajectory and outcomes for children and families by building a new concept of the university–school partnership and influencing state legislation to create new categories of public schools—charter schools in New Jersey and innovation schools in Massachusetts—which transformed education in their respective states and neighborhoods. I found throughout this study that the two models were different; LEAP Academy emerged from a bottom-up, grassroots, and community-engaged participatory process, and UPCS formed from a top-down, presidentially led institutional initiative to transform the neighborhood.

This study contributes to university–school partnership literature by documenting multidisciplinary approaches of integrating community needs to create a college-access pipeline that the literature has not fully confirmed. This dissertation is not an impact study of the effectiveness of pipelines, and nor is it an economic analysis of how much a university–school partnership builds economic wealth and value in a neighborhood. It is a focused approach to documenting stages of development that provides a blueprint for pipeline development, demonstrating sustainability and effectiveness at preparing students for college and careers. The cases in this study offer an opportunity to introduce how university personnel built an education pipeline using schools as vehicles of community development. The university campus offers social and intellectual capital to strengthen a partnership through civic engagement and community development for college students and faculty, opportunities for faculty and staff research, and support for new innovations on teaching and learning. The focus is on drivers that build and sustain a partnership from initiation to ongoing implementations and sustainability.

Designed by Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, a Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor in Public Policy and Administration, LEAP Academy University School is a comprehensive, birth-to-college pipeline model in which children start their educations as early as six weeks and proceed through high school to college. The school has approximately 2,000 students in the pipeline and has graduated over 1,000 since its inaugural class of 2005, which is 100% of all students educated at LEAP. LEAP graduates attend and have graduated from partner institutions Rutgers University, Rowan University, and Camden County College, all of which have campuses and facilities along Cooper Street in Downtown Camden. Others attended and graduated from top institutions, including Princeton, Brown, University of Pennsylvania, Howard, University of Rochester, and Villanova. Using rigorous STEM curricula, Dr. Santiago oversees Centers of Excellence through her Rutgers–Camden Community Leadership Center (CLC), including the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), STEM Fabrication Lab, Health and Wellness Center, Parent Engagement Center, and Center for College Access, to build more programs around the holistic learning and wellbeing of children and families.

University Park Campus School (UPCS) is a 7–12 grade school located near Clark University in the Main South neighborhood of Worcester. It is situated in a small, 19th-century, redbrick firehouse, enrolling approximately 50 students per grade. UPCS does not have the same kinds of centers that LEAP does, but it integrates parents into decision-making regarding curricula and personnel, and it partners with the Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC) to refer families for housing. Unlike LEAP, UPCS began as a university-wide initiative spearheaded by Richard Traina during

the early 1990s to revitalize a struggling neighborhood economically, incorporating UPCS as a strategy for retaining and recruiting families settling in the neighborhood.

Both models have been institutionalized in their respective universities, despite the differing governance models. LEAP has an independent and autonomous Board of Governors comprised of university representatives, parents, business leaders, and alumni to maintain the university–community partnership and ownership. Dr. Santiago developed the Community Leadership Center (CLC) at Rutgers–Camden to formalize contracts, endowed scholarships for students attending Rutgers with a high GPA, and credit ratings for real estate to preserve structural connections between LEAP and Rutgers. Traina and his staff and faculty at Clark decided to keep UPCS a separate entity under the Worcester Public School system, but maintained oversight of the curriculum and teacher training program through the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice. He budgeted full tuition annually for students from UPCS to attend Clark, which has been honored by each succeeding university president. Academically, LEAP and UPCS students take dual enrollment courses at the universities (in its second year, LEAP’s seniors take their entire course load at Rutgers) so students earn college credits while they are still in high school, not only exposing them to and challenging them with college-level courses, but saving time and money once the students matriculate at college. The social benefits of the partnerships have symbolically elevated the status of the communities by uniting traditionally exclusive university institutions with isolated neighborhoods that do not have access to and opportunities for social mobility and education. Through Dr. Santiago’s and Traina’s leadership, the orientation of university relations with their communities shifted from neglect to intentional transformation.



The two cases were chosen because of their similar socioeconomics and narratives that emerged when their respective cities experienced economic declines and increased poverty. They emerged during the mid-1990s, a period of national school reform that built stronger accountability and outcomes for urban public schools. University–community partnerships shifted their approaches to include deeper involvement in the community (Boyer, 1990), and the federal government and major foundations invested in place-based community development initiatives (O’Conner, 1999), such as the Clinton Administration’s Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) program, HUD grants for university partnerships, and the Ford Foundation’s and Annie E. Casey Foundation’s solutions to large-scale and interrelated social and economic factors, such as education, housing, health, and employment.

Traina and Clark Vice President for Government and Community Affairs, Jack Foley, engaged the nascent Main South Community Development Corporation in developing the University Park Partnership as a place-based economic development initiative to improve housing, economic corridors, public safety, and education, receiving funding from Seedco (a Ford Foundation-backed program) and HUD to redevelop the neighborhood. Similarly, Ford, Annie E. Casey, and the Prudential Foundation provided seed and planning money to Dr. Santiago and Camden community organizations to strengthen initiatives in uniting housing, healthcare, and educational institutions in neighborhoods near the downtown area (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Kromer, 2010).

Dr. Santiago also capitalized on the emerging community school and charter school movements during the 1990s that reshaped the conversation regarding how schools could be more innovative and serve more needs beyond the traditional school

district and educational systems that persistently left minority and poor populations behind and disadvantaged, especially among African Americans and Latinos in urban environments. As Dryfoos (1994) suggests, community schools joined the interests of education and health and social service systems to create more powerful institutions. Demand for more comprehensive, collaborative, unfragmented programs located in schools came from a spectrum of organizations and individuals who advocated education reforms and adolescent health on the behalf of young children and families (Dryfoos, 1994). LEAP began as a community-school that integrated health, education, and community programs, but it altered its approach to managing these functions from contracting and partnering with local health and social service agencies to hiring and funding an onsite pediatric clinic and a behavioral health counseling center, which has proven to be more effective at oversight and provision of services directly to students and families.

Of major significance during LEAP planning, Dr. Santiago and members of the community harnessed and adapted the charter school model that was popularizing throughout the United States and that granted schools more autonomy in curricula, governance, and financing to provide more local community control of schools, rather than from top-down, bureaucratic systems (Nathan, 1998). Inspired by legislation in Minnesota and Michigan, Dr. Santiago aligned development of LEAP with the advocacy and passage of charter school legislation in New Jersey, which transformed the state's educational landscape and today has profound effects on improved graduation rates and test scores state-wide. Clark and UPCS did not pursue the charter school model to retain a traditional public school identity and avoid major conflicts with teachers' unions, which

became a serious point of contention during introduction of charter schools. Instead, they adapted an innovation school model that mirrors charter school autonomy but that retains traditional public-school status.

The two cities' economic indicators highlight comparative elements for research. Shown in Table 1.1, although Worcester is twice the size of Camden (population of 181,000 versus 77,000) and has stronger wealth indicators (poverty rate of 22% versus 39.3%), its Main South neighborhood has had similar and significant challenges to Camden, particularly concerning economic decline and abandonment (the poverty rate in Main South is 37.4% versus 39.3 % in Camden).

**Table 1.1 Sociodemographic Comparisons of Camden and Worcester**

City	Population	Poverty Level	Median Household Income	% With High School Diploma
<b>Camden</b>	77,000	39.3%	\$26,200	68%
<b>Worcester</b>	181,000	22%	\$46,000	84%

\*Main South neighborhood where school is located has 37.4% poverty rate and \$31,000 median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

### Significance of the Study

The two cases emerged from conditions that still exist today concerning vast inequalities that persist in education, income, and social mobility that affect children's and family's livelihoods (Sharkey, 2013; Chetty et al., 2017; Putnam, 2016; Deluca, Clampet-Lundquist, and Edin, 2016; Florida, 2017). Children's prospects of earning more than their parents have fallen from 90% to 50% over the past half-century (Chetty et al., 2017). Wealthy and poor children are growing up in separate, unequal Americas, tied to whom their parents are and the zip code in which they reside (Putnam, 2015). Metropolitan areas are becoming more segregated by income, education, and occupational class, in which the landscape is split into zones of concentrated advantage and disadvantage that cross cities and suburbs (Florida, 2017). Intergenerational poverty

is a driver of these challenges when those who live in chronically poor neighborhoods lack economic resources and are isolated from social and economic institutions that enable upward mobility (Wilson, 1987; Florida, 2017). A legacy of policies and practices has mired poor, minority children in highly segregated contexts, in which life choices are badly diminished (Deluca, Clampet-Lundquist, and Edin, 2016) and yet children and families are resilient and transcend difficult circumstances when quality education and employment exist.

Educational opportunities and college access for urban minority youths are drivers of upward mobility, disrupting persistent intergenerational poverty. Schools have the innate ability to foster relationships between various power structures of communities and elites that symbolize a path to economic security (Coleman, 1988; Kozol, 1991). College access and success have been defining factors in the growing economic divide in America since the early 1980s (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016), but the reality is that public school and college degree attainment remain inequitable. When high schools fail to prepare students for minimal expectations of college work—class attendance, reading and summarizing a paragraph, cogent writing, and basic arithmetic—students are set up to fail (McGuire, 2008). The current cases offer solutions to bridge the divide that persists and improve the quality of high schools to align with college, providing lessons learned 25 years ago regarding establishing sustainable partnership models that apply today.

Major education indicators shifted the demographic and economic landscapes of the United States, exacerbating the need for stronger university–school partnerships. Suitts et al. (2015) report that for the first time in recent history, the majority of

schoolchildren who attend public schools come from low-income families, and according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, for the first time, workers with a Bachelor's degree or higher comprise a larger portion of the workforce (36%) than workers with a high school diploma or less (34%) (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016). Workers with a high school diploma or less are losing access to high- and middle-skill jobs, and are settling for low-skill, low-wage employment (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016). Median earnings of young adults with Bachelor's degrees in 2015 were \$50,000, which is 64% higher than those of young adults who completed high school at \$30,500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These indicators demonstrate a remarkable shift in public schools' and colleges' roles in ensuring that low-income students secure employment.

In the contemporary and future U.S. economies, jobs have and will shift away from traditional manufacturing and industry to those that employ a greater share of workers with postsecondary education in healthcare, consulting and business services, financial services, education, and government services, accounting for 46% of the workforce, in comparison to 28% 70 years ago (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish, 2016). If postsecondary education is necessary to obtain work that pays a living wage, all individuals, regardless of family income, parents' education, socioeconomic status, and other demographics, should have equal opportunity to participate, complete, and benefit (Cahalan and Perna, 2017). These measures of inequality are reminiscent of federal publications "A Nation at Risk" in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and "Beyond Rhetoric" by the National Commission of Children in 1991, which reinvigorated national discourse on substandard education conditions 30 years ago

that permeate to the present. The path to college for many urban children and families has been paved with good intentions but has lacked large-scale, stable, serious interventions.

The current cases demonstrate how two urban universities used a community development model of sustained, large-scale, integrated projects to eliminate burdens of obtaining a college education academically and financially. As anchors with significant assets and resources, they implemented strategies to bolster the accessibility and academic success of students and families in their cities. One-third of students enter colleges unprepared for college-level work (Reed, 2010), and universities continue to struggle with the challenge of preparing students to compete in the job market.

Universities in urban cities continue to struggle with providing students with an equitable and quality path to college or career, in which a concrete college access pipeline integrates students in the fabric of the university. They lack links with urban K–12 school systems and do not see the need to develop educational pipelines during this early stage. The two cases epitomize early, direct engagement of a university in developing a school pipeline while revitalizing a neighborhood and influencing policy in new school models.

These educational circumstances force many universities to make the problem of the American school system their highest institutional priority (Benson and Harkavy, 2000). Although many universities believe this, they commonly develop approaches that are disjointed, disconnected, and peripheral. Some researchers suggest “actively help[ing] to develop an effective, integrated, optimally democratic, pre-K through higher-ed schooling system,” (Benson and Harkavy, 2000, pg. 48), but no study assesses models that are emblematic of systems being proposed of a continuum of pre-K through higher-

ed schooling. The method many universities use for achieving the goal of broadening their educational reach to prepare students in the K-12 system varies across multiple models of engaging with schools and school districts, including teacher preparatory programs (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988) and university-assisted school models (Harkavy and Hartley, 2009). Both models have merit regarding universities extending resources to local schools and communities, but the process is not a direct channel for communities and students to benefit from these programs and enter college-ready for higher education's rigor and social transitions. These models build connections and access between university and K-12 schools that are disconnected from a true partnership regarding dual-college or early college experiences as part of a pipeline in which high school students in a university's neighborhood qualify for acceptance and tuition benefits and become integrated into the life and culture of the university.

Traditional university-school partnerships expose university students to the challenges of an urban environment, and research recognizes the challenges of maintaining partnerships by earning the trust and respect of partners, establishing effective communication, and developing mutually beneficial relationships (Biag and Sanchez, 2016). Traditional partnerships have accelerated research opportunities to improve teaching and scholarship in the university and have uplifted the university students who participate and their university engagement programs. The two case studies were intentionally embedded in a community development strategy to improve the quality of life in the universities' adjacent neighborhoods. Dr. Santiago used a school to attract and retain families to stay, grow, and excel intellectually and economically, and Traina integrated a school in an economic development plan that addressed challenges

from housing, small business, and educational perspectives. However, traditional research on university partnerships does not address whether pipelines are critical to the success of high school and college graduation of minority students. The pipeline model involves cohorts of students who are tracked throughout high school and college to ensure they graduate and receive the social and academic benefits of connecting with peers, teachers, and staff. For decades, minority students have not been afforded educational resources in urban contexts to prepare them for college academically, socially, and financially. Urban disinvestment and discriminating policies neglected advancement of African American and Latino children to secure an advanced degree that children in suburbia have not experienced.

A model of creating educational pipelines from birth to college in one neighborhood and the vicinity provides meaningful academic trajectories for students and families. LEAP Academy is the only infant-to-college pipeline that exists in the country, in which children stay on one trajectory in a cohort from Kindergarten to college and that is overseen by the same institution in partnership with a community (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). In many cases, policies have not adapted to this framework to link traditional pre-K–12 school models with university anchors that provide a clear path to higher education. Literature is scant on both how pipelines develop and the policy outcomes that emerge from such partnerships. Other examples of east coast and Midwest university–school partnerships are documented thoroughly in the literature, but none addresses universities that build schools at which college readiness is the focus and part of a pipeline. A case in West Philadelphia of the Penn Alexander School demonstrates how the University of Pennsylvania reshaped education in its



neighborhood by creating a K–8 public school (Kromer and Kerman, 2004; Rodin, 2007; Kromer, 2009; Puckett and Lloyd, 2015). The program attracted new families to the neighborhood, but a major concern was how it accommodated families that struggled to afford property in its vicinity given residual effects of an upper middle-class arrival. In Chester, PA, Widener University established the Widener Partnership School from K–5 to improve educational outcomes (Harris III, 2009; Ledoux, Wilhite, and Silver, 2011; Harris III and Pickron-Davis, 2013). The school created a sound academic program, but there was a gap regarding how students moved to middle and high school before entering college. In East Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University is leading a revitalization project in conjunction with its medical campus, which includes development of an elementary school (Cromwell et al., 2005). In Detroit, Wayne State University operates a charter middle school that prepares students to enter 9th grade in one of several choice high schools (Childress, 2002).

These examples suggest a willingness and desire of universities to build schools to contribute to the educational pipeline, yet they focus on only lower grades of Kindergarten to middle school. When examining university–school partnerships through a lens of college readiness, research must target high school programs in which a university and school cooperate to prepare students for college. Research on how university–community partnership relationships affect outcomes is lacking (Buys and Bursnell, 2007; McNall et al., 2008), especially regarding how pipelines sustain new outcomes. I add value to the literature by demonstrating how two pipeline partnerships are original models that emerged and redefined the relationship between universities and communities using schools as vehicles to transform and empower communities to excel

and succeed in college. I argue that to sustain the innovation that emerges from partnerships, stakeholders must alter policies to transform political and educational landscapes and accommodate innovative university solutions for long-term change. The two cases presented in this dissertation address this task by influencing state legislation that created new funding sources and schools' ability to be autonomous regarding governance, with university support, curriculum, and community models for transforming new conditions for schools to be productive and sustainable. These lasting influences demonstrate that university–school partnerships must construct new policy frameworks to allow for conditions to change in poor, urban school districts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation addresses a research question regarding how two universities in small cities developed and sustained an education pipeline as a community development strategy to provide access to college for students and families, and to revitalize distressed neighborhoods. I sought a framework to address and inform these concerns, especially regarding how a community development framework would address the needs of the most marginalized and disenfranchised populations. I used Herbert Blumer's sociological framework (1971) and theory of collective definition, which defines a process for how social problems emerge using five stages of development: (1) emergence of a social problem, where a condition is identified as a social problem, (2) legitimation of a social problem, where a social problem must acquire social endorsement to be taken seriously and move forward, (3) mobilization of action, where a series of actions occur, including discussion, advocacy, evaluation, falsification, diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals in casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers, and

committee hearings, (4) formation of an official plan, which represents the decision of how a society will act regarding the problem, and (5) implementation of an official plan, where new lines of action are formed on the part of those involved with the social problem and influenced by the plan.

I used this framework to understand the implementation of the policy process in developing new schools and to show evidence and describe a community development process of planning and designing schools in two small cities. This theory is appropriate because it ascribes a social process with meaning and intention that focuses on outcomes for families who are vulnerable and marginalized. As an action researcher, I integrate theory and action with the goal of addressing important organizational, community, and social issues together with those who experience them (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). I focus on creation of areas for collaborative learning and the design, enactment, and evaluation of actions by combining action and research, and reflection and action, in a cycle of co-generative knowledge (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Blumer's theory applies to action research as a means of transforming distressed communities.

I address several sub-questions in the broad framework related to Blumer's stages of development to analyze the cases' trajectories:

- (1) **Emergence:** When did the university partnerships emerge, who were the agents of change, and what role did they play?
- (2) **Legitimation:** How did agents of change legitimize the problem through collective action toward developing the partnership?
- (3) **Mobilization:** How were constituencies mobilized to act according to the vision to create a university–school partnership?

(4) **Formulation:** How were the social policy process and a plan formulated to direct leaders and constituents to achieve passage of the new policy?

(5) **Implementation:** How did the school's governors and university's leaders implement and sustain the partnerships over a long period, and what are the results and influences of the university partnerships regarding the success of high school and college access graduation among minority students?

To address these questions, I used a qualitative methodology, collecting individual- and community-level data. At the individual level, I interviewed senior university officials, school officials, and parents who were active during emergence of the partnerships. At the community level, I analyzed census data of socioeconomic indicators, analyzed historical documents of strategic plans and newspaper archives, and observed students, teachers, and the physical school facilities and their neighborhood conditions. The interviews, analyses, and observations produced data on conditions, qualities, and characteristics that supported their creation. Blumer's framework served as a tool to categorize and chart each partnership's course of action.

Findings from both case studies add value to the literature by documenting approaches, lessons, and outcomes of the first community development-based university partnerships that lasted for 25 years in collaboration with a university. No study documents educational pipelines that have been in continuous existence since the mid-1990s, or how entrepreneurial faculty members work with a community to build a new school that benefits a neighborhood and connects directly with a university. University leaders have written on their experiences with developing partnerships during teacher training and civic engagement programs to bolster a university's outward relationships

with a community, but there exists no record of a sustainable pipeline model rooted in a community development framework that aligns educational trajectories of students and families in neighborhoods to prepare for college. I became immersed in the cases for two years to document these two enterprises and offer lessons learned from their development (Stevenson and Shetley, 2015).

While reviewing this topic, I found that characteristics of university partnerships concern individual faculty's, university administrators', and community leaders' perseverance and vision for better social outcomes, rather than as a designated mission for the university itself. I investigated how much stakeholders followed a social policy framework, finding that Dr. Santiago, as a social scientist, intentionally used Blumer's framework to build a movement and policy process to establish charter school legislation in New Jersey and introduce alternative school models. Richard Traina and faculty at the Clark Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice did not use a framework. Clark's process mirrors Blumer's, but there was no intentional design during development of the partnership and innovation school policy outcome. Based on research of the two cases, I found several methods and best practices of assets regarding how university-school partnerships develop and remain sustainable:

(1) University partnerships emerge when committed faculty and community leadership come together in a planning process that is inclusive and is driven by a collective participatory process of building solidarity, shared meaning, and common purpose with the community, along with building agency and capacity to sustain the partnership for an extended period of time.

- (2) Visionary leadership fosters collective action that drives the projects forward, when the vision becomes a reality by communicating, empowering, and taking action at all levels and stages of the development of a project
- (3) Shared governance and autonomy in leading the university and school partnership is critical when working within the preK-12 school environment in order to offer innovation, community entrepreneurship and new avenues for educational effectiveness
- (4) Early college access programs connect K–12 students with university programs, culture, and rituals, and prepares them for the college experience, only if the partnership or collaboration has systems in place to make this happen.
- (5) University partnerships work best when universities see themselves as anchors in community transformation and development, where the work is reciprocal, visible and beneficial to both the university and the community. True collaboration must be at the core of the partnership in order for it to succeed and be sustained.
- (6) A community asset approach, where community leadership, university faculty, administrators, and stakeholder input leveraged their social, political, and intellectual capital, to make transformational impact in their community and its neighborhoods.
- (7) University school partnerships are institutionalized through strong leadership, community support and through financial mechanisms that sustain the relevance and integrity of the partnership beyond when founding faculty and leaders depart.

In conjunction with the process of how the schools were developed, these findings demonstrate a new framework for how university–school partnerships have emerged and sustained for over 25 years. As anchor institutions grounded in their local geographies,

universities were the units of analysis for this study because many argue that they have a moral responsibility and the required resources to educate and prepare students from all backgrounds intellectually and professionally to contribute to a democratic society (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Benson and Harkavy, 2000). Universities are rich in human, intellectual, and physical capital, and have deep roots in communities, placing them in an ideal position to serve as catalysts for community action. However, over time, they have not capitalized on the opportunity to integrate themselves into neighborhoods and to empower and uplift communities. Many have community-engagement programs that are suited to students and faculty who want to do good at volunteer events, participate in service-learning to assist with community projects, and contribute to school recreational programs that fulfill academic experiences (Maurasse, 2002). These university experiences often occur in poor cities and are less advantageous to communities that struggle with educational and economic challenges because of a disconnect in terms of experience and need. Communities often perceive no reciprocity because their needs are not being fully met. Consequently, universities without a community or university broker have difficulty addressing the needs of poor, urban communities because they are not invested in the development of their neighborhoods and are disconnected from communities' real needs (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

### **Organization of the Study**

I organized the dissertation around a sound narrative and contextual analysis of the conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement of university–school partnerships that focus on college access strategies for K–12 students, enveloped in community development initiatives, using Blumer's framework of collective definition to solving social problems. The introduction provides a lens into the scope of the study and

its significance of addressing a research question regarding how universities use a community development framework to create educational pipelines to provide access to college and revitalize neighborhoods. A literature review offers a framework of how partnerships are creations of initiatives that blend education and community development. I introduce grassroots community development that is embedded in organizing constituents and stakeholders to achieve lasting change and outcomes, and discuss emerging theories of how schools are vehicles of community development and neighborhood revitalization, embedded in social contexts of poverty and distressed cities, and how universities extend into schools as stewards of building a stronger democracy. The methodology section discusses characteristics of qualitative comparative case study analysis that highlights the contexts and intricacies of university–school partnerships and their situational complexities. I outline interviews and the primary document analyses I used to triangulate and corroborate how the partnerships formed and sustained. In the findings and analysis section, I discuss each case in greater detail, documenting their historical and social trajectories along Blumer’s stages of development, starting with the emergence of the social problem and concluding with implementation of the plan. I highlight policy outcomes to demonstrate that each case had a distinct path to transforming education in their respective cities. I then review findings to reflect on emerging themes generated from the interviews, document analyses, and observations of the partnerships. In the discussion and recommendations section, I address the research questions to explore outcomes and overlapping processes involved with each of Blumer’s stages of development. I present recommendations for future research, particularly concerning a need for stronger longitudinal cohort analyses and impact studies that build



stronger credibility and results for an evolving trend of integrating institutions of higher learning with K–12 schools.

## Definitions

Definitions of terms in the research questions and literature review to clarify

leading categories and themes include:

1. University–School Partnerships: A university–school partnership occurs when a university forms a working relationship with a local school that caters to grades K–12, usually a public school, to provide resources, including social resources such as teachers and students or capital resources such as physical space or financial assistance, to build capacity among its own institution and that of a school district it supports. In this study, university administrators classified the schools with which they formed partnerships, even though the schools did not exist prior to the partnership. This classification is unique and strengthens the novelty of this type of relationship.
2. Charter School: Charter schools are public schools that signed a charter or agreement with a local public school district and the state to assign their own governance structures and autonomy regarding curricula and operations. Charter school regulations vary across states and commonly must be authorized by a state agency or entity and renewed every few years. Charter schools continue to receive public funding and per-pupil costs like traditional district public schools do, but the amount is typically less than other schools, and funding discrepancies must be recouped through fundraising or other innovative funding schemes.
3. Innovation School: Innovation schools are governed like a traditional public school, with direct reporting to a school district committee or board, but similar to charter schools, they have the ability to implement creative strategies in their curricula, budgets, and personnel decisions to enjoy some degree of autonomy during operations.
4. Educational Pipeline: An educational pipeline refers to a system or series of educational processes for a student to continue along one educational trajectory in a contained organizational structure. The ideal model is for a student to start his/her education at birth and continue through college while remaining in one geographic area. LEAP Academy is an example of a model in which one governing entity controls all functions and operations in the pipeline. UPCS has a pipeline beginning in grade 7 that carries students through high school and into college.
5. Collective Definition and Collective Action: Collective definition and collective action are monikers concerning how groups unite in a shared process to achieve a social or policy outcome (Blumer, 1971, Tilly, 1973). An intentional, guided path

of a problem emerging and then being legitimized, followed by mobilization and formulation and implementation of a plan, focus to achieve a group's desired goals for social change.

6. Community Organizing: Community organizing is a process during which members of a community, defined by a social or physical boundary, cooperate to mobilize, advocate, lobby, and influence a change in policy or conditions in their locations. Alinsky (1971) was a proponent of grassroots organizing efforts in urban communities affected by deindustrialization and decreasing employment opportunities.
7. Community Development: Community development is defined traditionally as improving housing conditions in neighborhoods but reemerged as a field that blends various disciplines such as sociology, political science, urban planning, public administration, anthropology, public health, and psychology to connect resources and make systems more efficient at serving vulnerable populations with more comprehensive and holistic services. The process is used to capitalize on assets in a community and empower members to build capacity, shared meaning, and solidarity to improve living conditions and excel in mainstream society (Giddens, 1984).

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review: The University as an Anchor Institution and the Emergence of School Partnerships**

Research demonstrates that for universities to act on their desires to engage with communities, university leaders and faculty must embrace the intentional social directions they seek (Zimpher and Howey, 2004; Taylor and Luter, 2013; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Cantor and Englot, 2016; Harkavy et. al, 2016). If actions are void of cohesive social justice outcomes, programs become fragmented and both meaning and purpose are lost. Partnership theory concerning universities and schools was developed primarily in the context of universities that train teachers to work in schools through departments of education (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1986), but showed how development of partnership models strengthens the cause and legitimizes the structural role that universities play in influencing the K–12 pipeline. Puckett (1989) contends that school-university partnerships have to extend their agendas to include the revitalization of at-risk communities. Collaboration breaks down bureaucracies and allows fluidity between university and K–12 schools. Sirotnik and Goodlad (1986) define such partnerships as creating a process and accompanying structures through which one equal party draws on complementary strengths of the other in advancing its self-interests through collaborative agreement. A university then has an interest in building a school and supporting its students to attract students to attend the university. Applications grow and the university earns more funding to attract students from lower economic backgrounds. A partnership brings together institutions that need each other to address adaptive problems (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1987), especially regarding how an urban university partners with a school

to empower communities by building an educational pipeline that produces students to be college-ready.

During the 1990s, scholars recognized the critical importance of universities opening their resources to their host cities to reduce crime, fix blight, and uplift social and educational conditions for communities (Harkavy and Puckett, 1992; Boyer, 1994; Hackney, 1995; Cisneros, 1996). Sheldon Hackney, former president of the University of Pennsylvania, expressed at the time that “the problem of the city is the strategic problem of our time. As such, it is a problem most likely to advance the university’s primary mission of advancing and transmitting knowledge” (Hackney, 1995, pg. 313). Since then, urban universities embarked on large-scale programs to invest in real estate and expose university students to the challenges of urban poverty and inequality. Yet the programs lacked a coherent and transformative vision for how the communities themselves would benefit and grow economically.

Research has been scarce on the long-term impact and sustainable qualities of university–community partnerships; it largely addresses the benefits and characteristics of successful partnerships (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005) and is commonly prescriptive, descriptive, or both (Spoth et al., 2004). Research does not address a theoretical framework of why partnerships exist or succeed. Little has been documented regarding operationalizing and measuring how university partnerships sustain relationships with schools in the form of educational pipelines. Few studies examine a true positive measure of a university–school partnership—high school graduation and college readiness (Durham et al., 2015; Brewster et al., 2016). Smith (2015) suggests that researchers espouse partnerships as extremely useful and meaningful, but little is known

about how to create partnerships correctly. Spoth et al. (2004) find that a primary reason for limited sustainability of research projects with communities is lack of local ownership and the capacity building required for institutionalization with appropriate leadership capabilities and reliable sources of funding. Ongoing community partner guidance and involvement is vital to the success, growth, and sustainability of a community–academic partnership (Simmons et al., 2015).

*Blumer's Theoretical Framework Applied to University–School Partnerships*

Herbert Blumer's (1971) theory of collective definition addresses my research question of how two universities in small cities developed and sustained an educational pipeline as a community development strategy to provide access to college for students and families and to revitalize distressed neighborhoods because it provides a roadmap for how universities can build pipeline models that are sustainable and effective. Instead of devising and managing many civic engagement programs for university students, universities can implement a pipeline and community development model with clear social justice underpinnings to create lasting change and impact for the distressed communities they serve (Putnam, 1993; Lawson, 2013; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Blumer's framework provides a unique lens that aligns with school and community development and university anchor institution literature to evaluate collaboration while building successful models, such as education pipelines that have clear, guided outcomes. It is a theoretical approach that suggests that universities must unite communities in shared activities to achieve desired outcomes, particularly regarding changing the educational paradigm.

Blumer (1971) recognized that the first step to outlining a path for educational transformation is defining the social problem. He theorized that social problems lie in and are products of collective definition, explaining, “The process of collective definition determines the career and fate of social problems, from the initial point of their appearance to whatever may be the terminal point in their course” (Blumer, 1971, 301). The five stages of development he observed are (1) emergence of a social problem, where a given condition is identified as a social problem, (2) legitimation of a social problem, where a social problem must acquire social endorsement to be taken seriously and move forward, (3) mobilization of action, where a series of actions occur, including discussion, advocacy, evaluation, falsification, diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals in casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers, and committee hearings, (4) formation of an official plan of action, which represents the decision of how a society will act regarding the problem, and (5) implementation of the official plan, where new lines of action are formed on the part of those involved with the social problem and affected by the plan (Blumer, 1971). Blumer thus foresaw the structural intentionality required to create change.

Various researchers extend Blumer’s stages with further definitions of collective behaviors that apply to desired outcomes that university school and community partnerships seek to achieve. Tilly (1973) coined *collective action* as the application of a community’s pooled resources to common ends, lauded as a neighborhood’s desire for economic sufficiency, good schools, adequate housing, and a clean, healthy environment. Theories of collective socialization demonstrate that neighborhood adult role models are essential to a child’s socialization (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Sampson et al., 1999).

Sampson et al. (1997) and Sampson et al. (1999) strengthen these outcomes with collective efficacy, which describes a link of mutual trust and willingness to intervene for a common good that defines the neighborhood.

These collective theories base social capital theories (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993), which triggers action around universities and develops schools into vehicles of community development. Capital theories of schools, poverty, and community shaped how university–school partnerships connect education with mainstream society and the power of schools as channels for communities to overcome segregation and isolation. Social capital is the value that comes from connections within and between social networks—building of trust, collective norms, and reciprocating relationships (Walter and Hyde, 2012). It represents the communal binding necessary for community capacity-building and collective action, and is a contributor to individual and community health and wellbeing (Kawachi et al. 2008; Walter and Hyde, 2012). Glaeser (2001) combines social capital with human capital, defined as educational attainment, arguing that the “education-social connection relationship should probably be seen as the most robust and most important fact about the formation of social capital” (p. 16); an educated person is an engaged person who drives transformative change (Helliwell and Putnam, 2007). Community action and direction guided principles of community development and university engagement to develop schools that were essential for the two cases to flourish. Education and school, in conjunction with neighborhood revitalization, fulfill a purposeful agenda to achieve social outcomes that create positive effects on people and their environments.

*Charter and Innovation Schools Create New Educational Conditions*

Since the early 1990s, schools have transformed structurally through large-scale policy reforms that altered their abilities to serve students and families more creatively and effectively (Noguera, 2003). As many researchers suggest (Kozol, 1991; Lieberman, 1995; Sarason, 1996; Anyon, 1997), large-scale bureaucratic reforms in public school systems have not produced an equitable public education system. Systemic reforms in which change is dictated from above are unattainable because of myriad social policies that perpetuate the social and physical conditions of impoverished neighborhoods (Anyon, 1997). Impediments in schools include low expectations for students, district bureaucracy and rigidity, and educator resignation (Anyon, 1997). During a wave of education reform attempts during the 1990s, at the time LEAP and UPCS formed, other researchers recognized that new models of schooling had to emerge. Sarason argued, “Salvation for our schools will not come from without but from within” (Lieberman, 1995). Lieberman (1995) recognizes that changing schools requires changing practices and structures around the whole school, rather than just individual projects and classrooms. Instead of reforming existing school systems, new school models in the form of community (Dryfoos, 1994) and charter schools (Budde, 1988) demonstrate the power and capacity to achieve these same goals by creating new structures and organizations. These models’ goals are to decentralize administration to support democratic governance of schools, implement school-based decision-making, and manage resources (Anyon, 1997). School systems should depart from hierarchical models of government oversight toward market-like models, and develop flexible, diverse methods to deliver public education (Mintrom and Vergari, 1997). Community schools particularly provide a



model that reflects John Dewey's theory that a neighborhood school can function as a core neighborhood institution that provides comprehensive services, galvanizes other community institutions and groups, and helps solve the many problems schools and communities confront in a rapidly changing world (Harkavy et. al, 2013).

Through her research, Dr. Santiago and the LEAP working group adopted the community school model and national charter school legislation model that emerged during the 1990s in Minnesota and Michigan. The legislation allowed for autonomy, innovation, and decentralization in a new policy that was introduced to open new public charter schools in New Jersey. UPCS considered the charter model but was committed to maintaining a traditional public school with new internal models, leading to the innovation school development. Nevertheless, both processes corroborate what Lieberman (1995) and Anyon (1997) encouraged—a new individual public school model.

The charter school movement emerged two decades before LEAP, gaining attention during the late 1980s and early 1990s when both LEAP and UPCS were nascent. In the context of university–school partnerships, university faculty and administrators shaped the charter school movement, which sparked national debate on the merits of autonomous schools in public education systems. In 1974, University of Massachusetts Professor Ray Budde proposed that teachers should establish autonomous schools, an idea endorsed by American Federation of Teachers President Al Shanker (Budde, 1988; Kolderie, 2005). Groups of teachers would receive educational charters directly from the school board to carry out instruction (Kolderie, 2005). During the late 1980s, a committee in Minnesota modified the idea to allow states to authorize schools rather than the local school board, which eventually led to legislation that authorized

charter schools (Kolderie, 2005). In 1991, Senator Dave Durenberger (R-MN) introduced legislation in Washington, DC for a charter school grant program that received bipartisan support from Congress and the Clinton Administration. This turning point in education led states to pass similar laws to expand charter school provisions. State charter school policies offer disparate degrees of autonomy, and charter schools vary in both their ability to innovate and potential for high performance (Wohlstetter et al., 1995). Charter schools offer a radical approach to decentralizing management in education that allows individual schools to self-govern (Wohlstetter et al., 1995).

Universities similarly play a role operationally in authorizing charter schools in a state. The National Charter School Institute (2015) identifies multiple benefits for universities to serve as authorizers: (1) alignment with the university's mission, (2) studying what works in public education, (3) teacher and school leader placement, (4) student recruitment, and (5) increased attention on universities from policymakers. Michigan introduced the first wave of universities that acted as charter school authorizers, empowering public state universities to authorize charter schools in their geographic boundaries (National Charter Schools Institute, 2015). In 1993, then Governor John Engler believed that universities could represent the interests of charter schools better than superintendents so they could remain outside of the traditional public education system (National Charter Schools Institute, 2015). Central Michigan University became the first public body in the state and nation to charter a public school (National Charter Schools Institute, 2015). Since then, universities that authorize charter schools spread to 17 states and 47 institutions of higher learning (National Charter Schools Institute, 2015). Through the charter school movement, university professors

have been social innovators and entrepreneurs, and have served in leadership roles during school development.

The national charter school movement legitimized others states to adopt new policies to create local, urban schools and satisfy growing demand for poor parents and children to have a choice in the education system. Instead of channeling efforts in bureaucracies of traditional public-school systems, university researchers and entrepreneurs recognized the possibility of building autonomous public schools to strengthen urban public education. Urban schools and the promise of educational attainment and success connected to a university attracted poor families to neighborhoods and prevented families from leaving them. These new urban schools anchored community development that influenced other place-based decisions concerning economic revitalization (Taylor and Luter, 2013; Luter, 2016, Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

Recent adaptation of innovation schools throughout the country has not been researched or codified in academia fully. Various states, including Massachusetts, Indiana, and Colorado, adapted innovation schools as not being autonomous charters, but traditional in-district public schools with leverage and autonomy to set their own policies and curricula. Innovation drives the change to school identity and quality, but a nationally organized movement has not emerged regarding this school category.

#### *Schools as Vehicles for Community Development*

Research on schools as vehicles for community development emerged as a response to a systemic failure of public education that serves poor and minority children in urban environments. Societies that advanced the most in their social and economic aspects worldwide have achieved incredible progress in their creation of knowledge,

transformation of their K-12 education systems, and contributions to new research, production, innovation, and advancement in their competitive economies (Chmielewski and Reardon, 2016). Both cases in this study emerged during a period when the influence of public education was being examined as a result of dismal academic performance and oppressive physical building conditions for students living in poverty, particularly in urban settings. According to Noguera (2003), constraints to urban public schools are both external and internal to school systems, where low test scores, high dropout rates, ineffective teachers, and dilapidated buildings are common in urban schools (Noguera, 2003). Externally, schools are situated in environments of poverty and social isolation of families in economically depressed, inner-city neighborhoods (Wilson, 1987; Noguera, 2003). Internally, high turnover rates among school leaders and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1997) and inadequate facilities create disorder (Payne, 1984) that hinders teaching and learning.

Wilson (1996) argues that schools should play a prominent role in designing policies that address concentrated poverty. An exodus of jobs destroys businesses, social institutions, and youth socialization, leading to social isolation (Saegert, Thompson, and Warren, 2001). The decline of good-paying jobs for low-skilled workers and an exodus of middle-class residents contributed to a concentration of urban poverty (Wilson, 1996), where many adopted public policies undermined community social capital. Isolation of ethnic neighborhoods produces less social integration and increases disorder (Arum, 2000). Schools that do not produce adolescent attachment to conventional activities experience greater delinquency (Sampson and Laub, 1995). School is a forum for connecting youths to conventional adult norms and adapting them to mainstream societal

and economic structures (Coleman, 1988; Arum, 2000). Arum (2000) extends this concept by suggesting, “A school’s relevant community is not just a neighborhood demographic environment, but equally an institutional environment” (p. 400).

Expectations for success are institutionalized and school challenges are addressed using intellectual, human, and social capital available from researchers who share meaning and solidarity with a community (Giddens, 1984).

Schools have innate abilities to foster relationships among various power structures of communities and elites (Warren, 2005), which symbolize a path to economic security because schools are integral during community development, influencing shifts in residents’ perceptions of public institutions that are meant to serve them. Community development should overcome external and internal isolation of urban public schools. As educational and democratic institutions, schools can break down isolation by empowering students and families to seek fulfilling educational and economic pursuits. Stone et al. (1999) declares four components of how schools serve as a vehicle of community development: (1) they provide parents and others in poor communities with valuable experiences of interacting with public agencies, (2) they increase the skills and aptitudes of community residents for adults and children, (3) they strengthen social ties and the capacity for collective action in poor neighborhoods, and (4) they link neighborhoods with much-needed resources from the larger community.

The two schools discussed in this study are anchors and bridging institutions that advance community development, empowering residents and augmenting community control during urban revitalization (Patterson and Silverman, 2013). Patterson and Silverman (2013) argue that incorporating historically disenfranchised groups into a

governance structure of anchor institutions entails targeted capacity-building and technical assistance that equalizes actors in social institutions. It is in the interest of schools as community institutions to become anchors and improve the conditions of community life inside distressed, underdeveloped neighborhoods, eliminating non-academic barriers that thwart school performance and educational achievement (Patterson and Silverman, 2013).

The value of schools serving as vehicles for community development is virtuous, but implementation has challenged policymakers and practitioners. For the latter half of the 20th century, educators and community developers operated in separate spheres (Warren, 2005). School districts have not always been willing partners during community development (Chung, 2012). Some in the community development field observe it among housing and small-business communities, and schools under the auspices of school districts and educational systems. Community development involves neighborhoods with schools and businesses. Much stronger integration recently led to diverse neighborhood revitalization strategies that include schools (Warren, 2005).

Chung (2012) corroborates this notion, calling for a model of integration and partnerships of community health clinics in school, job-training, and trade-school classes for community members, and more neighborhood-oriented school facilities that promote smart growth by reusing and preserving historic buildings, components that Dr. Santiago integrated into the Rutgers/LEAP pipeline from inception as part of its design under one governance structure. Clark faculty and leaders tied UPCS into a larger community development strategy in the Main South neighborhood, which did not integrate health and

housing components directly into the school, but established a network of referrals and partnerships with other local community agencies

*The University as an Anchor in Sustainable Community Development*

The role of university partnerships in this study was critical to understanding and contextualizing how universities transform neighborhoods economically through school, housing, and business development (Kromer and Kerman, 2004; Zimpher and Howey, 2004; Perry et al., 2009; Glanville, 2013; Harkavy et al., 2013, 2016; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Ehlenz, 2017). Universities historically have powerful social and intellectual influences on their cities and regions (Rodin, 2007); they have a unique identity as an anchor institution that harnesses resources to make demonstrative improvements in their vicinities (Adams, 2003). Universities buy much real estate to create housing, office space, and retail opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. However, Rodin (2007) and Harkavy et al. (2016) argue against this, suggesting that universities should prioritize solving real-world problems in their communities. By creating civic identities, they advance research, teaching, learning, service, interdisciplinary collaboration, and mutually beneficial relationships. LEAP Academy and UPCS serve as zones of research, teaching, service, and professional development for universities by engaging university students and faculty in working with the school community to improve school climate, access to college, and teacher development opportunities.

A focus of building civic identity is for universities to integrate in the public school system. Harkavy, Benson, and Puckett (2000, 2011, 2013, 2016) argue that higher education institutions recently entered a new era in which radical reform will occur in the “crucible of significant, serious, sustained, active engagement with public schools and

their communities” (Harkavy et al., 2013; Harkavy et al., 2016). Current findings suggest a contrary position—engagement is insufficient. Findings suggest that traditional civic engagement in traditional public schools by universities has not been measured on a large scale to change educational outcomes for poor children and families. Civic engagement alone focuses solely on student and faculty experiences and less on changing outcomes for the community. It must be combined with integrated and direct college access pipelines to support underserved students and families with obtaining a degree, advancing in society, and achieving meaningful work.

The conceptual framework of university–school partnerships traces to John Dewey at the turn of the last century, who advocated that universities engage with schools to build a democratic society. An education philosopher, Dewey recognized the inherent nature of education, instilling a sense of citizenship and democratic principles to a population. In *The School and Society* (1899), he suggested removing “barriers that divide the education of the little child from instruction of the maturing youth; to identify the lower and the higher education, so that it shall be demonstrated to the eye that there is no lower and higher, but simply education” (82). He partnered with University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper in building a profile that universities are responsible for the greater education of the population. Harper extended the accountability of universities in this enterprise, suggesting that the “original responsibility of universities is the performance of the schooling system as a whole. If the American schooling system does not powerfully accelerate ‘democratic progress,’ then American universities must be performing poorly” (Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2007, 16-17). He emphasized that the “research university must constitute the primary



component of a highly integrated (pre-K–post 16) schooling system that could potentially function [as] the primary agent of democracy in the world and the United States”

(Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, 2007, 77).

In the current study, the two case studies consistently support this assertion. For example, UPCS follows the Dewey model of the lab school, in which there is greater teaching placement, observations, and strengthened educational practices, while Rutgers and LEAP follow community development of a university pipeline of a birth-to-college model as a path for minority students to access college and career preparation. LEAP innovated by implementing the first birth-to-college pipeline for minority students to participate in early college, and has succeeded for over 20 years at moving students from high school to college. UPCS mirrors Dewey’s ideas by extending educational lab practices to a school community, investing in and ensuring that all children are engaged with college so they are prepared for college classes.

Dewey’s influence revived discussion of the role of universities as anchor institutions, where urban universities have taken on social responsibilities because of economic challenges in their communities. Anchor institution literature commonly concentrates on economic development of vicinities rather than the educational, human, and community development that Dewey envisioned. Traditional definitions focus on the wealth of capital and resources that universities influence economically in their environments. Webber and Karlström (2009) argue, “Anchor institutions are those non-profit or corporate entities that, by reason of mission, invested capital, or relationships to customers or employees, are geographically tied to a certain location” (p. 4). Sampson (2008) and the Democracy Collaborative (2017) extend this concept, defining anchors as

organizations that leverage assets and revenue to promote local private-sector development and that have large workforces. These definitions are problematic because they apply a static quality to the role of anchor institutions in a community, where development is implemented for economic gain, which contradicts what Dr. Santiago and Traina promoted through a social justice mission of greater education outcomes for poor children and families.

Some argue that anchor institutions must have a social-purpose mission, including democracy, equity, social and racial justice, place, and community, that enables an anchor to build democratic, mutually beneficial, sustainable relationships with a host community, enabling it to become an agent of change and socioeconomic development (Taylor and Luter, 2013). Social responsibility is embedded in the concept of enlightened self-interest (Cisneros, 1996; Taylor and Luter, 2013) that de Tocqueville (1835) observed in America, in which a person's high regard for him/herself prompts assistance to one another and contributes to the welfare state, a concept that resonated deeply for Traina and the Clark faculty to fulfill their social-purpose mission beyond physical and capital development.

Cantor and Englot (2016) and Berkman and White (2016) challenge traditional definitions of anchor institutions and support current findings that the new educational anchor role is to expand education access for all children and escape the school-to-prison pipeline, and be embedded in a culture of high expectations and committed institutional support. According to Zimpher and Howey (2004), the university offers many resources to help redress problems, including how university presidents are accountable for the academic successes and failures of youths. Urban universities should be integrated

closely with the society in which it exists and for which it teaches, studies, experiments, and communicates (Zimpher and Howey, 2004). It should be engaged thoroughly, accepting the agenda of the larger community as part of its own research and teaching agenda, and should cultivate social capital, civic responsibility, and a commitment to service and philanthropy that are valuable to community members and students (Zimpher and Howey, 2004).

Through development of authentic, democratic partnerships among universities, schools, and communities, young people in distressed neighborhoods can become successful students and engaged citizens (Harkavy and Hartley, 2009), as demonstrated by strong high school and college graduation rates among partnership schools. Rodin (2007) suggests that improving local public schools is a win-win situation because the university supplements its academic curriculum by providing students with real-world experiences; in the long-term, universities influence policies and programming to improve the public education system.

#### *Measuring the Success and Outcomes of Educational Pipelines*

One challenge that researchers have experienced is how to measure the success of a university partnership and identify mechanisms that achieve such success. Although this study is not an impact study of specific long-term outcomes and indicators, it addresses social tools and measures of how to sustain partnerships over multiple decades. Researchers and policymakers during the past decade have begun advocating the pipeline model to emphasize college readiness, but research is limited regarding documenting stages of development. Brewster et al. (2016) define college readiness as a determination of whether students are prepared for the next developmental stage of formal education.

Ortega (2012) reports that education researchers are able to find ways that students flow toward the goal of a college degree. Lawson (2013) advocates prioritizing policy changes for colleges and universities to adapt pipeline partnerships as core functions and missions, including pre-school programs with rich, challenging curricula (Krueger, 2002).

The most documented pipeline is the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York City, which is a comprehensive network of community organizations, schools, and other public resources that guide children through learning and support families with health and career development services (Mclester, 2011; Gabrieli, 2014). However, researchers have been challenged with how to measure HCZ's success and replicate it because it fails to follow a K–16 pipeline education model that is consistent and successful over a period. Dobbie and Fryer (2011) test causal influences of HCZ charter schools on educational outcomes, suggesting that high-quality schools in this model do not necessarily increase academic achievement among poor students and community programs. The notion that HCZ builds community programs in a neighborhood and not in a school pipeline influences this outcome.

Through the federal Promise Neighborhood Grant program, modeled after HCZ, the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority created the Perry Choice Neighborhood, which was a place-conscious approach to education that built a pipeline with local schools and early learning centers to prepare students for college (Sanders-Garrett and Taylor, 2013). In Buffalo and New York City, schools and universities were not at the center of community development. Education and schools must integrate with a development plan to provide comprehensive services and prepare students for college if the goal is to

provide access and opportunity to students and families. Some researchers measure the influence of university school and community partnerships on college readiness by tracking high school graduation and mentorship programs. Brewster et al. (2016) assess a program at Duke University that involved undergraduate students in weekly team meetings to identify methods to engage students in a local district. However, the planning team only identified a process to mentor a group of students who were at-risk of dropping out; they did not evaluate or recommend structures to formally connect students with university resources to build a culture of college readiness. Durham et al. (2015) link high school transcript data of Baltimore students to an assessment of development college courses, reporting that universities use disparate scales and assessments to determine a student's college readiness.

The two cases in this study sustain an educational pipeline into college that can be learned from and replicated. Once educational pipelines are codified and understood, they can be modeled into sound policies to support all facets of the pipeline, from early childhood to high school graduation, college graduation, and entering the workforce (Ewell, Jones, and Kelly, 2003; Howey and Zimpher, 2007). Developing pipelines using universities as anchors is also a study in leadership, organizational dynamics, and partnership development that take courage, willpower, and persistence, seen in the two cases.

### Chapter 3. Methodology

The research question this dissertation addresses is how universities develop and sustain educational pipelines in distressed cities to change educational conditions and revitalize neighborhoods. I conducted qualitative comparative analysis of two university–school partnerships located in cities of comparable size, socioeconomics and demographics, and historical backgrounds. I chose the two cases because they emerged in the same historical period of the 1990s national education reform movement and, based on a survey of the literature, were the first initiatives by universities to build new schools in conjunction with communities and economic development plans to transform local neighborhoods. During my initial research, I identified that they both emerged and grew with a similar process and trajectory, later finding that they have significant differences and models of development.

#### Research Design

I used qualitative comparative case study analysis to assess the situational complexity of the partnerships (Khan and VanWynsberghe, 2008; Stake, 2013) and the intricacies of developing a university–school partnership (Stevenson and Shetley, 2015). I investigated a contemporary phenomenon of university–school partnerships in a real-world context (Yin, 1984) by engaging the lived experience of participants, particularly their “emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lines of individuals and groups” (Berg, 2009, p. 16). Comparative analyses of these partnership systems provided guiding frameworks, evaluative criteria, and methodological recommendations that allowed assessment of how organizations cooperate in authentic, collaborative partnerships (Lawson, 2013). I interviewed senior university officials, school officials, community organizational

leaders, and parents who were active during emergence of the partnerships, and analyzed census data of socioeconomic indicators, analyzed historical documents of strategic plans and newspaper archives, and observed students, teachers, and physical school facilities and their neighborhood conditions.

I grounded interview questions and research methods within the appreciative inquiry (AI) framework to elicit affirming information and responses on the qualities, characteristics, and best practices of development of the partnerships. AI is used traditionally as an evaluation tool for community planning and development to focus on assets and community strengths to understand and promote transformational change in challenging circumstances (Paige et. al, 2015; Coghlan, Preskill, and Catsambas, 2003). After defining the positive inquiry approach, there are four main components of the Appreciative Inquiry approach to examine assets within a community: (1) Discovery, where assets are identified as to what is working presently; (2) Dream, where community envisions what could work well in the future; (3) Design, where planning groups determine and plan what works well, and (4) Delivery, where the proposed plan and design are implemented (Wikmalm and Wikmalm, 2009). I framed my questions, observations, and analysis to determine the best practices of the assets of both university-school partnerships to chart a new asset model for each. The chart on the following page demonstrates the AI framework:

**Figure 3.1 Appreciative Inquiry Framework** (Source: Wikmalm and Wikmalm, 2009)

During the interviews, I created a supportive context in which individuals felt comfortable sharing the histories of the successes and challenges of partnership formation. According to Flint (2012), AI is a way of seeing that is selectively attentive to and affirming of the best and highest qualities in a system, a situation, or another person. The study did not result in practical changes based on community planning designs, but I was able to construct a list of findings and best practices that can be applied to future university–school partnerships that build educational pipelines.

### Setting and Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was each case of a university–school partnership that incorporated an educational pipeline that directly involved K–12 students into college courses and culture. I selected schools and participants purposively to apply a comparative analysis (Lijphart, 1971; Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Lijphart (1971) defines items being comparable when they are “similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other” (p. 687). The guiding narratives of economic decline and social isolation between Camden and Worcester are emblematic of the deterioration of urban cores and manufacturing centers during the mid- to latter half of the 20th century. The neighborhoods of Rutgers–Camden and Clark experienced challenges associated with poverty, including increased drugs, crime, and unemployment. Both cities represent the challenges small industrial cities faced throughout the 1990s and early 2000s—a steady decline in population, steep employment loss, and the fastest growth in poverty rates (Fox and Axel-Lute, 2008). I document the socioeconomics and demographics of



each city as they are today to highlight and provide an overview of why these cases were selected to analyze partnerships. Conditions during the schools' development are documented in the Findings section.

### Camden, NJ

Camden is one of the poorest cities in the United States, despite going through major economic changes such as business tax breaks to encourage the building of new facilities in the city. With a population of 77,000, it has a poverty level of 39.3%, which increased since the 2000 Census when it was 32.3%, and currently over twice as high as the national poverty rate of 15.1% (United States Census, 2016). The median household income is \$26,200, which increased from \$24,000 in 2000, but half as much as the national average of \$55,322. The percentage of people with a high school diploma is 68%, which increased from 51% in 2000, but still below the national average of 87% (United States Census, 2016). Thus, income and high school graduation have increased, but poverty has not decreased, and all indicators are extreme when compared nationally.

Rutgers–Camden, a satellite campus of Rutgers University whose primary location is in New Brunswick, NJ, is located downtown close to city hall and the waterfront entertainment district. It matriculates over 6,600 undergraduate and graduate students, has a student-to-faculty ratio of 10-to-1, and in 2017 distributed over \$103 million in financial aid to 85.5% of students, which is part of the Bridging the Gap program that provides aid to students beyond their initial financial aid packages (Rutgers University, 2017). It has four major schools—College of Arts and Sciences, School of Business, School of Law, and School of Nursing—which all develop programs and clinics for students to connect with Camden community agencies and members through

experiential learning and civic engagement. Most students do not live on campus, commuting from locations in southern New Jersey and Philadelphia, which influences a lack of retail and weeknight/weekend entertainment options for students and the community to build a foundation of commerce near campus.

Growth of LEAP along Cooper Street evidences the innovation and vision required to transform a neighborhood using schools as vehicles for physical development, combined with social and community development. As a social science researcher and community organizer, Dr. Santiago influenced Rutgers to expand the university presence to Cooper Street, which was characterized by dilapidated buildings, homeless people, and drug use. In conjunction with Provost Roger Dennis moving his offices to Cooper Street in a historic building, Dr. Santiago and the LEAP working group built new school buildings, planted vegetation, and repaved sidewalks to improve the physical conditions along the corridor, and bring renewed meaning, solidarity, and community to the street, opening access and inclusivity to residents. Figure 3.2 shows the city of Camden with an insert of Rutgers–Camden and the LEAP campus.

**Figure 3.2: Map of Camden and Downtown Area** (Source: Google Earth, 2017)

LEAP is unique in that it attracts students from all over Camden, while other charter schools cater only to individual neighborhoods. Figure 3.3 shows the diversity of neighborhoods represented by LEAP, and the economic disparity of low median household incomes that families earn.

**Figure 3.3 Map of Neighborhoods Where LEAP Families Live**

Source: Hopeworks 'N Camden, 2018

Worcester, MA

Worcester, MA is the second largest city in the Commonwealth, behind only Boston. With 181,000 people (United States Census, 2016), it is larger than Camden. Its overall wealth indicators are also better, with a poverty rate of 22% and median household income of \$46,000, both misaligned with the national average (United States Census, 2016). Worcester grew quickly in the 19th century during the industrial revolution, but its economic success plateaued gradually since then, unlike sharp declines experienced in Camden. However, pocketed neighborhoods with minority populations still suffer economically.

Clark University and University Park Campus School (UPCS) are located in the Main South neighborhood of Worcester, one of the poorest sections of the city. Main South's poverty rate and median household income are comparable to Camden's at 37.4% and \$31,000, respectively, in comparison to a 15% national poverty rate and \$55,322 national median household income (United States Census, 2016). Rodrigues (2003) describes the Main South neighborhood as "one of the worst in the city,

characterized by three-decker houses, boarded-up buildings, and low-income living conditions” (p. 10). At the time of Rodrigues’s writing in 2003, the neighborhood median income was \$21,702 in comparison to a city median of \$35,623, 10% of Main South residents were unemployed in comparison to a city rate of 6%, 28% of students lived in households headed by single mothers, and 65% did not speak English at home (Rodrigues, 2003). The neighborhood was diverse; Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans comprised over 50% of its population, and Spanish, Vietnamese, Albanian, and English were the top four languages (Rodrigues, 2003).

Clark is a smaller school than Rutgers–Camden in terms of student enrollment, with over 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Ninety-three percent of students receive financial aid, and the student-to-teacher ratio is 10-to-1, the same as Rutgers–Camden. A major difference in student indicators is that 67% of Clark undergraduate students live on campus (Clark University, 2017), and only 13% of Rutgers–Camden undergraduates do (U.S. News and World Report, 2018). Much of the Main Street corridor next to Clark has thriving retail and small businesses that cater to a substantive number of students on campus. Since 1995, home sales and the number of owner–occupancy units have increased in the Main South zone (Brown and Geoghegan, 2007). Figure 3.3 shows Worcester and the neighborhood of Main South, where the partnership developed.

**Figure 3.4: Map of Worcester, University Park Partnership and Main South**

**Neighborhood** (Source: Google Earth, 2017)  
Worcester:

Source: Clark University PowerPoint

The map indicates areas in which the University Park Partnership was instrumental in rehabbing property in the neighborhood in addition to creating UPCS. Clark faculty at the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice worked in tandem with senior administrators who partnered with the Main South Community Development Corporation to build a more stable neighborhood with better housing, schools, green spaces, and commercial properties for small business owners. Newer schools Claremont Academy, Woodland Academy, and Goddard School joined UPCS in a formative Innovation Schools neighborhood partnership in which the principals are all Clark alumni (Quinn-Szcesuil, 2018).

### Participant Interviews and Document Analysis

Stakeholders of each partnership narrated their own interpretations on the formation, implementation, and sustainability that offered rich content for me to understand the phenomenon (Borthwick et al, 2003). I interviewed a purposeful sample of 39 stakeholders across both schools involved in the formation, implementation, and sustainability of the university–school partnerships. I focused on a small population of influential people involved in the formation of the partnerships to gain a deeper level of understanding and insight (Dexter, 1970). I concentrated on the quality rather than the quantity of interviewees to acquire an understanding of a particular phenomenon only available to insiders (Padgett, 1998). Stakeholders included former university and government officials, professors, school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders. The following table indicates the breakdown of stakeholders. A full list appears in Appendix A.

**Table 3.1 Summary of Interview Subjects**

<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
University Administrators and Faculty	10
School Officials	9
Parents/Community Leaders	8
Teachers	5
Students	5
Government Officials	2

I identified LEAP interview subjects through a review of historical documents, strategic plans, state reports, and newspaper articles about LEAP's initial founders, conversations with community leaders, Dr. Santiago, and Wanda Garcia, Associate Director of the Rutgers–Camden Community Leadership Center, and UPCS subjects through Jack Foley, Clark Vice President for Government and Community Affairs. This stratified and purposeful sampling of stakeholders at various levels of the partnership (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was the most reliable form to assess facets of the relationship from various perspectives. I also used snowball sampling to encourage one stakeholder to participate to gain further insights into the partnerships (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Some potential subjects were unable to participate due to personal circumstances or time constraints.

The approach included potential biases in that interview subjects provided a subjective and largely positive view of the partnerships' development. However, they addressed the tensions, challenges, and shortcomings of the partnerships, particularly political oppositions from school districts and teachers' unions. This study encompasses these conflicts but focuses more strongly on assessing leading factors toward building a model of how universities develop new schools in a community development context to create a baseline framework for how partnerships emerge and can be sustained. The subjects' perceptions influenced analyses since they came from disparate backgrounds, which strengthened the case studies.

I visited the schools and conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (Boyce and Neale, 2006) from April to September 2017. After closer analysis of findings and recognizing that I needed to collect more information, particularly regarding how

Rutgers and LEAP approach college access today, I conducted additional interviews during April and May 2018. Interviews provide meaningful and personal interactions that yield information efficiently and consistently. The interviews were conducted both in-person and over the phone for individuals who were unable to meet face-to-face. At LEAP Academy, Dr. Santiago served as liaison to university and school officials, and to parents engaged with LEAP during its founding and who remain active with the school's governance and operations. At Clark University, Jack Foley, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs, served as liaison to university, school, and neighborhood stakeholders active with developing the University Park Campus School, including himself. I devised interview questions following the chronology of Blumer's stages of organizational development and influenced by Sirotnik and Goodlad's (1988) study on school–university partnerships. Sample questions appear in Appendix B. The interviews were semi-structured to allow follow-up questions and discussions for clarification of themes and topics. I audio recorded each conversation to capture the information and transcribed the interviews to have the conversation documented for thematic analysis. Each participant completed and signed an interview consent form for audio/video recording, as the IRB required.

When I visited the schools and met with stakeholders, I collected and reviewed newspaper articles and historical documents that chronicled the planning, development, and initial stages of the university–school partnership to elicit further meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (CSUCL, 1995; Frederick, 1995; Foley, 1996; Leusner, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1997; Holmstrom, 1997; McDonald, 1997; Jaeger, 2003; Bowen, 2009; Steiny, 2012). The articles came from both regional and local



newspapers from the two cities. Frequent publication of articles provided a trajectory of development of each partnership and created credible evidence (Eisner, 1991; Bowen, 2009). I similarly collected strategic plans, public testimonies, and legislation to review deliberative measures implemented to create the partnership and advocate a new school model. The schools provided organizational documents so I could analyze collective outcomes from planning committees and legislators. I accessed legislation from New Jersey and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Departments of Education websites, where legal components are stored for public viewing.

### Data Analysis and Mapping Onto Blumer's Stages of Development

On completion of the interviews and review of documents, I coded responses and content manually to extrapolate themes that defined development of the partnership (Miles and Huberman, 1984). I wrote memos to document the immediacy of an interaction and provide initial analysis to the data. Coding of interviews structured the themes and common issues throughout the content. Codes that represented the characteristics of a successful partnership and the challenges of sustaining it allowed in-depth analyses. The codes were interpreted and structured to identify patterns, themes, surprises, and relationships, and enabled dynamics to be explicated from the data. Table 3.1 on the following page shows codes that guided analysis.

**Table 3.2: Codes of Emergent Themes from the Interviews**

Code	Theme
ACC	Access
ACT	Accountability
ADV	Advocate
AUT	Autonomy
CHC	Choice
CHR	Charter

CLT	Collective
CMT	Commitment
COLL	Collaboration
COM	Community
CON	Connection
CRE	Culture
DSR	Discretion
ESI	Enlightened Self-Interest

<b>EQU</b>	Equity
<b>EXP</b>	Expectations
<b>INT</b>	Integrate
<b>ISO</b>	Isolation
<b>IVN</b>	Innovation
<b>LGCY</b>	Legacy
<b>MIS</b>	Mission
<b>OPP</b>	Opportunity
<b>OWN</b>	Ownership
<b>PMS</b>	Promise
<b>PPL</b>	Pipeline
<b>PSH</b>	Partnership
<b>TNS</b>	Tensions
<b>TST</b>	Trust

I aligned themes extrapolated from the interviews and documents using constant comparison analysis to identify areas of agreement and divergence (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). Since the cities are demographically similar and the partnerships were developed as a vehicle to create schools, comparison analysis was useful to identifying common practices and motivations. The opportunity to explore their facets simultaneously provided contributions to the conversation regarding how university–school partnerships transform education and communities in small, distressed cities. I mapped Blumer’s stages of development onto each case to analyze the similarities and differences in their processes and trajectories, determining that LEAP intentionally followed Blumer’s path, while UPCS mirrored it but did not align directly with each stage. Table 3.2 shows parallels of chronologies and characteristics that incorporate Blumer’s stages.

**Table 3.2: Blumer Stages of Development Mapped onto LEAP and UPCS Stages**

<b>Blumer Stage of Development</b>	<b>Description of Stage</b>	<b>LEAP Academy Stages</b>	<b>UPCS Stages</b>
<b>Emergence of Problem</b>	A given condition is picked out and identified as a social problem: <b>Chronic underperforming school system</b>	Camden historically has:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a chronic underperforming school system with students failing in almost every educational indicator and dropping out of school;</li> <li>- deteriorated local economy that has not produced jobs or a strong tax base to sustain city government and provide revenue streams</li> </ul>	Worcester/Main South experienced:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- decline of stable employment and the outflow of people</li> <li>- deterioration and absenteeism in property maintenance</li> <li>- arson for profit</li> <li>- abandonment of property</li> <li>- growth of criminal activity in the neighborhoods</li> <li>- 10 percent unemployment</li> </ul>

		<p>to the public-school system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a staggering rate of violence mostly amongst minority residents and youth related to drug trafficking and gang activity;</li> <li>- a physical environment characterized by decaying housing and school buildings, abandoned neighborhoods, a lack of safe public spaces, and environmental hazards in the air, water, and soil</li> </ul>	and high school dropout rate
<b>Legitimation of a Problem</b>	Social problem must acquire social endorsement to be taken seriously and move forward in its career	<p>Rutgers Camden Project LEAP problem was legitimized by strong endorsements from community parents who organized to demand better conditions. Experts such as Dr. Santiago and her early research, the media, state and local government officials (like Governor James Florio and the Camden City Board of Education), the Rutgers University Provost, the Camden community, and the Delaware River Port Authority, who</p>	<p>University Park Partnership emerged out of a planning process with the Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC), gaining support and legitimation from local community leaders</p> <p>Worcester Public School Superintendent James Garvey approached Clark to devise a solution to the persistent dropout rates in the Main South and</p>

		<p>donated \$1.5 million to Dr. Santiago for planning purposes and research of Project LEAP</p> <p>Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Prudential Foundation gave planning money to explore opportunities and invest in training and neighborhood plans to support project LEAP.</p>	<p>adjacent neighborhoods</p> <p>The U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) legitimates problem of disconnect between universities and communities and awards \$2.4 million to develop Clark partnership plan</p>
<b>Mobilization of Action</b>	<p>A series of actions occur, including planning and focus groups, discussions, trainings, advocacy, evaluation, diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals in casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers, and committee hearings</p>	<p>Community rallies and marches and makes demands to the State; Parents for School reform emerges as an organization of parents which organize all over the city and the state. 14 community focus group sessions to assess and mobilize: (1) problems and issues of the community, (2) problems and issues with the school district, (3) strengths and resources, (4) barriers and challenges, (5) an overview of major challenges faces, and (6) recommendations for addressing what was needed. A core</p>	<p>Senior leaders from Clark University and Main South CDC engage community in meetings and planning sessions to identify means to revitalize neighborhood and new school partnership</p>

		<p>group of 40 stakeholders, comprised of Project LEAP staff, Rutgers faculty members, teachers and administrators, and parents, met for 10 full day sessions to develop a strategic action plan, with the first priority of developing a mission statement, statement of beliefs, strategic policies, and goals for a new school</p> <p>Parents as Partners for Educational Change (PAPFEC) Advocacy Council trained parents to advocate to legislators on new charter school legislation</p>	
<b>Formulation of a Plan</b>	Decision of how a society will act with regard to the given problem	<p>LEAP working group developed a guidance system, including (1) a statement of beliefs, a mission statement, and guiding policies and principles, (2) a critical analysis of the internal and external environments that will support the project, (3) the development of long-term goals and short-term objectives, (4) the development of strategies and action plans to achieve these goals and objectives,</p>	<p>Clark leadership identifies Donna Rodrigues, an educator from the Main South neighborhood, to become founding Principal and recruit families for the school</p> <p>Rodrigues develops a high standards curriculum, maximizing the learning time, and building a community of practice amongst</p>

		<p>and (5) an ongoing process for monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>A Strategic Plan is written and incorporates the development of an academic philosophy based on constructivism, and design, leadership and professional development programs, health, College Access, human services components, community outreach programs, and a physical design conducive to teaching and learning for a new urban setting.</p> <p>A legislative bill is introduced for a charter community school in the legislature</p> <p>A feasibility study is done to fundraise for the building of the school and to obtain other funding to implement the Rutgers Centers of Excellence.</p>	<p>teachers and students</p> <p>Rodrigues designs the school to have a small, personalized learning environment; a rigorous, streamlined academic curriculum; and preparation for college and meaningful work, all strategically aligned with university support</p> <p>Classes are added on one after the other to build a culture of mentorship and ownership amongst the students</p> <p>Classes were designed to mirror college courses, where instruction fostered higher-order, demanding thinking skills, like using roundtable discussions and Socratic seminars</p> <p>Literacy and personalized learning are grounded into the academics so that students learn to be critical readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers</p>
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<b>Implementation of a Plan</b>	New lines of action are formed on the part of those involved in the social problem and touched by the plan	<p>New Jersey Charter School Act of 1995 is passed and signed in 1996, allowing 13 new charters throughout the state</p> <p>The LEAP Working Group hires consultants to work with Dr. Santiago to train a team to lead the school, write the school curriculum, and a local architect develops the schematics and finds a location for the school.</p> <p>Rutgers CLC is set up as a structure to provide oversight of the Community schools</p> <p>LEAP Academy opens its doors in 1997 to 325 students in grades K-5, and in 25 years, expands to a district of 2,000 students from infancy to college across five major buildings along Cooper Street</p>	<p>UPCS opens its doors in 1997 with 37 students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, with every succeeding year adding an additional 50 students through 12<sup>th</sup> grade</p> <p>Innovation Schools are introduced and passed in Massachusetts legislature in 2010, granting UPCS new status to remain in-district, but have autonomy in governance, budgeting, personnel, and curriculum</p>
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### Credibility and Generalizability

Each model had disparate circumstances for their development, but the contexts and university-driven directions were similar. The qualitative study of stakeholder interviews created internal biases concerning the quality, character, and success of a



partnership. However, multiple observations of similar qualities and effects yielded validity of interpretations. The themes and structures united these models and amplified the partnerships in the community development framework. The context, leadership decisions, and community engagement offered unique differences in the levers of change that influenced how the schools developed. There are inherent drawbacks of this case selection method, particularly regarding the generalizability of the cases to larger theories. The partnerships followed a pattern of development that combated social inequalities in small, distressed cities. This study generalizes the stages of development and processes employed to build and sustain partnerships for long-term change and effectiveness. Limited cases exist in which university leaders built and developed a school in conjunction with their mission to improve economic conditions. Context and leadership are paramount to a school's development and are challenging to replicate. However, best practices that derive from these experiences are lessons and successes of how university partnerships can be replicated and scaled to similar cities that struggle with the quality of education in their schools.

This study expands the literature by pairing common methods in university–school partnerships to explore new cases. As Flynn et al. (2014) recommend, documented accounts of program models, development of partnerships, and lessons learned regarding implementation of partnerships were useful in the context of these cases. Dr. Santiago (2014) documents her narrative during formation of the school, followed by a case study of the LEAP model. Jennings and Danin's (1998) evaluation of community planning of the LEAP model highlights how the Project LEAP working group broke down social barriers in the community and used an asset-based approach to

design the new school. The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (2006) concluded that LEAP's innovative performance-based compensation system, groundbreaking for charter schools, strengthened professional growth and engaged teachers much more in their evaluations and compensation.

A series of evaluations and non-academic reports about Clark introduce much of the guiding principles and structures. Rodrigues (2003), founding principal of UPCS, chronicles the school's development after she left UPCS in a guiding report for the organization Jobs for the Future. Another education consulting group in Massachusetts, Education Resource Strategies (2008), included UPCS in a case study of leading urban high schools for its core academic principles and growth. However, the current study builds on these initial evaluations and case studies by applying Blumer's sociological framework to document stages of development of the partnerships and engage with stakeholders and primary sources to collect data.

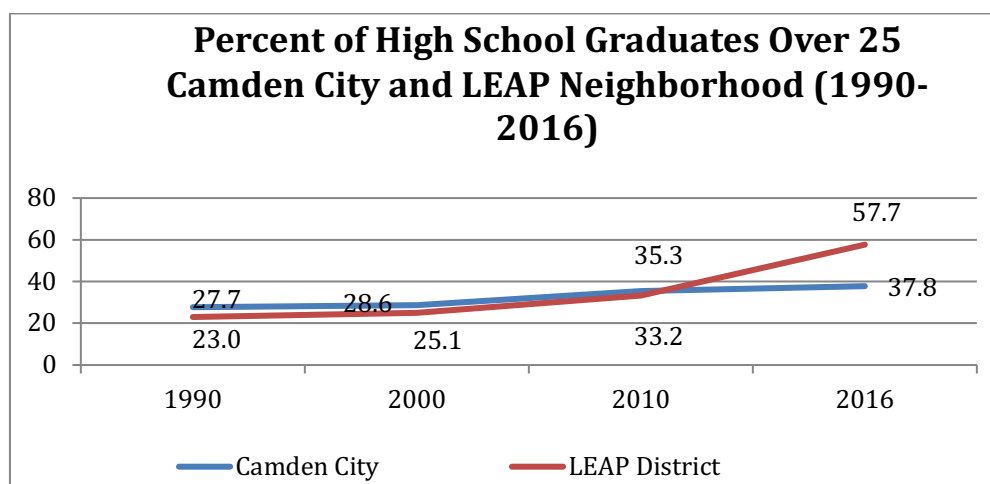
## **Chapter 4. LEAP Academy University School**

In Camden, NJ, LEAP Academy University Charter School redefined the role of the university–charter school partnership in a downtown, distressed urban environment. Created in 1993 by Dr. Santiago, LEAP improved social and economic conditions along Cooper Street, a major Camden thoroughfare, by replacing a downtrodden neighborhood with a flourishing birth-to-college school system with new and repurposed buildings and student and family traffic along a beautified street (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Influenced by Alinsky’s (1989) IAF community organizing strategies, Wilson’s (1996) segregation and power structure theories, and Coleman’s (1988) formulation of human and social capital theories, Dr. Santiago mobilized parents, students, legislators, and university stakeholders to create a new, comprehensive, integrated model of an educational and development pipeline that redirected young people from birth to prison (prevalent in Camden at the time) to a birth-to-college model. LEAP achieved 100% graduation rates for the past 14 years and placed students in prestigious universities throughout the country, including Ivy League schools (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Most students have attended Rutgers University, Rowan University, and Camden County College, given that LEAP has a unique partnership with these three colleges and universities, located along the Cooper Street Educational Corridor. LEAP is a lottery-based enrollment system that draws students from throughout Camden, currently with over 1,500 students enrolled in the K-12 district, over 300 students in the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), an affiliated early learning program overseen by the Rutgers Community Leadership Center that feeds into LEAP, and over 1,000 students on the LEAP wait list.

Since opening in 1997, LEAP has redefined the physical environment and educational landscape along Cooper Street, adjacent to Rutgers University. Over \$300

million in real estate value has been added to the street through the construction, acquisition, and renovation of historic buildings, including renovation of a 12-story Wilson building into the 9–12 grade STEAM campus (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) and preservation of a historic façade of the former Campbell family castle (Campbell Soup Company). Growth of education activities through LEAP, Rutgers, and the satellite campuses of Camden County College and Rowan University have strengthened partnerships and social and intellectual capital to direct and enroll more students into college, particularly using LEAP as a feeder school. Although not perfect causation due to LEAP’s influence, a notable statistic for the neighborhood demonstrates that the percentage of residents with high school diplomas over the age of 25 in neighboring census tracts has grown substantially since LEAP was founded (Figure 4.1), based on economic data of Census Tracts that border the LEAP Academy, from 27.7% to 57.7%.

**Figure 4.1 Percent of High School Graduates—Camden versus LEAP Neighborhood**  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990-2016



Dr. Santiago’s vision was not just to develop a school near a university, but form a community hub and comprehensive model that provided a variety of services inside the

school. Dr. Santiago created a center on campus, then called the Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership (CSUCL) and now called the Community Leadership Center (CLC), to leverage Rutgers' intellectual assets (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2008) and channel university resources, both financial and academic, toward operations and structures of LEAP. The CLC served as an academic center and hub to link faculty and university students in STEM, arts and sciences, law, business, and nursing to mentor and train teachers and students at LEAP, while enhancing their own research and teaching agendas. In return, LEAP students were able to enroll in dual enrollment and now early college courses while in high school, and then enroll as matriculated students into the university, providing a feeder of local Camden students, who are mostly African-American and Latino. Figure 4.2 shows the Rutgers/LEAP pipeline that the CLC oversees.

**Figure 4.2: Rutgers/LEAP Cradle to College Pipeline Framework**

Source: Rutgers–Camden Community Leadership Center, 2017

As part of the CLC, Dr. Santiago formed the university Centers of Excellence to complement the innovative STEM curriculum being implemented, and built an environment conducive to supporting children and families holistically. The centers are a college-access and culture center that begins at birth and ends in college, in which students and parents participate in college-awareness seminars, dual courses and early college with local colleges, a family support center that provides workforce development, a co-op, microenterprise, and career training center for parents, a health and wellness center for families that provides legal and family support services and ESL classes, and a modern STEAM fabrication lab for innovation and entrepreneurial education for children

and families. All aspects are connected to the university. Rutgers School of Nursing assisted during development of the health and wellness center, the School of Law ran legal clinics, biology and chemistry students and faculty built curricula and projects in the fabrication lab, and students and researchers from the Childhood Studies and Psychology Departments observed infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in the Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), the formative center in the birth-to-college pipeline, to study behavior, cognitive development, and socioemotional skills.

The LEAP story is unique because it concerns the formation of a new school and a fundamental policy shift that shaped New Jersey education for 25 years, challenging bureaucracies to provide quality education to poor students statewide. To improve educational conditions in Camden and ground them in a research study, Dr. Santiago led a 60-member LEAP working group, comprised of university faculty and staff, parents, school district teachers and administrators, city government officials, business leaders, the Delaware River Port Authority, and members of the community, particularly churches and neighborhood service organizations. Figure 4.3 shows the web of stakeholders that were interlocked during formation of LEAP and that to this day continue to provide the infrastructure for its operation.

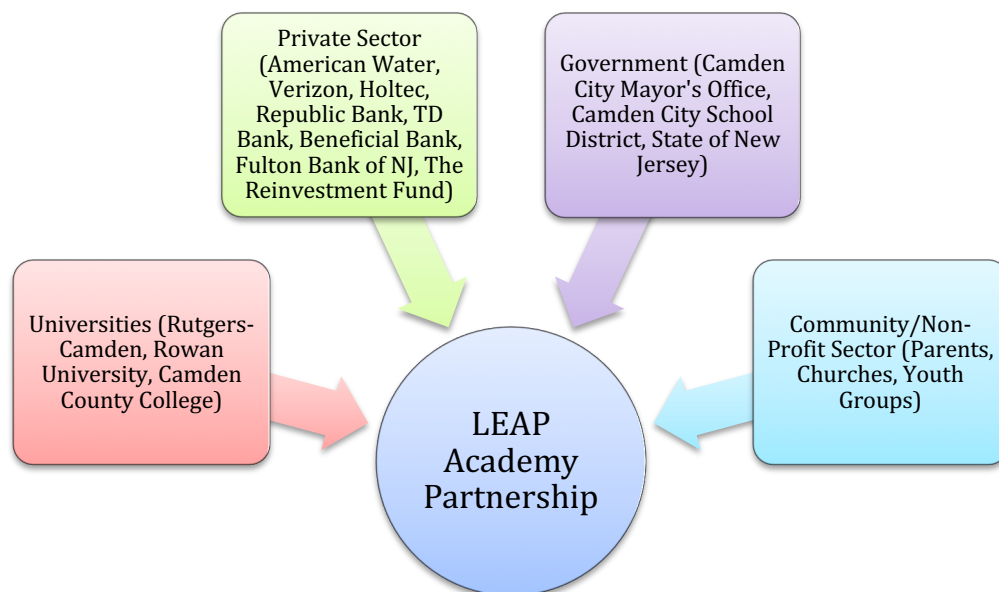
**Figure 4.3 Stakeholder Engagement of LEAP Academy Assets**

Source: Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, 2014

The following figure is a more detailed representation of the partnership assets:

**Figure 4.4 Graphical Display of LEAP Academy Partnership Assets**

Source: Author Illustration



Dr. Santiago was highly influenced by social welfare policies, antipoverty programs, and community schooling models that provide an outlet to transform the education system in Camden (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). She used Blumer's framework to align social policies and theories with a blueprint for solving a social problem. Through focus groups, site visits, and community meetings, the working group followed the stages of development that Blumer charts to follow an incremental process that led to the passage of a charter school law in New Jersey and opened the LEAP Academy. Dr. Santiago explained:

“Blumer, as a sociologist, gave me a framework to look through the lenses of an academic researcher, activist and social justice scholar. It provided a framework to define what a social problem is, and how you take that definition of a social problem to a level of social policy formation, implementation and evaluation” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

Blumer's framework enabled Dr. Santiago to build social meaning around the LEAP project that emphasized a moral prerogative to improve education and health outcomes of children and families in Camden. To comply with Blumer's intention of influencing new public policy, Dr. Santiago knew that the outcome was initially a legislative achievement to change the system, whether a local or state ordinance/law. During research into alternative school models, she learned about the emerging vehicle of charter schools that allows schools to remain public but provide innovations and autonomies outside of the traditional public school system (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). In what follows, I document each component of Blumer's stages of development using interviews, newspaper articles, and other primary documents to demonstrate that the plan for LEAP was strategic and intentional to unite community members to work toward a policy and partnership outcome that would transform education in Camden for the next 20 years. Dr. Santiago initiated dialogue and momentum to convince Rutgers of the engagement.

### **Emergence of the Problem**

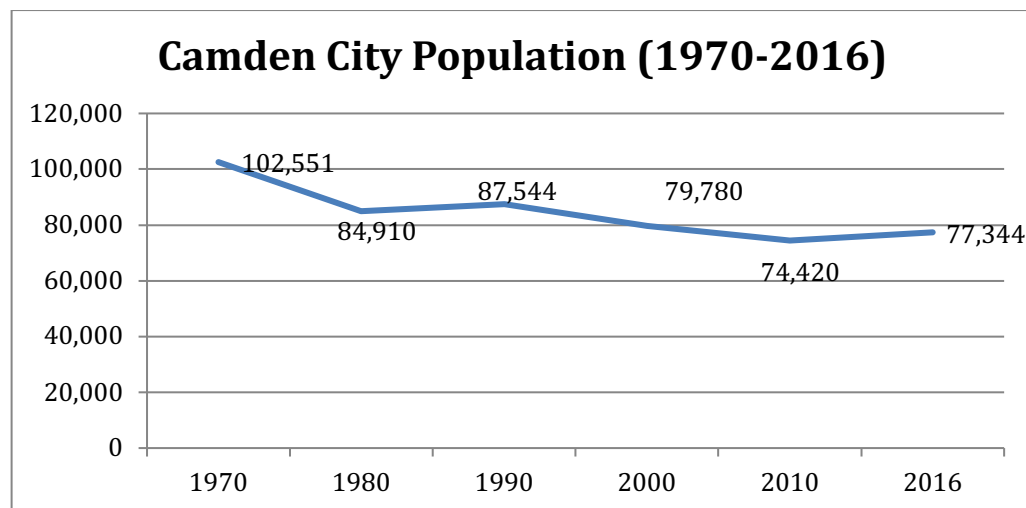
Like many other cities that experienced deindustrialization and white relocation to the suburbs during the second half of the 20th Century, Camden had a troubling history, experiencing economic and social downward spirals between 1955 and the mid-1990s (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Gillette, 2005; Seligsohn and Mazelis, 2014). Camden lost nearly 50,000 residents and tens of thousands of jobs (Seligsohn and Mazelis, 2014). As middle-class whites, industries, and jobs moved to surrounding suburbs, African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites remained behind in a jobless, decaying city without an economic base, turning to public assistance and perpetuating a cycle of poverty (CSUCL, 1995; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). The city's tax base decreased



and government capacity deteriorated (Gillette, 2005). Figure 4.5 shows the decline in population in Camden, as analyzed using census tract data from 1970 to the present. The population began to rebound following losses during the 1980s and 1990s, and again after the economic recession in the late 2000s. In contrast, the Camden City School District population continuously dropped from 18,536 in 1998 to 7,941 in 2018, demonstrating the detrimental effects of population decline of school-age children (Figure 4.6).

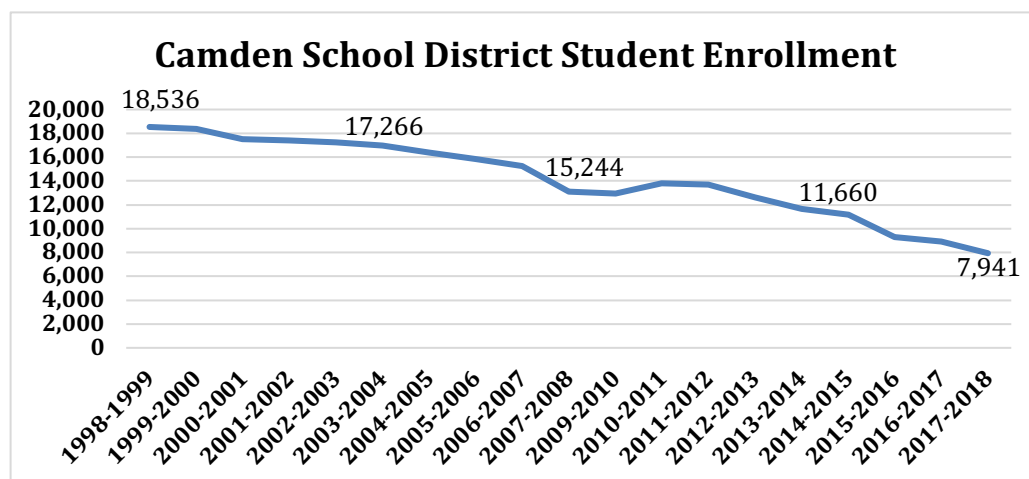
**Figure 4.5 Camden City Population Trends, 1970–2016**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970-2016



**Figure 4.6 Camden School District Population Trends, 1998-2018**

Source: New Jersey Department of Education



Camden is a city in which a university–school partnership works because of its history and sociodemographics of deindustrialization and distress. Dr. Santiago’s social justice motivations and influences to build a school in conjunction with a university are framed by the sociological theories of poverty and isolation. Camden has not had a local economy that produces jobs and a tax base to sustain city government. It has a dysfunctional city government that depends on state aid to provide basic services to its residents, a high rate of violence related to drug trafficking and gang activity, a chronically underperforming school system with students failing nearly every education indicator and dropping out, a physical environment characterized by decaying housing, abandoned neighborhoods, and lack of safe public spaces, and a history of political corruption and dysfunction (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Gillette, 2005; Seligsohn and Mazelis, 2014; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014, pg. 186; Founding Parent Interview, 2017). During the decades following World War II, major industrial companies, such as the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), the New York Shipbuilding Company, and Campbell’s Soup Company, reduced manufacturing operations due to increased competition and cheaper labor and operational costs away from Camden. The growth and marketing of suburbia enticed white, middle-class residents to depart the city, leaving a vacuum and void of revenue and investment in the urban core (Gillette, 2005; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Limited financial and social resources from private and public institutions created a concentration of minority and poor families in the urban center and influenced deterioration of the school system and economic support networks that benefited middle and upper classes that resided in the suburbs.

The emergence of LEAP during the early 1990s came just after the court case *Abbott v. Burke* in 1985, which ruled that New Jersey's method of funding education was unconstitutional because it caused significant expenditure disparities between poor urban and wealthy suburban school districts, and that poorer urban districts were unable to meet the education needs of students (Education Law Center, 2018). The case generated more funding for disadvantaged communities, including Camden, Newark, and Patterson, to strengthen and improve education programs. It signified the imperative mandated in the New Jersey state constitution that the state provide "a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all the children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen years" (State of New Jersey, 2016). New Jersey has the highest school segregation in the country, where underprivileged children and families are concentrated in poverty in urban centers and predominantly white and upper middle-class families go to school in the suburbs (Orfield et. al, 2017). The Abbott case gave hope and opportunity for urban populations to gain economic standing, but the undercurrent of institutional racism and disparities between urban and suburban wealth gaps continued to perpetuate the poverty cycle.

The effects of poverty on children have been detrimental. In 1992, *TIME* Magazine asked who would want to live in Camden, finding that the answer was only people with no other choice, and in Camden, that usually meant children (Fedarko, 1992). The poverty rate was approximately 40% for the past few decades, yet more than half of the population and of those in poverty were children (CSUCL, 1995; Seligsohn and Mazelis, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In 1994, Camden was listed as a Special Needs School District by the New Jersey Department of Education. Emotions among

families toward the school and classroom environment were of angst and a major concern. Gang activities and drug dealing permeated the streets of Camden, leading to incessant crime and behavioral challenges, even inside schools. A founding staff member of LEAP Academy justifies the examples of how detrimental the school setting was:

“The quality of the instruction was poor. A lot of teacher absenteeism, lot of substitutes in schools. Serious behaviors with discipline. A lack of empathy or some kind of apathy from the teachers.”

and further elaborated:

“I knew in my heart that if something was going to change in the city of Camden in terms of their educational system, it had to come from ground up; it had to come from the grass roots” (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017).

A parent whose child started during LEAP’s inaugural year recalls how conditions in Camden were on a self-perpetuating cycle of destruction:

“I just think that the mentality of a lot of people, they downgrade because they see what has happened here. And a lot of the devastation around us, especially back at the time, is self-inflicted. You see some of these towns, and we went through one when I was really young, where we burn our own town. We burn our own stores, we burned... So this is self-inflicted.” (Founding Parent Interview, 2017).

Another parent during LEAP’s inaugural year was dissuaded by the role of public schools in motivating her to succeed in life:

“Public schools are lost. They don’t push our kids, they don’t engage our kids, they don’t...I had a teacher one time that told me...that I would never amount to anything in the public school” (Founding Parent Interview, 2017)

The mindset and narrative had to shift drastically:

“Like no child left behind, they leave our kids behind. There's so much good here that no one sees, or talks about. All you hear is the negative. You never hear about the positive. And it was really needed here” (Founding Parent Interview, 2017).

Another parent remarked that the schools offered non-nutritious food and contained contaminated water with lead (Founding Parent Interview, 2018), conditions that Dr. Santiago reversed with new, clean buildings and a food program now led by an executive chef that serves healthy food options combined with nutrition classes for students and parents. Comments like those above are not generally included in secondary accounts of Camden's history to personalize the struggles and afflictions faced by the parents and families within the public-school system. In the context of university–community relations, the relationship between Rutgers University–Camden and the community was uninviting. Signs posted on campus prohibited outsiders from walking through, and police patrolled the grounds looking for people who should not be there (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). Founding members of LEAP perceived the environment to be unfriendly to minorities since the number of African American and Latino students was low. Professors were unaccommodating; one founding staff member who lived in Camden had to take care of her children as a single mother, which involved constantly seeking alternative childcare options (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). During the early 1970s, Gualberto “Gil” Medina, a Rutgers Law student in Camden, was instrumental in leading student protests and advocating administrators to admit and enroll more Puerto Rican and African American students and faculty, even leading a takeover of the Campus Center until demands were met for increased academic and financial support (Clemens, 2015).

Rutgers and the community recognized the strain and disconnectedness of the university and K–12 education system, particularly regarding academic preparedness for college-level coursework. Dr. Deborah Bowles, a Rutgers–Camden Associate

Chancellor, enrollment management leader, and strong partner of Dr. Santiago during the initiative, recognized the imbalance between the goals of the university and results from the K–12 school district population. She commented:

“A lot of sense of frustration on the part of the schools because they didn’t feel that enough of their students were accepted, were able to go to Rutgers either in Camden or New Brunswick, and frustration on the part of the university that students weren’t being prepared early enough or well enough to gain access to the university. And for many years the community/Rutgers relationship was very strained. A lot of people feeling that Rutgers was in the community but not of the community, and that Rutgers did not understand its obligation to try to bring along more students who could become eligible for admission to Rutgers or other universities” (Bowles, 2018).

Dr. Santiago capitalized on this concern about Rutgers not accepting a large portion of Camden students, given its proximity in the middle of the city. She used her leverage as a faculty member and steward of the community to convince senior Rutgers administrators that LEAP would prepare more students to be accepted into Rutgers. In addition to creating new educational outcomes, including graduating high school and entering college, the motivation for LEAP past and present was to provide a welcoming sense of community to parents and children in the city. Its purpose is to “foster an understanding and acceptance in American leaders of the importance of new organizational environments, strategies and building bridges and partnerships between urban communities and academia for dealing with race relations and urban development” (Frederick, 1995, p. 7). Many policies precluded people from education both in the Camden public school system and at Rutgers. LEAP treated families with pride, dignity, and respect. Five hundred families would be instrumental in shaping LEAP’s structure and governance, and as an education program, to provide a sense of being and belonging that had never existed for minority families in Camden before. A founding parent who

served on the original board and planning group remarked that Dr. Santiago provided parents a voice with a vision for a stronger education platform:

“[She] gave us opportunity to gain knowledge that we wouldn’t have gotten in the Camden city school system...it was an opportunity to get out of poverty and get an education. Opportunity for me to want to be more educated, you know, and to have set higher goals for me and my children. And then while you’re, you know, getting your education and you’re improving your lifestyle, you also give back to the community where you came from and that’s, you know, how I see her” (Founding Parent Interview, 2018).

Education leads to choices and opportunity to families and children, who then have to decide how to harness their knowledge and power to advocate and contribute to society (Founding Parent Interview, 2018; Dunlap, 2018). Parents were trained to be leaders, advocates, organizers, and independent thinkers. Parents have consistently enrolled in personal finance, home ownerships, life skills, and safety classes, served on governing boards and councils, were invited to social and celebratory events at the schools throughout the year, and welcomed direct channels of communication to school administrators.

### Legitimizing the Problem

Following Blumer’s second stage of development, an influential number of public and private stakeholders legitimized the problem by supporting Dr. Santiago and parents to address solutions to the education crisis. At the local level, Dr. Santiago received strong endorsements from the Camden City Board of Education, Rutgers University, the Camden community, the Governor’s Office, foundations, and the Delaware River Port Authority, which donated \$1.5 million to form Project LEAP for the “very valuable civic purpose to which it is intended” (Brown, 1994). Institutional partners throughout Camden, including institutions of higher learning, parents, hospitals, policymakers, and churches, joined the collaboration because they were influenced by the

problem and could unite to solve it (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Influenced by social capital theorists James Coleman, Robert Putnam, and Pierre Bourdieu, Dr. Santiago capitalized on relationships and social capital garnered throughout Camden to unite stakeholders in a shared vision and mission to transform education in the city, increase high school graduation rates, and increase college enrollment of minority students.

Dr. Santiago had to leverage influence and capital at Rutgers to convince university officials and those in New Brunswick's central administration that the LEAP project was critical to the campus and city. As a young and newly tenured professor, Dr. Santiago built a portfolio and strategy to encourage the majority older, White male administrators that LEAP would open doors to accept more minority students from Camden into Rutgers, which was a major concern between the university and community. She found support from Provost Walter Gordon,<sup>1</sup> who believed in her work and the opportunity to build on his legacy of boosting the credibility and inclusion of Rutgers–Camden. According to former Rutgers Vice President for Academic Affairs Joe Seneca, Provost Gordon “envisaged this as also being a vehicle for Rutgers academic initiatives, vis-à-vis education programs for the university as well as the wonderful output that it was able to deliver to the community” (Seneca, 2018). In meetings with senior Rutgers leaders, Dr. Santiago and Provost Gordon characterized the LEAP initiative as:

“the development and operation of a university/community sponsored, multi-service educational institution, located directly within the community, provides unique research and field experience opportunities for university students and faculty alike, which ultimately will lead to an educated, highly trained work force and an increased tax base for the community” (CSUCL, 1995, 1-7).

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<sup>1</sup> The provost was the head of campus, equivalent to the modern role of chancellor



Dr. Seneca emphasized that from a university perspective, “the research mission is the springboard and the catalyst from which all things flow, and that means outstanding, inquiring, excellent research faculty that then go out and do good things, do great things, and have great ideas” (Seneca, 2018). After the strategic plan was adopted in 1995 and with the plan for LEAP formulated, the Rutgers Board of Governors approved LEAP Academy in a formal resolution on October 11, 1996, lauding Dr. Santiago for her leadership and granting autonomy to the operations and implementation of LEAP. A year later and to further legitimize the role and concept of LEAP, Roger Dennis, the subsequent Rutgers–Camden Provost, supported Dr. Santiago’s efforts as an entrepreneurial faculty member, which influenced all disciplines on campus (Dennis, 2017). He saw LEAP as a gateway to high-quality learning on the models of what could work in urban education (Dennis, 2017). Rutgers started to emerge from isolation, and physically and symbolically moved its presence to Cooper Street, the downtown corridor where LEAP operates. When Dennis became Provost in 1997 and after LEAP officially opened, he began reshaping the Rutgers landscape along Cooper Street as part of the campus’s vision for a university district along the street and a strategic plan for expansion (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2008), including moving the provost’s office to a new building on Cooper Street to demonstrate that the highest levels of the campus would be on a more visible and outward-looking street toward the city, rather than insulated on campus. Dennis’s acts represented a new level of engagement with the city that coincided with the partnership with LEAP to transform Cooper Street, revitalize the neighborhood, and welcome Camden families to the Rutgers community.

Among unwavering support from the Rutgers–Camden and New Brunswick leadership, there were still obstacles that had to be overcome, particularly in the shift of the university to be more outward-oriented and engaged in community projects. Some faculty members were unsupportive of the role of universities moving away from strictly teaching and research and felt unfairly treated, while the act of the Rutgers leadership supporting one faculty member's initiative drew scorn and criticism (Dennis, 2017). Leaders in New Brunswick wanted to see concrete budgets and work plans to justify the expenses, time, and effort in channeling resources to the project (Seneca, 2017). Nevertheless, the project was viewed as too important for the image of the campus of being more inclusive and not ignoring the depravation at its doorstep.

At the state level, Dr. Santiago worked with governors, legislators, and government officials to identify venues for long-term funding (CSUCL, 1995). New Jersey education officials, led by Dr. Leo Klagholz, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, and a group of bipartisan New Jersey legislators, including Assemblymen Joe Doria (D) and John Rocco (R), and Senator Jack Ewing (R), were starting to encourage establishment of charter schools as part of education reform (CSUCL, 1995). They legitimized Project LEAP as a model for providing quality education in a decentralized public-school system while maximizing resources through partnerships (CSUCL, 1995; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Simultaneously at the national and federal levels, Project LEAP was being legitimized and designed in the context of national education reform during the 1990s, including the Education Goals 2000 legislation, emphasizing improvement of mathematics and science education and increasing the number of minorities that completed degrees in those fields (CSUCL, 1995), and for provision for states to use

funds for overall school reform to promote public charter schools (Wohlstetter et al., 1995).

### **Mobilization of Action**

Dr. Santiago gained influence among Rutgers–Camden and New Brunswick administrators and mobilized 500 parents to advocate development of a new school while designing a parent-training institute to empower parents to advocate charter school legislation in the state. As part of the mobilization, 14 community focus group sessions were conducted with five groups of stakeholders—teachers, school administrators, school support personnel, parents, and elementary school children (CSCUL, 1995). The purpose of mobilizing the focus groups was to assess problems and issues in the community, problems and issues with the school district, strengths and resources, barriers and challenges, an overview of major challenges, and recommendations for addressing these issues with a new quality of school (CSUCL, 1995). As mobilization continued, a core group of 40 stakeholders, comprised of the Rutgers CSUCL Project LEAP staff, Rutgers faculty members from the Schools of Law, Business, and Arts and Sciences, teachers and administrators, and parents, met for 10 all-day sessions to develop a strategic action plan, with priority on developing a mission statement, a statement of beliefs, strategic policies, and goals (CSUCL, 1995). The process the working group used was participatory and grassroots-oriented, resembling tactics used by Alinsky to train community leaders. A founding staff member for Project LEAP called the working group members “pioneers” who are “brave enough to be able to sustain, coming to the meetings and the focus groups” (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). She elaborated:

“It was very revealing through the focus groups that we did with the students and parents. And the academic group did with the teachers and principals that something needed to change and that the change wasn’t gonna come from the top

down, they had to be more of a grass roots movement, more revolutionary, that the parents have to be really engaged in it. That they really needed and wanted the change” (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017).

By engaging and mobilizing parents and community members, Project LEAP leaders instilled a sense of ownership, trust, and accountability among local stakeholders to build a communal culture. Today, LEAP is grounded in the belief that parents, students, and alumni are the most important groups to ensure the school is sustainable and remains operating. The challenge at this stage was to sell the vision of the school to other members of the community and mobilize parents to believe in the mission and foundation of a new school model. A founding staff member reflected on advocacy actions she and her parents used to build a supportive base for the school:

“I was deeply embedded into the community, going from street to street, house to house, knocking on doors. We kind of probably combed the city letting them know that we were working on a project, we wanted to open a school that would be a different kind of concept where students could actually learn and they could learn in different ways and it would be safe and we were looking into longer hours and longer days. So we were talking to the families about the new concept and inviting them to come out to meetings and inviting them to come out and participate in focus groups and also we were making a list of inquiries of interest and we would take their names, their addresses, their children’s names and grade levels at that time” (Founding Staff Member and Parent, 2017).

Some people were skeptical, thinking that just another school was being developed and that recruiters were part of a political group. Since the group affiliated with Rutgers, families were reluctant to attend meetings on campus and recruiters had to go into the community to talk to people. A founding staff member recalled:

“We would go to the neighborhood, we went to the streets, we went into the supermarkets, churches, we went to the WIC offices... We went every place and everywhere that we could drop off information that we could talk to people that we could give them a pamphlet or something” (Founding Staff Member, 2017).

Other school administrators began to take notice of the recruitment and blocked the group's ability to organize and hold meetings at their schools. The group could no longer go to parent-teacher conferences or be outside school buildings trying to give out information (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). The resistance increased when school officials learned of the activities going on, but the working group persisted and eventually morphed into a parent institution and state movement for parents to be trained to advocate better schools for urban kids through legislature concerning passage of a charter school law. The Parents as Partners for Educational Change (PAPFEC) Advocacy Council formed when the Project LEAP working group recognized the potential, knowledge, and skill sets parents could use to create change. It was a major shift in how parents were treated in the city, particularly regarding education. The school system tended to inform parents of how the schools were, and how they should follow orders and not ask questions (Founding Staff Member Interview, 2017). Parents were conditioned to not participate in decision-making. Through the training program, parents were given learning assessments and the Parenting Stress Index to reflect on their own abilities and capacities as individuals. Seminars provided parents with new knowledge, new approaches, techniques, and competencies concerning children's ways of learning, their development, and the education system (Bonilla-Santiago, 1995). Empowerment through this type of program elevated parents' roles as actors and drivers in the community to enact change.

As parents became stronger at communicating their vision for a new school, Dr. Santiago capitalized on their strength as a constituent group to lobby legislators. As the charter school legislation began to be taken seriously in the New Jersey legislature, Dr.

Santiago bussed parents to meetings and hearings where they would “pack the hearing rooms and fill the galleries in the legislative chambers. They would walk the hallways to promote their cause. They were enthusiastic and inquisitive and had all the time in the world. And their presence alone proved effective in moving the legislation to enactment” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014, pg 141). State associate Melanie Schulz reflected on how the parents “evolved like butterflies” through this advocacy (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014, pg. 141; Schulz, 2017):

“Gloria gave [parents] an understanding of the nuance of meetings, the importance of how they should present themselves in a professional manner, the way they should look, and the way they should express their opinions. She gave them the experience of participating, made them proud of who they were, and gave them confidence. All of it changed the dynamics of shaping charter legislation, made a huge impression on legislators, and made the parents valuable participants in the process. That what she gave to them” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014, pg. 141).

Parents are at the core of LEAP Academy. As a community development initiative, the school not only provided a new education model for the city and instilled greater academic rigor in students, it empowered parents to take hold of their own destinies, build new paths, and open new doors for themselves. Dr. Santiago intentionally organized parents in peaceful and civilly obedient ways to teach them how to advocate and create structures to help students study. She explained:

“So, we went from advocacy to really how to conduct homework sessions at home, how to present testimony and how to communicate to the legislature, how to position yourself as a good advocate, and how to use peaceful means for getting people to respect you” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

The LEAP school changed the social and inter-relational dynamic of how parents were treated; they were now respected and treated with dignity in an environment that disempowered them. Parents became an important constituent and voting bloc for the

politicians controlling education funding. If parents could be empowered, they could speak at legislative sessions and have a seat at the table. Parent engagement also plays a role in shaping school culture and climate and influences accountability, transparency, and academic performance.

### **Formulation of the Plan**

The Project LEAP strategic plan and Melaville's five-stage process created a blueprint for planning and advocacy of charter school legislation (Appendix D). Using strategic planning theories from Adams (1991), Tanner (1991), Cook (1992), and O'Brien (1991), the working group recognized that strategic planning reflected an interactive, interpretive, and influential process from stakeholders. The group adapted Melaville et al.'s (1993) five-stage process for change and building a new system: (1) getting together, (2) building trust, (3) developing a strategic plan, (4) taking action, and (5) going to scale, and then embedded Cook's (1992) planning approach into strategic planning, which included five steps: (1) development of a guidance system, including a statement of beliefs, mission statement, and guiding policies and principles, (2) critical analysis of internal and external environments that would support the project, (3) development of long-term goals and short-term objectives, (4) development of strategies and action plans to achieve these goals and objectives, and (5) monitoring and evaluating achievements (CSUCL, 1995). These steps created an approach that made discussions, directions, and decisions focused and tangible. Implementation of these planning concepts strengthened the reality of the outcome of developing a charter school that would serve the interests of the community profoundly and in a targeted way.

Cook (1993) suggests that a guidance system comprises a mission statement, statement of beliefs, strategic planning principles, focus areas, and goals and objectives.

The working group developed a mission statement to reflect its belief that LEAP must adopt a holistic approach to education:

“The mission of Project LEAP is to enhance opportunities for the children and families of Camden through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of education, health, and human service programs and through community development” (CSUCL, 1995).

The statement of beliefs consisted of ten statements that emphasized the focus of education environments that met the needs of students and families, in which community organizations, families, and education systems collaborated to achieve excellent academic outcomes. The first statement read:

“We believe that children are our future and that all children can learn. Therefore, educational programs must encompass alternative learning strategies that are academically challenging and maintain high standards and expectations” (CSUCL, 1995).

Four principles of LEAP derived from the statement of beliefs:

1. All children will be ready to succeed in school.
2. All children will receive a high quality education and have access to a variety of school linked human services that meet the needs of the whole family.
3. All residents will have access to an integrated health and human services system.
4. All residents will be empowered to achieve self-sufficiency and maximize their potential. (CSUCL, 1995)

These principles established the core foundation of Project LEAP’s approach, goals, and objectives. Six areas of the school were identified as goals and objectives of the plan: (1) planning and implementation, (2) curriculum and instruction, (3) human services, (4) leadership and professional development, (5) community outreach, and (6)



physical design (CSUCL, 1995). Cook (1993) emphasizes these objectives as “what the organization must achieve if it is to accomplish its mission and be true to its beliefs. Such objectives are the transformation of the mission into results” (CSUCL, 1995, 2-10).

During the final stage of development, the working group identified core functions of how the school would operate in the education system. The first approach proposed would be through shared governance between the working group and Camden Board of Education, which builds on existing working relationships between the two institutions and provides an established legal framework and source of fiscal support for operations (CSUCL, 1995). However, parents resisted the arrangement because the school district had failed them and they had lost faith in the traditional system. The working group was committed to the parent group that worked hard to create a different and innovative model. The working group opted for an independent structure and governance model, positioning LEAP to not have any oversight by the Camden Board of Education. The working group advocated for passage of the first charter law in New Jersey that gave parents their first charter school in Camden in 1997. As a charter, governors report directly to the State Commissioner of Education in partnership with Rutgers University, a process that allows greater creativity, independence, and decentralization regarding hiring, firing, and use of instructional staff's time, and flexibility with curricula, scheduling, and procurement (CSUCL, 1995).

LEAP's development also experienced challenges. The working group recognized that the nascent movement of charter schools would serve as a school vehicle for establishing a new school structure. From the beginning, charter schools were perceived as a competitive drain on financial resources that hindered a partnership with

the Camden Board of Education (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Rutgers administrators were resistant because the group focused on conducting research and planning to build schools (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Competition over resources and core philosophies concerning education and civic engagement also caused resistance and obstacles for sustaining alliances (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Nevertheless, the LEAP working group, led by Dr. Santiago, strengthened alliances with stakeholders and maintained focus and determination to implement the LEAP enterprise.

After two years of focus groups and working sessions with parents and members of the community, the strategic plan, *Camden Counts: A Strategic Plan for the Project LEAP Academy*, was adopted in January 1995. While the plan was being adopted, Dr. Santiago enlisted two state Republican legislators—Assemblyman John A. Rocco from Camden County and Senator John H. Ewing from Somerset County—to introduce the charter school bill as Education Committee Chairmen (Goodnough, 1995; Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Both legislators and Democratic Assemblyman Joseph Doria were proponents of education reform and were educated on the merits of charter schools. Ewing convinced Governor Christine Todd Whitman to consider the charter school legislation during her first year as governor to enact a bold education agenda (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). Dr. Santiago emphasized to legislators that the charter school program would be a pilot program for 5 years, the initial length of the charter contract, to see if it would work governmentally and academically (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). A pilot program assuaged the apprehension of legislators to consider a more lenient timeframe.

When the bill was introduced during Spring 1995 as the Charter School Program Act of 1995, Dr. Santiago mobilized parents on buses to speak directly with legislators on the merits of Project LEAP and charter schools. In March 1995, she testified to the Senate Education Committee, emphasizing the provisions of autonomy from state and local bureaucracies and the flexibility on staffing, curricula, scheduling, and procurement (Bonilla-Santiago, 1995). She told legislators that charters would still be receiving state funding through local districts, but districts would become decentralized and restructured to allow families the right to new, quality schools (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

The bill had support in the state legislature from both parties, but the New Jersey Education Association, a powerful teaching union in the state, voiced opposition and skepticism on the bill's passage over concern of decreased control regarding salary negotiations, teachers' certification standards, and teachers' workload with an enhanced schedule (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014). A compromise was negotiated in which charter schools could employ only certified teachers, teachers could still be represented by the union, and teachers would have a choice to remain at the charter school or return to a larger public school once the 3-year charter contract expired, but each school would set its own teachers' salaries and were not required to grant tenure (Goodnough, 1995; Martello, 1995). Once this opposition was overcome, Senator Ewing was ready to push the bill through the legislature before the end of the session in early January (Martello, 1995). On January 4, 1996, the Assembly passed the legislation with a 66-8 vote (O'Neill, 1996). On January 12, Governor Whitman, flanked by a dozen school children, signed the legislation, making New Jersey the 20th state to allow teachers, community

groups, and corporations to start alternative public schools using tax dollars (Leusner, 1996). The legislation cited charters schools as:

“offer[ing] the potential to improve pupil learning; increase[ing] for students and parents the educational choices available when selecting the learning environment which they feel may be the most appropriate; encourag[ing] the use of different and innovative learning methods; establish a new form of accountability for schools; requiring] the measurement of learning outcomes; mak[ing] the school the unit for educational improvement; and establish[ing] new professional opportunities for teachers” (State of New Jersey, 2011).

The law allowed any interested district to turn one of its public schools into a charter school, which are limited to 500 students each in up to 135 charters statewide, with each county guaranteed a minimum of three charters (Ott, 1997). By June, the state education commissioner opened the application process, which received applications from groups in Jersey City, New Brunswick, and LEAP Academy in Camden (Leusner, 1996). Seventeen charters were awarded in January 1997, which prompted the Prudential Foundation to lend \$10 million to charter schools to cover startup operation costs since the state government delayed initial funding (Leusner, 1996; Chiles, 1997). Dr. Santiago elicited corporate sponsors, including AT&T, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, PSE&G (an energy company), Ford Foundation, and Mott Foundation, to match funds and fill the funding gap as LEAP prepared to begin operations (Leusner, 1996).

LEAP had to institute a lottery to select students randomly because it had only 324 seats available in its new school but already over 340 applications (Ott, 1997). The school began operations on September 15, 1997. Dr. Santiago rented 19 portable trailers to house the first groups of students before a property at Cooper and Linden Streets would be available for the first school building (Fitzgerald, 1997). As the first day neared, students, teachers, and parents were excited to enter the new school. Virginia

Castro, a municipal court employee and single mother, “let go of her worries and [fell] headlong into hope,” guiding her 10-year-old son, Israel, into the school building, where he was brightened by the computers and science classes waiting for him (Rhor, 1997). Another parent said that the school “is a breakthrough and the answer to my prayers” (Lucas, 1997, pg. 1A). With a fresh start at a new curriculum, teacher Kelli Marsh “want[s] to let these kids know they can do and be anything they want to be” (Lucas, 1997, pg. 1A). The positive experiences of parents and children when entering the new school in Camden altered education dramatically, which has continued for 20 years.

The initial rollout of LEAP and charters was challenging. During the first few months, teachers were becoming exhausted with the larger workload and schedules, and the student body was beginning to grow out of the cramped trailer space as it waited for its new building (Rhor, 1997). The culture of academic excellence had to sink in since students were unaccustomed to the grinding work and extended day. In an article, Dr. Santiago said that LEAP is “fighting against an old paradigm, against a community that feels hopeless” (Rhor, 1997). A reenergized spirit in the school, providing a new mindset of how schools can function differently, demonstrated core beliefs in the power of charter schools that Dr. Santiago and parents fought hard to institutionalize.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

LEAP Academy’s major components included a comprehensive, integrated model for development of an academic philosophy, program and design, leadership and professional development, college access, health and human services, parent affairs, early learning center, and law clinic, and a physical design conducive to teaching and learning that was clean, safe, open, colorful, and calming. Figure 4.6 shows the symbiotic

relationship between the structures of accountability among students, teachers, stakeholders, and organizational factors that guide LEAP's decision-making.

**Figure 4.7: Rutgers/LEAP Model**

Source: Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, 2014

LEAP was initially designed for a pre-K–8 school with curricula focusing on science, math, and technology, following national education goals (CSUCL, 1995). The original schools were designed with 20 students per class and 60 per grade level. As the school grew and as part of a pipeline, the grade levels became 120 while maintaining the 20-student maximum class size. The working group identified three ideas that guided its process: (1) curriculum development, (2) school structure and environment, and (3) time and space use (CSUCL, 1995). Pedagogy would emphasize learning as an emergent process rooted in meaningful experiences and purposes of the urban learner, in which active learners would construct knowledge rather than receive a prescribed curriculum

passively (CSUCL, 1995). A longer academic year of 200 versus the traditional 180 days and a longer day (8:30am to 4:30pm) emphasized more constructive learning hours for students to stay at school rather than home or on the streets. These curriculum components charted an innovative course of teaching and learning for an urban school that moved away from traditional models and structures of rote academics and toward project-based and applied learning in STEAM fields, while empowering teachers with stronger pay-for-performance metrics.

Once the first cohort of 8th-grade students approached the end of middle school in 2001, LEAP administrators added high school grades 9–12 to build a full pipeline to college. The Center for College Access was established for staff to work directly with students on preparing college applications and taking required standardized tests such as the SATs and ACTs. A continuation of alliances that guided LEAP's success is that students can take dual enrollment courses at Rutgers–Camden, Rowan University, Cabrini University, and Camden County College to earn college credits. Rowan University, based in Glassboro, NJ, and Camden County College, based in Blackwood, NJ, have satellite facilities on Cooper Street adjacent to LEAP's five buildings. Cabrini University (formerly Cabrini College) in Radnor, PA teaches dual enrollment classes at LEAP due to the president's commitment to supporting Camden students' learning. In addition to Stockton University in Atlantic City, these universities all have representation on the LEAP Board of Trustees, which signifies the strength of building partnerships with other universities to support a college-access culture. During the past few years, LEAP created a Parent Training Institute for parents to learn life skills and earn a certificate for credit toward their Bachelor of Arts degree at Rowan University, since Rowan offers

credit programs for parents while Rutgers does not. Rowan University has dual courses and supports the parent university along with STEM courses for students in collaboration with the Engineering School. Each year, most students in the graduating class attend one of these three universities (including Rutgers–New Brunswick and Rutgers–Newark).

During the two years, LEAP initiated an Early College Program, in which the entire senior class is taking college-level courses at Rutgers–Camden and Rowan University in anthropology, Latin American studies, African-American history, finance and investments, social entrepreneurship, marketing, math, and English composition. Students can earn up to 30 college credits, which will save them time and money when they enter university. The senior class participates in the program and all students in the first year passed their classes. The college-access program is the backbone of the relationship between Rutgers and LEAP Academy. The university–school relationship extends beyond just having university faculty and students engage with the school and community. Senior leaders, especially deans, admissions, registrars, student services, and financial aid administrators, must support LEAP’s mission of students earning college credit and experiencing college to prepare them for the rigors and social context of college. Many LEAP students are first-generation college students, so they have not been exposed to the social and academic environment and expectations of college. Khary Golden, LEAP Director of Early College, expressed that in the LEAP model:

“Students and families don’t necessarily have a choice about whether or not they are engaged in higher education. We meet them where they are, and students are provided opportunities where they can learn about the avenues and pathways into higher education before they even become graduating seniors in high school or actual college standards” (Golden, 2018).



Golden is instrumental to developing relationships and building trust with Rutgers faculty and administrators to demonstrate that LEAP students will add value to the university. He has nurtured partnerships with the admissions and registrar's offices to ensure that LEAP students are considered fairly when beginning dual enrollment or early college programs. Scott Owens, Rutgers–Camden Director of Alumni Relations and former Admissions Administrator, commented that the success of the relationship requires a:

“core foundation of understanding and buy-in from not only the LEAP administration but the academic leadership at Rutgers University, as well as the admissions side of things, because with all three working together, then I think that's the only way it would succeed” (Owens, 2018).

He and Dr. Bowles, a former enrollment management official, reflected on the power of trust between Rutgers and LEAP; LEAP was doing the best thing for students and Rutgers must adapt its mindset and administrative structures to accommodate the needs of students (Bowles, 2018; Owens, 2018). Dr. Bowles shared that she and Wanda Garcia, Associate Director of the Rutgers–Camden Community Leadership Center, would have to fight other Rutgers administrators to prove that LEAP students belonged and could succeed, changing the mindset that African-American and Latino students can excel. All interactions and internal battles were hard fought for the benefit of students, demonstrating that the relationships between administrators, acting as institutional brokers, drove the actions and outcomes of ensuring that students were accepted at the university. Dr. Santiago and various Rutgers–Camden provosts built political and institutional capital to bring resources, success, and credibility to the project, but other LEAP and Rutgers administrators must continue to buy in to the partnership and enact policies and administrative strategies in good faith that will drive outcomes forward.

Even today, the university has had to address growing inequalities in enrolling minority students and the struggle of financing a college education, currently implementing its Bridging the Gap program, which provides financial assistance to balance financial aid and tuition.

In addition to college access emphasis and core components, a Professional Development and Leadership Training Center, led by the Rutgers Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership (CSUCL), complemented core elements of the student teaching and learning model. The intent of the professional development school model is to increase parity between local school and college participants, encouraging local schools to take increased responsibility for teacher education and colleges to be involved more closely with school improvement (CSUCL, 1995). Professional development programs would link between LEAP and other schools in Camden through principal seminars, mentor teacher study dialogues, and collaborative research in classrooms (CSUCL, 1995). The essence of these programs instilled the value and partnership with Rutgers that LEAP could serve as a research site for new methods in urban teaching and learning, combining best practices and research-based approaches to improve the quality of Camden schools.

As focus groups and needs assessments concluded, the quality of learning was tied to the health and wellness of students and families. Education, health, and human service needs required a multifaceted, collaborative, long-term solution to problems of children and families (CSUCL, 1995). Four themes were identified to build a strong health and wellness program, which included design of an on-site clinic staffed by the Rutgers–Camden Nursing School and continual workshops on nutrition and healthy

habits: (1) starting children at an early age with healthy lifestyles, (2) building on human strengths to increase the capacity of families and residents in the community, (3) avoiding fragmented service delivery by containing all health and human services in one centralized school location, and (4) celebrating and embracing diversity to respect and understand disparate cultural values (CSUCL, 1995). In addition to the health programs, legal and business clinics were established in partnership with the Rutgers–Camden Law and Business Schools to help families navigate administrative components of their lives and work, including an immigration law clinic and family and domestic law services. A holistic approach to educating students and families in Camden integrated Rutgers services into the school model so students and families could use the services at one time and location, saving costs that deplete valuable resources. The inclusiveness of the school beyond the curriculum practically and symbolically identifies previously marginalized people with dignity and respect.

The location and physical design of the school are just as critical as the social and learning components to elevating the meaning of fairness and inclusion. As traditional schools deteriorate and become unkempt, the message communicated to students is that their school buildings are not prioritized to be maintained as clean and safe spaces for learning. The Project LEAP group was cognizant of this perception and sought to build a state-of-the-art facility from the ground up (CSUCL, 1995). During the past 20 years, LEAP transformed Cooper Street in downtown Camden into one of the most affluent and healthy places in Camden, with six buildings that were renovated and repurposed, or constructed using various innovative and creative financing approaches, including using Rutgers’s AAA credit rating and economic incentives to finance construction and

redevelopment of the facilities. Dr. Santiago preserved four buildings' exterior façades, such as castle-like features of the Hamilton family mansion (the founders of Campbell's Soup Company) and total renovation of the 1930s 12-story Wilson office building.

Meaning associated with the physical design of spaces reflects a need to share stories of the past but shape stories of the future. Access to communal spaces outside and inside, including courtyards, gardens, lobbies, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and classrooms, provides access and a constant flow of people among students, parents, other business leaders, and university officials to share in events, celebrations, and learning experiences. Murals, public art, and greenery along Cooper Street beautify the landscape and provide outlets for artistic expression. Physical space is symbolic of providing opportunity for gathering in public forums that bridge cultural and class divides, breaking down isolations and lifting up hope and prosperity for neighborhood residents. LEAP's governance model resembles collaborations and partnerships that sustain college-access and community-driven foundations. The Board of Trustees comprises senior representatives from each institution of higher learning in Camden, Rutgers University, Rowan University, and Camden County College, members of the business community from Verizon, American Water, and ABCO Federal Credit Union, parents, and alumni. Dr. Santiago expressed that her dream is to have LEAP alumni comprise the entire Board of Trustees from all sectors in the future.

Another component of how LEAP has sustained for 25 years is the institutionalization of cultural rituals and symbols that instill a powerful feeling of solidarity and meaning for children and families, as evidenced by student portraits, college pennants and banners that promote excellence, and annual achievement

ceremonies in academics, sports, and teaching. Dr. Santiago emphasized that the community and social justice philosophy is institutionalized “by building solidarity, by educating every person that comes into the LEAP Academy about who we are and what we are, by creating new conditions every day to sustain our philosophy of excellence” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). “One of the biggest values at LEAP is love, that people needed to respect and love one another. And loving the children was critical. Creating new conditions where children could be loved, cared for, and treated well, including parents, is critical for the LEAP enterprise” (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017).

Twice a year, students from K–12 are recognized for high academic achievement through the Rutgers Alfredo Santiago Scholar Society, named for Dr. Santiago’s late husband, Alfredo. As K–12 students, scholars are inducted into the society and given certificates and patches to sew onto their uniforms to wear and promote proudly. Students who graduate with a GPA of at least a 3.5 and attend Rutgers qualify for a scholarship from an endowment established as part of Alfredo’s legacy, which Dr. Santiago used as a driver to ensure that LEAP students can attend Rutgers with limited financial burden, given high costs of college tuition and living and book expenses. The endowment has reached \$3 million, financed over 150 students’ education, and garnered major corporate sponsors and support for over 20 years.

## Conclusion

LEAP Academy contributed to accelerating high school graduation rates and enrolling students in college, with its 100% annual graduation and college placement rates for 14 years since the inaugural class in 2005. It provided jobs to Camden residents through food services, maintenance, custodial work, and even teachers living in the city. Despite uneven economic growth throughout Camden, LEAP remains one of the top

schools and true to its social justice mission of access, equity, and education success for children and families. Dr. Santiago and other Rutgers and LEAP leaders carried the core philosophy of partnership and mission to daily operations. Dr. Santiago's tenacity is not just sustaining LEAP, but changing education policy in Camden and New Jersey, and creating new paradigms for underserved communities using good public schools and universities as anchors and vehicles of community and economic development.

Over time, Dr. Santiago and LEAP leaders recognized the limitations of their model and adjusted accordingly. Contracting with outside services for health and wellness and counseling for students was too fragmented and unstable, so LEAP obtained a license to operate its own health clinic, staffed by a pediatrician and nurses under LEAP's management. The arrangement garnered a greater ability to attend to students timely, and to link health outcomes more closely with academic ones so students are more attentive in class. Financially, LEAP continues to struggle with public funding for both early childhood programs and physical development of buildings (a provision of the charter school law to not provide building support). The Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) has been supported financially by a grant from the Morgan Family Foundation and through preschool subsidies from the Camden Board of Education. The buildings have been creatively financed through municipal bonds and economic development credits through New Jersey, but no public education dollars are provided for charter schools.

LEAP demonstrated to be an ever-evolving organism in which Dr. Santiago and leadership teams have always implemented new ideas and identified new methods of achieving them. The vision to create, fund, and manage a true birth-to-college pipeline is

clear and present—the methods, the people, and the political support continually shift and pose new challenges to implement it. In a different context and unlike LEAP Academy University School, the University Park Campus School (UPCS) emerged as a presidential-led initiative grounded in a larger community and economic development project—the University Park Partnership. UPCS retained its size, structure, and character throughout its life, which offers a unique contrast to LEAP’s growth and expansion. I trace the emergence and implementation of the plan for UPCS, demonstrating that a traditional public-school partnership, rather than a charter school, kept the school smaller in scope and limited the inputs of a community development and pipeline model.

## Chapter 5. University Park Campus School

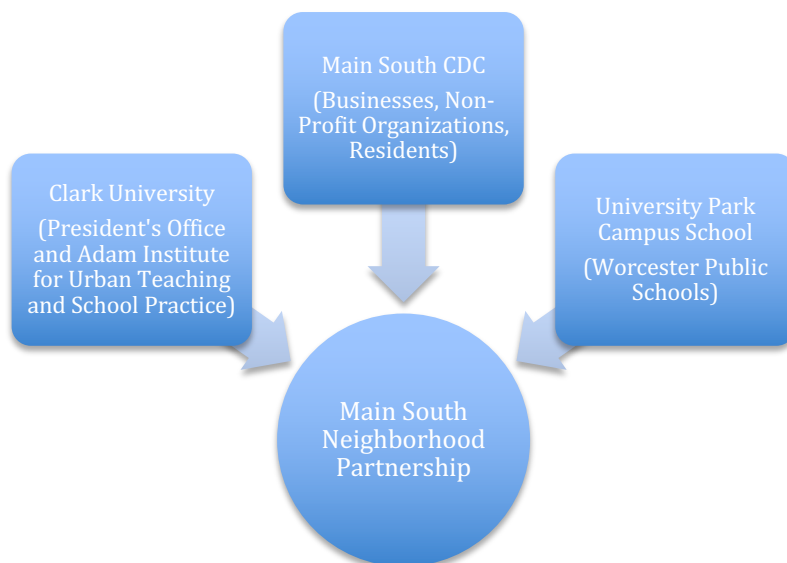
Embedded in a larger economic and community development plan called the University Park Partnership, the University Park Campus School (UPCS) serves as the direct education path among Clark University, the Main South community, and the public-school system. Stakeholders and interview subjects shared common perceptions and insights into how leaders united community members to believe in a vision of transforming a neighborhood using a university partnership. During the early 1990s, Richard Traina envisioned a new model of university engagement that would empower families and students to overcome decades of disinvestment and plight in the neighborhood. The school is unique, with its small size and quaint facilities, located in a 1870s redbrick building a few blocks from Clark's main campus. It has 254 students, with an average 42 students per grade in grades 7–12 (St. Louis, 2017). In 1997, it began operations with just 37 seventh graders. Each year thereafter, it added an additional class, graduating its first class in 2003, in which every student graduated and went on to college. Since then, each graduating class has attained a near-100% graduation rate, with students attending top-tier, 4-year universities, including Brown University, Emory University, Georgetown University, the University of Massachusetts, and Clark University. One benefit of the relationship between Clark and UPCS is that students from the neighborhood who attend Clark receive a full-tuition scholarship. In 1996, a year before the school opened, the Stoddard Charitable Trust of Worcester donated \$1 million to Clark and the University Park Partnership. The grant became a part of a permanent endowment supporting "Clark's commitment to offer eligible University Park residents full-tuition scholarships to Clark" (Nangle, 1996, pg. A1).



Interviewees reflected on the commitment, promise, and enlightened self-interest that defined the intentions, goals, and aspirations of Clark University directing a revitalization of the Main South neighborhood for residents. Traina (Hoffmann, 2011) and his staff led strategic planning, with multiple components to change the social and physical landscapes of the neighborhood to retain residents, attract new ones, and change the perception that Clark University was a partner, not an adversary, in the community. It began changing education in the community fundamentally not only by offering free tuition to neighborhood residents, but influencing a new school model and introducing innovation schools into the Massachusetts education system. The steering committee identified a founding principal in Donna Rodrigues, a public-school educator who lived in the Main South neighborhood and went door-to-door to recruit families to the school and charted the curriculum and educational culture and environment that captured the school's philosophy. Figure 5.1 shows the structures involved in the Main South Partnership, which balance alignment among Clark, the Main South CDC, and UPCS.

**Figure 5.1 Graphical Display of Main South Partnership Assets**

Source: Author Illustration



This case study documents the emergence of UPCS and its influence in passing legislation in Massachusetts for a new school model. Clark leaders did not intentionally follow Blumer’s framework, but followed a similar trajectory of (1) a strategy plan for the neighborhood, (2) partnering with a corporation to build community development and agency, (4) designing a new school to improve educational conditions in the neighborhood, (5) recruiting families to implement the new school model, and (6) building a college access culture with Clark to adapt new practices for being college-ready. I overlay Blumer’s framework to document how it applies to development of a university–school partnership with a college access pipeline.

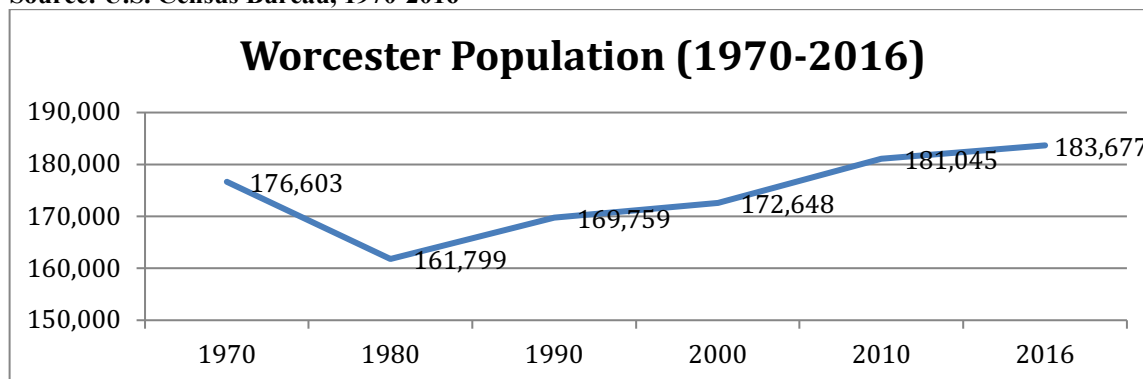
### **Worcester Economic and Social Conditions**

Worcester, MA, known as the Heart of the Commonwealth (Morrill and Morrill, 2014), was a national leader in diversity manufacturing throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The city became known as the largest inland manufacturing city in the United States, with major companies American Steel and Wire and Norton’s, an abrasives manufacturer, experiencing rapid growth (Morrill and Morrill, 2014).

Worcester's industrial growth and attraction of the city's many colleges and arts institutions increased the population, particularly students. According to Foley (2017), "There was just a real manufacturing base, and people could afford to own their home or take care of their families. If they were under-educated, newly immigrant, they could still afford to take care of their family because the job paid pretty well." However, during the latter half of the 20th Century and following the trajectory of major industrial centers, manufacturing dwindled and economic opportunities faltered. The growth of unions during the 1970s cheapened labor and forced companies to move south, and the rise of suburbia caused middle and upper-middle class families to move out of the city. Worcester's population decreased by 11% from 1950 to 2010, from 203,486 to 181,045 (Carroll, 2011), but has been rising steadily since a major downturn from 1970 to 1980 (Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Worcester Population from 1970–2016**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970-2016

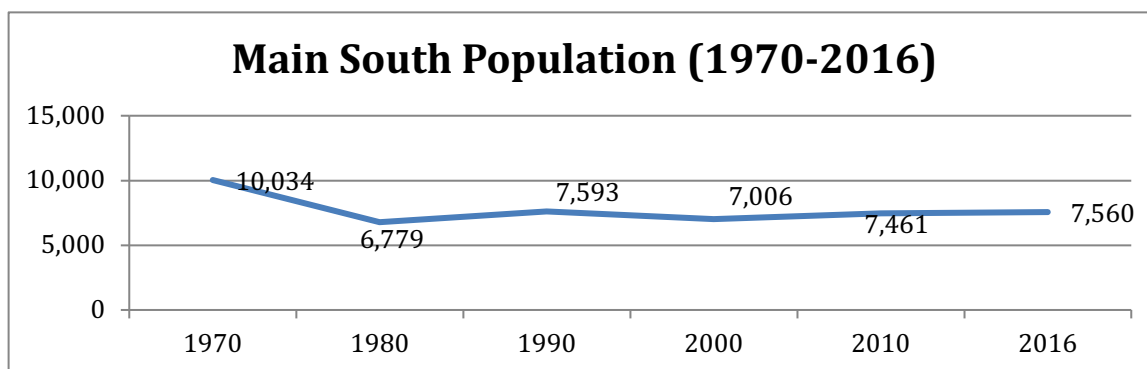


During the mid-1980s, Worcester's social and economic decline lessened the attractiveness of Clark University and its surrounding Main South neighborhood. With the decline of stable employment and an outflow of people to the suburbs, Main South experienced deterioration and absenteeism in property maintenance. According to Foley (2017), "We started to experience the kind of arson, abandonment of property, arson for

profit, the growth of criminal activity in the neighborhoods that you typically see when people are abandoning neighborhoods.” Figure 5.3 shows a decline in Main South’s population from 1970 to 1980, but a slight increase from 1980 to present.

**Figure 5.3 Main South Neighborhood Population, 1970-2016**

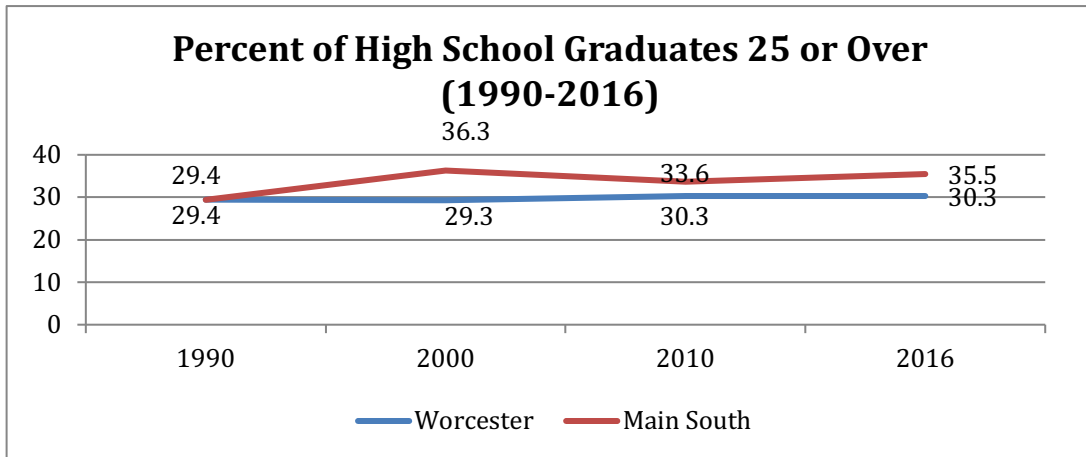
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970-2016



At the time of UPCS’s emergence, the neighborhood’s median income was \$21,702, in comparison to a city median of \$35,623, 10% of Main South residents were unemployed, in comparison to a city rate of 6%, 28% of students lived in households headed by single mothers, and 65% did not speak English at home (Rodrigues, 2003). The dropout rate in Worcester in 1994 was 8.8%, above the state’s rate of 3.7% (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1998). The commonwealth did not track graduation rates until 2006, nine years after UPCS had been in operation. People 25 years and older with a high school diploma increased gradually in Main South, in comparison to overall trends in Worcester (Figure 5.4), and Worcester School District enrollment has declined significantly between 2002 and 2008 (when figures were available), but increased to original levels at about 25,000 (Figure 5.5)

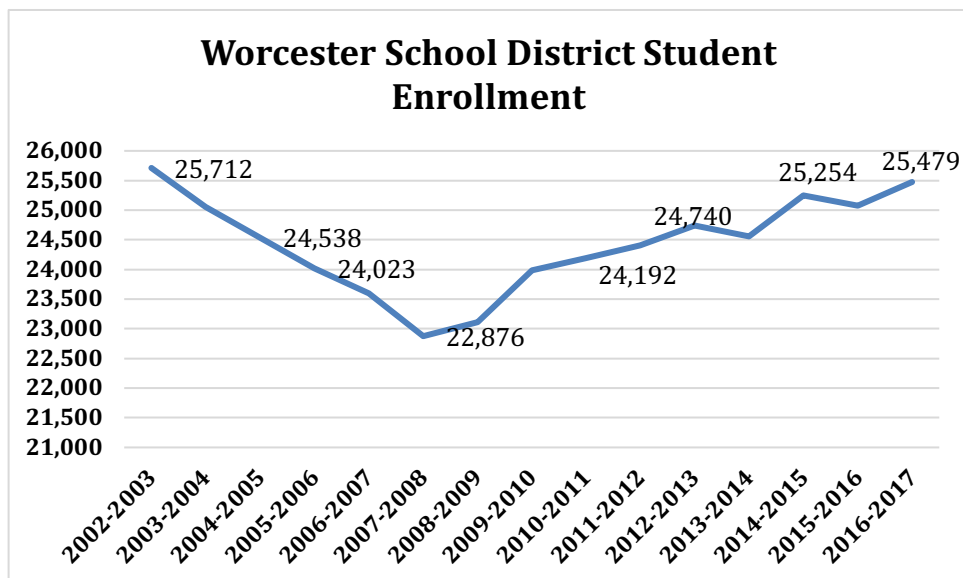
**Figure 5.4 Percent of High School Graduates 25 and Over, 1990–2016**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990-2016



**Figure 5.5 Worcester School District Enrollment, 2002-2017**

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education



Clark University's presence did not improve the economic situation in Main South during the mid-20th century. During the 1950s and 1960s, Clark had a small campus that attracted mostly commuter students, but it started to purchase property, tear it down, and build residential dormitories. The expansion started to "encroach on the neighborhood" (Foley, 2017), which drove people away and created town-gown tensions because the university was not acting as a respectful neighbor. Noise and activity from students living in the neighborhood heightened the tension. Students and faculty were both transient populations that destabilized housing and prevented real investment in property (Erresy, 2017; Hall, 2017).

Traina, who served as president from 1984 to 2000, recognized the tenuous situation in the Main South neighborhood, knowing that Clark, for its survival, had to be a greater part of the community and see how it could partner to solve many issues (Foley, 2017). He saw the challenges other urban higher education institutions experienced, such as University of Chicago, Yale, and University of Pennsylvania, in becoming islands

surrounded by blighted neighborhoods. As a defense and to prevent Clark from moving, Traina wanted to attract students and faculty to the area to forestall some of the blight (Foley, 2017). Traina brought his background and spirit to the project, which trickled to all stakeholders. He grew up poor in San Francisco, but someone saw a spark in him at an early age and encouraged him to go to a private school in San Francisco (Foley, 2017). During a UPCS graduation speech, he said:

“Many years ago there was a poor, Italian kid. Half Sicilian, half Swedish, who lived in the slums of San Francisco. And San Francisco University had a campus school, and somebody thought that I was good and smart enough to go to that school. And that school changed my life, and I always wanted to be able to give other kids the same experience, and we’ve done it today” (Caradonio, 2017).

Traina saw himself in the kids in the Main South neighborhood and confided in their success and opportunity. His embodiment of this ideal that all children could succeed permeated the pride of the university and its faculty and student body (Hall, 2017), translating to a powerful concept that many interviewees recited—“enlightened self-interest” (Caradonio, 2017; Erresy, 2017; Foley, 2017; Hall, 2017). Improving the neighborhood is in the self-interest of Clark to have a more attractive setting, but by having an enlightened component that focuses on residents’ empowerment and education, Clark portrays a value of moral certitude, in which it is committed to the success of the community. Tom Del Prete, Director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice at Clark, stated:

“There was a good combination of things that worked: the university’s interest in the neighborhood, the realization that education could be one of the keys to stabilizing the neighborhood, by creating really terrific opportunities for kids, and a superintendent that was interested in that as well and saw the partnership predisposition of the university, as something to take advantage of” (Del Prete, 2017).

Del Prete's comments resonate with the literature that schools are drivers of community development initiatives that empower students and families to remain committed to the transformation of their neighborhoods.

### **Partnership Development in Main South**

Mechanisms for instilling commitment to the community and legitimizing the problem and vision were to establish a defined partnership with the neighborhood that channeled measures of accountability. The University Park Partnership emerged from planning with the Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC), which represented voices in the community. With funding from Seedco, a HUD-funded community development organization, to develop urban institutional partnerships, Clark established the CDC in 1986 to refurbish housing and regenerate small businesses along the Main Street corridor. Clark and its neighborhood partners designed a board of directors so Clark would not dominate decision-making. Clark was allotted one seat, St. Peter's Parish one seat, and the remainder comprised community stakeholders who live or work in the neighborhood, including former principal of UPCS Ricci Hall. When Foley (2017) describes the impetus for the CDC, he explains its driving and core value to be successful: "It has to be a neighborhood-based decision-making process with a strategic vision shared and developed by the community, and everyone is held accountable to achieve that vision." For six years, the CDC focused on stabilizing the neighborhood with affordable, high-quality housing and developing commerce along Main Street. As it made noticeable improvements, Clark recognized the opportunity for an enhanced strategic plan with the community.

Around the same time in 1993, newly named Worcester Public School Superintendent James Garvey approached Clark to devise a solution to persistent dropout



rates in the Main South and adjacent neighborhoods. During a wave of education reforms in Massachusetts during the 1990s that brought accountability and other mandates to schools, there was an infusion of funding to urban school districts based on a lawsuit threat regarding inequality in schools between wealthy suburb and inner-city schools (Foley, 2017). Worcester benefited from this situation and received about \$14 million each year to build its programs. With significant funding, Superintendent Garvey enlisted Traina to set a framework for a partnership school with the university. Garvey wanted to be innovative and creative in driving and attracting families to stay in the neighborhood. By 1995, Clark and the CDC had been convening meetings in the neighborhood to identify a vision and core elements of a strategic plan for strengthening the University Park Neighborhood Restoration Partnership. Although the plan is a joint framework, Clark still acts as overall facilitator and expresses intentions to be inclusive.

The plan's opening preface states:

“Clark’s interest in assembling this partnership is rooted in its beliefs and tradition of involving learning and teaching with solutions to real world problems. It is also, without apology, rooted in the strong belief that the university cannot survive and prosper without an environment conducive to teaching and learning.” (Clark University, 1995)

This statement exemplifies the enlightened self-interest that Traina and others attribute to Clark’s demeanor and heightened awareness of its role in the community.

The plan’s statement of vision legitimizes neighborhood problems by emphasizing that through the partnership, community residents, leaders, and stakeholders would collaborate to solve the challenges:

“If we can give those families who have made our neighborhood their home encouragement to stay, and build the base with committed families and individuals willing to be participants in the rejuvenation of our neighborhood, we can rebuild a strong community. This effort can only be successful if there is a

real partnership effort by all participants, particularly the Main South Community Development Corporation, the city of Worcester, the public schools, Massachusetts Electric, state and federal agencies, the banking community, national and local foundations, and Clark.” (Clark University, 1995)

Clark places itself last in the partnership and places the onus on the CDC and other public institutions. However, Clark still drove much of the partnership development, given its status and availability of financial and social resources. The plan encompassed five areas of improvement to the neighborhood: (1) physical rehabilitation, including property acquisition and homeowner assistance, (2) public safety, involving the police and public works departments, (3) education, declaring tuition benefits at Clark and devising a public school, (4) economic development, focusing on employment and banking resources, and (5) social/recreational, sharing Clark facilities and green spaces with the community. Since this study focuses on education and development of UPCS, the plan cites the priority of developing a public education charter school with Clark University and the Worcester Public Schools. Foley (2017) explains that at the time, the term *charter* did not carry as much weight as it does today and was much more definitional. Leaders determined that it would remain a neighborhood public school.

The plan recognizes:

“The secondary school level has been the area where parents have been less enthusiastic about Worcester’s public education and where students ‘at risk’ have traditionally fallen behind and left school. The Worcester Public Schools and Clark University will create a small, neighborhood-based secondary school (grades 7–12) that will place students in a rigorous academic curriculum dedicated to preparing students for higher education. This school will incorporate new ways of teaching and learning, low teacher/pupil ratios, one-on-one tutorial and mentoring programs, after-school and summer academic and recreational programs, parental and community involvement, and professional development for the faculty.” (Clark University, 2005)

The vision was that if the neighborhood was to be revitalized and become a genuine community, young people had to have hope, and providing the best education with initiatives from the school system and Clark University had to be part of the plan (Rodrigues, 2003). A third force was introduction of community development grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of University Partnerships. The partnership plan had just been devised, so Foley and Steve Teasdale, Executive Director of the Main South CDC, submitted a proposal for the Joint Community Development Program (JCD) to produce large-scale community development programs in partnership with neighborhoods and localities. Clark was one of five schools awarded \$2.4 million to develop its plan, which encompassed the same components of the partnership plan. The proposal requested that for UPCS's development, ground-level funding would provide initial planning and oversight, and curriculum and professional development, during the critical first years of the project (Foley, 1996); \$130,000 would be allocated to the first two years (one year for planning and the other for the first year of the school) and \$30,000 would be for the third year for educational supplies and technology (Foley, 1996).

Major funding set Clark on its path to implementing its vision of transforming the Main South neighborhood. A Steering Committee between Clark and the Worcester Public Schools was formed, with each institution having four seats. This new partnership emerged between the university and the public-school system, which Foley (2017) describes as "two unlikely partners." The committee formed some of the foundational elements of the school, such as allowing Worcester Public School administrators to manage it and pay the typical per-pupil allocation, and Clark would use grant funds to

augment public funding for professional development and planning. Once the overarching structure was established, the committee needed to hire a founding principal who could use the initial planning year to design curricula and a daily school structure, and recruit families. After interviewing five candidates, the committee hired Donna Rodrigues, a Worcester public school educator and resident of Main South, who would lay cultural foundations and mobilize her community to begin the new school.

### **Recruiting Families and Mobilizing the Community**

Hiring Rodrigues was the best decision of the Steering Committee regarding carrying out the school's vision; the "stars were aligned" (Caradonio, 2017). Rodrigues was a 30-year teacher in Worcester and had just completed a Master's in Education from Harvard when she saw the job description and applied. She lived in the Main South neighborhood, which was advantageous to building rapport with families. Her husband, Marco Rodrigues, Worcester Public Schools Chief Academic Officer, remarked at Rodrigues's ability to "be able to relate to the neighborhood and then whatever what you say goes, because you live around, you know the circumstances, you know who the families are" (Rodrigues and Rodrigues, 2017). Ricci Hall, former Principal at UPCS, recalled the Steering Committee's goal of hiring Rodrigues:

"Let's create this school and let's find a transformative leader who knows the work of educating kids and particularly knows the work of educating kids in this part of the world, and then get out of her way. We're gonna be here for advice and counsel. And we're gonna be here at least initially to some degree with some financial support." (Hall, 2017)

Parents were instrumental to buying-in to and developing the goals and mission of the school. Since an autonomous board does not privately govern UPCS, parents are not involved directly in the governance structure of the school, but they serve on the board of the Main South CDC and connect with UPCS staff to refer parents to housing and

financial resources. The school is mission-driven to build a strong school community based on shared purpose (Rodrigues, 2003). Students, parents, school staff, and university partners developed the central mission:

“to produce students who become confident in their ability to tackle new learning situations, who grow in an appreciation of community, who come to understand that desire beats adversity, and who learn to realize that people working together with a common cause can indeed make promises come true” (Rodrigues, 2003, 18).

Rodrigues walked door-to-door (Rodrigues and Rodrigues, 2017) to recruit the initial 37 families the school was accepting for the first year in 7th grade. Parents were skeptical about the college-oriented vision of the school because college was still six years away from their child’s first year. Rodrigues (2017) said that the challenge of speaking to parents was to break a shared sentiment that too much work would be detrimental to their children. Rodrigues had to convince parents that it was not about working hard but gaining access to things and catch up to a position at which students could be successful in high school (Rodrigues, 2017). On receiving notice that their child would be attending UPCS, parents were surprised and ecstatic, stating, “It’s too good for me. I’ve never been picked for anything good,” and “It’s not every day you get offered something like this” (McDonald, 1997).

Rodrigues changed the mindset and provided hope and opportunity to a community that could not envision a new education path for its children. Within the Main South neighborhood, residents were very pleased with the result of a new school and did not show any resistance. However, as word spread of the school’s enrollment and success, those living outside the neighborhood became envious. Teachers in other

schools expressed deep concerns about the attention UPCS was receiving and its ability to function as a small school with Clark's backing. According to Marco Rodrigues:

"No one would talk about it internally. We would get all kinds of notoriety from the state, from country-wide. [In] Worcester, that school that is better than everybody else's school then. People distanced themselves from it. It was a very different perspective once the school became what it became after the first year" (Rodrigues, 2017).

To overcome these tensions, Donna Rodrigues had to explain the new culture at UPCS to a wider audience and demonstrate why this new partnership and school model was critical to supporting and building the skills of the Main South residents. Parents became an important ally and were equally valued in succeeding at their own education. At the school, parents participate in English and computer classes. One parent remarked at the opportunity to take her GED classes because she stopped going to school at 16 (Holmstrom, 1997). An inclusive, welcoming environment for parents demonstrates the school's intentions of being a neighborhood hub of activity and a safe place for families to engage with each other and teachers. Lynnell Reed, UPCS guidance counselor and parent of UPCS students, observed:

"We have so many families from so many countries and so many different backgrounds where going into a school is sometimes an adversarial position, sometimes you feel uncomfortable coming in and asking because you just don't do that in some settings. And to know that it's welcome and a comfortable place and a safe place, has been very important, and I know that's out there coming in." (Reed, 2017)

Building trust with parents has been essential to ensuring that students focus on their academics and remain disciplined in their behaviors and programs. Parents were initially resistant to the behavioral issues administrators would address with them regarding their children (Erresy, 2017). Once students received bi-weekly progress reports, families could monitor their progress and know that the school was improving

teaching and learning. In conjunction with Clark professors and the community, Rodrigues designed a new school tailored to students' needs. Since the school started graduating 7th and 8th graders who began in 1997, 95% of the school's graduates have been going to college (Steiny, 2012). When the first class graduated in 2003 and students enrolled in top-tier schools such as Brown University and Georgetown University, UPCS received national attention and was lauded for its promises to the students and leaders' beliefs that students can succeed. UPCS's model was examined by Paul Reville, a Harvard professor who became Secretary of Education in Massachusetts, and who developed legislation in 2010 that would adopt innovation schools as a new type of autonomous school in Massachusetts. Under the auspices of a leadership committee of school and Clark administrators, UPCS formulated its own plan to become an innovation school, an authorization status that lasts five years and that UPCS achieved twice since the law was passed.

## **Developing and Implementing the Plan of UPCS**

### **UPCS Structural Components for Teaching and Learning**

To implement the mission, Rodrigues and school leaders would have to decide how the academic program would accomplish the goal of college success for students who enter the school with weak academic preparation and limited English proficiency (Rodrigues, 2003). The school would offer a small, personalized learning environment, a rigorous, streamlined academic curriculum, and preparation for college and meaningful work, all strategically aligned with university support (Rodrigues, 2003). Planners were cognizant of building a legacy culture that permeated from the first cohort and on to subsequent class years. Clark's symbiotic role in placing Master's students in UPCS for

training and teaching jobs, and UPCS teachers teaching in the Master's program, contributes to the continuity of culture and leadership that aided the stability of UPCS's performance and success.

### **Building a Collaborative Culture**

Collaboration among administrators, teachers, students, and parents internally at UPCS and between UPCS and Clark influenced a philosophical framework for how UPCS would operate. Symbiotic relationships (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1983) between stakeholders produced a culture of community in the school with the mission that every student would succeed and meet the challenges of a rigorous, honors-level curriculum. Students even interviewed prospective teachers to reinforce a culture of mutual respect and accountability among students and faculty (Rodrigues, 2003). Rodrigues was deliberate in starting UPCS in 7th grade and then adding one class in each subsequent year to build an identity and culture in the school. The first class is referred to as the legacy class because it set the tone for each new one. The cohort of 37 students mentored and guided the next class, which in turn led the class after that, and so on. A culture was established that students have collective responsibility to ensure that each other succeed academically. Former Principal Ricci Hall observed:

“Upperclassmen and legacy class members become ultimately the keepers of the flame and the mentors who instruct those who are coming behind them...you get this sense amongst the students eventually that we have a legacy to keep up with. That this is something special, that the people who preceded us founded this for us, and we have an obligation to keep it going.” (Hall, 2017)

Marco Rodrigues, Chief Academic Officer of Worcester Public Schools, said:



“They are the owners of how they set the tone moving forward for the incoming seventh graders and then incoming seventh and eighth graders. It becomes that well established routine of certain things...it gives you the credibility that you need year after year to create something solid.” (Rodrigues and Rodrigues, 2017)

A three-week August Academy for incoming 7th graders eases transition from elementary to high school (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006; Shields et al, 2008). The program acclimates students to the culture and prepares them for the rigors of the curriculum prior to the first day of school. A culture of success and mentorship is also instilled in the teachers, who are given essential professional development opportunities to excel. Although it acts like a lab school, Ricci Hall (2017), former UPCS Principal and Clark student, states that UPCS was not set up to be a rotating lab for student teachers from Clark. Instead, it would be a conduit for Clark to train and place teachers to be stewards of the partnership with UPCS as a vehicle to improve the educational circumstances and outcomes of children and families in the neighborhood.

Tom Del Prete, Director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice and previous Director of the Hiatt Center for Urban Education, led the collaboration between Clark’s teaching program and UPCS’s teacher development. His colleagues in education “commit[ed] to the formation of a school, trying out what we all felt is something that we would all want to see in education, and have the chance to do it” (Del Prete, 2017). During the planning year, a faculty group convened to identify channels for infusing arts, sciences, literacy, and numeracy development (Del Prete, 2017). Curriculum development was important to the school’s operations, but Del Prete’s mindset was much more open-ended to establish a culture of collaboration and inquiry. Del Prete could maintain a continuous cycle of collaborative learning, where Master’s students from Clark were hired at UPCS, including eventual Principal Ricci

Hall, and Del Prete and professors from Clark could learn from the teachers in professional development sessions and even by having UPCS teachers return to Clark as professors. The learning culture of constant reflection and “student-centered collaborative decision making” among the teachers permeates to students, who are positioned to learn to be thinkers, readers, writers, and problem-solvers (Del Prete, 2017). Learning is a continuous, collaborative process that leads to achievement.

### **Academic Program**

The core of the academic program was centered on a high-standards curriculum, maximizing learning time and building a community of practice among teachers and students. Rodrigues spent the planning year conceptualizing these elements based on her experiences as a public-school teacher, education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and resident in the Main South neighborhood, knowing what students needed to succeed. The curriculum mirrored high expectations embedded in the school’s mission and culture that every child succeeds and goes to college. All 7th-grade students, regardless of background, took the same classes on entering the school. In 9th grade, all students took honors classes in English, math, history, science, and foreign language (Rodrigues, 2003). There were few academic choices, with no opting out and no avenue of retreat for students from a demanding, college-preparatory curriculum (Rodrigues, 2003). Classes were designed to mirror college courses, in which instruction fostered higher-order, demanding thinking skills, such as using roundtable discussions and Socratic seminars (Rodrigues, 2003). Literacy and personalized learning are grounded in academics so that students learn to be critical readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers (Shields et al., 2008). Even in science and math courses, students write creative stories

and letters to fellow students about scientific and mathematical concepts so that they express and learn the concepts.

A focus on core instruction and literacy is reflective of the high standards UPCS places on state assessments and benchmarks to track student progress. Teachers use data from state tests to identify interventions for student struggles and new teaching tools to enhance proficiency and performance in individual students (Rodrigues, 2003). Constant analysis influences the success of students on MCAS exams. Rodrigues was cognizant of maximizing the learning time students and teachers had each day. Traditional 45-minute blocks of time in public schools were increased to 60- and 90-minute blocks to provide more productive, uninterrupted, intellectually tranquil chunks of time for learning (Rodrigues, 2003). A homework center provided students extra help before and after school, and partnerships with local organizations provided students opportunities in arts, athletics, and music. Rodrigues instilled an 8-hour school day that lasted five years, when in 2002, district budget cuts prompted UPCS to cut the day to six and a half hours (Rodrigues, 2003). Teachers benefited from common planning times, conferences, and inter-disciplinary lessons, in addition to extensive professional development and free classes offered at Clark.

Collaborations among students, parents, and teachers permeated the academic program regarding how lessons were taught. A peer learning culture was established in which group work and collaborative learning approaches were implemented. Students were responsible for teaching a lesson to model the importance of students learning from one another (Rodrigues, 2003). Parents and teachers help each other through ongoing dialogues and conversations to address learning and behavioral issues (Jaeger, 2003).

Monthly parent meetings allow for consistent feedback between school leaders and parents. A positive, supportive peer culture among traditionally low-performing students, particularly African-American and Latino students, creates an environment in which students hold each other accountable and successes and failures are celebrated collectively.

After the initial planning year, during which Rodrigues designed and conceptualized the school in consultation with the Steering Committee, UPCS began operations in 1997 with the first legacy class of 37 students. Data for students' abilities on entering in comparison to their improvements three years later were positive. As 7th graders, 44% of students read at a 3rd-grade level and 56% read at a 4th-grade level. By the time they were in 10th grade, 100% of the students passed both the English and math tests on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exams. UPCS was ranked 34th in the state for achievement on exams (Rodrigues, 2003). Every student in the first class graduated in 2003, with a zero dropout rate and average attendance of 97% (including a teacher average attendance rate of 99%) (Rodrigues, 2003).

In addition to the rigorous curriculum Rodrigues established in the school plan, students became much more engrained in Clark's culture. Students were called Little Clarkies for being accepted onto Clark's campus (Jaeger, 2003). UPCS students were given Clark IDs to access the library, gym, and dining halls, in addition to the dual enrollment classes they could take for free. Ricci Hall, former UPCS Principal, recalls that Clark established the notion that the campus would be a welcoming space for students. As university students studied alongside UPCS students, their perceptions of the neighborhood and its inhabitants changed. When students are "part of the space,

feeling like [they] belong at a place like that, [it] breaks down the walls that for first generation college-goers who are challenged economically, those walls are tremendously high” (Hall, 2017). As Rodrigues stated, being part of Clark on day one set the expectation and mindset that UPCS students are immediately part of a college-going culture and that college is attainable.

### UPCS and Innovation School Development

Although UPCS and Clark did not follow Blumer’s course toward a policy outcome, UPCS serves as a model school for the state government to institute innovation schools—a new category of in-district public schools that create autonomy. Paul Reville, Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former Secretary of Education for Massachusetts, was not involved in the founding of UPCS, but as an education entrepreneur used it as an example of a high-performing school to garner attention and influence in the passage of *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010*, which established innovation schools in the Commonwealth. According to Reville:

“UPCS was an example of the school system that in a very unusual way had created an internally more autonomous school and developed it in a very thoughtful, deliberate way with an outside partner and had achieved extraordinary results” (Reville, 2017).

In Fall 2003 and as Executive Director of the Center for Education Research and Policy at MassINC, Reville supervised publication of *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts*,” which ranked UPCS as the top-performing school among schools with a poverty rate of more than 50% and a minority population of approximately 50% (UPCS had 70% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch and the demographics met the criteria) (Minkoff, 2003). Small learning

communities, high standards and expectations, a culture of personalization, and data-driven curricula were indicators that researchers identified as successful attributes of UPCS. As a Harvard faculty member and having grown up in Worcester, Reville visited UPCS and brought students to observe and experience the UPCS model. Once Reville became Secretary of Education under the administration of Governor Deval Patrick in 2006, he became a champion of institutionalizing innovative schools through legislation.

UPCS administrators attest that Reville modeled the concept of innovation schools after UPCS, but Reville ascribed UPCS as an example for creating more autonomous schools in a school system (Hall, 2017; UPCS, 2017; Del Prete, 2017; Reville, 2017). Ricci Hall, former UPCS Principal, remarked, “You could codify some of the de facto sorts of innovative and special practices that UPCS enjoyed in a piece of legislation” (Hall, 2017). Legislation “comes mostly from [Reville’s] experience with how UPCS operated in a way that was almost an in-district charter school sort of feel to it, or that at least districts could grant some autonomies to schools within their system that are not typically granted to others” (Hall, 2017).

*An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* passed in 2010, providing educators with new rules and tools, including the power to intervene in turnaround schools, open new high-performing charter schools in the lowest-performing districts, and innovate through in-district charter schools designed to create renewed sense of urgency concerning the need to close persistent achievement gaps by expanding proven strategies for reform (Pauley, 2011). Innovation schools have increased autonomy and flexibility in one or more of the following areas: (1) curricula, (2) budgets, (3) school schedules and

calendars, (4) staffing policies and procedures, (5) school district policies and procedures, and (6) professional development (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2010).

Innovation schools represent a compromise between traditional public schools and proliferating charter schools implemented in Massachusetts as part of the Education Reform Act of 1993 (Reville, 2017). Mainstream constituencies deemed charter schools unpopular, yet innovation schools find a balance by structuring schools with autonomous governance and curriculum elements, and are overseen by a larger public-school system (Reville, 2017). Massachusetts developed a new mechanism to address desires to be autonomous and innovative, without curtailing oversight of the public-school system.

Once the legislation passed, UPCS weighed each element and decided to pursue autonomies in curriculum and staffing policies. Principal Daniel St. Louis echoes Hall regarding how innovation schools capitalize on autonomous governance:

“You got to create a plan, line out these autonomies that you’re asking for, have a faculty vote, have the support of your school committee, superintendent and union...So the autonomies that we asked for were really just codified versions of the things we’d been doing for a long time, which Paul Reville knew.” (St. Louis, 2017)

An applicant group comprised of UPCS and Clark administrators and faculty, and members of the UPCS Parent Council and community, met regularly to discuss ideas and collaborate in writing an Innovation School Plan (UPCS, 2011). In a plan submitted prior to the 2011–2012 school year, administrators cited the pride of individualized instruction that steers UPCS so well, and proposed teachers not follow the prescribed city curriculum, select their own textbooks, and dedicate less time to standardized testing, in addition to targeted professional development and flexibility to work with English-language learners and special education students (UPCS, 2011). Teaching vacancies

were rare because of the school's small size, but administrators wanted more leverage and control over hiring decisions and not be subject to union seniority (UPCS PowerPoint, 2017). The plan called for establishment of a hiring committee, comprised of teachers, parents, students, and administrators, to develop rapport and relationships with a candidate and determine whether her/his teaching philosophy fit with the school's mission (UPCS, 2011).

After submission and acceptance of the plan, UPCS became one of the first four innovation schools in Worcester and continues to operate as one. Over the four years since the initial year of the status, English and language-arts proficiency increased from 87% to 92%, and math proficiency from 79% to 84%, both attributed to the innovative hiring practice of identifying the right teachers for open positions (UPCS PowerPoint, 2017). Even before the innovation school status, during the mid-2000s, UPCS had high proficiency in math and English at 89% (Jobs for the Future, 2013). Teachers become more motivated and engaged across all disciplines when they take on their own initiatives in the curriculum and during scheduling (UPCS PowerPoint, 2017).

## Conclusion

Clark administrators and faculty were not directly involved in the passage of the innovation school legislation, but they attribute its model to UPCS and the structure they created. Tom Del Prete, Director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice at Clark, stated, "Without UPCS, the Innovation School movement might not have happened or the opportunity might not have been built into that legislation. UPCS has made a contribution in that way...it's made a direct contribution to other schools" (Del Prete, 2017). Clark University leaders, especially President Traina, did not use a social policy framework when designing and implementing UPCS, but they internalized



and projected social justice consciously to improve economic conditions and education in the Main South neighborhood, which empowered and revitalized the community. Founding Principal Rodrigues and senior university administrators and faculty committed themselves during nascent stages, and remain influential today. The school is embedded in the Clark identity and ethos, with much of the synergy and symbiosis essential for sustainability of a university–school partnership.

## **Chapter 6. Research Findings and Best Practices as Assets for Sustaining a University-School Partnership**

Both UPCS and LEAP Academy share many similarities and approaches in their philosophies to plan for their schools, rooted in a community-development and college-access framework. Clark University and Rutgers–Camden senior administrators supported the goals and endeavors of Traina and Dr. Santiago to implement their vision for change. The entire focus on changing conditions for the betterment of students and families in their neighborhoods guided their strategic plans and adaptations of new school models. Yet their stories have major differences, particularly in how UPCS emerged from a top-down presidential initiative and LEAP emerged from a grassroots, community-driven process. UPCS has remained small and structurally and programmatically constant, and LEAP has expanded and experimented with new community-development and programmatic structures. Using the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework, I identify emergent themes and best practices of assets from the case studies that are useful tools for understanding how university–school partnerships remain sustainable. Findings from both case studies offer lessons and insights for researchers

and practitioners regarding components that contribute to new university–school partnerships in that each approach tends to develop schools as strategies for community development and neighborhood revitalization. The themes and findings are:

(1) University partnerships emerge when committed faculty and community leadership come together in a planning process that is inclusive and is driven by a collective participatory process of building solidarity, shared meaning, and common purpose with the community, along with building agency and capacity to sustain the partnership for an extended period of time. The partnership focuses on community development rather than engaging in civic engagement and service programs just for students.

While establishing LEAP, Dr. Santiago intentionally formed a community participatory process to envision and design a new school model. As a faculty member, she had to earn trust and build credibility among Camden families to advocate to Rutgers and New Jersey that a new charter school was the best solution to change the conditions of public schools in Camden. She empowered, organized, and trained parents to have a voice, share opinions, and take ownership of their children’s educational future, a process that they had not previously had in the existing structure. She knew that schools needed to be different, with systems of accountability and quality instruction for kids and opportunities for families. Teachers and administrators needed a different model of management and leadership. The children needed much more than classroom instruction. Dr. Santiago created new conditions with new protocols and policies for people to follow. She created an integrated, comprehensive community hub that catered to families, with additional support in early learning, college access, health, wellness, legal assistance, and parent training.

As a sociology professor and social activist, she was conscious of incorporating social researchers in her vision for LEAP. She studied Blumer's (1971) stages of development for solving social problems, which presented a blueprint for identifying and legitimizing the problem, mobilizing actors, and formulating and implementing a plan. She applied Freire's (1972) educational liberation theories to motivate constituencies that education would lead to freedom and better economic and intellectual outcomes for people oppressed in traditional bureaucratic systems, hampering progress. Using Wilson's (1987) recognition of social isolation in poor neighborhoods and Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (1993) vision of using education to build social capital among families and communities, Dr. Santiago recognized that a school could be a powerful community anchor for achieving these goals of enhanced community development by uniting students and families in a shared learning space that builds STEM skills and knowledge, and provides onsite health and wellness services and counseling. To embed the new school into a social science framework, she aligned her research interests in solving urban education challenges to research and service missions of the university. With parents behind her and grant funding from the Delaware Port Authority, she convinced university officials, both the provost of Rutgers–Camden and president of Rutgers, that supporting LEAP was critical for the university to improve its image and accessibility for students and families in Camden, particularly acceptance of more minority students from Camden into the university. LEAP became entrepreneurial and served as Dr. Santiago's laboratory and zone of practice for her research, from which she could disseminate best practices and lessons for public policy and upscale LEAP as a

social enterprise. Dr. Santiago attributes LEAP's community development approach to the international standards of community development, defined as:

“a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes democracy, sustainable development, equity, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings” (International Association for Community Development, 2017).

Her community development approach is a much more integrated, comprehensive approach that brings meaning and solidarity to families and children versus traditional civic-engagement approaches universities use to partner with communities. Under her approach to community development, families transform and move up the economic ladder by gaining meaningful employment and apprenticeships, and for students to attend and graduate college. She engages over 150 college graduates as they gain meaningful experiences by applying coursework in the community, being trained to be teachers, supervisors, and early learning assistants, and engaging in service-learning projects. Faculty engaged in meaningful research that is both qualitative and quantitative, along with the research they produce, informs the work of the school and the Community Leadership Center.

This study demonstrates the value of having universities more fully engaged in the community infrastructure, including K–12 education, jobs, and improving standards of living and quality of life of the neighbors to ensure the community thrives. It cannot be walled off from the people who live and work in the city, perhaps even at the university itself. The university succeeds when the community succeeds by attracting and retaining students, families, and faculty. As a faculty member, Dr. Santiago understood this and had to fight to convince and sustain Rutgers–Camden leaders and

faculty that this was a cause critical to the university's survival and sustainable development.

Unlike in the Rutgers–Camden case, Traina and his senior staff and faculty at the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice knew that Clark and the Main South neighborhood had to change to survive. They capitalized on opportunities for major grants and funding to accelerate their community development projects and follow a vision of neighborhood revitalization. Traina was encouraged by the concept of enlightened self-interest (de Tocqueville, 1835; Foley, 2017), which guided his desire to transform the Main South neighborhood, including education as a pillar of partnership. As president, he could instill greater inclusivity of the neighborhood on Clark's campus to integrate students in the college experience with little resistance.

Community engagement was directed through local institutions rather than direct meetings with parents and families. The Main South CDC was a partner that represented community interests and applied for the initial federal grant. Community development was viewed through segmented approaches of education, housing, public safety, and workforce development, and the planning committees identified projects that fit these areas. A committee of university and public-school officials oversaw development of UPCS and hired Rodrigues as the founding principal so that community members were less engrained in the school's design. The school's focus was on instruction and college access, and did not incorporate additional elements such as health and wellness, legal assistance, and parent advocacy trainings. UPCS also does not have a concrete pipeline from birth to college but is intertwined with a network of elementary and middle schools in the neighborhood that creates a pipeline.

One difference in these approaches is where leaders and faculty are situated in the university. Dr. Santiago is a sociology and public-policy professor who began her career at the Rutgers School of Social Work in New Brunswick, and later the College of Arts and Sciences and Department of Public Policy and Administration in Camden, so she applied sociological theories of poverty and education to develop a comprehensive community development approach to LEAP's design. Faculty from the Clark Adam Institute of Urban Teaching and School Practice were trained in education theory that they could instill in students recruited to teach at UPCS and build a training school for them. The UPCS model was very traditional and it remains small to focus on curricula and instructional methods, tied with resources from the university, and LEAP was created as a community school that built curricula and instruction with university faculty from various disciplines that incorporate all sciences under the auspices of a comprehensive community-development and family-engagement model.

(2) Visionary leadership fosters collective action that drives the projects forward, when the vision becomes a reality by communicating, empowering, and taking action at all levels and stages of the development of a project. Entrepreneurial faculty and leaders reshape traditional enclosed mindsets of a university to include community in its fabric and identity.

Neither Dr. Santiago nor Traina grew up in the neighborhoods they would change, but their experiences and determination for the projects affected outcomes. Dr. Santiago grew up in migrant agricultural communities in South Jersey and experienced labor social activism (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014), and Traina grew up poor in San Francisco and benefited from educational opportunities (Foley, 2017; Caradonio, 2017). Dr. Santiago

chose to live in Camden as a young professor early during her career, and during that time, she mobilized youth groups in community-development efforts, building connections and credibility with the community early. Traina instilled educational mobility among staff members, which permeated to the Main South neighborhood. When Clark received the grant from HUD, it could hire Rodrigues, a teacher from the Main South neighborhood, to be its founding principal. Rodrigues brought her own charisma and determination to recruit families and share her vision for the school and what it could become.

In both cases, the presence of a champion with local knowledge and personal affiliations with the social justice cause of education transformation was critical to development and sustainability of the university partnerships. When leaders see a clear path of their vision for better schools and have the backing of university leaders (e.g., Traina himself and Dr. Santiago gaining support from the Rutgers–Camden provost), they can build a plan, gain funding resources, and mobilize constituencies to produce the outcome desired. Leaders drive a vision and direction but still mobilize staff and community members toward collective behaviors that Blumer (1971) emphasizes for achieving social policy outcomes. The partnerships' longevity is based on collective ownership that leaders instill in others. Junior staffers at the schools and universities had to build trust and jointly believe that students and families deserved a better education and the right to attend college.

(3) Shared governance and autonomy in leading the university and school partnership is critical when working within the preK-12 school environment in order to offer innovation, community entrepreneurship and new avenues for educational effectiveness

Each partnership was innovative due to the universities building schools to address poverty and a poor state of education. In this context, the schools took advantage of their innovative status (colloquially, not technically, like in Massachusetts) to design new governance and operational systems that altered daily education for students. LEAP Academy and UPCS immediately incorporated an extended school day and year, with enhanced programming and activities over the summer to ensure students were continuously engaged and intellectually stimulated. Due to the new charter school status in New Jersey, LEAP could appoint its own governing board of trustees to oversee its operations, including representatives from Rutgers, Rowan, Camden County College, parents, business, and civic leaders. The LEAP board reports to the New Jersey State Board of Education. Rutgers or any other group could not hold a majority on the board. UPCS was still under management of the Worcester Public School System but was able to make decisions autonomously from larger school system policies regarding operations. When *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010* passed, UPCS could gain more formal autonomy for its operations concerning daily scheduling, budgeting, and teacher performance.

As a charter school, LEAP is a school district and incorporated as a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization with an integrated comprehensive community development model under one governing structure, while UPCS remains a school entity that partners with the Main South CDC to refer families to housing and health services. LEAP incorporates health and wellness, STEM programming, and parent education programs to build a “healthy community of learners” (CSUCL, 1997). UPCS parents sit on the board of the Main South CDC and refer community members to housing and small business resources



and programs that are maintained by the CDC to enhance economic outcomes (UPCS, 2017). As the schools gained autonomy through legislation, and as offshoots of universities that are guided by research and experimentation, the schools demonstrated that new models of governance and operations affect educational outcomes of the community positively. Autonomy provided greater flexibility and creativity when devising new school models and governance structures that are conducive to urban students and families.

The new structures demonstrated that traditional public urban school models do not work when fostering these types of partnerships because traditional schools are not set up to be innovative, autonomous, or creative. The charter school model enabled LEAP to chart its own course through altered schedules and curricula that challenged students and teachers to teach and learn differently. The UPCS innovation school model demonstrates that new school structures and classifications are one way to maintain ingenuity. Both cases suggest that autonomy, innovation, creativity, and accountability to the mission of their schools and university partnerships are paramount to preserving a sustainable partnership's integrity.

(4) Early college access programs connect K–12 students with university programs, culture, and rituals, and prepares them for the college experience, only if the partnership or collaboration has systems in place to make this happen.

Prior to the emergence of university–school partnerships, the university's responsibility for building a pipeline and ensuring a college-going culture among neighboring schools was not prominent. The university's responsibility to its neighboring schools was primarily teaching training and experimentation using new

education processes (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988; Zimpher and Howey, 2004). In contrast, the partnerships described here opened opportunities to be innovative in securing paths for students in the K–12 system to be ready for college and experience a smooth transition during freshman year. LEAP and UPCS shifted mindsets that students would ask not only if they are going to college, but where they would be going to college. College attainment is engrained in the students from the beginning of their schooling so there is a clear educational direction and outcome. In LEAP's case, the experience begins at birth and is cultivated and supported through a pipeline of support, commitments, programs, scholarships and internships. The students are the focus of teaching and learning, and the pipeline is supported by college access staff at every level of learning until they graduate and attend college.

Both schools have dual enrollment programs. However, LEAP's innovative Early College Program has the entire senior class admitted to college and taking courses as high school students to learn directly from college professors and practice college writing, math, and biology assignments while earning college credit that is applied to their college programs to alleviate costs and time in college. Many of these students confront financial difficulties that hamper college graduation in low-income neighborhoods. LEAP and UPCS students attend their schools near Rutgers–Camden and Clark campuses, allowing them to be exposed to the college grounds and use the library, gym, and campus center, which engrains them into the social environment of a college campus. The LEAP Early College Program has all high school seniors take one semester of college classes at Rutgers–Camden and Rowan University, with subsequent recitation classes led by LEAP

teachers at Rutgers and Rowan. Students receive up to 30 college credits when transitioning from high school to college, again alleviating financial burdens of college.

The ability to infuse college exposure early and daily into K–12, low-income students is a way to build a college-going culture that prepares students to be mentally ready to enter college. College is celebrated in each school as a necessary and intrinsic step in the students' educational trajectory. Financial support through Rutgers, which pays for dual enrollment courses, and Clark's free tuition for students from the neighborhood symbolize the commitment and promise that if students perform well academically, they will receive free college credits that will boost their chances of completing college early with limited financial debt.

Symbolism in the school cultures at LEAP and UPCS demonstrates the innovation of building new civic identities and shared meaning among students and families that construct collective action in achieving social justice outcomes. Dr. Santiago (2017) and Rodrigues (2017) were explicit at attributing graduation rates and sustainability of the partnerships to building a school culture and identity not just of college access, but with an identity of excellence, ritual, and shared meaning among the student body and greater school community. Dr. Santiago incorporated a series of values into the strategic plan that are displayed throughout the school, particularly that love for children drives learning, accountability, rigor, excellence, and the notion that parents are central to the school's mission. LEAP is a safe, clean, and welcoming environment for all children and families to support children that come from low-socioeconomic status. A value at LEAP is that everyone has the right to an education environment that is physically and socially conducive to learning (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Another one of

LEAP's values is to do "whatever it takes" to ensure that students and families are supported, which includes home visits, extended day and year school programs, individual phone calls to families, structured time, and working extra hours if needed (Bonilla-Santiago, 2014; Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Some of the rituals that consist of graduation and scholarship induction ceremonies, branding the LEAP vision in every classroom and hallway, posting pictures of all students in the hallways, student rewards and assemblies, student events, and project-based learning outdoors and indoors demonstrate the individual attention, cherished practices, and shared meaning for students and families that success and educational attainment are possible. There is no room for failure, and that allows for the instructional teams not to be complacent and work with a sense of purpose and intention. LEAP works daily to produce college-ready students and build and support a community of love and support that families do not normally receive in traditional public schools. LEAP students are expected to attend college classes with Rutgers students, and are competing with the best and brightest. Consequently, LEAP made it possible for most students to be placed in college through the Rutgers partnership.

Rodrigues built UPCS one grade level at a time to build a culture of excellence and high expectations methodically. Each rising grade serves as mentors and keepers of the UPCS culture to ensure that subsequent grades follow UPCS customs of strong academics through small learning communities. The first class of graduates became the legacy class that was honored and commemorated throughout UPCS history to symbolize the historical progression of the school. The term Little Clarkies (Jaeger, 2003) is the moniker for UPCS students and their relationship with Clark, empowering high school

and college students to feel like UPCS students are equals in the Clark student body.

Students are recognized as equals in the Clark environment and are welcomed into Clark's culture and identity as college students. Those who take dual enrollment classes extend their relationship further into the university classroom and earn credits toward their college degrees.

(5) University partnerships work best when universities see themselves as anchors in community transformation and development, where the work is reciprocal, visible and beneficial to both the university and the community. True collaboration must be at the core of the partnership in order for it to succeed and be sustained.

Under the anchor institution framework, universities have a moral obligation to support the educational trajectory of the K–12 neighborhood schooling system (Taylor and Luter, 2013; Harkavy et al., 2013; Harkavy et al., 2016). LEAP and UPCS received major commitments from Rutgers and Clark to build a partnership infrastructure physically, financially, educationally, and socially. As Dr. Santiago conceived her vision for a better school in Camden and convinced Rutgers leaders, she transformed the way Rutgers engaged with the community. She established the Center for Strategic Urban and Community Leadership (CSUCL) to house all innovative initiatives and build new programs to serve city residents better through research, teaching, professional activities, and services. Projects such as the LEAP Academy, STEM Fabrication Lab, Professional Development Institute for Teachers, leadership programs for parents to further their own education and careers, an Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) to start children on a quality education path as babies and toddlers, and a comprehensive college access program to prepare students for college rigor complete the holistic community

development experience for children and families in Camden. Dr. Santiago's early efforts influenced Rutgers–Camden Provost Roger Dennis to expand the college's presence outward, physically and symbolically, by moving senior offices to Cooper Street and opening the university to the urban community and for more minority students from Camden and South Jersey to apply and be admitted to Rutgers–Camden. Clark partnered more closely with the Main South CDC to devise joint strategies for improved housing, small businesses, and school development to attract new and existing families to move or stay in the neighborhood to live, work, and go to school. Dr. Santiago and Traina mobilized their staff members to identify physical buildings for housing the schools, write grants and underwrite bonds for building and planning financing, and align their own education missions with the neighborhood schools being developed to ensure that high school students could continue to college with minimal challenges and easier transitions.

Both universities established tangible outlets for their promises and commitments to prepare students for college and ease their financial burdens while attending. Rutgers–Camden and Rowan University are supporting the cost of dual enrollment and early college programs for LEAP seniors, and Clark pays for dual enrollment courses and free tuition for neighborhood residents. Consistent messaging regarding these principles of the college supporting the financial costs of college demonstrates the seriousness and support that the universities provide to assist children and families in the neighborhoods. Each case demonstrates reciprocal and symbiotic qualities reflected in the relationship between each school and university (Goodlad, 1986). Dr. Santiago believed that by opening its doors to minority students from Camden, Rutgers would benefit with a larger,

more diverse pool of students who would enroll that reflected the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the community. Through enlightened self-interest, Traina believed that if Clark could improve economic and education conditions in the neighborhood, more families would move there and stay. Reciprocity and fluidity between institutions enhance educational outcomes of students and families who take advantage of the resources and opportunities granted by university–school partnerships. Buy-in from not just top leaders, but university staff is critical to building relationships, trust, and reciprocity between university and school staff to sustain college access programs that exemplify the partnerships.

(6) A community asset approach, where community leadership, university faculty, administrators, and stakeholder input leveraged their social, political, and intellectual capital, to make transformational impact in their community and its neighborhoods.

As Director of the Community Leadership Center and Founder and Chair of the LEAP Board of Trustees, Dr. Santiago harnesses the capacity and power to make influential decisions that affect processes and outcomes at LEAP. The value of the asset-based approach (Flora and Flora and Fey, 2004) is that Dr. Santiago uses social, intellectual, and political capital to gain resources necessary from various stakeholders. She understands how to use financial and physical capital from banks, investment firms, bondholders, and economic development enterprises, foundations, businesses, and universities for buildings and bond ratings for credit. She leveraged political capital from New Jersey state legislators, governors, and other political power brokers to champion the Charter School Act, and social capital among parents and non-profit organizations in the community to build awareness, trust, and leadership for them to be self-empowered

and motivated to advocate power structures when implementing the new school. All of these activities and assets working in tandem, with a skilled facilitator like Dr. Santiago in the middle, are essential to achieving large-scale transformation of systems that create lasting change in a community.

As for UPCS and Clark, much initial planning was conducted under the auspices of university leaders and faculty in the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice. Traina set a vision and charged his staff with applying for seed funding from the federal government to begin revitalizing the Main South neighborhood with housing, businesses, and educational improvements. Much decision-making came from boards and committees of the Main South CDC, which has parent representation on its board, Clark, and the Worcester Public Schools. Rodrigues, the UPCS founding principal, was hired by a committee to draw up plans for UPCS. She was from the community and engaged parents in the formulation of the school, but she was the driver of designing and implementing her vision. Much decision-making in the partnership was committee-driven.

Although Traina led the initial vision of a partnership, he charged his staff with partnering closely with the CDC and Worcester Public Schools to create mechanisms in which Clark would not have all of the power of overseeing the partnership and school. Clark holds only one seat on the board of the CDC, and no official governance of UPCS, which creates more autonomy for the school and accountability directly from the school system rather than the university. Embedded in a neighborhood partnership plan, Traina demonstrates that Clark is invested in the growth and transformation of the neighborhood, but cedes some power to grassroots organizations such as the CDC and



school. Since Traina passed away, senior staff and faculty have had to maintain relationships closely to ensure longevity.

Both LEAP and UPCS capitalized on assets to transform the neighborhood and made significant community improvements in terms of physical, human, cultural, social, built and financial capital. The neighborhood improved in terms of jobs, education, real estate development and families/children being engaged in their community in a visible way. The ability to influence disparate stakeholders and empower local communities and organizations allowed LEAP and UPCS to sustain for over 25 years. Community and university leaders agreed with the design and plans for the schools and created governance structures that ensured perpetually equitable representation. The mechanisms are stable and well-crafted, but people in the power structures must continue to cooperate to maintain the partnerships. The values, purpose, and social justice missions instilled in the creation of LEAP and UPCS must be continually communicated and advocated to ensure that the work thrives. Community members and neighborhood residents are engrained in the schools and have been for nearly three decades. The next generation of community development leaders and champions both inside and outside of the institutions must build the capacity and identify local assets while being innovative and adaptable to changing economic, social, and political circumstances to sustain the success, optimism, and hope of the program.

(7) University school partnerships are institutionalized through strong leadership, community support and through financial mechanisms that sustain the relevance and integrity of the partnership beyond when founding faculty and leaders depart.

As Project LEAP formed, Dr. Santiago instilled mechanisms in the partnership and relationship between Rutgers University and LEAP to sustain a financial infrastructure. Three ways she created financial sustainability are contracts, endowments, and scholarships, which ensure that Rutgers will support LEAP in perpetuity when she departs and retires. She formed the Community Leadership Center (CLC), formerly the Center for Strategic and Urban Community Leadership (CSUCL), to be a fiduciary liaison between Rutgers administration and the school. The Rutgers Board of Governors built into its resolution that LEAP would have representation on its board of trustees from the director of the CLC, currently Dr. Santiago and either the Rutgers–Camden chancellor or provost in perpetuity. She amassed over \$300 million in assets from public and private philanthropy and investments, which include the physical value of the buildings constructed along Cooper Street, to which the university contributes its bond ratings, and annual contracts and endowments that the center receives from various sources for staff who oversee administrative and operational areas to support the school. The Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA) receives over \$2 million annually from the Camden Board of Education and has a \$2 million endowment from the John Morgan Foundation and \$3 million from the Alfredo Santiago Endowment (Bonilla-Santiago, 2017). Dr. Santiago set up the Rutgers Alfredo Santiago Endowed Scholarship to ensure that students who graduate from LEAP receive financial assistance when they enter Rutgers on any campus. She has bestowed personal gifts on Rutgers toward the schools as part of her legacy to support her work and efforts in perpetuity. The CLC is the only self-sustainable center campus-wide that offers many community and educational opportunities to communities locally and globally.

As Dr. Santiago attests, relationships and trust between Rutgers and LEAP are critical to administrative operations between the institutions, but without financing to sustain the relationship, the partnership can dwindle. This is the essence of sustainable community development—the infrastructure must be laid out for long-term success, otherwise projects and organizations rise and fall. She created an equitable and reciprocal system in which students, community members, and university benefit.

Since UPCS was developed from the president's office, the goals of institutionalizing the partnership were already in place. Senior administrators directed the partnership with the Main South CDC to integrate UPCS into the strategic plan of the University Park Partnership, and with the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice, to build a pipeline of teachers and Master's students into UPCS. The recognition that Clark required to support Main South students financially by paying for full tuition at Clark was imperative to securing the promise that students could attain a college degree. Tuition is budgeted annually, and each president since Traina has maintained this commitment. The decision to place UPCS under the auspices of the Worcester Public Schools demonstrates trust in the public-school system to maintain the buildings and assets. The building is still housed in an old 1870s historic firehouse and has lagged in keeping up with modern amenities. In terms of real property value, Clark does not gain much from the school's presence, but it has gained a flow of students from the neighborhood who are prepared to succeed at college and will represent Clark's commitment to ensure the growth and prosperity of the neighborhood.

## Chapter 7. Discussion and Recommendations

The research question addresses how two universities in small cities developed and sustained an educational pipeline as a community development strategy to provide access to college for students and families and revitalize distressed neighborhoods. Case studies of LEAP Academy University School in Camden, NJ and UPCS in Worcester, MA demonstrate two university–school partnerships that emerged at a time of national school reform to instill greater accountability and autonomy at the local level. Leaders at Rutgers–Camden and Clark University recognized that as anchor institutions with social, physical, and political capital, universities needed to engage directly with development of new schools as vehicles for neighborhood transformation, giving families and students new opportunities to seek education paths that lead to college and meaningful careers. The ability and opportunity for families to choose to attend new schools or move into neighborhoods with university-backed infrastructures enable universities to build capacity and leverage assets to create change in their environments.

Each case influenced outcomes of policy, advertently and inadvertently, that altered the educational structures in its respective states. Highly influenced by sociological and social policy theories of poverty and social movements, Dr. Santiago followed Blumer’s stages of development for solving social problems to build LEAP Academy, knowing the outcome had to be a legislative act, in this case, the statewide legislation of the *New Jersey Charter School Act of 1995*. As shown with LEAP, the public charter school is conducive to lead in this type of university partnership because it allowed for creative governance and innovation in teaching and learning. The relationship has sustained for 25 years because it institutionalized and aligned programs of the school with the mission and strategic plans of the university and campus. It

created the first birth-to-college pipeline in the country through cohorts of 20 students per class and 120 per grade. The partnership created a pipeline of comprehensive services of support that creates opportunities for Rutgers students, faculty, and staff to conduct research and practice, creates a pathway for children and students to attend college, allows community parents and families to attend college, helps establish a community neighborhood that is safe, healthy, and vibrant for its neighbors, finds employment and training for families and teachers, and transforms the university into an outward and more welcoming anchor for the community. The school and university benefit from a fiscal model of funding that allows creative fundraising and contracts of services. Schools benefit from intellectual, social, and physical capital from the university.

UPCS leaders, including Clark President Traina, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs Foley, Clark Director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice Del Prete, and UPCS founding Principal Rodrigues, did not incorporate social frameworks to shape each stage of UPCS's development, and did not anticipate that policy would be affected in the long-term with introduction of innovation schools 13 years later with *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap of 2010*. They instilled their personal backgrounds, familiarity, and connections with families and the community in the Main South neighborhood to drive change regarding educational trajectories using Clark as an institution to shape economic and educational outcomes for the people. UPCS's small size influenced its success through individualized learning, but it was hampered by tight budgets, which prevented accommodating more students, renovating a building for contemporary amenities, and incorporating more types of health and human services under one governing body. UPCS is still treated like an anomaly and

a pocket of success throughout Massachusetts, but there is no strategic plan to replicate its model; its qualities and characteristics have been infused by former staff and leaders into other local schools. Overall, it serves its purpose of educating students in Main South and maintaining a positive relationship with Clark.

These two cases offer lessons on how university–school partnerships integrate a community development model to build capacity in the neighborhood. Leadership, innovation, autonomy, college access, and asset-based community participation are critical qualities for sustaining university partnerships. These cases offer new knowledge about schools and community and its relevance to sustaining university partnerships. Themes that emerged from this study represent components for building systems in which universities, as research institutions, can experiment with new designs of educational structures to improve outcomes for students and families. Each university and its influential leaders remained firm in their core beliefs that they could break the status quo and build new models that could teach other pioneers how to engage in this work.

LEAP and UPCS have both celebrated 25 years of operation and success. The first group of graduating seniors from both schools in 2005 defined a legacy class in which culture formed and subsequent classes had proof to believe that they could graduate and attend college. Continuity of encouraging a college-going culture shaped the identities of each school to provide a clear direction for the community. College opens doors to careers, and LEAP and UPCS, with Rutgers–Camden and Clark, permeated the conversation that university-backed schools could integrate students into college-level classes and resources that contribute to the rigor and degree of preparedness

for college. Consistently high graduation rates set the bar high for academic achievement and perseverance that differentiate them from other types of schools. This is critical since education is the only way out of poverty for many of these students and families.

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

The implications for theory and practice from these two cases expand the theoretical knowledge of university–school partnerships within a community development and sociological framework. Blumer’s collective action theories for solving social problems provide a blueprint for how sustainable partnerships emerge and last for an extended period. This study corroborates Blumer’s theory as an effective framework because it demonstrates meaning and intention that is required for partnerships to excel. Blumer connects the academic intent of research to pragmatic solutions to societal challenges that improve people’s lives. Academic literature rarely ties community development theory to development of university–school partnerships. Much literature is grounded in discussions of universities as civic actors, connecting students and faculty to communities. I demonstrate that LEAP and UPCS are products of university faculty leadership with commitment to social justice and community empowerment, and that they created a model of access for first-generation college students. The school pipeline and college access model embeds the partnership in the fabric of the university.

I suggest that universities in small, distressed cities move beyond external partnerships and instead focus on building school pipelines in which students and families connect directly to a university from early learning through college-access programs. Charter schools, in LEAP’s case, are vehicles that can facilitate such partnerships given their autonomy. Other hybrid models can also be developed if there are clear mechanisms for structuring the pipeline with connective measures and

accountability. As a sociologist, Dr. Santiago understood that her theory of action was influenced by her practice, and that practice provided her impetus for collecting data on her school to take back to the university classroom, publish findings, and disseminate practices in the field. She developed Cooper Street as a zone of practice to allow learning and applied theory. The zone has been beneficial to Rutgers students, faculty, and staff to conduct research, teach, and learn (Bonilla-Santiago Interview, 2017). She used Community Capital Theory (Flora, and Flora and Fey, 2004) to evaluate her progress with the school, particularly using social, built, and human capitals to frame and strengthen LEAP resources, progress, and assessments. She is an applied researcher who knows how to use applied theory, which provided her an opportunity to make decisions based on the best evidence and practices. Similar to drawing on research to produce evidence-based programs, Del Prete at Clark's Education School channels his expertise in teaching and learning techniques toward curriculum and teacher professional development to enhance use of Clark Master's students who stayed at UPCS as teachers and even principals, and then uses current UPCS teachers to teach in the Master's program, an example of how research informs practice and practice informs research.

Further implications for practice are that partnerships need to be designed within an asset-based community development framework in which community members are included during planning of the school and then are active in its operations and governance. A community champion, whether a professor with deep-rooted connections with the community, a parental leader, or a community-based organizational leader, should be engaged from the beginning to ensure that the community is involved during design. The university needs to include health and wellness programs, parent training,



early learning programs, and dual enrollment and early college programs in the school partner to create a holistic enterprise in which children and families obtain the resources they need to live healthy and productive lives. LEAP and the Rutgers CLC maintain accountability and quality by managing, integrating, and evaluating all services, connecting and addressing health and wellness directly to academic outcomes. UPCS is part of a network of neighborhood services that the Main South CDC oversees, and Clark is concerned only with educational components of students. The Main South ecosystem of referrals and shared neighborhood services has strengthened bonds between residents and organizations, but there is no centralized oversight and accountability over the influence of the various agencies.

This study places community development practice at the forefront of public policies that shape education reform. Both LEAP and UPCS were able to use their school experiences from practice to influence policy formation; they created a new theory of action from practice, and the practice informed the policy rather than vice versa. Asset-based community development informed the type of school and model that the community desired and the university supported, which then led to policy outcomes of charter schools in New Jersey and innovation schools in Massachusetts. These cases demonstrate that policies should be adapted from grassroots innovation that the community can develop and own, rather than from government-mandated decisions that are detrimental to the communities they are meant to serve, as seen by the education and urban policies during the 1980s and 1990s that broke down social institutions in urban settings and created sub-par conditions for children and families. Policies that are

legislated from a grassroots advocacy approach with community input are more efficient, amenable, relevant, and sustainable.

### **Limitations and Challenges**

Since this study was conducted in two neighborhoods in two cities, it is limited to the experiences and intricate situations of those particular cities. The neighborhoods of Camden and Worcester have similar histories and socioeconomic characteristics, so they are comparable, yet they have their own social contexts and politics that influenced development of the partnerships. Conditions in the Camden public schools were not conducive to a safe and comfortable learning environment, so dropout rates were high and high school graduation rates were poor, leading Dr. Santiago to create a new school for the entire city. In Worcester, the Main South neighborhood, adjacent to Clark, was similar but concentrated in that neighborhood, not the entire city. Clark dedicated its resources to that vicinity rather than the entire city. Therefore, the scope of both cases is different in the radius of impacting students and families. This is a concern for comparing cases in that they are not identical. However, their foundations of a university that improves its neighborhood using schools as a community development strategy upholds the ability to draw conclusions from the two cases.

In the original proposal for this dissertation, I started with a third partnership—the Widener Partnership School in Chester, PA. I met with two deans at Widener to discuss the nature of the partnership and received approval from the school board to move forward with the study. However, after attempts to connect with the school failed because the school staff was inaccessible, I recognized it was better to assess the two cases to conserve resources and time. The Widener Partnership School is a K–8 school,

so I removed it from the case study so that I could focus on two schools that went to Grade 12 and had direct connections with the universities for college-access programs, particularly dual enrollment and early college. The Widener Partnership School, the Penn Alexander School associated with the University of Pennsylvania, and the Johns Hopkins Henderson School in Baltimore, all K–8 schools, might be valuable cases in a study that focuses on the early stages of the educational pipeline and how universities support only elementary school programs.

Another limitation is that archival research was limited in scope since the study focused only on university partnerships and the influences of community development during a specific period and not throughout the entire history of implementation of the partnerships. A historical perspective was needed to situate the context of development of the partnerships for the period. Historical documents regarding the partnerships have never been documented so it took time to document original work from many files, news clippings, strategic plans, proposals, applications, and original presentations. When focusing on development projects, most archival materials, including plans, reports, meeting minutes, and proposals, were written by evaluators or school staff members, so much of the material failed to offer a critical scope of the projects and plans and instead presented many development plans and proposal strategies in a positive light, with limited discussions of negative or opposing ideas. A few critical viewpoints were obtained from the media, which were also limited since they often boosted many of the projects.

The interviews posed limitations since they focused on events that occurred over 20 years ago, which might have clouded and distorted memories. Some subjects

commented that they had to go deep in their memories to recall events. Some potential subjects declined the offer to be interviewed or were inaccessible since they have not been connected with the project for some time. Snowball sampling created some biases because subjects were preidentified instead of selected randomly, and they spoke with positive perspectives toward the project. I have worked in the Community Leadership Center for 4 years, which presented both benefits and challenges. I knew some stakeholders because of periods of work in the neighborhood over the years, which made me an insider and offered an advantage in terms of accessing and understanding the culture. However, I had to proceed cautiously and professionally when interviewing participants whom I knew from prior work in the community, remaining aware of positionality, disclosure, and shared relationships. I have deep empathy for this neighborhood and its community and residents, so I had to monitor my bias throughout the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study creates a baseline sociological and organizational framework for how university–school partnerships emerge and offers components for sustaining partnerships. Future research should build on this foundation and use both quantitative and qualitative methods to demonstrate the influence of 25 years of work. One recommendation is to conduct a longitudinal study of educational and professional achievements of graduated students and families toward college to understand the obstacles and challenges of first-generation, minority students as they prepare to attend college. Topics should include what leading factors exist in the pipeline and what partnership model among college-access programs, health and wellness programs, and parental engagement influences student outcomes and success. Researchers should use students in the pipeline as a

treatment group to assess those outside the pipeline to determine what causes some minority kids to be successful and others to fail. Test scores, graduation rates, employment rates, and salaries are indicators of such outcomes. Participants in the treatment and control groups would have to consent to being tracked and provide regular data. Another recommendation is to analyze economic indicators in the neighborhood to determine whether partnerships contribute positively to economic outcomes, such as improved property values, growth of small businesses and entrepreneurship, homeownership, physical improvements to the neighborhood, and employment of community members. Researchers should use public records of property and real estate longitudinally to learn about the trajectories of economic situations, and survey businesses and residents to learn about employment conditions.

## Conclusion

A university–school partnership does not occur in a vacuum; it takes extended periods to cultivate. Blumer’s model of collective definition offers a structured path to gain legitimacy and notoriety for a partnership, which instills lasting influences on a community and its residents. Each partnership has its own history and social context. Application of a theoretical framework unites partnerships in shared causes and meanings that lead communities and their schools and neighborhoods to transformation and liberation. I document two original, community-development, and university–school partnership models that have existed for 25 years. These two models changed the discourse of universities, acting as anchor institutions to integrate an education pipeline into principles of community development. Entrepreneurial faculty and leaders demonstrated that it takes individuals with a vision and belief in transformational change

to unite and mobilize stakeholders, including community members, parents, students, and organizations, to build and sustain new school models and alter education policy.

Faculty and senior staff members must embrace building tangible bridges through dual enrollment, early college, and tuition-benefit opportunities with community members to instill a college-going culture in the community. Community members, especially parents, must participate in planning and governance to claim ownership and pride in the work, while holding leaders accountable. The university must provide financial and physical infrastructures to demonstrate long-term commitment and a promise that conditions will sustain the partnership. The legal structure of the partnership must allow innovative practices to provide multifaceted services to the community and be flexible to experiment, evolve, grow, and adapt. The community, university faculty, staff, and students must embrace their education mission and express it with conviction, intention, and guiding principles of social justice and equity so that change is attainable and transformational.

## Appendix A – List of Interviews

### LEAP Academy

Name	Role	Date of Interview	Interview Method
Norma Agron	Director of Enrollment Management, LEAP Founding Parent	April 20, 2017	In Person
Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, Ph.D.	Rutgers Board of Governors Distinguished Service Professor; LEAP Founder and Chair of the Board of Directors	October 6, 2017	In Person
Debbie Bowles, Ph.D.	Former Associate Provost, Enrollment Management, Rutgers–Camden	May 9, 2018	In Person
Roger Dennis, JD	Former Provost, Rutgers–Camden	April 21, 2017	Phone Call
Barbara Dunlap	LEAP STEAM High School Principal	April 20, 2018	In Person
Odessa Edmond	LEAP Founding Parent	September 16, 2017	In Person
Khary Golden	Chief Innovation Officer, LEAP Academy	May 4, 2018	In Person
Barbara A. Lee, Ph.D.	Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Rutgers University	May 5, 2017	Phone Call
Rory “Cal” Maradonna	LEAP Academy Board Member and Current Professor in Rutgers School of Business-Camden	April 20, 2018	In Person
Hector Nieves	LEAP Board Member and Original Parent	May 11, 2017	In Person

Scott Owens	Director of Alumni Relations, Rutgers–Camden	April 9, 2018	In Person
Melanie Schultz	Director of Government Relations, New Jersey Association of School Administrators	October 17, 2017	In Person
Joe Seneca	Former Vice President for Academic Affairs, Rutgers University	May 12, 2018	Phone Call
Jean Shepard	Founding LEAP Parent	April 27, 2018	In Person
Ivonne Vargas	LEAP Original Parent	April 20, 2017	In Person
Robert Williams, JD	Distinguished Professor, Rutgers School of Law-Camden	May 2, 2018	In Person

#### University Park Campus School

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Interview Method</b>
Jim Caradonio	Former Superintendent, Worcester Public Schools	April 5, 2017	Phone Call
Tom Del Prete	Director of the Adam Institute for Urban Teaching and School Practice	April 20, 2017	Phone Call
June Erresy	Former Principal, UPCS	April 7, 2017	In Person
Jack Foley	Vice President for Government and Community Affairs, Clark University	April 5 and 7, 2017	In Person
Ricci Hall	Former Principal, UPCS	April 6, 2017	In Person
Liz Hamilton	Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of Worcester	April 5, 2017	In Person
Susan Leo-Johnson	UPCS Parent and Staff Member, Clark University	April 7, 2017	In Person



Lynell Reed	UPCS Parent and Staff Member	April 6, 2017	In Person
Paul Reville	Former Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Massachusetts	September 21, 2017	Phone Call
Donna Rodrigues/Marco Rodrigues	Founding Principal of UPCS/Chief Academic Officer, Worcester Public Schools	April 7, 2017	Phone Call
Daniel St. Louis	Principal, UPCS	April 6, 2017	In Person
Steve Teasdale	Executive Director, Main South CDC	April 5, 2017	In Person
5 Current Teachers and Students		April 6, 2017	In Person

## **Appendix B – Interview Questions for Partnership Leaders**

(Adapted from Sirotnik, Kenneth A., and John I. Goodlad. *School-University Partnerships in Action: Concepts, Cases*. Teachers College Press, New York, NY, 1988.)

1. How did the partnership form and begin operation? How and why did operations change over time?
2. What were and are various participating stakeholder needs and motives for joining forces in this way and continuing to cooperate?
3. Describe the planning process and how you mapped out different stages of development.
4. How do relationships among participants (particularly those from the university with those from the schools) develop and impact outcomes? How are the outcomes assessed?
5. What are the different roles played by each of the participants? How do university personnels' research and management roles change? How do school personnel's teaching and management roles change?
6. How are policies made, enacted, and evaluated?
7. What are the most likely outcomes to be associated with the partnership for the university and school personnel and students?
8. Does participation in the partnership encourage school transformation? If so, how and in what way? If not, why?
9. What are the communication patterns within the partnership and what are the implications for education and learning generally?
10. What problems are encountered and how are they addressed?
11. How does the partnership celebrate accomplishments?
12. How do university and school personnel maintain continuous engagement with community stakeholders, including parents, business leaders, and civic leaders?
13. What is your vision for how the partnership will change in the near future?
14. What political, economic, and social contexts affect the way in the partnership has adapted and will adapt?

15. What stories, anecdotes, or personal insight about the partnership can you share?

Interview Questions for Community Stakeholders

1. How did you first learn of the partnership?
2. What information were you presented with about the partnership? From whom?
3. What aspects of the partnership appealed to you? Why?
4. What have been the best means of communication you receive about the partnership?
5. How do you provide feedback or your own comments about the partnership?
6. What are some challenges that you perceive within the partnership? How can they be overcome?
7. How has the partnership impacted the economic and social wellbeing of the community it serves?
8. What do you foresee as the future of the partnership as it impacts you?
9. How has the partnership benefited you personally? How has it not benefited you?
10. What stories, anecdotes, or personal insight do you have about the partnership?

## **Appendix C: Interview Consent Form with Audio/Visual Recording**

I am a Ph.D. student in the department of Public Policy and Administration at Rutgers University, and I am conducting interviews for my dissertation. I am studying the emergence of university-school partnerships as a strategy for community development and neighborhood revitalization.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions as to how the school you associate with initially formed and how structures were implemented to sustain its operations. This interview was designed to be approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your role in the planning and organizing process of the university-school partnership. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity unless you specify otherwise.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be retained indefinitely in the researcher's personal files.

You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

You will be recorded to ensure that all content discussed is recorded accurately and information cannot be misconstrued. The recording(s) will include your name, current title, and role that you fulfilled in the planning and implementation process of the university-school partnership. If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the

recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts.

The recording(s) will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and USB drive and will be retained indefinitely for the researcher's personal records.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at [matthew.closter@rutgers.edu](mailto:matthew.closter@rutgers.edu) or 856-225-6923. You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago at [gloriab@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:gloriab@camden.rutgers.edu) or 856-225-6348.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants).

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey  
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200  
335 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
Phone: 732-235-9806  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. By participating in the above stated procedures, then you agree to participation in this study.

## Appendix D: List of Formal Documents Reviewed

### LEAP Academy

Center for Educator Compensation Reform. *Case summary: LEAP Academy University Charter School's performance-based compensation program*. 2006.

Center for Strategic Urban Community Leadership (CSUCL). *Camden Counts: A strategic plan for the project LEAP Academy*. Camden, NJ: CSUCL, 1995.

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Middle States Commission on Higher Education. "Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey. Section VIII. Community Engagement: – Rutgers – New Brunswick and Rutgers-Camden." 2008.

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### UPCS

Clark University. University Park Neighborhood Restoration Partnership. (1995).

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## Appendix E: Melaville's Five-Stage Process for Change

Adapted from: Melaville, Atelia I., Gelareh Asayesh, and Martin J. Blank. *Together we can: A guide for crafting a profamily system of education and human services*. DIANE Publishing, 1993.

**Appendix F: Rutgers Board of Governors Resolution in Support of the  
Project LEAP Academy Charter High School**



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## Curriculum Vitae - Matthew K. Closter, Ph.D.

### Education

#### **Rutgers University – Camden**

##### ***PhD in Public Affairs—Community Development***

**Diploma 2019**

- Dissertation: The Emergence of University-School Partnerships as Strategies for Community Development in Distressed Cities: Lessons Learned from Rutgers University – Camden and Clark University

#### **University of Pennsylvania, Fels Institute of Government**

##### ***Master of Public Administration, Certificate in Nonprofit Administration***

**Diploma 2010**

- Institutional Service Award (2010) – for outstanding dedication to the Fels and University communities
- John K. Parker Award (2009) – for outstanding commitment to public and community service

#### **Rice University Volunteer Management Academy, Houston, TX**

**Spring 2007**

- Certificate for seminar on recruiting, retaining, and rewarding volunteers

#### **Brandeis University, BA Sociology/Anthropology; Minor in Spanish**

**Diploma 2005**

#### **Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Valparaíso, Chile; Study Abroad**

**Spring 2004**

### Work Experience

#### **Rutgers University, Camden, NJ**

##### ***Research Associate, Community Leadership Center***

**9/2014–Present**

- Research effectiveness of cradle to college educational pipelines in community development context
- Manage and direct multi-disciplinary and departmental research conferences, symposia, and publications around issues of universities as anchor institutions in community development, particularly in education, population health, STEM fields, and arts and humanities; recruit and support faculty from university departments in participation and execution
- Oversee fundraising outreach and events, application process, and student support for a \$2.5 million endowed scholarship fund for Camden students attending Rutgers University
- Manage research initiatives for Distinguished Professor in Public Policy and Administration, including planning, stakeholder engagement, and implementation throughout university, school district, and city communities
- Write content for websites, annual reports, conference presentations, and grant proposals

#### **Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, Philadelphia, PA**

##### ***Assistant Director of Individual Giving***

**7/2013–8/2014**

- Managed direct mail and e-mail solicitation campaigns with 100,000 recipients
- Grew membership base and increased pool of giving for the Raven Society, the Library's group of young supporters, through individual meetings, event planning, and Board administration
- Personally solicited individual donors to increase giving level

##### ***Donor Relations Manager***

**6/2012–7/2013**

- Cultivated and stewarded major and long-term donors, promoting planned and annual giving

- Developed annual endowment reports, newsletters, and collection updates to major donors

**AFS Intercultural Programs USA, New York, NY**

**5/2010–5/2012**

***Quality Assurance & Compliance Coordinator***

- Implemented strategies to strengthen compliance in the organization amongst volunteers and host families
- Traveled to Midwest and Northeast US to assess program quality with students, families, and volunteers

**Amigos de las Américas, Houston, TX**

**2003–2008**

***Chapter Services Administrator, Project Director, Project Supervisor***

- Coordinated the application process, volunteer recruitment, administration, and communication for 30 domestic chapters and over 500 annual youth volunteers
- Worked inclusively with a volunteer community, managed databases and files for chapter clientele, provided on-site personal and technical support, published newsletters, organized workshops and trainings
- Directed 70 youth volunteers and supervisors in Costa Rica, supervised 10 young public health volunteers in the Dominican Republic, and volunteered in Oaxaca, Mexico

**Graduate Internships**

**City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program**

**9/2009–7/2010**

***Intern, Development & Public Engagement, Art Education***

- Developed marketing and fundraising plans for restoration of over 2,500 murals and for the Mural Mile, an audio walking tour of Center City murals
- Drafted project proposals for the *Restored Spaces* environmental and youth initiative
- Facilitated project activities and meetings between the Philadelphia School District, City of Philadelphia agencies, neighborhood associations, and artists

**University of Pennsylvania Washington Semester Program**

**9/2009–5/2010**

***Graduate Assistant***

- Marketed the semester-long program to undergraduate students and administered the application process
- Conducted interviews and made recommendations to the director for program acceptance

**Institute of International Education, Washington, DC**

**Summer 2009**

***Intern, Inter-American Foundation Grassroots Development PhD Fellowship***

- Developed marketing, alumni outreach, and administrative processes for staff and candidates of the research fellowship program in Latin America and the Caribbean

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Philadelphia, PA**

**9/2008–5/2009**

***Intern, Affiliate Relations***

- Managed processes associated with agency changes, including mergers and disaffiliations

**Publications and Conference Presentations**

Community Development Society, 2018. “Community School and University Anchors Transform Neighborhood.” Co-Presenter. Detroit, Michigan.

Urban Affairs Association Annual Conference, 2018. “The Emergence of University-School Partnerships: A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Two Public Schools Built by Universities in Small Cities.” Toronto, Canada



“Anchor Institutions Advancing Local and Global Sustainable Community Development. 2017-2018 Conference Proceedings.” Rutgers University-Camden. Contributing Writer. 2018. Available URL: <https://clc.camden.rutgers.edu/files/CLC-Conference-Proceeding-2018.pdf>

Closter, Matthew. “Public Library Evaluation: A Retrospective on the Evolution of Measurement Systems.” *Public Library Quarterly* 34.2 (2015): 107-123

Urban Affairs Association Annual Conference, 2015. “A Miracle on Cooper Street: A Case Study on How a University Professor Transforms a Community Through a School Named LEAP Academy.” Co-presenter. Miami, Florida