

Research and Practice Alignment:

How Meaningful Collaboration Between Practitioners and Researchers Can Inform Equity-Centered Decision-Making

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Executive Summary

Large school districts across the country are faced with a monumental task - creating and managing a system that has the capacity to ensure that students can learn and grow during their time in school. School districts benefit from research that is closely aligned with their most pressing problems of practice and an efficient allocation of that research to decision-makers who will take action based on the results. All of this must be done within the constraints of the K-12 school district. In order to do this well, districts and researchers must collaborate to ensure that the end result will be useful and beneficial to both parties. The Central City Department of Education (CCDOE) is a fertile ground for research and improving school outcomes.

However, improving practice across the district requires alignment between research and policy. Currently, research conducted within the district is designed independently of issues relevant to practitioners. Based on the work of Penuel, Coburn, and others, we investigated the best practices for establishing partnerships, systems for supporting research and ensuring equitable research and why inconsistent sharing across stakeholders occurs.

As a result of insights pulled from the literature and the needs of Central City, the following research questions were established:

- **Research Question 1:** What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?
 - Research Question 1a: How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?
 - Research Question 1b: How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?
- **Research Question 2:** What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making?
- **Research Question 3:** What kind of research evidence and practices would most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?

- **Research Question 4:** How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?

We employed a mixed-methods study by surveying members of the CCDOE and researchers who work with the CCDOE. We also conducted interviews with external researchers from organizations that have submitted upwards of ten proposals through the DOE's Internal Review Board in the last ten years; with individuals who were recommended to us as experts in their field when it comes to working with large, diverse school districts; and with key staff members from the Research Practice Alignment Team (RPAT) of the CCDOE. Lastly, we performed a landscape analysis of large diverse school districts in order to compare their research systems and structures to those of the CCDOE.

Through analysis of the research conducted, we compiled a list of findings in response to each of the research questions above:

Findings from Research Question 1, 1a, and 1b:

- Investment From Both Parties Supports Success of Research
- CCDOE Research Request System is Ineffective
- Strategic Priorities of the CCDOE are Difficult to Find and Interpret

Findings from Research Question 2:

- Research Outputs Given to the CCDOE are Inconsistent
- Researchers and Practitioners Desire Useability in Work Products from Research

Findings from Research Question 3:

- Researchers Want Findings to Be Useful to Practitioners
- No Current System for Sharing Findings Exists in CCDOE
- Researchers Value of Practitioner Feedback
- Researchers Appreciate Being Seen As Contributors
- Relationships Are Central to Partnership Success

Findings from Research Question 4:

- Research Questions Are Designed with DEIJ Priorities In Mind

- Diversity of Perspective Not Included with Research

A set of recommendations have been drafted based on the findings and informed by best practices in the literature. These recommendations are particularly useful to those who work directly in partnership with researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

Recommendations for Research Question 1, 1a, and 1b:

- Clarify the IRB process
- Clearly state the key priorities to which research requests must align and review IRB submissions based on alignment with those priorities
- Assign a contact person in the district

Recommendations for Research Question 2:

- Clarify expectations for research outputs
- Connect researchers with their desired audience / department

Recommendations for Research Question 3:

- Build a system of sharing and feedback between researchers and practitioners
- Raise priority decisions and urgent problems to a set of researchers for “technical” assistance and insight

Recommendations for Research Question 4:

- Establish relationships with research institutions that have diverse populations
- Require that research requests include a detailed description of how their work aligns with DEIJ priorities
- Invest resources and time in projects that do more than just understand inequity, but begin to address it

If followed, these recommendations will allow the RPAT to produce quality and relevant research with a quick turnaround, while overcoming their limited resources and capacity.



Introduction

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, school districts are now required to utilize research-based evidence in decision-making. These new accountability measures placed on schools have forced districts to search for relevant research to inform practice. In response to changes in policy, schools are utilizing research more than ever and are being held accountable to the results of their research-informed decisions. School district officials and practitioners are in need of a steady stream of research to improve practice and meet statutory requirements (Harrison et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2017; Shankland, 2010).

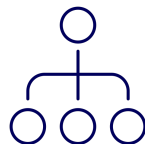
School districts have responded to ESSA's requirements by reexamining their research processes to ensure that researchers are in tight alignment with district needs and priorities. School districts are composed of multiple components, including but not limited to offices, networks, and stakeholders. Each element of the district is responsible for making complex decisions on a daily basis. Therefore, district leaders need to ensure that district goals are tightly aligned and communicated with all stakeholders and that they have processes in place that will best serve their districts (Coburn et al., 2020).

With the increased demand for research, those conducting research can no longer simply produce findings and place them in a public forum like the What Works Clearinghouse (Joyce & Cartwright, 2020). To best inform practice, school districts would most benefit from research that is closely aligned with their most pressing

problems of practice, and an efficient allocation strategy that shares research with decision-makers who will take action based on the results. All of this must be done within the constraints of the K-12 school district. In order to do this well, districts and researchers must collaborate throughout the research cycle to ensure that the end result will be useful and beneficial to both parties.

The Central City Department of Education (CCDOE) faces the same challenge: an urgent need for relevant research that can guide decision-making and policy. As one of the largest school districts in the country, the inconsistencies across research, policies, and practices at the district-level is a critical organizational problem. Without a solution, the district faces potential ineffective research application and wasted time and resources. Inside of the CCDOE, processes are in place to support both researchers and practice/policy implementation; however, these processes do not align across stakeholder groups. Researchers have a system to follow in order to submit research requests and conduct their investigations. Contrastly, there are separate structures available for departments to search for relevant research to inform curriculum and instruction. Within the larger DOE, the Research Practice Alignment Team (RPAT) attempts to bridge the gap between these two groups. Their current responsibilities include conducting internal evaluations, public reporting of data, responding to ad hoc requests from policy makers, providing research support, and reviewing over 400 IRB submissions and 150 data requests. While the CCDOE is a very large school district, the RPAT is a small department with limited resources and capacity that cannot support the large amount of research requests. As a result of the limited resources, the RPAT cannot provide a quick turnaround on data requests, research request submissions, and efficiently disseminate findings to the rest of the district.

The Central City Department of Education is a fertile ground for research and improving school outcomes. However, improving practice across the district requires alignment between research and policy. Currently, research conducted within the district is designed independently of issues relevant to practitioners. This leads to research findings that are irrelevant to practitioners, and district problems attempting to be solved without being informed by current research. The RPAT sits at the intersection of policy and practice, representing a key point of intervention in achieving CCDOE's vision for the future. This project provides recommendations on how CCDOE could close the gap between research and practice/policy. If followed, the recommendations will allow the RPAT to produce quality and relevant research with a quick turnaround, while overcoming their limited resources and capacity.



Context & Problem Statement

The Central City Department of Education is one of the largest school systems in the nation, serving a diverse group of students with a variety of economic levels, native languages, lived experiences, and educational needs. One of the district's priorities is to support the diverse student population it serves - and provide the wide range of supports needed by such a community. A majority of students served by the CCDOE are economically disadvantaged; almost a quarter are provided Exceptional Education services; and there are pockets of students who are Multilingual Learners. As of August 2018, the CCDOE reported a four-year graduation rate of around 75%. Given the population and the concentration of students in one geographical area, the CCDOE provides an opportunity to work with a large, diverse population of students. This is a draw to many researchers, resulting in the CCDOE being frequently targeted as a partner with large research institutions and universities.

Supporting the work of research partnerships requires human capital and material resources. As a result, the Department of Education established an office dedicated to the review and support research efforts. The Research Practice Alignment Team is a division of the Office of Policy and Evaluation. ([See Appendix A](#) for an organizational chart detailing the CCDOE.) The RPAT exists to handle public reporting, evaluations of internal programs, ad hoc requests from policymakers (e.g. literature reviews, data analytics), and advising and partnering with external researchers.

In any given year, the RPAT receives hundreds of requests to do research in the district's schools, as well as data requests from researchers, including requests for school level data (ie: math scores for a specific subgroup, distance students travel to school, racial makeup of a specific neighborhood of schools). The CCDOE currently receives around 300 - 400 IRB (Institutional Review Board) requests a year from external researchers seeking access to schools, teachers, and assessment systems among other things within the district; close to three-fourths of these requests are approved every year. This becomes an internal issue for the department as attending to a large number of research projects and data requests absorbs the time and resources that could be spent in other ways.

Despite all of the research performed within the CCDOE, there are few systems and structures in place to ensure that research is disseminated to policy makers, with the goal that research can be translated into improved practice. At the close of research projects, there is a request for researchers to submit a final deliverable to the DOE; of the deliverables submitted, the majority are a draft of a research article or a book – products unlikely to be disseminated widely or used to inform policy makers or practitioners. For this reason, these final deliverables are not an effective tool for disseminating research insights. As this process currently exists, there is an extraordinary amount of research conducted within the CCDOE that is not in a usable form, not of practical value, or inaccessible to practitioners.

The Central City Department of Education is dedicated to ensuring that all processes are aligned and constructed so that the research happening in the district is benefitting the practitioners, the students, and the greater city and research community. This is a complex and rigorous problem to solve, made increasingly more challenging with the size and diversity of the district.



Problem of Practice

Large school districts across the country are faced with a monumental task - creating and managing a system that has the capacity to ensure that students can learn and grow during their time in school. Institutions, particularly school districts, offer opportunities for researchers to pursue their research agenda with students, teachers, and the broader school community (Whithurst, et. al, 2013). School districts provide researchers an opportunity to learn more about schools themselves and the larger ecosystem around schooling. The scope of potential research results in partnerships between researchers and large school districts across the country. The partnerships between researchers and school districts are often mutually beneficial. Districts benefit from the partnership when they can utilize research findings to inform decision-making, improve teaching practices, and use as a foundation for drafting policy. However, the wide-range of responsibilities that correspond with supporting research efforts are time consuming and resource intensive. Districts must navigate between the benefit of having researchers conduct their work within the district and the structural and process demands that it puts on the district's resources.

As districts build out systems for working with researchers, there are several considerations they must make about research partnerships. The first is how to share data that is collected for the district's needs, but might be useful for those conducting research outside of the district. Large districts often have a set of data

that is available to the public; that data has been cleaned and sorted so that any identifying information has been removed to protect the privacy of students and staff. Districts like New York City, Boston, and Atlanta have robust datasets available to the public. Data systems take time and resources to maintain, and yet do not always meet the needs of researchers. Information like student-level data, school-specific data, and demographic data at a more granular level are needed to answer many research questions. In response to the additional data needs of researchers, districts may establish a data request process. Districts have different processes for individuals to request data. Some districts have a formal form that requires researchers to submit their rationale for their research and describe the specific data that they need, while others have a direct email to connect with a district-level individual who processes their request. These processes are human resource intensive, may be inconsistent or untimely in their responsiveness, and, as a result, are often a pain point for districts. (Barnes, et. al, 2020)

Districts must decide how to review, approve, and support research proposals. Systems are created to manage the large number of requests for research. Review processes ensure that research is high quality and abides by the highest level of ethical codes for doing research. Districts often create systems that either utilize Internal Review Boards (IRB) from external partners affiliated with researchers or create a IRB system themselves to ensure that proposals meet research standards. Los Angeles Unified School District, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Indianapolis Public Schools utilize IRB approval from other entities and then align requests to district priorities (LA Unified School District, n.d., Miami-Dade County School District, n.d. Indianapolis Public Schools n.d.). Contrast this with districts like New York City Public Schools and Baltimore City Public Schools that have their own Internal Review Board that requires initial IRB approval from a partnered university or organization (New York City Department of Education, n.d., Baltimore

City Department of Education, n.d). The systems which districts use to review and approve research requests can be cumbersome and time consuming for both researchers and district employees. As a result, the process can be a bottleneck in getting research off the ground.

Time may be a contributing factor to the useability of the research. Districts and researchers are often on different timelines; districts need research that can influence a school year or a specific policy while researchers may have a longer block of time (often years) in which they will complete the research. The consequence of differing timelines from a practitioner perspective is a lack of access to the data and insights when decision-making occurs. From the research perspective, pressure to move quickly may cause frustration because high-quality research takes time. The differing time-based needs of the various stakeholders are often in conflict with one another.

Each consideration contributes to the larger question of resource allocation: how can districts optimize for quality research that produces actionable findings so that practitioners can improve outcomes for students? When districts don't have a strategy for optimizing these processes, there are several potential consequences. The first consequence is a draining of resources. Human capital is often needed in order to support data requests, IRB approvals, and translating insights into practice. The second consequence is one of missed opportunities. When research is not translated and put into practice, there are potential changes and insights that do not make their way into district knowledge. This results in continued separation between researchers and practitioners, despite alignment in wanting to improve outcomes for students and deepening understanding of district needs. Ultimately, when research processes are not optimized, there is a waste of resources, knowledge and potential.

The Central City Department of Education's Research Practice Alignment Team is clear on the importance of improving the clarity, efficiency, and outputs of their partnerships with researchers. Over the last decade, they have worked to streamline their IRB and data request process, build out structures to support questions, and reimagined the roles of the department in order to best support researchers. While those adjustments are improvements, the RPAT still wishes to improve their practices to better support both researchers and practitioners.



Project Questions

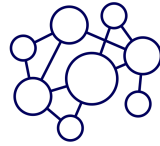
This project seeks to understand the ways that systems and structures with the CCDOE can be improved to lessen the tension between researcher and practitioners. Ultimately, the goal of the district is to establish a system that effectively supports external research priorities and research-informed decision-making, thereby resulting in more equitable experiences and opportunities for students. In pursuit of understanding best practices to inform the district, the following research questions were composed:

- Research Question 1: **What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?**
 - Research Question 1a: **How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?**
 - Research Question 1b: **How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?**
- Research Question 2: **What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making?**
- Research Question 3: **What kind of research evidence and practices would**

most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?

- **Research Question 4: How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?**

The research questions were drafted in hopes of informing the CCDOE so that they can improve their research process holistically to build stronger research outcomes and drive practitioner action. From these questions, a project plan was drafted, which is outlined and detailed later in the report.



Conceptual Framework

In order to articulate how the historical experience of the district, the literature, and the research questions align, we established a conceptual framework outlining how each of these components impact and influence each other. The conceptual framework for this project is best understood in three layers. The first layer is through the CCDOE's vision of achieving equity, which is the ultimate goal of the district. This leads to an inquiry to understand the reasons behind the K-12 research-practice gap and the link between a lack of dissemination of research and inconsistent action by district decision-makers and practitioners. Ultimately, by solving for the gaps between research and practice, research-informed choices can be made to better serve the students and larger school community of Central City.

Central City's Department of Education is committed to "creating a supportive learning environment that reflects the diversity of Central City" (Central City Department of Education, Vision and Mission, n.d.). To achieve this goal, both practitioners and researchers are working to understand the areas in which inequities exist, and to find potential solutions to address those injustices while promoting diverse perspectives and experiences. It is necessary that all stakeholders have a clear sense of the goals of the district prior to engaging in teaching, learning, and research. This vision provides a way of assessing success and keeps everyone focused towards the same priorities and goals.

Once the vision is clear, the second layer is to address some of the barriers to creating a system of shared insight and knowledge between researchers and practitioners. The first point of intervention is time, the second is establishing shared priorities, the third is a strategy for sharing with the correct people, and the fourth are the outputs themselves. By sharing within a time frame and about current problems of practice, researchers will produce insights that practitioners want and need. Some strategies that might be used are Research-Practice Partnerships and participatory research; both of which are driven by community and practitioner needs. A system that aligns research insights that are easily digestible and actionable with partner practitioners who can act on those insights unlocks the ability to create policy, build systems, and improve instruction based on research findings.

The final layer is to build partnerships that improve outcomes in schools. Research deliverables must be shared with practitioners who can use the insights to inform their decision-making. This requires that the problems of practice (listed above) have been sufficiently solved for. It also requires a dissemination strategy so that the digestible and actionable research is in the hands of practitioners. If viable research is in the hands of practitioners, then practitioners can share back their insights and findings from the field, making the research more relevant and viable for practitioners. This shared feedback cycle improves researchers capability to create insights that drive action. If there is a true partnership in which sharing of insights can be developed, the result is a school district that produces more equitable outcomes for students.

A visual representation of the conceptual framework can be found in [Appendix B](#).



Literature Review

Research-practice gap in K-12 education & the systems related to research use

Knowledge of the gap between research and practice in K-12 education is not new (Joyce & Cartwright, 2020; Penuel et al., 2017). In the 1960s, educational leaders had the belief that rich resources to improve teaching and learning already existed but were not reaching practitioners in a usable format, so the Office of Education began developing experiments, systems, and structures to find a way to get those resources in the hands of those who needed them. These initiatives were a part of the “Great Society” era and lasted through the 1980s, when policy makers began leaning toward creating federal initiatives that would restructure education (instead of continuing to leverage “research-use” as a way to improve schools) (Farley-Ripple et al., 2017; Joyce & Cartwright, 2020; Penuel et al., 2017; Bulterman-Bos, 2008).

Farley-Ripple’s team of researchers (2017) conducted a qualitative study that built upon the idea of brokers and brokerage as the missing link in getting research to educators. Essentially, a broker is a link between the research and the practice. While their study was not without limitations, they found that organizations that use research well have people in important structural roles that help to guide the research from the researchers to those who are in need of it. However, from their research, it was deemed that having a person in that structural role is not the sole

answer; instead, they recommend that organizations focus on their brokerage network - the system in which practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers work together to exchange, transform, and communicate research (Farley-Ripple et al., 2017; Shankland, 2010; Coburn et al., 2020; Neal et al., 2019). Educational research is moving beyond researchers as the experts and practitioner as receiver of research to one of collaborative research and action. This can reduce the research-practice gap.

As was evident in the 1960s, one of the barriers between getting research from researchers to practitioners is the deliverable produced. Due to the demands of their roles, practitioners have limited time to search through and read lengthy studies to find what applies to their practice, preventing research from being efficiently applied in the field (Donovan et al., 1999, Farley-Ripple et al., 2018). Policymakers and practitioners alike need to be able to find relevant research and quickly apply the learnings without spending a bulk of time interpreting the findings and the non-technical language. As a result, researchers must identify and state clear strategies for application to support their integration into the work of nonresearchers (Donovan et al., 1999).

Under the guidance of ESSA, a 2016 national survey indicates that school and district leaders are wanting timely, relevant research to fuel their ongoing work and decision-making (Harrison et al., 2017). Educators are ready to build relationships and close the gaps with research, but they have many doubts. According to educators, research is often out of line with practice and studies that are completed are often poorly aligned (if at all) to the daily needs and priorities of practitioners (Farrell et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2017; Tseng et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2017; Coburn et al., 2009; Shankland, 2010). Educators also worry that research is not timely enough to be useful and results are often published in ways that educators are not

able to access easily (Farrell et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2017; Penuel et al., 2017; Farley-Ripple et al., 2017; Shankland, 2010). Educators express doubt due to research often being conducted in contexts that are different than their own and question the sustainability of research-based initiatives that are under-resourced and are likely to fail due to the chaotic policy environments in which our educational systems exist (Harrison et al., 2017).

Building capacity: Role of RPPs

Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) are becoming more popular in the educational research world. The focus of RPPs is to create a sustainable and dynamic relationship between research and practice (Tseng et al., 2017).

The goal for researchers and practitioners should be to build mutually beneficial relationships. Research-practice partnerships should exist in cyclical relationships, wherein the research is given to the practitioner and integrated into practice before giving feedback and insight back to the original researcher. From there, the researcher continues to build upon the research before sending it back to the practitioner. Through this cyclical relationship, both the researcher and the practitioner benefit and grow in their practices together (Henrich & Good, 2018).

The key uniting force between different stakeholders is research-practice partnerships, which work to identify problems and work to build solutions, while working to improve education at the school and district level (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). These partnerships should work with close collaboration between the researchers and the practitioners, but require several components in order to do this well - with proper alignment being a key component. There must be alignment around the vision, the motivation, and the potential impact of the partnership, as

well as direct ties for how the findings can be put into practice for those in the field (Horner, 2020). With this alignment, researchers and practitioners can create the productive cyclical relationship previously mentioned.

However, creating sustainable RPPs is not a means to an end in education. There is a limited body of research showing the consistency and reliability of use of research evidence that came from RPPs and districts. (Farrell et al., 2021; Penuel et al., 2017) Researchers must do more than just form these partnerships; they must be dedicated to doing the work alongside others, while also being focused on helping to ensure equity and the voice of all in their research.

Issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice

“Why am I always the one being researched?” This is a question that has been raised by both educators and historically marginalized communities in our country. Researchers have consistently ignored historical inequities during the research process.

There are many different ways that the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) can be applied to research and partnerships within districts.

However, in many places, issues of DEIJ are seen as an add-on, rather than a key part of the research process. Researchers should press on the importance of embedding and infusing matters of DEIJ into frameworks and processes (Henrick et al., 2019; Liberman & Young, 2020). Research partnerships have always focused on building trust in relationships, but they should also be intent on developing relationships that are equitable, while also addressing the inequities that have long existed between the people who are being researched and the researchers themselves (Henrick et al., 2019; Liberman & Young, 2020; Diamond, 2021).

Developing these research relationships can also help turn research initiatives away

from a top-down approach and move into more of a collaborative space (Henrick et al., 2019; Tseng et al., 2016, Liberman & Young, 2020). The idea of research being done to a community or a group of people, as opposed to being one with a community or a group of people, is an idea of the past (Tseng et al., 2016; Diamond, 2021). Researchers and communities must come together and partner in research areas - as they work together to inform educational improvement.

In order to reach the point of bringing researchers and communities together, it is important for all involved parties to have shared values and priorities for the research. Research questions, research agendas, and processes about the research should be shared conversations and decided on equitably - not just by the researcher (Tseng et al., 2016; Henrick et al., 2019; Liberman & Young, 2020). As Doucet (2021) points out, “Unless everyday people have a central role in telling their own stories, the stories researchers tell...will always run the risk of glorifying dominant discourses (n.p).” Researchers and districts must work to get community members and members of marginalized groups who are used to being researched to join and work with the research teams.

Another issue pertaining to DEIJ is the use of research as a method of amplifying already existing inequitable structures and hierarchies. Research evidence is a system of power and researchers often misuse research evidence thinking that data is neutral and unbiased (Kirkland, 2019; Diamond, 2021; Denner et al., 2019). Historically, data is a tool that has given powerful people a way to make claims about other groups of people by reinforcing ideals of a racial hierarchy (Kirkland, 2019; Doucet, 2021).

Research partnerships should be focused on dismantling these issues of inequity in research - and not just reinforcing them (Diamond, 2021). Some things that

equitable partnerships can do to help improve issues of DEIJ are things like keep a “common equity language,” be open about biases of all team members, and avoid making assumptions that could be harmful to others based on these predetermined assumptions (Lieberman & Young, 2020).



Data Collection

Based on the project questions, literature review and conceptual understanding of the problem, the following data collection strategy was designed. We first focused on collecting data through two different surveys and through interviews. We wanted to survey a variety of practitioners from within Central City’s Department of Education, as well as a variety of external researchers who frequently conduct research within the CCDOE. We chose to interview some external researchers from organizations that have submitted upwards of ten proposals through the DOE’s Internal Review Board in the last ten years. We also interviewed individuals who were recommended to us as experts in their field when it comes to working with large, diverse school districts and individuals who provided user interviews of the IRB and data request process. Lastly, we interviewed key staff members from the Research Practice Alignment Team (RPAT) of the CCDOE.

When creating our surveys, we studied the work of William Penuel and his *Survey of Practitioners’ Use of Research* (2016), as we defined the term “research” in our surveys. Like Penuel, we wanted our survey respondents to view research through the lens of “using systematic inquiry to answer a specific question” (Penuel et al., 2016, p. 3) as opposed to the standard practice in education of looking at a data set to identify certain things.

The survey for external researchers (Survey A) asked participants to reflect on six different categories of thought. We wanted to press researchers to think about the research they have conducted within the CCDOE; how they present their research findings; the relationship they have with the CCDOE; how strategic priorities of the department influence their research; how they incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities in their research; and how they would compare the IRB application processes of the CCDOE with the application process of other large, diverse districts. Survey A was distributed throughout January/February 2022 and was sent to external researchers identified by the RPAT as frequent users of their IRB system. (Survey A was sent to 107 external researchers.) Surveys were anonymous and contained no identifying markers. (See [Appendix C](#) for the contents of Survey A.) This survey had a response rate of 34%.

The survey for practitioners of the CCDOE (Survey B) asked those who work within the department to reflect on how they regularly utilize research in their work, the relationship that they have with researchers, and how they incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice ideas within their daily work. Survey B was distributed throughout January/February 2022 and was sent to members of the district identified by the RPAT as members of departments that the RPAT most wanted to hear from (in terms of how the current research processes are serving those departments and how these processes might be improved). (Survey B was sent to 32 members of the CCDOE. See [Appendix E](#) for an organizational chart highlighting which offices of the CCDOE received our survey.) Survey B asked respondents to name their position within the district. However, the survey was confidential - it was not required for respondents to answer that question and, in the results, all identifying markers were removed. (See [Appendix D](#) for the contents of Survey B.) This survey had a response rate of 44%.

We created an interview protocol for those researchers who have completed research (Protocol A) within CCDOE, as well as an interview protocol for those who contain expertise in conducting research with other large, diverse school districts (Protocol B). In both protocols, we aimed to press researchers to reflect on how they navigate systems; how priorities of an organization are considered in the work they do with that organization; how relationships are developed and maintained with organizations; how they define success in terms of research partnerships; and how they work to ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in their work. Interviews were conducted virtually between November 2021 and February 2022. Our interviewees for Protocol A were selected by staff members of the RPAT, as they were researchers that have frequently worked with the department and could offer valuable insights as to how the systems of the CCDOE work. Our interviewees for Protocol B were selected from institutions we were already in contact with and recommendations from interview contacts. (See [Appendix F](#) for the contents of Protocols A and B.) We conducted user interviews with researchers outside of the CCDOE to provide insights and feedback as they navigated through Central City's current IRB system. Our goal was to gain insights into pain points from people who utilize IRB systems but have no experience with CCDOE's IRB system. Our user interviewees were selected from institutions with which we had established contact. We completed 21 different interviews across all interview types.

As well as collecting data through surveys and two different types of interviews, we also performed a landscape analysis to collect other data. The Central City school system is one of the largest school systems in the United States; for our landscape analysis, we compared the IRB systems and structures of the CCDOE to the IRB systems and structures of some of the other largest districts (including Los Angeles Unified School District, Chicago Public Schools, New York City Public Schools, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Clark County School District, Broward County

Public Schools, Houston Independent School District, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Orange County Public Schools, and the School District of Palm Beach County). We then expanded our analyses to include diverse urban school districts including Atlanta Public Schools, Indianapolis Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools, Baltimore Public Schools, and Philadelphia Public Schools.

Throughout this landscape analysis, we looked to compare information such as:

Does the district...

- ...ask researchers how their research will benefit the larger body of knowledge?
- ...ask researchers how their research will benefit the school district directly?
- ...list their strategic priorities for the year?
- ...ask researchers to name how their project will align with those priorities?
- ...ask for a time-frame for submission of results?
- ...give instructions as to how to submit a deliverable (or describe what the district is requiring in terms of deliverable)?

In making these comparisons, we aimed to look at ways that other large and diverse school districts are running their IRB/research application process. We also had the opportunity to speak to various members of some of these districts to learn more.



Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the data. The qualitative and quantitative data collected were used to answer each of the four research questions below. To answer the research questions through a qualitative lens, an inductive method of coding was used with a combination of descriptive coding and process coding to analyze the findings (Maxwell, 2005). The quantitative data was analyzed using Stata and a variety of statistical analyses appropriate for each research question. Below is a description of the strategy used to analyze the data for each of the research questions. Each section identifies the qualitative process, then the quantitative process, and a final comparison for alignment and conflicting information.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?

The initial qualitative review consisted of a landscape analysis of large districts, which informed the codes for interviews. Interviews were conducted to gain insight into multiple perspectives; the codes for the interviews were consistent across perspectives. The perspectives that provided the bulk of the insight into the first research question were research partners of the CCDOE and external researchers who have experience working with large, diverse districts across the country.

By starting with the documentation from large districts, we uncovered process related themes (ie: asking for help, requesting data, protecting privacy) that then informed both our survey questions and the approach to our analysis. The literature references the need for mutual priorities; as a result, the codes specifically identified pain points in the system, focusing on the ease of establishing a research partnership. Therefore, those codes were prioritized when analyzing data (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).

The key codes used to analyze interviews to inform RQ1 were: requesting data, protecting privacy, applying for approval, resubmitting, asking for help and receiving approval.

One comparison that was key to answering RQ1 was the responses of interview participants that spoke to the process of applying for approval to do research within large districts that were not Central City and those that had experience applying directly with CCDOE. For the sake of the recommendations, particular attention was paid to insights that were positive experiences from external researchers that could be applied to Central City or points within the CCDOE RPAT process that were highlighted as easy to navigate or helpful to individual researchers.

The quantitative data (collected through surveys) was analyzed using the following methods: a frequency distribution of the survey respondents that submitted IRB and data requests, as well as the number of resubmissions to the platform. Additionally, a correlation analysis was run between the submission of an IRB and data request to see if there was a relationship between the two processes.

Research Question 1a (RQ1a): How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?

Data from the landscape analysis was used to establish a deeper understanding of the ways that districts currently navigate between priorities and the broader research agendas of their partners. All interviews provided relevant insights into this research question; though researchers who publish their work had more experience balancing the priorities. Interview participants answered questions that dove into the alignment from two perspectives - the first being how researchers think about an organization's priorities when conducting research in partnership with a district, and, secondly, how district employees and practitioners put external researcher's insights into practice.

In combination with the interview trends, codes were designed. The primary codes attributed to this research question were: connecting, sharing insights, setting priorities, shifting direction, building partnerships, and resisting partnerships.

The quantitative data (collected through surveys) was analyzed using the following methods: a frequency distribution of the use of research by practitioners, the frequency of receiving relevant research, and knowledge of priorities of the district. Data for this analysis was a combination of both Survey A and Survey B.

Research Question 1b (RQ1b): How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?

To gather data for this research question, we returned to the landscape analysis to identify if there were consistent themes in the questions or expectations of researchers when applying for data requests, or working as researchers within the district. From that analysis, interview questions were drafted that sought to

understand how researchers consider the pressing problems of practitioners and how practitioners apply research to make decisions within districts. Interviews were coded into themes and then reviewed for consistency.

Key codes used to analyze data that informed findings related to RQ1b were: identifying priorities, establishing benefit, returning insights, putting into practice, navigating timelines, and building new partnerships.

The quantitative data collected to answer this question included insight into the use of external research in decision-making by district level employees. The data was analyzed using a frequency distribution reviewing the questions related to: how often they received relevant research from external researchers, and how often they went looking for research to inform their decision making.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making?

The landscape analysis found that many districts and organizations have established methods to ensure that outputs are most usable to practitioners. From the analysis of current practices, interviews were conducted with researchers who work alongside the CCDOE, researchers that work with other large districts, and members of the RPAT department who work to make research more useful for practitioners. Those interviews yielded insights that were coded by theme and then reviewed for insights and tensions.

Analysis of this data found there were several points of convergence in thought or expectations. Those sources of potential tension are noticeable in the key codes used to make sense of the data.

Codes that informed RQ2 finding were: co-creating findings, disseminating findings, committing to outputs, using findings, differing outputs, sharing promptly, translating research, hoping for usefulness, communicating findings, and publishing.

The quantitative data collected to answer this question included insight into the ways that researchers consider their final outputs, and the way that practitioners use and share research findings. The data was analyzed using a frequency distribution reviewing the questions related to: how often they received relevant research from external researchers, what form the research was provided to them in, the frequency of the shared research, and the usefulness of the research output provided.

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What kind of research evidence and practices would most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?

This question was answered using interview and survey data. The interviews focused on researchers who have worked alongside other districts and had insights on building meaningful systems and partnerships. The initial interviews conducted were analyzed using the following codes: sharing priorities, establishing sharing cadence, aligning around priorities, systematizing feedback, and sharing actionable insights.

The quantitative data was analyzed using a frequency distribution to understand how often practitioners are bringing in external research into their decision making. A correlative analysis was also conducted between survey questions regarding how often practitioners communicate with researchers, and how often practitioners are given research outputs.

The findings in the surveys and the interview data were then compared for similarities and differences. The majority of the analyses yielded similar results; however, there was a data point that was present in the interviews (the importance of relationships) but that was not as present in the survey data. Additional interviews were conducted to understand more about the difference between the survey and the interview insights. As a result, the interviews were reviewed with the addition of one thematic code: building relationships.

Research Question 4 (RQ4): How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?

In an attempt to understand the ways that diversity, equity, inclusion and justice guide research decisions, a mixed method approach was used. A survey collected insights into how departments within the DOE consider DEIJ outcomes in their decision-making.

The quantitative analysis used was a frequency distribution. The questions in the survey analyzed for RQ4 asked about the frequency that research questions, findings, and decision-making are done with DEIJ priorities in mind.

To further our understanding of how diversity, equity, justice and inclusion were actually prioritized, we analyzed interviews from external researchers and those who partnered closely with CCDOE. We also reviewed the survey data from those who work within the district. The analysis of the interviews resulted in the following thematic codes: reflecting diverse perspectives, diversifying researchers, systematizing practices, bringing in community, reflecting personally, gatekeeping, and shifting focus.

For a full list of codes and descriptions of the qualitative themes, see [Appendix G](#).

Limitations

There are two main limitations with the findings.

The first is a limitation with the selection of the sample population. The survey respondents were selected by the partner organization as individuals with insights into this process. Those interviewed were a combination of researchers who were designated by the DOE, members of the DOE who self-selected to be interviewed, and researchers from outside of the DOE who were willing to be interviewed. When reviewing the departments within the DOE that received the survey (see [Appendix E](#)), there were three departments that contain Diversity-related offices. Our survey recipients were not in any of those departments, but employees specifically working on DEIJ issues might have been able to provide insight that was not captured. People who worked within the DOE were asked to potentially critique the system they work for, which may have resulted in less detailed responses or an unwillingness to complete the survey at all. Another response limitation is that DEIJ questions were responded to at a much lower rate. This represents some inconsistencies in response rates across survey questions. A final response

limitation was that the researchers designated by the DOE were not up to date; several requests went to inactive emails or individuals who did not have appropriate insight to complete the survey.

The other limitation was the data collection process for the interviews. The interviews were all conducted via an online conference software with the context that the project was in partnership with CCDOE. The partnership with the DOE might have prevented those currently working with the DOE from sharing their full experiences. There may have been a hesitancy to be forthcoming while on a recorded virtual call; there was less opportunity to respond to body language and ask more probing questions; and participants could not show documents or examples as easily as if the interviews were in person.

These limitations should be considered when reviewing the findings as they speak to the generalizability of the insights.



Findings

Research Question 1: What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?

Investment From Both Parties Supports Success of Research

One finding that was consistent in both the literature and in our data collection was the need for mutually supportive relationships between the researcher and the school district. To have a successful partnership, priorities on both sides of the equations must be aligned.

Many interviewees observed that consistent alignment around priorities was key to the success of a research partnership. Some interviewees spoke about this inside of the context of an RPP; however, even traditional research partnerships found that alignment led to greater success. One interviewee who had experience working with districts, state organizations, and research consultancy groups reflected on their time at the district noting that:

If... [the researchers] just wanted data, but they didn't want to partner, my answer is no. It's a non-starter...we are basically saying that the researcher is carrying out

work on the superintendent's behalf. And so, we're really putting a big stamp of approval on that research work. And so, automatically, it needs to be a partnership. And what we found was that certainly that requires a lot more work on our end as well.

CCDOE Research Request System is Ineffective

A second finding was related to how members of a research office within a district think about how resources and human capital are being allocated. When comparing the IRB/research processes of the CCDOE and other school districts with which our research respondents have worked, there was a sharp contrast between the number of proposal resubmissions that were requested. In working with the CCDOE, 91% of respondents indicated on our survey that they have had to resubmit their research proposal at least once before being approved by the DOE to perform their research. In contrast, it was almost a 50/50 split in other districts between having to resubmit or not. Our survey data also indicated that 76% of researchers who responded indicated that the IRB/application systems of other districts are easier to use than the CCDOE's system. One researcher went as far to comment, "The CCDOE IRB system is, by far, the most complicated, difficult to manage, and time-consuming application process I have ever encountered."

RQ1a: How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?

RQ1b: How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?

Strategic Priorities of the CCDOE are Difficult to Find and Interpret

A third finding that was evident was the need to align the research being completed to the priorities of the district. On Survey A, 100% of the external researcher respondents indicated that their research would somehow be beneficial to the practitioners of the CCDOE; however, 80% of the practitioners who took Survey B responded that research that matches the strategic priorities of their team is rarely shared with them. From another perspective, only 40% of researchers surveyed indicated that they were aware of the priorities of the CCDOE when establishing their research questions. Out of that 40%, 63% of those same researchers indicated that they had a district contact to help them navigate the systems. Our analysis of survey data and interviews demonstrates that most researchers who have contacts are able to find and utilize the district priorities, but researchers who do not have contacts are not.

An interviewee, who has experience working with large state-level departments of education, spoke to the fact that researchers should be taking on the work of the superintendent, by focusing their work on the strategic priorities of the district. In doing so, the researcher and the school district must make the commitment to partner and work together in concert to ensure the work matches both researcher and district goals.

A district administrator in a large southern district explained that, in order to help districts and researchers determine what the priorities are, they list them in the IRB application, as well as request explanation of how that proposal aligns to those priorities.

When speaking about the Central City IRB process, one user interviewee, who is a Master's student out of a top university, noted that the application asked applicants for the “expected educational benefit [their project would] provide the Central City education community.” The interviewee wondered “Is there an external link or definition of expected educational value that we could look at to determine if our request is likely to be approved?”

Defining educational benefit or value could take many forms, but we found in our landscape analysis that 63% of the large districts that we studied opt to do this by listing the current priorities of their district or the research needs of their district on the IRB/research application. This forces researchers to justify how their research aligns to the needs of the district, but also allows the district to easily deny a researcher if the research doesn't align to what the district needs.

Research Question 2: What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making?

Research Outputs Given to the CCDOE are Inconsistent

Our first finding is that there is a lot of inconsistency in how research outputs are being shared with the CCDOE at the conclusion of a research cycle. Survey A showed that, though 84% of respondents did submit a final work product to the district, there is no consistency as to how those findings were submitted. 52% of

respondents indicated that they sent a completed report or book to the district; 16% had a conversation with a member of the CCDOE about their findings; and 16% sent an abstract or brief summary of the results.

As discussed in the literature review, research shows that the barrier that most commonly prevents the closing of the research-practice gap is that deliverables are produced in a format that is not easily used and accessible by practitioners. In fact, 70% of practitioners who responded to Survey B indicated that they would be more likely to use research that was given to them, if it was given in a more desired format. (According to Survey B, 60% of respondents indicated that they would prefer research deliverables to be given as a one-page brief with main ideas highlighted or as a research summary.)

Research must be shared back with districts in order for it to truly improve practice. Through our landscape analysis, we found that 69% of the large districts we examined had explicit directions on their IRB/research application that explained what was expected of researchers at the culmination of a research cycle. For example, Boston Public Schools require a bi-annual research summary to be submitted to a department sponsor; Baltimore City Public Schools require that researchers present their findings via short summary insights; while Indianapolis Public Schools require that researchers submit a complete report to the Director of Evaluation and Assessment at the end of the project. Other larger districts like Los Angeles Unified School District and the New York City Department of Education don't have a submission requirement at the end of a research partnership. Districts must consider how researchers are sharing their findings in totality, and what processes exist in order to disseminate the findings within the district. Only then can practitioners then use the findings to impact policy, day to day decisions, and student learning.

The landscape analysis also discovered that there are inconsistencies between what districts ask for in terms of outputs and what practitioners ask for in terms of deliverables. While 69% of the district websites analyzed have directions regarding the deliverable that needs to be submitted at the end of a research cycle, most districts only require a final report. (Of the districts we studied, Baltimore Public Schools was one of the exceptions, instead asking for a two to three page brief of the research with summaries.) Practitioner responses suggest that across the country, districts are requesting final reports from researchers that are not in a digestible or usable format to practitioners.

Researchers and Practitioners Desire Useability in Work Products from Research

Our second finding examines how districts are utilizing meetings and facilitating conversations to ensure that research deliverables are usable by the practitioners. Some districts are bringing researchers and district practitioners together for discussions through the entire research process. According to one interviewee who is a researcher outside of Central City:

[At the end of a project,] we would try to have the program staff have a facilitated discussion with the research team to discuss, "Here are the findings. What does this mean for your work? What are the implications?".... If I give my program teams a report to read and digest and react to, this won't happen. They don't have time, but those facilitated conversations

were more helpful.

Some districts are also committing to ensuring that the research summaries are accessible to all, and in an everyday language that is easily understandable. One interviewee stated:

[This organization is] really committed to writing accompanying pieces that are briefs - one to two page overviews for teachers, families, and support staff...That's new for us to have that commitment and kind of name for us as a group that we want to be engaging with the public in that way.

One researcher, reflecting on their own research into early reading strategies, suggested some questions researchers should consider by stating:

[We ask] 'What does it mean to you with parents, with teachers, with school leaders?' I think that's probably the most important thing to be in terms of making sure that it's useful and out there so other people can make use of it.

Research Question 3: What kind of research evidence and practices would most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?

The following insights speak first to the ways in which the research itself, and the practices of engaging in research, can more strategically guide decisions within CCDOE.

Researchers Want Findings to Be Useful to Practitioners

The first finding for this question is a need for alignment between the research priorities of the district, and the questions the researchers are trying to answer. Best practices in developing Research-Practice Partnerships suggests an alignment prior to working together and this practice is a generalizable strategy to improve research partnerships (Henrich & Good, 2018). Prioritizing this alignment during the initial steps of creating research partnerships is key to ensuring that research is useful to practitioners. This is supported by recurring insights from the interviews, who emphasized the importance of truly aligning research around priorities of the practitioner. One researcher (who worked with large, diverse midwestern districts) said that external researchers must “try to identify ‘what is their [the district] strategic plan?’ ‘What are their particular strategies?’ ‘Does our project align?’” Throughout the conversation, this researcher came back to the point that it was important for the district and the researcher to have the same priorities so that the results of the research were usable.

To this point, another interviewee reflected on the need for researchers to be flexible in the research questions they pursue, in order to ensure that their projects are useful for the district. A current partner of the DOE reflected on the need to be flexible as a researcher when approaching a partnership - sharing an example of a

time when she had to adjust her research questions to better align with the current goals of her partnering department - she shared that:

Maybe it's not always a good fit. Maybe the questions aren't actually policy and practice relevant questions... I hope that we figure out how to have conversations to say 'Okay, fine, let's also ask this question, or let's add this measure or let's drop this piece that feels too cumbersome.' So feel entitled to do that, that's a wish I have for our partners.

Other interviews revealed shared thoughts; one researcher spoke to the importance of aligning around long-term and short-term research priorities, but said that, in both cases, it is important that researchers are asking questions that are important to the district. In conversation with a different researcher, who had experience as both the external researcher and the district employee, the researcher mentioned the importance of knowing where the district's priorities currently were, and where they were headed. Another interview noted tools that are helpful, such as a “learning agenda that we could use to help us have a shared understanding of what our priorities are in terms of research questions.” Ultimately, practitioners and researchers alike spoke to the need for the content of research to be relevant to the individual districts' highest leverage priorities first, in order for the research to effectively influence decision-making.

No Current System for Sharing Findings Exists in CCDOE

The second finding for this question centers on co-creating dissemination strategies, including the frequency, timing, and focus/target audience of the research results. Interviews revealed that there were two logistical linchpins that participants thought could make their research more relevant to decision-making at the district level. One interview revealed a conflicted response when discussing research related to math instruction for middle school students, in which exciting findings on pedagogy were found. They first shared the excitement of having information as a researcher that could be useful from a district's perspective, but framed that reaction with frustration with the misalignment of the timeline, potentially making the insights less relevant. When thinking of the timing of disseminating information, they said that:

When you actually give information is very, very important for use. If we gave it to them in August and then we asked them, "How did you use it for this upcoming year?" they would've been like, 'We couldn't because you gave it to us too late'.

The same researcher continued to discuss frustration; not just of the lack of alignment around the timeline, but of ensuring that the right people received the information. Continuing the same example of math instructional strategies, the interviewee shared the importance of identifying key individuals within the district who could put the insights into practice. They shared the importance of knowing

who could benefit from research at the partner organization by noting:

Every partnership has to have a dissemination strategy, but there's almost not just a dissemination strategy, but we need to constantly be understanding what other people are learning too, because that informs how we are thinking about our work.

The results from Survey B spoke to the need for research to be shared regularly, with the people who make decisions. When reviewing the external researcher responses, 84% of respondents submitted the findings of their research in some form. However, practitioners within the DOE received the findings from researchers only 1 - 2 times a year. There is a timing gap between the submissions from researchers, and when those findings actually make their way to those who can apply the insights to policy and practice within CCDOE.

The frustration with timing and sharing was not just felt between researchers and practitioners. Researchers felt the same pressure when navigating the IRB and data request system. One researcher mentioned the frustration of the turnaround on data requests when trying to find insights that were relevant for the current school year, stating that “you want the most recent data but you just have to wait.” Another researcher who works directly with CCDOE mentioned that working in partnership with the district actually made the sharing of information harder. “In some ways the biggest surprise is I think we thought doing it [research] in partnership would make a lot of things easier. And it actually feels like it’s made so many things harder.”

Researchers Value of Practitioner Feedback

The third finding was of the benefits of incorporating practitioner feedback. Interviews revealed that many of the researchers either are already attempting to share back findings of research, or see the benefit of having practitioner feedback, and would like mechanisms in order to receive feedback regularly. As noted above, when external researchers were surveyed, 83% of respondents believed that their research was useful to the district they partnered with. However, interviews revealed that transferring knowledge to decision-makers was difficult, and that feedback and/or insights from those implementing decisions at the district level would make research more relevant.

One researcher, who worked to develop professional development tools for teachers shared the current process of incorporating practitioner feedback:

We would plan for sessions towards the end of a project for the research team to come in and talk to a wide range of staff about the findings..., not just as a presentation by the researchers, but really a facilitated discussion with the state team to say, 'Here are the findings. What does this mean for your work? What are the implications?'

Other interviews revealed similar findings. One researcher, who works on demographic data for the city, emphasized engaging with decision makers, saying “we need to engage them in the entire process and not just put a report out and say, ‘Here's what we've learned about this,’ without any authentic engagement.” Other

researchers shared that they wanted to provide “more hands on, more concrete” opportunities to engage with their findings or even opportunities to hear “how the program has changed based on what we’ve learned through the process.” Other researchers said that true feedback would include practitioners being “willing to review drafts and provide feedback and provide policy context, so that the end result was really something that was useful to us and also accurate.”

Gathering feedback from districts and practitioners is not always easy. Some researchers who work within CCDOE shared some of the barriers to gathering insights from those impacted by the work. Some reasons for not partnering were a lack of access, not knowing exactly “where and who to go to for feedback, and there being no concrete system through which to give insights or solicit perspectives from decision-makers.”

One researcher spoke to the hesitancy that some practitioners felt in working with a formal partner of the district, sharing that getting feedback is challenging. “There's not been that sense of this is easier. And actually, because folks have such big feelings about bureaucracy and DOE central, I think in some ways it's maybe raised some sense of suspicion.”

Researchers Appreciate Being Seen As Contributors

The fourth insight is for researchers to identify not only as academics, but as policy makers for the district with which they are researching and cooperating. Several interviews revealed ways in which researchers have been brought in to contribute to solving pressing problems that districts faced.

In one example, the researchers were brought in because the district was making choices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and wanted a research partner to offer their insights during the decision-making process. The research team was brought in to be a partner to the practitioner team when looking at the data in a way that was “unique in the history of the relationship.” The interviewee explained that the district asked to partner in finding solutions.

[The district asked]... what is the systematic approach to start to address disparities and findings? So I feel like ... If it were not for the partnership, I don't think we would've been at that table. And I think that we expanded their capacity to really dig into the data and understand what was there.

In another example, a researcher had extensive insights into a teacher prep program, and the district was making choices that were tangentially related to preparation of teachers but saw ways to utilize the researcher's perspective. The interviewee described the shift in the partnership as:

We have this problem that we're brainstorming right now. And we need a thought partner....we're really stuck and what are your thoughts? It was no longer just a question of completing a very finite individual dual project. But rather we had this partner studying a body of research with us and who really understood the ins and out.

In another example, an ongoing relationship had been established where a department within a district had started to present specific researchers with upcoming decisions, or opportunities, in order to gain insights from an alternative perspective. The interviewee shared that it was a major transition in the partnership, highlighting:

A recognition of our expertise and that we could have something to offer just in trying to do rapid translation of science and offer some recommendations. So that was a really gratifying time to be able to give something back and offer something that might be helpful as folks were just trying to figure it out.

Relationships Are Central to Partnership Success

The fifth insight is that building cooperative research-practitioner relationships is a key way to improve a district's ability to make research backed choices. Throughout the interviews and the insights above, a throughline of the importance of relationships being established between researchers, district team members and/or practitioners in schools.

When surveying external researchers and CCDOE partners, several respondents noted that the reason their research was done in Central City public schools was because of a relationship that had been previously established. Specifically, respondents said that the reason they chose to conduct research in Central City

public schools was due to an “existing relationship between client and Central City public schools;” there were “specific schools and staff that wanted to participate with us,” or they had “existing relationships with Central City schools.”

One researcher was working on a study that used data spanning decades. They shared that the reason the research was able to continue was because of the relationship that existed between themselves and members of the RPAT staff, specifically saying “We've maintained that relationship through changes in administration, both [city leadership] and in the Research Practice Alignment Team. And so all the data we get comes from them.” When asked about the success of their research, the interviewee said “It's about creating relationships with the people at DOE to make it better for everyone, better by means of they trust us, we trust them.”

Interviews revealed that relationships between districts and researchers are key to the success of a partnership. A researcher who works with a large district on the East Coast said “We have built up relationships with trusted partners over time. And so, that's where for me, personally, I found the greatest value in those relationships that we had had long term.” They went on to say that the ease of conducting the relationship, the feedback from the final reports, and the confidence in the usability of the final output were all increased by long term relationships.

Not only are relationships key to the partnerships between districts and researchers, but strong relationships also facilitate the ease of applying and getting approved for research with districts. Interviewees mentioned that having a strong relationship allowed them to gain access to “why some things might be moving slowly or additional communication with leaders that might be useful.” Contacts,

according to interviewees, offered insight into how to navigate conducting research, including the barriers. One researcher who has conducted several research projects for the DOE as a contracted researcher said that:

Certainly history matters. I mean, a lot of the people and organizations I've worked with, I've worked for a long time. And so, when somebody approaches me about doing a project, if I've worked with them in the past and want to continue working with them, I just say yes.

Another researcher spoke to the importance of having a relationship because it allowed the researchers to navigate through bureaucratic barriers. The interviewee used privacy as an example of how districts might reject research proposals, saying it was a “handy excuse” if districts “don’t want to put in the time or they don’t want to be embarrassed by what the results might show.” The interviewee ended the story saying that because of their contact in the district “I don’t feel like the DOE does that, at least with me. Maybe with other people.”

While there may not be a current system in place in order to establish and maintain relationships, the data speaks to the value a relationship provides researchers in both navigating the system, getting access to data, and conducting meaningful research.

Research Question 4: How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?

Two findings came from the investigation into the DEIJ priorities of CCDOE's research decisions.

Research Questions Are Designed with DEIJ Priorities In Mind

The first finding is that there appears to be consideration of DEIJ priorities in the research decision-making already - specifically in the design of the research questions and the consideration of the priorities in decision-making. Respondents of both surveys replied that they often are considering DEIJ priorities in their work. This theme was equally represented in the interviews of researchers and practitioners.

The findings outlined below were formed from the analysis of the survey data directly asking about diversity, equity inclusion and justice from the perspective of practitioners in the district. The survey asked specifically about the consideration of DEIJ in research questions, research findings, and in decision-making by those within CCDOE. When responding to the question of how often do you consider DEIJ priorities when drafting research questions, 56% of the survey respondents reported that they "always" or "most of the time" consider DEIJ in the design of their research questions. When responding to the question of how often do you consider DEIJ priorities in research findings, 33% of respondents reported that they do "always" or "most of the time." When responding to how often DEIJ prioritizes influencing decision-making, 78% of respondents reported that they did "always" or "most of the time."

External researchers were also asked to reflect upon their own DEIJ practices. Similar to the district practitioners, most respondents said that they considered the implications of DEIJ in the presentation of their findings - 87% said that they “always” or “most of the time” considered those priorities in their research.

Interviews echoed this same concept, highlighting the importance of doing research that was aligned with priorities of promoting equity. One researcher stated that “all our research focuses on race and income. We don't think of it [research] without [an equity lens]. We don't design a study without it.” Repeatedly in interviews, researchers said that their work was rooted in DEIJ priorities. Several researchers spoke to the idea that “all of their research” was aligned to issues of equity. Those researchers who work directly with Central City often said that an equity lens was baked into their research. One interviewee said, “most of the students who attend are minority and low income; you couldn't design a study in Central City without thinking about that.”

However, one interviewee spoke to the challenge of going beyond just considering DEIJ priorities in designing research and actually putting those concepts into practice:

The researchers who were thinking critically about how they were going to be careful and guard against their own biases and biases in different methodologies and all these things versus someone who acknowledged that there were inequities, but it was very surface level.

Diversity of Perspective Not Included with Research

The second finding was about how the DEIJ priorities were incorporated into the research process. Our survey sought to determine if respondents conducted research with an equity lens, and if the community that was being studied actively engaged in the research to ensure diversity of perspective. The survey that went to external researchers asked how often the team that conducts research reflects the diversity of the community being serviced by the research. Of those who responded, 73% said that this was true only “some of the time” with only 7% of the respondents saying “most of the time.” It should be noted that no one who completed the survey indicated that the researchers were “always” representative of the population.

This insight was also explored through qualitative methods. The participants in the interview process spoke to areas in which diverse perspectives were included in the research process and two areas of interest arose. The first was about the strategies that researchers use in order to intentionally bring in diverse voices or perspectives. One researcher spoke to the need for increased diversity of those analyzing findings. They suggested the researchers find ways to bring in the community, saying “[We are] always going back to the problem and then thinking, how are we incorporating people's voices?”

Another researcher stated that, in the past couple of years, there has been an increase in the willingness to dive into these challenging conversations saying “there's just been a really big shift, I think, in greater comfort and saying, we start with race and racism and that connects to everything else.”

Other researchers suggested that there needs to be a process for incorporating diverse perspectives. One said that “interpreting the findings with a multiracial community advisory board will be really important.” Another suggested a systems-approach saying “we need to do better in our next studies to build in procedures at the beginning.”

Another researcher reflected on some of their past research projects, summing up the need for processes to engage with community members, noting:

Here's that potential to either dismantle or reinforce inequity along every step of the research process, starting with what are your research questions? And from what I have been learning, the best way to guard against that is by engaging the people who we are trying to research and serve in the whole process.

Additionally, researchers acknowledge the general lack of diversity, racially and otherwise, in the community of academic researchers. Those that conduct research tend to be fairly homogeneous, thus making it more challenging to represent diverse perspectives and viewpoints. It makes it particularly difficult to identify and counteract areas of bias when backgrounds are similar. Researchers throughout our interviews noted explicitly that the population of researchers is not diverse. One researcher spoke about the diversity of the research community saying “there is a really big diversity issue, so we need to get a more diverse population into doing this.” Another researcher who had over 20 years of experience working with CCDOE talked about the impact of a lack of diverse research community by

highlighting:

And the impacts are really small over time, but you have to find meaning in it...the field needs to do a better job of attracting, black and Latinx and LGBTQ and low income people into the field. And it needs to start early.

The second insight that arose was that the mechanisms used to conduct research and academia at large and are not accessible to everyone. One interviewee referred to the process of conducting research - specifically the IRB and data request processes - as “gatekeeping.” Another researcher mentioned that the process was meant to “keep people out of the process.” A third said that the IRB process “would be impossible to navigate without someone experienced in academia.” One researcher reflected overall on research as a means of equity, stating:

We want to use research to dismantle inequity, but we recognize that it might perpetuate it and without critically assessing our own processes and our own blind spots, we would be potentially in a position of reinforcing inequity instead of dismantling it

The data indicates that the respondents are considering DEIJ priorities in their work as both external researchers and practitioners; however, there seem to be gaps in how those priorities translate into meaningful action and change.



Recommendations

Based on the research discussed, we have drafted a set of recommendations for those who are working in partnership with researchers, policy makers and practitioners. We believe these recommendations will be most useful specifically for the RPAT.

Based on the findings, we recommend that the CCDOE RSPG consider the following:

Research Question 1: What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?

- a. How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?*
- b. How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?*

Clarify the IRB process. In order to ensure that the limited capacity and resources of the RPAT and the DOE are being allocated wisely, we recommend that the CCDOE clarify their IRB processes. This could take many forms; our recommendations include:

- Providing a checklist of what the researcher needs before they begin the IRB process;

- Moving any needed templates to the top of the IRB application process, instead of at the bottom;
- Providing a flow chart at the beginning that explains their IRB process (what happens during and after);
- Providing a contact protocol for researchers to get their questions answered during the research process (and letting researchers know who they can contact if they have other questions that need answering throughout the process); and,
- Providing a FAQ document/Research Review Manual that contains important information as to how the research process works and what the expectations are for researchers that they can review throughout the process. (See example [here](#) from Clark County School District and [here](#) from Chicago Public Schools.)
 - The CCDOE has information about how to navigate the IRB system, but it lacks specificity around the content of the request for research.

Clearly state the key priorities to which research requests must align and review IRB submissions based on alignment with those priorities. On the IRB application, we recommend that the CCDOE list their yearly priorities. Researchers must be able to explain to which priority(ies) their research aligns; this allows the DOE to ensure that the only research being done is research that is going to help them meet their goals aligned with their priorities. With this recommendation, the DOE must be prepared to decline research projects that do not align; but, it also lets the researchers know what type of research projects the DOE is currently looking for.

Assign a contact person in the district. Upon approval of submission of IRB proposals, we recommend that the RPAT assign a contact person to that research

team. This contact person should be a member of the office that will most benefit from the researcher's research, and should be the liaison between the researcher and the practitioners of their department. This will aid in building symbiotic relationships between the CCDOE and researchers; it will aid in practitioners being able to work alongside the researcher and ensure that the research being done will help the department; and, it will give the researcher a contact to help answer questions about the district and will aid them in their research.

Research Question 2: What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making?

Clarify expectations for research outputs. On the IRB application (as well as in the preparation information listed before the application starts), we recommend that the CCDOE give a clear description of the requested deliverable. This should include any requested information, as well as who to send the deliverable to, and a timeline as to when the deliverable should be sent.

Connect researchers with their desired audience / department. On the IRB application, we recommend having researchers select which department their research is going to benefit the most. This will help the RPAT assign the researcher a contact (within a relevant department in the district) upon approval (see Finding 3 from RQ1), and will give the researcher an idea of which department they will be working alongside in the partnership.

Research Question 3: What kind of research evidence and practices would most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?

Build a system of sharing and feedback between researchers and practitioners.

We recommend investing in a system that invites researchers and practitioners together to share relevant insights, and gather feedback from practitioners. This might be a data dashboard (Ohio Department of Education shares their research projects [here](#)), or a set of conferences for specific departments throughout the school year. While this is an investment, it would ensure that research outputs are in reach of practitioners.

Raise priority decisions and urgent problems to a set of researchers for “technical” assistance and insight. Create a system that allows for departments to raise issues and current challenges to a set of researchers that would be willing to join a working group, provide one-off feedback, or offer relevant research. Researchers benefit from seeing how they can contribute to the timebound and urgency problems of practice.

Research Question 4: How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?

Establish relationships with research institutions that have diverse populations.

Find institutions and departments that are made up of diverse researchers across race, ethnicity, culture, and class. Foster those relationships by asking them to contribute to practitioner problems (recommendation 2 above), and seek out diverse candidates for contract research roles. Our findings have revealed the importances of relationships in supporting researchers, and the RPAT has a responsibility to invest time and effort in making research more inclusive.

Require that research requests include a detailed description of how their work aligns with DEIJ priorities. Build out a question within the data request and IRB

process that had researchers identify how their work aligned with DEIJ priorities. Include examples of strong responses and update the website with a note about the importance of working towards a more just world. Draft a rubric outlining adequate results so that responses to DEIJ questions are a deciding factor in the approval process.

Invest resources and time in projects that do more than just understand inequity, but begin to address it. We recommend that the department review past research proposals with DEIJ-related outcomes for impact, and identify proposals that have accomplished work to address DEIJ needs of the school community. Moving forward, RPAT should focus attention on building capacity to support projects with outcomes that drive forward equity.



Conclusion

There is a desire within school districts across the country for relevant research that can inform pressing problems of practice and policy decisions. To fulfill district needs, researchers and practitioners must be aligned. School districts, like the Central City Department of Education, are striving to ensure that they have research processes in place that will best serve the entirety of their district and an array of diverse stakeholders (Coburn et al., 2020). Districts are forced to make decisions every day and they want to do that with the highest quality of research-informed information; however, because of the gap between researchers and practitioners, often they are making due with the best that is available as opposed to the best that is out there.

If research is not disseminated so that practitioners can use it, the research is ultimately an inefficient and ineffective use of time and resources for all stakeholders. Historically, the CCDOE has allocated resources to support research requests, data requests, and reviewing research findings. However, given the volume of requests and the scope of many of the research projects that are undertaken every year (both internally and externally), the CCDOE cannot keep up with the pace of the (ever-expanding) research support demands. Moreover, if these research findings are not shared with offices and relevant practitioners directly and systematically, then it isn't serving the purpose or needs of the district.

Our research recommends that CCDOE focus on three primary areas of intervention: forming meaningful relationships between practitioners and researchers, improving the clarity and structure of the IRB and data request processes, and embedding DEIJ priorities into the research process. By implementing these recommendations, the Central City Department of Education will improve their research outputs, drastically increasing the usability of the research conducted within their district. After implementation, Central City will be a national leader in bridging the gap between research and practice.

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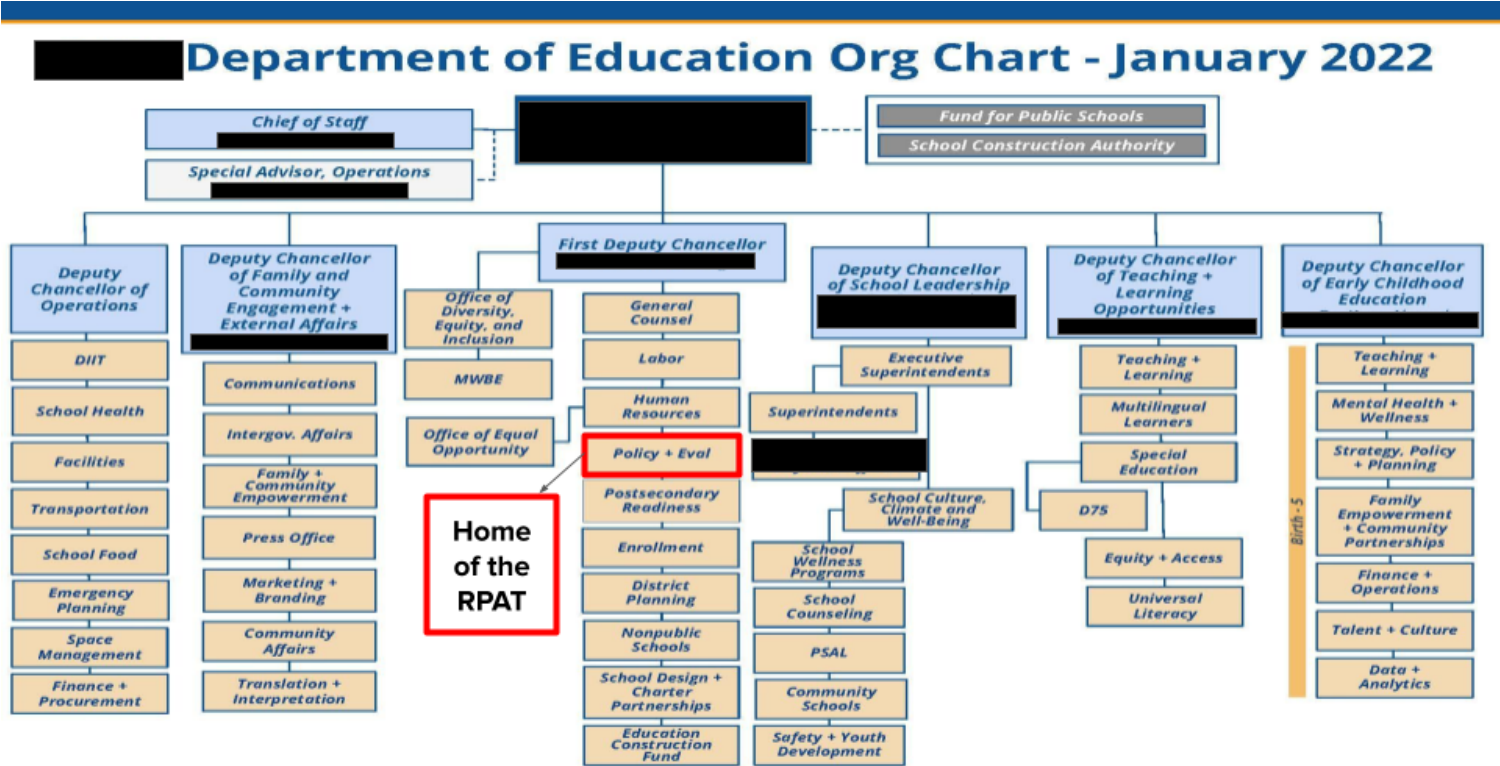
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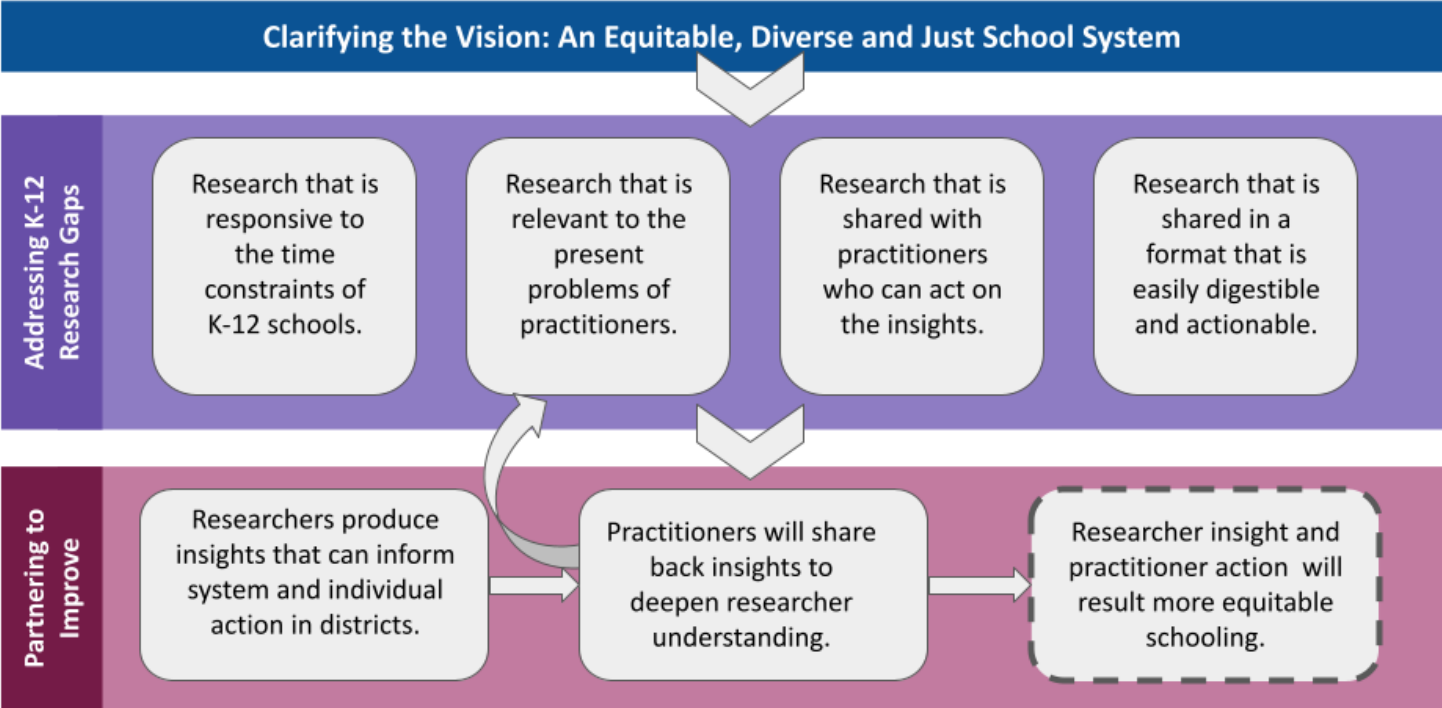
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Appendices

Appendix A: Central City Department of Education Org Chart (RPAT)



Appendix B: Conceptual Framework



Appendix C + D:

The survey introduction and the definition of research is found at the beginning of both surveys.

Dear Participants,

We invite you to participate in our research by completing the following survey.

Our research is focused on how we can help the Central City Department of Education create sustainable, scalable, and efficient systems and structures that will enable them to enhance the production of usable research evidence and improve the capacity of the Research Practice Alignment Team to produce effective deliverables. We are also researching how to ensure that usable research evidence drives racial equity.

The following questionnaire will require approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Thank you for taking your time in assisting us with our research. Under no circumstances are you obliged to answer any of the questions; however, answering them all will greatly assist us in completing our research and enhancing the understanding of our research focus. The data collected will remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. These survey results will comprise an integral part of the research study. They will be used to highlight your collective perspectives as practitioners within the CCDOE, and, in so doing, will influence decisions related to research conducted within the district.

Sincerely,

Martha McMillan and Emma Trout
Doctoral Students at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Claire Smrekar

If you have any questions about our research, please reach out to martha.c.mcmillan@vanderbilt.edu or emily.j.trout@vanderbilt.edu.

For the purposes of this study, please keep the following definition of research in mind:

"Research is an activity in which people employ systematic, empirical methods to answer a specific question. Research bases its conclusions in investigations involving statistical data, interviews, observations, and case studies, or a combination of these. Research can appear in books, academic journal articles, practitioner-oriented journals, and analyses of program implementation developed by researchers external to the district. It can also appear in policy and evaluation reports or presentations developed by researchers within a district.

For this study, we differentiate between research, which involves systematic inquiry to answer a specific question, and the practice of looking at data from the district, school, or classroom, which is more open-ended and seldom addresses specific research questions. For instance, looking at state standardized test results to identify students who need extra support in the classroom would not be research. However, asking the question “what is the relationship between fourth grade state standardized test results and high school graduation?” would be research.” (Penuel, 2016)

CCDOE Capstone - Department Survey (Survey B)

The following questions will ask about your demographics and your work experience within the CCDOE. We want to remind you that all survey responses are confidential.

Including this year, how many years have you worked at the CCDOE?

- 1-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- 16-20 years (4)
- 21+ years (5)

What is your position/role within the CCDOE?

The following questions will explore how research conducted within the CCDOE coincides with your work.

Please mark how much you agree with each statement below.

(Participants were given a Likert scale with the choices of Never, Once or Twice a Year, Once or Twice a Month, Once or Twice a Week, Every Day, N/A or Unsure to answer the next six questions.)

1. I utilize research in my daily work (1).
2. I communicate with researchers doing research within the CCDOE (2).
3. I collaborate with researchers doing research within the CCDOE (7).
4. I am given a research brief or final product from researchers. (3)
5. Research that is given to me matches the strategic priorities of my office or team. (5)
6. I seek out new research in my field. (4)

Has a researcher provided you findings from any research projects that have been conducted in the district?

- No (3)
- Yes (4)
- N/A or Unsure (5)

Display This Question:

If Has a researcher provided you findings from any research projects that have been conducted in the... = Yes

In what format did you receive the findings?

- Published Article/Book (1)
 - Official Abstract of Article (2)
 - One Page Brief with Main Points/Information (3)
 - Email with Main Points (4)
 - Link to Journal Article or Website (5)
 - Slide Deck/Powerpoint (8)
 - Research Summary (7)
 - Other (Please explain) (6)
-

Display This Question:

If Has a researcher provided you findings from any research projects that have been conducted in the... = Yes

Please explain how useful the findings have been in regards to your work within the team.

In what format would research findings be most useful to your team?

- Published Article/Book (1)
 - Official Abstract of Article (2)
 - One Page Brief with Main Points/Information (3)
 - Email with Main Points (4)
 - Link to Journal Article or Website (5)
 - Research Summary (7)
 - Other (Please explain) (6)
-

In what format would research findings be least useful to your team?

- Published Article/Book (1)
- Official Abstract of Article (2)
- One Page Brief with Main Points/Information (3)
- Email with Main Points (4)

- o Link to Journal Article or Website (5)
 - o Research Summary (7)
 - o Other (Please explain) (6)
-

Would you be more or less likely to use research findings if they were formatted in a more useful way?

- o Less likely (8)
- o More likely (10)
- o Neither/Unsure (11)

When external researchers/organizations conduct research within your team, what communication exists between your team and the external researcher/organization?

This next question will ask about how diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are considered in research used by your team.

For the purposes of this next section, please keep these definitions in mind.

"Diversity - Representation of all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another

Equity - Evaluating institutions and systems to identify and remove biases in the distribution of opportunities and resources

Inclusion - Ensuring differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every individual feels a sense of belonging

Justice - Systematic and proactive reinforcement of the public policies, institutional practices, cultural messages, and social norms needed to achieve and sustain racial equity." (EAB, 2022)

Please mark how often the following statements occur when thinking about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

(Participants were given a Likert scale with the choices of Always, Most of the Time, About Half the Time, Sometimes, Never, and Not Sure to answer the next three questions.)

How often are DEIJ priorities...

1. ...embedded in research questions that are explored within your team at the CCDOE? (1)
2. ...embedded in the use of a research finding that came from a project completed within the CCDOE? (2)
3. ...considered when making decisions within your office or team? (3)

CCDOE Capstone - External Researcher Survey (Survey A)

This set of questions will ask about your experiences navigating the IRB process and publicly available data within the Central City Department of Education.

In the last ten years, how many independent research proposals have you submitted for IRB approval in CCDOE schools?

- 1-3 (1)
- 4-6 (2)
- 7+ (3)
- 0/Not applicable (4)

Have you ever had to resubmit a project through the CCDOE's IRB process? (By resubmit, we mean: Have you had to make edits to a proposal before gaining IRB approval?)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If Have you ever had to resubmit a project through the CCDOE's IRB process? (By resubmit, we mean:... = Yes

What was the rationale given to you by the CCDOE's Institutional Review Board for having to resubmit?

Have you utilized CCDOE publicly available data in your research?

[This data is found on the Information and Data Overview page of the CCDOE's website:]

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If Have you utilized CCDOE publicly available data in your research? [This data is found on the I... = Yes

From which of the following categories did you pull publicly available data? Please select all that apply. (Each of these categories are listed on the Information and Data Overview site previously linked.)

- Test Results (4)
- Graduation Results (5)
- Demographic Snapshot (6)
- End-of-Year Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism Data (7)

- Central City School Survey Results (8)
- Principal Satisfaction Survey (9)
- School Quality Reports (10)
- Quality Review Ratings (11)
- Doing Research on Central City Public Schools (12)

Did you have to submit a data request to the CCDOE to find data beyond what was publically available?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (4)

This set of questions will ask about your experience sharing research outcomes or project findings with the CCDOE.

Did you have a sense of how your research findings could benefit practitioners within the CCDOE?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Somewhat (3)

After being approved through IRB, were you given any formal instructions as to how to share your findings upon completion of your research?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (4)

Upon completion of your research project, which of the following did you submit to the CCDOE?

- I didn't share my findings. (1)
- I sent them a finished report/book. (2)
- I had a conversation with a member of the CCDOE. (3)
- I sent the abstract to an upcoming article/report. (4)
- Other (5) _____

This set of questions will ask about your working relationship with the CCDOE throughout your research.

Why did you choose to conduct your research in Central City public schools?

Throughout your work with the CCDOE, did you have a district contact to assist you?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If Throughout your work with the CCDOE, did you have a district contact to assist you? = Yes

In thinking about your contact from the CCDOE, please respond to the following statements.

(Participants were given a Likert scale with the choices of Yes, No, Somewhat, and Not applicable/Not sure to answer the next eight questions.)

My contact within the CCDOE...

1. ...was able to answer questions in a timely manner. (1)
2. ...was a member of the RPAT. (2)
3. ...was staffed on my project team. (3)
4. ...was from a department outside of RPAT. (4)
5. ...helped me navigate the IRB process. (5)
6. ...helped me navigate the legal structures within the system. (6)
7. ...was explicit in sharing how the department would utilize the findings from the research project. (7)
8. ...regularly met with me to stay current on my research. (8)

Display This Question:

If Throughout your work with the CCDOE, did you have a district contact to assist you? = No

What was the process you had to go through in terms of getting questions answered?

After completing your research, did you receive any communication from the Research Practice Alignment Team (of the CCDOE) to collect your findings or to learn more about your research project?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)
- Not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If After completing your research, did you receive any communication from the Research and Policy Su... = Yes

What was the nature of the communication?

Display This Question:

If After completing your research, did you receive any communication from the Research and Policy Su... = No

Would you have liked to receive follow-up communication?

- Yes (4)
- No (5)

Display This Question:

If Would you have liked to receive follow-up communication? = Yes

What is the nature of the communication that you would have liked to receive from the RPAT?

This set of questions will explore how the priorities of the CCDOE influenced your research decisions.

For this section, we define priorities as the Superintendent's priorities for Central City public schools.

When submitting your research proposal to the CCDOE's IRB system, were you aware of the priorities of the CCDOE?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Not sure (3)

Display This Question:

If When submitting your research proposal to the CCDOE's IRB system, were you aware of the prioriti... = Yes

Please explain how knowledge of these priorities made (or didn't make) an impact in your research decisions.

Display This Question:

If When submitting your research proposal to the CCDOE's IRB system, were you aware of the prioriti... = No

Would knowledge of the district's priorities impact research proposals that you submit to the CCDOE IRB? Please explain.

This next question will ask about how diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are considered in your research.

For the purposes of this next section, please keep these definitions in mind.

"Diversity - Representation of all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another

Equity - Evaluating institutions and systems to identify and remove biases in the distribution of opportunities and resources

Inclusion - Ensuring differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every individual feels a sense of belonging

Justice - Systematic and proactive reinforcement of the public policies, institutional practices, cultural messages, and social norms needed to achieve and sustain racial equity." (EAB, 2022)

Please mark often Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) priorities are utilized in your research.

(Participants were given a Likert scale with the choices of Always, Most of the Time, About Half the Time, Sometimes, Never, and Not Applicable/Unsure to answer the next three questions.)

How often...

1. ...are DEIJ priorities embedded in your research questions? (1)
2. ...do issues of DEIJ impact your research generally? (2)
3. ...do you consider the implication of DEIJ in the presentation of your findings? (3)
4. ...is your team of researchers reflective of your research population? (9)

This set of questions will ask about your experiences navigating the IRB processes with a school district that is not the CCDOE.

In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or research system?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or... = Yes

Through what school district outside of the CCDOE did you submit your last research proposal?

Display This Question:

If In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or... = Yes

In the last ten years, how many independent research projects have you submitted for approval within this other district?

- 1-3 (1)
- 4-6 (2)
- 7+ (3)

Display This Question:

If In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or... = Yes

Have you ever had to resubmit a project through the other district's application process? (By resubmit, we mean: Have you had to make edits to a proposal before gaining approval?)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or... = Yes

And Have you ever had to resubmit a project through the other district's application process? (By res... = Yes

What was the rationale given to you by the other district for having to resubmit?

Display This Question:

If In the last ten years, have you submitted a proposal through a different school district's IRB or... = Yes

How did the ease of CCDOE's IRB application system compare to the other district's application system?

- The CCDOE's IRB system was easier to maneuver than the other system. (1)
- The two systems were about the same level of difficulty to maneuver. (2)
- The other system was easier to maneuver than the CCDOE's system. (3)

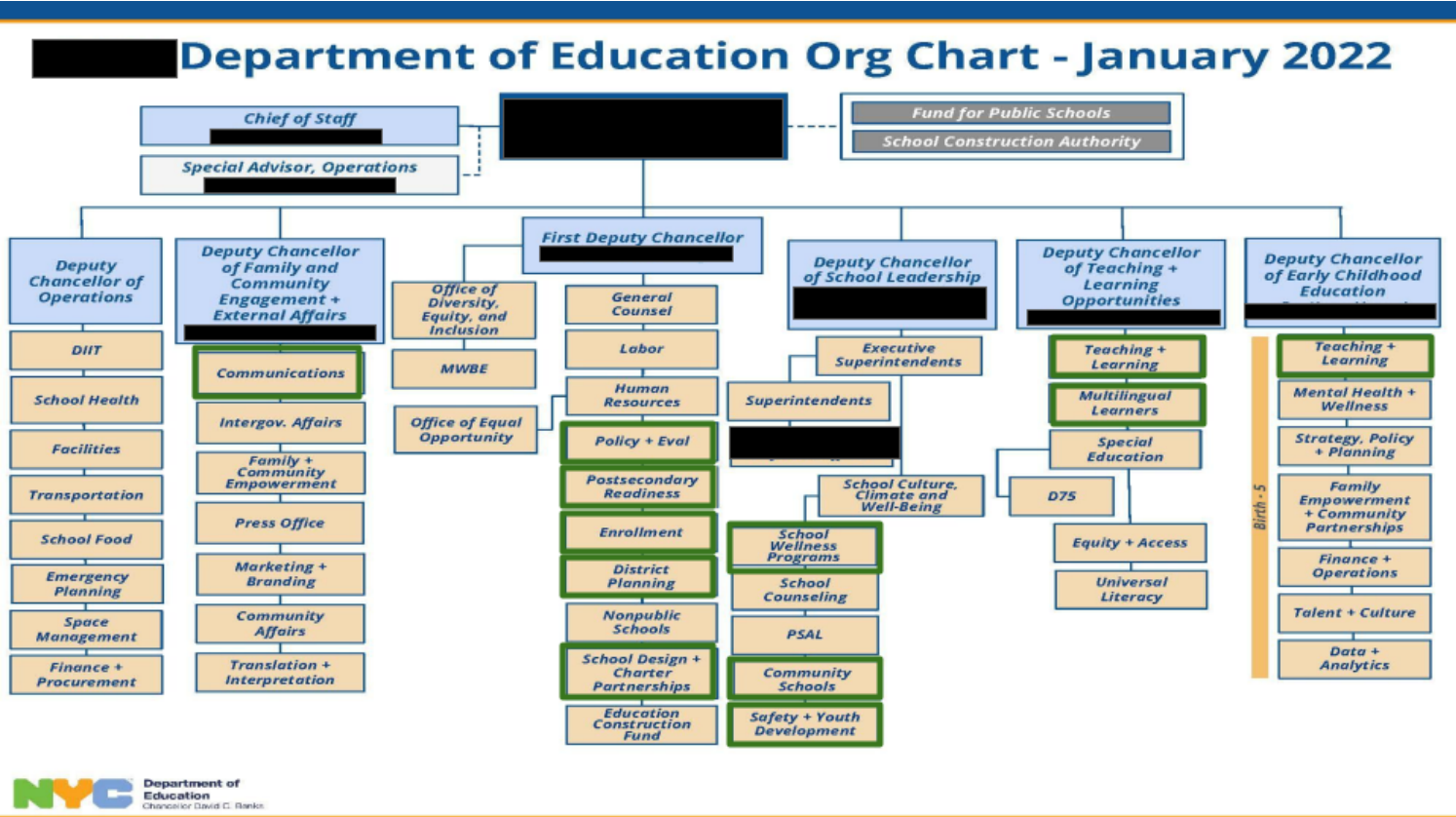
Display This Question:

If How did the ease of CCDOE's IRB application system compare to the other district's application s... = The other system was easier to maneuver than the CCDOE's system.

Please explain what made the other application system easier to maneuver than the CCDOE's system.

Appendix E: Central City Department of Education Org Chart (Survey Respondents)

Offices that are outlined in green indicate that a member/members of that office received Survey B.



Appendix F: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol for Internal DOE		
Aligned Research Question	Scripting + Question	Probes
Intro	<p>Thank you for taking the time to join us today. We will spend the next 45 - 60 minutes gaining insight from your experience with research/policy/practitioner partnerships.</p> <p>The purpose of our project is to understand the key choices and strategies that could better serve a district in effectively partnering with researchers, utilizing research findings, and align research with DEIJ priorities.</p> <p>We will be recording you with your permission.</p> <p>Before we get started are there any questions about our project that we can answer?</p>	
Background	<p>Could you introduce yourself to us? Tell us a bit about your professional background.</p>	<p>If they don't describe their current role / the role that gives them authority on the subject as them to specify that here.</p>
	<p>Thanks so much for sharing that with us. At this point we want to shift gears and start focusing more on your experience navigating research partnerships and research projects more generally.</p> <p>What experience do you have in establishing or participating in research projects at the DOE?</p>	<p>How do you think about the partner organization / institutions?</p> <p>What experience have you had in establishing research partnerships?</p> <p>Who have those partnerships been with?</p> <p>How have you decided to work with them?</p>
Q1	<p>Could you describe your process of navigating multiple systems required prior to launching your research project?</p>	<p>Which departments do you work closely with when initially starting the research process?</p>
	<p>How do you think about using publicly available data? When do you use that instead of starting a new research problem?</p>	<p>How do you think about publicly</p>

		<p>available data?</p> <p>How did you blend publicly available data vs. collecting your own data set?</p>
	<p>Do you consider the strategic priorities of the Central City DOE/ specific department prior to beginning a research project?</p>	<p>How do you navigate through your priorities as a researcher and that of the larger priorities of your institution or the partner institution?</p>
	<p>How does (did) your work connect to the larger research community?</p>	<p>How do you see your choices impacting practitioners?</p> <p>How do you see your work impacting other researchers</p> <p>In which ways do you research and institutions when you decide on a research project?</p>
	<p>How did you work with external research partners?</p>	<p>How did you think about external research partners compared about internal research projects?</p>
Q2	<p>Thank you for sharing. For this next section we want to discuss the way that you ensured that the outputs of your research were usable.</p> <p>How do you think about your role in ensuring that your research can be applied in practice?</p>	<p>What do outputs from research partnerships look like? What process is there to ensure that the outputs are useful/</p>
	<p>Can you tell us a story of when you finished a research project and what your hopes were for implementation of your findings?</p>	<p>How consistently is research applied to your decision making?</p>
	<p>How do you think about success in terms of research projects or partnerships?</p>	<p>How do you know if a project is successful? What do you do if a project is less successful?</p>
	<p>How do you think about the longitudinal plan for the projects that you work on?</p>	<p>Where do past research projects live? How do people access past projects?</p>
Q3	<p>Thank you so much for talking with us about your research practices and how you ensure that outputs are usable. We now want to transition to talk about your practices surrounding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice.</p> <p>How do you think about ensuring equity when it comes to your research practices?</p>	<p>Do you have any documents that you might be able to share with us?</p>

	What kind of systems or procedures do you have that ensure diversity (specifically racial diversity) in your research practices?	
Closeout	<p>As we close out this interview I wanted to remind you that your information will not be shared in any way in our final report. Your willingness to be interviewed is greatly appreciated.</p> <p>Are there any questions before we end the conversation?</p> <p>Wonderful, thank you for your time.</p>	

Interview Protocol for Researchers		
Aligned Research Question	Scripting + Question	Probes
Intro	<p>Thank you for taking the time to join us today. We will spend the next 45 - 60 minutes gaining insight from your experience with research/policy/practitioner partnerships.</p> <p>The purpose of our project is to understand the key choices and strategies that could better serve a district or large entity in effectively partnering with researchers, utilizing research findings, and align research with DEIJ priorities.</p> <p>We will be recording you with your permission.</p> <p>Before we get started are there any questions that we can answer?</p>	
Background	<p>Could you introduce yourself to us? Tell us a bit about your professional background.</p>	<p>If they don't describe their current role / the role that gives them authority on the subject as them to specific that here</p>
	<p>Thanks so much for sharing that with us. At this point we want to shift gears and start focusing more on your experience navigating research partnerships and research projects more generally.</p> <p>What experience do you have in establishing or participating in research projects?</p>	<p>How do you think about the partner organization / institution?</p> <p>What experience have you had in establishing research partnerships?</p> <p>Who have those partnerships been with?</p> <p>How have you decided to work with them?</p>

Q1	<p>Could you describe your process of navigating multiple systems required prior to launching your research project?</p>	<p>How did you navigate IRB application processes?</p> <p>Were there other bureaucratic obstacles in your way prior to starting your research process?</p>
	<p>How have you considered data requests as part of the larger research landscape?</p>	<p>How do you think about publicly available data?</p> <p>How did you blend publicly available data vs. collecting your own data set?</p> <p>Do you have forms or documents that you could walk us through for data requests?</p>
	<p>Do you consider the strategic priorities of a partner organization prior to building a partnership?</p>	<p>How do you navigate through your priorities as a researcher and the larger priorities of your institution or the partner institution?</p>
	<p>How does / did your work connect to the larger research community?</p>	<p>How do you see your choices impacting practitioners?</p> <p>How do you see your work impacting other researchers</p> <p>In which ways do you research and institutions when you decide on a research project?</p>
	<p>How did you work with external research partners?</p>	<p>How did you think about external research partners compared about internal research projects?</p>
Q2	<p>Thank you for sharing. For this next section we want to discuss the way that you ensured that the outputs of your research were usable.</p> <p>How do you think about your role in ensuring that your research can be applied in practice?</p>	<p>What do outputs from research partnerships look like? What process is there to ensure that the outputs are useful/</p>
	<p>Can you tell us a story of when you finished a research project and what your hopes were for implementation of your findings?</p>	<p>How consistently is research applied to your decision making?</p>
	<p>How do you think about success in terms of research projects or partnerships?</p>	<p>How do you know if a project is successful? What do you do if a project is less successful?</p>

	Do you have a sustainable or longitudinal plan to maintain relationships with the research projects that you participate in with organizations.	Where do past research projects live? How do people access past projects?
Q3	Thank you so much for talking with us about your research practices and how you ensure that outputs are usable. We now want to transition to talk about your practices surrounding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice. How do you think about ensuring equity when it comes to your research practices?	Do you have any documents that you might be able to share with us?
	What kind of systems or procedures do you have that ensure diversity (specifically racial diversity) in your research practices?	
Closeout	As we close out this interview I wanted to remind you that your information will not be shared in any way in our final report. Your willingness to be interviewed is greatly appreciated. Are there any questions before we end the conversation? Wonderful, thank you for your time.	

Interview Protocol for Research Organizations		
Aligned Research Question	Scripting + Question	Probes
Intro	Thank you for taking the time to join us today. We will spend the next 45 - 60 minutes gaining insight from your experience with research/policy/practitioner partnerships. The purpose of our project is to understand the key choices and strategies that could better serve a district in effectively partnering with researchers, utilizing research findings, and align research with DEIJ priorities. We will be recording you with your permission. Before we get started are there any questions that we can answer?	
Background	Could you introduce yourself to us? Tell us a bit about your professional background.	If they don't describe their current role / the role that gives them authority on the subject as them to specific that here

	<p>Thanks so much for sharing that with us. At this point we want to shift gears and start focusing more on your experience navigating research partnerships and research projects more generally.</p> <p>What experience do you have in establishing or participating in research practitioner partnerships?</p>	<p>How do you think about research partnerships broadly?</p> <p>What experience have you had in establishing research partnerships?</p> <p>Who have those partnerships been with?</p> <p>How have you decided to work with them?</p>
<p>Q1</p>	<p>Could you describe your process of navigating multiple research requests?</p>	<p>How do you decide which research partnerships to take on?</p> <p>Who do you say no to?</p> <p>Are there ever times when you have to say yes or no to a research project that isn't aligned to your priorities?</p>
	<p>How have you considered data requests as part of the larger research landscape?</p>	<p>What systems and structures exist to support data requests?</p> <p>How do you think about publicly available data?</p> <p>Do you have forms or documents that you could walk us through for data requests?</p>
	<p>How do you think about strategic priorities in terms of your research priorities and partnerships?</p>	<p>How do you make sense of research projects that are interesting but not aligned to the strategic priorities?</p> <p>Where do you draw the line in the sand and say yes or no? How does this relate to your research priorities?</p>
	<p>How does / did your work connect to the larger research community?</p>	<p>How do you see your choices impacting external researchers?</p> <p>In which ways do you consider external researchers when making decisions about research partnerships?</p>
	<p>How did you work with external research partners?</p>	<p>How did you think about external research partners compared about internal research projects?</p>

Q2	<p>Thank you for sharing. For this next section we want to discuss the way that you ensured that the outputs of your research were usable.</p> <p>What kind of structures did you have in place to ensure that the output of research projects got put into practice?</p>	<p>What do outputs from research partnerships look like? What process is there to ensure that the outputs are useful/</p>
	<p>Can you give us an example of when you used research outputs to make a decision?</p>	<p>How consistently is research applied to your decision making?</p>
	<p>How do you think about success in terms of research projects or partnerships?</p>	<p>How do you know if a project is successful? What do you do if a project is less successful?</p>
	<p>How do you think about the historical research inside of your organization?</p>	<p>Where do past research projects live? How do people access past projects?</p>
Q3	<p>Thank you so much for talking with us about your research practices and how you ensure that outputs are usable. We now want to transition to talk about your practices surrounding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice.</p> <p>How do you think about ensuring equity when it comes to your research practices?</p>	<p>Do you have any documents that you might be able to share with us?</p>
	<p>What kind of systems or procedures do you have that ensure diversity (specifically racial diversity) in your research practices?</p>	
Closeout	<p>As we close out this interview I wanted to remind you that your information will not be shared in any way in our final report. Your willingness to be interviewed is greatly appreciated.</p> <p>Are there any questions before we end the conversation?</p> <p>Wonderful, thank you for your time.</p>	

Codes	Description
What processes and structures are large diverse school districts using to effectively manage research and data requests?	
Code 1: Asking for help	<i>When, how and for what reasons interview participants wanted support in navigating the research and data request process.</i>
Code 1a: Building relationships	<i>How and under what conditions did researchers have or build relationships with the district</i>
Code 2: Requesting data	<i>When, how, for what reasons did interview participants apply for data requests or reach out for specific data from districts.</i>
Code 3: Exploring data	<i>When and how are participants looking through data (specifically applied to publicly available data).</i>
Code 4: Protecting privacy	<i>Privacy as a rationale for data not being available or structures being in place.</i>
Code 4: Applying for approval	<i>Details pertaining to the process of getting approval to conduct research or have data shared.</i>
Code 4a: Resubmitting	<i>When, how often and for what reasons did districts request researchers to resubmit requests?</i>
Code 5: Preparing for research	<i>What was needed by researchers in order to prepare to submit research requests, what surprises did they encounter, and what support did the districts provide.</i>
Code 6: Resubmitting	<i>When did researchers need to submit requests and for what reasons.</i>
Code 7: Receiving approval	<i>How, when and under what conditions did researchers receive approval for their projects.</i>
How do districts ensure alignment between district priorities and the larger research community?	
Code 8: Connecting	<i>How do research and practitioners connect around priorities and partnerships?</i>
Code 9: Sharing insights	<i>How do researchers and practitioners share their insights with one another?</i>

Code 10: Setting priorities	<i>How do districts set priorities? How do partnerships set priorities?</i>
Code 10a: Shifting direction	<i>How do district priorities influence researcher perspectives? How do researchers shift their perspectives based on practitioners' needs?</i>
Code 10b: Resisting partnerships	<i>How do districts say no to research partnerships? What criteria do districts and researchers use to say yes or no to a partnership?</i>
How do districts utilize external researchers to address pressing priorities?	
Code 11: Identifying priorities	<i>How do researchers identify the priorities they want to influence with their research? How do researchers consider the priorities of others in setting their research agendas?</i>
Code 12: Establishing benefit	<i>How do researchers identify the benefit of research? How do practitioners identify the benefit of research?</i>
Code 13: Returning insights	<i>How do researchers share back insights to the district or practitioners?</i>
Code 14: Putting into practice	<i>How do practitioners put research insight into action? How do researchers hope that practitioners use their insights?</i>
Code 15: Navigating timelines	<i>How do practitioners navigate the difference in timeline between researcher needs and district needs? How do researchers take the school timeline into considerations?</i>
Code 16: Building new partnerships	<i>How do research and practitioners build new relationships with each other?</i>
What efforts do large diverse districts undertake to ensure that research outputs are usable and can inform decision-making	
Code 17: Co-creating findings	<i>In which ways do researchers work with practitioners to analyze or confirm findings?</i>
Code 18: Disseminating findings	<i>How do practitioners best receive findings? How do districts best share findings?</i>
Code 19: Committing to outputs	<i>How do researchers share their findings? How do</i>

	<i>districts hold researchers responsible for sharing their findings in a useful format?</i>
Code 20: Using findings	<i>How do districts put research insights into action?</i>
Code 21: Differing outputs	<i>How might outputs differ based on the needs of the researchers?</i>
Code 22: Sharing promptly	<i>How are research agendas being designed in order for sharing to occur regularly?</i>
Code 23: Translating research	<i>How are researchers ensuring that research is digestible by practitioners?</i>
Code 24: Hoping for usefulness	<i>In which ways are researchers hoping their research gets used?</i>
Code 25: Communicating findings	<i>How are researchers sharing their findings? How do practitioners hope that findings are shared?</i>
Code 26: Publishing	<i>How does the need to publish impact the relationship between districts, researchers and practitioners in classrooms?</i>
What kind of research evidence and practices would most effectively guide research decisions at CCDOE?	
Code 27: Sharing priorities	<i>How are researchers sharing with the district? How do districts share priorities with researchers?</i>
Code 27a: Aligning around priorities	<i>How do partnerships navigate through aligning priorities?</i>
Code 28: Establishing sharing cadence	<i>How do researchers and practitioners come to an agreement about sharing information? How often? What timelines are important?</i>
Code 29: Systematizing feedback	<i>How is feedback to researchers and feedback for districts made scalable?</i>
Code 30: Sharing actionable insights	<i>How can researchers share insights that are the most actionable for districts?</i>
How might diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice priorities guide research decisions at CCDOE?	

Code 31: Reflecting diverse perspectives	<i>How do researchers reflect the diverse perspectives of the populations they serve / research?</i>
Code 31a: Diversifying researchers	<i>What structures might increase the diversity of the reserve community?</i>
Code 32: Systematizing practices	<i>How might we systematize ways to increase diverse perspectives in research?</i>
Code 32a: Bringing in community	<i>How might researchers bring community members to the table?</i>
Code 33: Reflecting personally	<i>How do researchers and practitioners currently reflect on DEIJ research priorities? How might that reflection help to reduce biases?</i>
Code 34: Gatekeeping	<i>In which ways do the structures of the IRB and Data request processes prevent equitable access?</i>
Code 35: Shifting focus	<i>How might researchers and practitioners shift focus to more equitable pursuits? How might current research agendas be adjusted to reflect the research priorities?</i>