Organizing for collective impact in a cradle-to-career network

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ORGANIZING FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT
IN A RURAL CRADLE-TO-CAREER NETWORK

By
Sarah J. Zuckerman

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Educational Administration and Policy Studies
2016
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ABSTRACT

This case study provides a thick description and conceptual analysis of the organization of community members for collective impact in a rural cradle-to-career network. This study focused on three intersecting areas: mobilization of network members; the development of shared issue frames, or common understandings of local needs; and the emergent theory of change held by network members.

The literature review encompassed the political science theories of civic capacity and urban regimes, along with the sociological theories of social capital, and social movement issue framing. Based on this review, three research questions guided the study: 1) How do community and organization members mobilize in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network? 2) How do community and organization members frame issues in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network? 3) What are the characteristics of the theory of change?

To answer these questions, a qualitative case study methodology was used. The analysis proceeded deductively from codes derived from the literature review and inductively with codes derived from interpretive field notes and memos, as well as summary reports of site visits. Member checking and peer debriefing safeguarded the findings.

The findings are presented across four chapters. Chapter 4 provides salient details of the network’s social geography. Chapter 5 provides the chronological development of the network, highlighting the development of various groups in the network. Chapter 6 examines the mobilization of individuals at various levels in the network, highlighting the importance of social capital and trust. Chapter 7 provides details on the framing processes and content, as well as the emergent theory of change described by participants. Together, these findings highlight the connection between initial issue framing and the development of action plans.
The final chapter presents five crosscutting conclusions. First, that civic capacity is dynamic in nature, with mobilization and issue framing proceeding iteratively. Second, that trust serves as social glue for mobilization and a lubricant for issue framing. Third, that the legitimacy of a backbone organization, or intermediary organization, supports mobilization and issue framing. Fourth, models for cradle-to-career network must be adapted to local contexts and social geography. Fifth, three types of leaders help to explain the progressive development of the Grand Isle Network.

This study gave rise to several important implications for policy, practice, and research. For example, policymakers should weigh implementation fidelity of cradle-to-career networks with the need to adapt models to local contexts, based on mapping community assets and geography. Implications for practice included the need to identify a legitimate backbone organization with intermediary leaders to serve as a center for mobilization and to drive issue framing. Implications for future research start with the need to critically examine how issues are framed and in particular, who is doing the framing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible by generous funding from the Initiatives for Women, the Graduate Student Association, and the Office of Graduate Studies at the University at Albany, as well as from the Chancellor’s Office at SUNY System Administration.

I would like to thank my committee for their insights and support during the dissertation process and throughout my time at the University at Albany. I would especially like to thank Dr. Lawson for his patient support and guidance, as well as the many conversations about the strategic use of self. I would like to thank Dr. Schiller for helping me discover what type of researcher I am and for helping me find my voice as an instructor. I would like to thank Dr. Wilcox for providing me the opportunity to learn qualitative research skills under her guidance. I would like to thank Dr. Lisy-Macan for her insights into rural education and editorial assistance.

I would like to thank my fellow SEADocs for their open ears, ready laughter, and friendship over the last five years: Maria Khan, Mansoor Khan, Leigh Yanuzzi, Cindy Gallagher, Nisa Felicia, RuiRui Sun, Larry Waite, and Dante Salto. I would especially like to thank Taya Owens for pushing me to think more clearly and helping me see myself as a leader among my peers. I would also like to thank the GSA Wages and Benefits Committee for keeping me honest and reminding me why I do what I do.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Jeanne Zammataro and Ira Zuckerman, for instilling in me the importance of education. I would also like to thank them for their support in helping me pursue my education to the fullest so that I can help others do the same.
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CHAPTER 1: FRAMING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Cradle-to-career networks represent the next chapter of collaborative efforts to improve educational outcomes on a community-wide scale. The most prominent among these community level collaborations is STRIVE Together, which emerged from efforts in the Cincinnati metropolitan area. The STRIVE model for cradle-to-career network development represents a specific, educationally focused form of collective impact, a cross-sector response to a community-wide need.

Models for both cradle-to-career networks and collective impact have developed primarily in urban areas and as such their theories of action may be incompatible with the unique features of rural areas. However, advocates for these models describe them as adaptable to any local context based on the prioritization of developing local leadership and goals. Yet advocates also prioritize fidelity to the models and their theories of action.

The need to balance implementation fidelity with adaptation to local context becomes particularly apparent in rural communities. Rural communities are not simply smaller versions of urban places, but rather have unique economic, social, civic, and educational landscapes, in addition to challenging physical geography.

This case study of a rural cradle-to-career network seeks to provide both a theoretical conception of an educational collective impact effort in a rural area, as well as provide actionable knowledge for leaders of rural communities. The case selected for study is one of the most advanced rural networks affiliated with the national STRIVE network and therefore provides a special opportunity to trace the network from launch through the first stages of collective impact action.

**Research Questions**
Three questions guide this study:

1) How do community and organization members mobilize in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

2) How do community and organization members frame issues in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

3) What are the characteristics of the theory of change? How do mobilization and issue framing contribute to this theory of change?

The rationale for this study and these research questions follows throughout this first chapter. This chapter begins with a discussion of one of the most pressing challenges faced by rural communities across the United States, brain drain. Like many social issues, brain drain has complex causes. The chapter continues with a discussion of cradle-to-career networks as potential place-based solution to the out-migration of college educated young people from rural areas. Next, this chapter identifies economic, social geographic, civic and educational factors that challenge the development of cradle-to-career networks in rural places. Lastly, the chapter concludes with unanswered questions about rural cradle-to-career network development and a further discussion of the purpose and contribution of this study.

**Rural Brain Drain**

For every thriving metropolis now, there are dozens of agroindustrial brain drain areas where economic growth has stalled. Experts believe these regions are in so much trouble largely because too few of their most-likely-to-succeed types with college credentials and upwardly mobile aspirations remain, and too many of the local kids with vocational certificates and the most diminished economic prospects do (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009, p. 5).
Images of the decline of rural communities in the United States conjure nostalgia for a uniquely American way of life rapidly fading into the past. Corbett (2007) wrote that for some, the disappearance of rural communities merely represents the inexorable march towards modernity. However, for the 17% of Americans who continue to call rural America home, declining local economies and populations present urgent needs, with the future of their community and way of life at stake.

Brain drain describes the out-migration of the most highly educated young people from rural to urban areas. Often this migration pattern is attributed to the need of young people to seek employment opportunities aligned to their aspirations and educational credentials (Artz, 2003). The ease of mobility increased and connectivity in the 21st century exacerbates this long-standing phenomenon. In many rural areas, brain drain leaves rural communities with the least educated, skilled, and connected young people, making it difficult for rural communities to reinvent themselves. Limited investments in non-college bound youth further limit the ability of rural communities to generate economic growth (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009).

Carr and Kerfalas (2009) identified schools in particular as being complaisant through their uneven investments in young people. A long history of school reform and educational policy built on the needs of urban schools further exacerbates this issue by preparing rural youth for jobs in urban areas, rather than their own communities (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009; Schafft & Jackson, 2010). However, Petrin, Schafft, and Meece (2014) note that many of the most successful young people are deeply connected to their communities. Rather than lay blame in the school system, they identify the lack of economic investment in rural places as a driver for brain drain, with young adults to seeking employment opportunities in urban areas that match their aspiration and educational credentials.
The disagreement on the underlying causes of brain drain underscores the complexity of the issue, with educational, economic, and social factors contributing to this migratory pattern.

**Reversing the Tide**

Petrin and colleagues (2014) and Carr and Kerfalas (2009) disagreed on the mechanisms of brain drain. However, both agree that those young people who leave rural areas tend to have the highest educational attainment, as well as greatest connections to their communities. This suggests that those that stay behind have limited human and social capital to draw upon. This suggests two routes to stabilizing the populations and economies of rural areas: human capital development and encouraging all young people to connect with their communities.

**Human capital creation.** Mirroring national discourse on human capital creation (Pittman et al. 1999), restructuring rural education has been identified as an important policy lever for retooling local economies to be competitive in a global marketplace and for stemming the loss of America’s rural communities (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). One such means to retool rural education for human capital creation is through the increase of high school graduates. As Carr and Kerfalas (2009) and Wilcox and colleagues (2014) suggest, rural high schools struggle to graduate at risk students. Wilcox and colleagues (2014) identified four mutually supportive factors at rural high schools with above average graduation rates: a culture of high expectations for all students, including looking beyond high school. These findings also included collective and individual teacher efficacy; engagement of families and community members in developing shared understandings of success as a contributing member of the community; and systems of adaptive interventions to ensure students stay on track to graduate (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker & Lawson, 2014).
Reflecting the need for high expectations for all students, but also the need for differentiation, Mitra and colleagues (2008) suggest that rural high schools must confront their college for all approach. Such an expectation often leaves non-college bound students without practical skills with which to enter the work force in skilled, high wage positions (Mitra et al, 2008). Similarly, Carr and Kerfalas (2009) identified the uneven investment of teachers and community members in students based on social status (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009) as a factor in limiting the human capital available in rural areas.

Both Carr and Kerfalas (2009) and Mitra and colleagues (2008) suggest that better alignment between high schools and local employers can alleviate these issues. When business owners share information about their workforce needs with schools, alignment can occur through curricular and pedagogical changes in schools. In particular, Mitra and colleagues (2008) suggest that schools should focus less on traditional industries and more on rising industry sectors such as green technology and biotech.

For example, Mitra and colleagues (2008) profiled a small-Rust Belt city seeking to create alignment through multi-sector collaboration to reduce brain drain. This work included revamping the high school curriculum to focus on four technical areas in high demand by local employers. The curriculum provided technical coursework for students in both technical and college preparatory tracks. Their goal was for all students, college-bound or not, to have the skills to enter the workforce in a high wage position and to have the skills to pursue post-secondary training as they move through their careers. To support this curricular redesign, the district constructed a new high school. Leadership on the part of the superintendent, and his ability to forge new relationships, contributed to the mobilization of stakeholders from business
and the social service sectors to support educational change (Mitra et al., 2008; Mitra & Frick, 2011).

In addition to providing non-college bound young people with skills needed in the local labor market, Carr and Kerfalas (2009) identified the need to provide opportunities for high school students to earn college credits. They suggested building on the existing community college infrastructure to provide bridges between high schools and local economies through dual credit programs and career exploration opportunities (2009).

This finding also points to the need for rural areas to overcome difficulties students have in attaining post-secondary education and in retaining those who have pursued a four year degree outside of the community (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). Access to post-secondary education also represents a challenge for rural students. The conventional wisdom is that rural student post-secondary aspirations are limited by the aspirations of families, peers and schools, (Hu, 2003) and limited access to information about post-secondary education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004).

However, McDonough and colleagues (2010) suggested that geographical distances and high opportunity costs might limit access to post-secondary education for rural students. These opportunity costs go beyond simple economics and include turning one’s back on family, friends, community (Budge, 2006; Howley, Hobart, & Leopold 1996; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & Jarsky, 2010) and on one’s self-identity (Bryan & Simmons, 2009).

Further, post-secondary institutions, like K-12 institutions are largely oriented towards the needs of urban areas. Overall, post-secondary institutions appear to do little to attend to the qualitative differences in financial concerns, lifestyle, and academic preparation of rural students (McDonough, Gildersleeve & Jarsky, 2010).
Despite limited access to post-secondary education, rural areas are net-exporters of college-educated people of all ages, while metropolitan areas are net-importers of those holding post-secondary credentials (Artz, 2003). While those with post-secondary degrees leave, those who fail to finish high school are the most likely to stay behind (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). While scholars have paid much attention to urban districts that function as “drop-out factories” (Balfanz & Legters, 2004), rural areas are not immune. In fact, rural districts overall have similar graduation rates compared to national samples (Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012). This pattern leaves rural areas without the human capital needed to rebuild local economies (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009).

**Place-based education: civic and social engagement.** While human capital creation through post-secondary attainment and alignment of education with local economies presents an opportunity for rural communities to bolster economic growth, rural educational researchers suggest that vocational and entrepreneurial training alone may not provide reverse brain drain. Howley (1991) cautioned that focuses on human capital alone might not provide youth with all of the cultural or social tools they need to remain as contributing adults in their home communities. Reversing brain drain may require not only aligning curriculum with local needs, but also focusing on social and civic development of young people. Howley (1991), along with others, argues for place-based education in rural areas to create not only human capital, but also deep connections between young people and the social and civic lives of their communities.

Place-based education is a progressive approach to education in which local communities become a source of learning and motivation to learn (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). These efforts typically include the incorporation of local history, geography, ecology, geology, and culture in the curriculum and employ a hands-on, community-oriented pedagogy (Hammer, 2001).
such, place-based education scholars identified as an important alternative to the “one-best system” approaches to K-12 schooling, as well as a means to better connect post-secondary education to local economic needs (Stauber, 2001).

Scholars who advocate for place-based education suggest this approach increases human capital aligned to local economic needs, but more importantly, it can also address social and civic needs in order to retain young people. Place-based education creates social capital by connecting students with local community members through service learning projects. This inter-generational learning strengthens reciprocal networks, builds trust, and instills the local social norms of the community in students (Hammer, 2001).

Place-based education also highlights the interdependence of individuals and communities in rural areas (Theobald, 1997; Howley, et al. 2011). As such, place-based education has been identified as a means to engage young people in the sustainability in rural areas, rather than seek employment elsewhere (Howley & Harmon, 2000; Howley et al. 2008; Theobald, 1997).

Gruenwald and Smith (2008) identified place-based education as a means to rebuild communities by strengthening attachments to place in order to reverse the placelessness and mobility created by standardized curriculum and pedagogy. Place-based and community-centered projects also allow young people to contribute to the greater good of the community, providing important intellectual labor (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008), potentially changing the way communities see the value of their young people. Howley (1991) also suggested place-based education in rural schools as a means to provide rural students with the cultural and sense-making tools they need to contribute to the longevity of their communities.
Creating place-based education requires change in pedagogy and curriculum, in what has been termed the instructional core of education. The instructional core of education, the interaction of student and teacher in the presence of content, has been notably difficult (Elmore, 1996). While Elmore (1996) made this point about scaling up good practices, rather than creating the type of homegrown changes implied by place-based education, the point still stands that creating change in the classroom is difficult due to the complex forces at play.

Like many educational reformers, Elmore (1996) also placed the impetus for change solely on schools and teachers, while place-based educational strategies include contributions of students and community members in leveraging change in curriculum and pedagogy. Additionally, the difficulty in creating and sustaining place-based educational initiatives (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008), suggests the need for new connections with community members who can support this work.

**Cradle-to-Career Networks as a Place-Based Solution**

Brain drain represents a complex social problem involving schools, communities, and organizations that serve children and families. Trist (1983) suggested that complex social problems require inter-organizational cooperation because no institution can meet their goals alone. Cradle-to-career networks, locally developed partnerships between educational organizations, social service agencies, and health providers, represent inter-organizational cooperation. These networks also represent a complex social solution to complex social problems in education.

Cradle-to-career education systems are new configurations that connect now-separate levels of the education system including early childhood, K-12 schools, community colleges, adult education institutes, and four-year colleges and universities. These new systems require
collaboration between individuals and partnerships on the part of organizations, as well as community leadership from stakeholders across sectors, including education, non-profit, social service providers, and business (Lawson, 2013). Such efforts may result in increased social capital for young people (McGrath et al, 2005), as well as adults.

The network selected for this study provides a unique case as many members spoke not only of developing successful students capable of entering the local workforce, but also of wanting to strengthen the connections between youth and community. These connections were stressed as both opportunities for youth to engage in activities, such as afterschool programs and sports, but also in strengthening relationships between young people and adults. As such, this network appears to focus on both human capital development and social capital creation.

As cradle-to-career networks focus on geographically bound issues, with local leaders and local needs driving the work, they can be framed as providing place-based connections between schools and communities. As such, they hold potential for supporting the alignment of rural education with local economies, integrating youth into communities, building relationships, and supporting more equitable investments in young people. In short, cradle-to-career networks may provide a means to reverse brain drain

However, large geographic spaces and low population density challenge the conception of a place-based cradle-to-career network approach. Rural leaders must decide on the geographic boundaries of such efforts, which may include not only multiple towns and villages, but also potentially multiple school districts and counties. Further, this work may be challenged by rural identities tied more closely to an individual community than a larger region. These challenges suggest the need to identify the network itself as at the unit of analysis and to cast a broad net in order to determine the outline of the network.
**STRIVE and Collective impact.** Before considering the challenges rural areas pose to the development of networks and collective impact, this section briefly explores these two terms. The network selected for this study is affiliated with the STRIVE Together national network. This national network provides assessment and technical support to help communities implement the STRIVE theory of action locally. In addition to being the most prominent model for cradle-to-career network development, Kania and Kramer (2011) held the STRIVE model up as an exemplar of collective impact. In turn, STRIVE Together national has embraced this language, with a 2014 book written by two key STRIVE leaders titled, *Striving Together: Early Lessons in Achieving Collective Impact in Education.*

As a result, the terms cradle-to-career network and collective impact have become conflated. However, collective impact efforts address any number of community-level issues, including water pollution and obesity (Kania & Kramer, 2011). To reiterate, not all collective impact efforts are cradle-to-career networks, and not all cradle-to-career networks utilize a collective impact approach.

While there is a need to differentiate between cradle-to-career networks and collective impact efforts, the network chosen for this study has drawn significantly from the STRIVE model and the collective impact literature. Participants tended to use the term collective impact to describe the Network. Notably, while individuals spoke of supporting children from birth through entry in the work force, cradle-to-career language was absent.

Therefore, cradle-to-career network and educational collective impact will be used interchangeably to describe the Network at the center of this study. While this usage may contribute further to the conflation of the two terms, it reflects how Network members view their
own work. Elsewhere, particularly in the literature review, terminology used by individual authors is retained.

**Rural Challenges to Network Development**

Although cradle-to-career networks and collective impact initiatives require local leadership and local goals, questions remain as to how they can be developed in rural communities, with unique economic, geographic, social, civic, and educational challenges. While acknowledging the diversity of rural communities in the United States, which can be found in every region in the country, many share similar conditions that challenge the work of coalition building, issue framing, and organizational partnership development necessary for cradle-to-career network development, including those in the economic, social, civic, and educational arenas.

**Economic conditions.** Rural areas are not merely smaller versions of urban places. They face unique challenges not typically addressed in national discourse, or national policymaking (Brown & Schafft, 2011). These challenges include local economies that are isolated from the national economy, the existence of peripheral industries that degrade local economies over time, rather than the core economic industries that contribute to growth (Howley, 1991). Weak economies make raising funds for civic projects more difficult (Flora et al., 1992).

For example, economic restructuring resulting from globalization has resulted in the relocation of manufacturing operations overseas, the consolidation of agriculture in corporate hands (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009) and extractive industries that have become limited by the depletion of natural resources and efforts to protect those that remain (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Weak economies in rural areas are further eroded by the low paying service and seasonal employment that have replaced traditional living wage jobs, limited local infrastructure for
incubating new businesses and the out-migration of highly skilled human capital (Budge, 2006; Hammer, 2001; Nadel & Sagawa, 2002).

In a unique twist to the story of globalization’s threat to rural economies, study participants reported that two of the largest employers, a mine and a paper mill, are now owned by multi-national corporations. The result, they reported, is that decisions made at these businesses reflect the interests of foreign shareholders, not the local community.

**Social geography: poverty, social isolation, & social exclusion.** Dear and Wolch (1989) argue that geography shapes the social, political and economic processes of a society. Rural areas are challenged by their social geography, based on low population densities, large distances, and sometimes difficult terrain. In particular, the large distances within and between rural communities create transportation challenges that oftentimes limit social participation and heighten social exclusion for rural individuals (Gray, Shaw, & Farrington, 2006).

School districts also are impacted by rural social geography. As school districts have consolidated, students and families have become more dispersed, limiting participation in school events and extra-curricular activities (Hammer, 2001; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Increased distances in rural areas limit friendships, weaken social networks and limit the availability of social capital (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Limited social capital may make developing the necessary coalitions for cradle-to-career development more difficult, and large geographic distances may limit who is able to participate.

Rural social geography and limited social capital contribute in part to the social exclusion and social isolation that often accompanies poverty (Lawson, 2009). Despite media, policy and scholarly focus on poverty in urban areas, rates of poverty in non-metropolitan areas remain higher than those in metropolitan areas (USDA, 2015). Rural poverty is likely to be obscured
from view literally by landscapes of winding country lanes, rolling hills, and forests. Rural poverty is also figuratively obscured by the narrative of rural communities as idyllic landscapes, hiding the material deprivation, lack of employment opportunities, and persistent low wages (Cloke et al., 1995; Woods, 2004).

Poverty, resulting from economic hardship, is strongly associated with undesirable child, family, and school outcomes (Reardon, 2011; Rothstein, 2004). For example, education in rural areas is further challenged by increased, poverty-associated risk factors for adverse childhood experiences (Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester; 2014) and inequitable access to interventions that can alleviate the negative impact of poverty, neglect and family instability, including high quality pre-school programs, health and mental health services (Grace et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). One key result of this combination is the greater likelihood that rural children will enter kindergarten with low skill levels and to be referred to special education services (Grace et al., 2011).

While poverty poses formidable challenges alone, its effects are intensified and exacerbated when social exclusion and social isolation prevail. Where social isolation is concerned, rural student and family social geography can limit participation in community activities. School consolidation increases the distance people have to travel to activities at schools that often serve as the center of rural communities (Lyson, 2002; Sherman & Sage, 2011) and limit the availability of social networks for parents and children alike (Sherman & Sage, 2011).

Social exclusion refers to the social mechanisms that deny particular individuals and groups full participation opportunities and pathways in mainstream society, especially the economy and democratic politics. It results from a lack of or denial of access to resources, goods,
services and rights, as well as the inability to participate in normal relationships and activities in economic, social, cultural, and political arenas of a community. Social exclusion not only affects the quality of life of individuals, but also negatively impacts the cohesion of communities (Levitas et al., 2007). In rural communities, social exclusion may be based on class and moral judgments regarding the worthiness of community investment in particular people, especially special student sub-populations (Sherman & Sage, 2011).

This trilogy of community features hinders change in two ways. First by limiting educational investment to groups seen as innately deserving either through their social position, talents or moral characteristics, schools limit the skill and creativity needed to identify new economic opportunities and to turn rural communities around (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). Secondly, social geography and social exclusion based on moral judgments that fall along class divides may limit the social capital in rural communities (Howley & Howley, 2010; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

While weak community social capital presents a risk factor in student achievement (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2002), weak social networks limit the ability of communities to organize for collective impact and other community level actions. Weak social networks therefore limit the availability of political power to create community conditions necessary for positive changes in local education systems. Community participation in school change is especially vital as teachers and administrators are unlikely to enact systems level change on their own (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannuzi, 2001).

As described further in chapters four and six, the development of the Network faced significant challenges due to its large geographic scope, which contributed further to the isolation
and exclusion of low-income community members, as well as those living in outlying communities and on the Native American Reservation.

**Civic challenges.** Rural areas also face challenges in their local governance. Flora and colleagues (1992) noted the low capacity of most rural governments and the challenges created in maintaining public infrastructure in areas with low population density and high poverty. Raising local funds for civic projects is difficult in areas that may be rich in land, but cash poor (Flora, Flora, Spears & Swanson, 1992).

However, combining local funds with private funds can help overcome this problem and local governments in rural areas, like those in urban areas, can benefit from partnerships with the non-profit and business sectors (Goodwin, 1998). Flora and colleagues (1992) identified difficulties in accomplishing civic goals where people often take on multiple roles in social networks, including challenges to risk-taking and confrontation of contentious agendas difficult.

These civic challenges may hinder the development of civic capacity: the mobilization of community actors from across sectors around specific issues that can facilitate changes in education and other local policy arenas. In turn, limitations to civic capacity formation may make the creation of a cradle-to-career network difficult, as partners must mobilize from across various sectors to identify community goals and develop plans to meet them.

Civic challenges identified by participants included limited capacity of local governments; difficulty in raising funds for civic projects, including new school buildings or recreation facilities; and difficulties in dealing with contentious issues when Network members interact in multiple venues.

**Educational challenges.** In addition to unique economic and social configurations, rural areas also face unique educational challenges. These challenges include funding inequities based
on inability to generate local funds, as well as inequities in state funding formulas (Johnson et al., 2014). Small school size limits course offerings and the number of support staff at rural schools (Schafft & Jackson, 2010).

Consolidation efforts that have sought to increase economies of scale and perceived efficiencies for rural schools (Schafft & Jackson, 2010) have increased transportation costs (Johnson et al., 2014) and decreased participation of students and parents in school activities and events (Sherman & Sage, 2011). Low salaries, increased certification requirements, and instructional demands along with social and cultural isolation have made it difficult for rural districts to attract and retain teachers (Collins, 1999).

While rural communities are clearly qualitatively and quantitatively different from their urban and suburban counterparts, there is also a great deal of diversity between rural communities and their schools. Despite their unique nature, rural school districts have been subject to the pressure to conform to the one best system ideal since the Progressive era (Schafft & Jackson, 2010; Tyack, 1974).

Much of the one best system agenda has been driven by a neoliberal focus on human capital creation and efficiency (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995) using scientific management principles from the business sector (Howley, 1991). Based on this neo-liberal agenda, states have adopted uniform standards for students and aligned accountability assessments to match, creating uniformity in curriculum and a mismatch between local needs and curriculum and pedagogy offered by rural schools (Feldmann, 2003; Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Locally, study participants identified state accountability measures as the biggest educational challenge. The state assessment regime notably stressed teachers to cover content without regard to students’ abilities or interests.
Further, limited numbers of early childhood programs (Grace et al., 2011) and post-secondary institutions (McDonough, Gildersleeve & Jarzky, 2010) exist in rural areas. These gaps create challenges for local school districts, and they constrain the development of creating cradle-to-career systems.

Creating viable rural communities goes beyond merely creating human capital via effective schools (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). The human capital focus of the one best system approach impacts rural students and their communities. Instead of being prepared for social, civic, and economic life in their communities, students are prepared for employment in urban areas, which creates pathways for out-migration for those that succeed in the standardized approach.

Simultaneously, this model fails to provide young people who wish to stay with means to do so constructively. This leaves rural communities without funds of social, civic, and economic capacity to be self-sustaining (Budge, 2006; Carr & Kerfalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Mitra et al. 2008; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

**Unanswered Questions**

What remains unclear from the literature on cradle-to-career networks, collective impact, and other collaborative efforts for educational change is how these models, which were developed in urban areas, can be adapted to the needs and configurations of rural communities. Can cradle-to-career models support the development of place-based, aligned educational systems that support the social, civic, and human capital skill development of young people from birth through post-secondary education? Or do these efforts largely rely on national human capital discourse aligned largely to the economic needs of urban areas? Which path a rural community goes down may have an impact on whether they are able to use system-wide
educational change as a means to stabilize their communities or whether they will become more efficient exporters of college graduates.

In addition to these overarching questions, there are more practical questions for rural areas left unanswered by the cradle-to-career literature. First, how do rural community leaders identify and mobilize the necessary stakeholders? The literature identifies the need to map the educational environment (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007) and to match the partners to the scope and scale of the effort (McGrath et al., 2005). Yet rural areas present unique landscapes and organizational configurations. Second, the literature identifies the need to bring partners together, but provides little insight into developing a network that can break through historically siloed, walled-in, educational organizations from early childhood to post-secondary. Without creating changes in educational organizations, these models are unlikely to create the types of academic and non-academic outcomes they desire (Lawson, 2014; unpublished). Third, the literature identifies the need to develop shared understandings of local issues, but provides limited understanding of how to do this across large geographic areas with multiple identities.

These gaps suggest a need to understand how people come together to support this work, as well as how their composition affects the developmental trajectory a network. This trajectory includes identifying local problems and potential solutions, as well as the development of theories of action as to how to undertake the necessary changes within schools and other educational institutions.

**Purpose**

The three research questions on mobilization, issue framing, and theory of change development frame the primary purpose of this study.
First this study seeks to broaden the conversation on STRIVE and collective impact into rural areas. Recent publications on cradle-to-career networks for collective impact have expanded out from the original STRIVE site. For example, Edmondson and Zimpher (2014) published a series of case studies of urban networks using the STRIVE model. In addition to Cincinnati, this book features urban networks in Portland, OR; Richmond, VA; Seattle, WA; and Houston, TX. These case studies describe the work of networks that served as “proof points” for scaling up the strategies used in Cincinnati. Although earlier literature on P-20 councils in Ohio feature rural networks (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), this analysis was limited by the failure of these networks to progress beyond the launch phase. Therefore they provide some insight into mobilization of a network, but not the development of a sustainable, actionable network. By examining a rural network that is engaging in community level action, this study provides an understanding of the mobilization and issue framing that supports transitions to institutionalization and sustainability.

Second, this study seeks to understand how mobilization and issue framing for educational collective impact occur in a rural context, with specific interest in the economic, geographic, social, civic, and educational challenges highlighted in this chapter. Each rural community will experience variations in these challenges that must be overcome in order to bring together community and organizational members and to develop a common understanding of local needs.

Thirdly, this study seeks to understand how those factors contribute to a theory of change, with a particular interest in how rural community members discuss local needs within the framework of a national framework developed in urban areas. In particular, this study seeks to understand how local issue framing develops into a local theory of change. This question is of
particular import given the marginal location of rural areas in the national economy. Whether these networks align with local priorities rather than relying on national human capital discourse to set their direction may determine whether they contribute to the sustainability of rural communities or serve to accelerate brain drain.

**Contributions to research and practice.** This study is structured to provide two contributions. First, this study provides practical and actionable knowledge for community leaders in rural areas seeking to undertake collective action for educational change, through STRIVE or other models. In particular, it provides knowledge on strategies used to bring stakeholders to the table. In particular, this study seeks to draw out the relationship between stakeholder mobilization, the development of shared understandings of local needs, and the theory of change in order to better understand how these factors interact to limit the availability of certain ideas and strategies for change.

Secondly, this study creates new knowledge in the field of collective action for school change by extending this research into rural areas by examining the formation and developmental trajectory of an educational collective impact effort in a rural community. Much of the literature on cradle-to-career networks and related efforts is descriptive and atheoretical in nature. Therefore, this study seeks to apply socio-political theories of coalition building and to generate new theories to extend the understanding of how place-based cradle-to-career networks operate in areas challenged by low population density, lack of services, low investment by the for-profit and non-profit sectors alike, and difficult economic, social, and civic challenges. By using a qualitative model, this study seeks to develop new theory on complex, multi-sector change initiatives and their adaptations to local needs.
Study Structure

The structure of this study provides a thick description of the development of a rural cradle-to-career network in its context, as well as findings to the three research questions. This begins in chapter two with a comprehensive review of the literature on cradle-to-career networks, as well as several related organizational partnerships. Given the narrow focus of many of these studies on the leadership council, the literature review was expanded to include municipal level theories of cross-sector efforts to enact large-scale systems change within a specific policy arena, such as education. In addition to moving up to a civic level of conceptual understanding, the literature review also focuses on interactions of individuals with social capital and social issue framing theories. This expansive review was designed to address multiple levels of the network simultaneously to examine how individuals, including civic leaders, organizational members, and community members come together around common problems and develop shared understandings to guide action.

Chapter three provides a description of the qualitative case study methodology used to collect and analyze the data. Following the methods, are four chapters in which the findings from these data are presented.

Chapter four provides an in-depth contextual description of the rural area in which the network at the center of this study is located. This description addresses the area’s specific issues and needs, as identified by participants and aligns them with the rural challenges to cradle-to-career network development identified in this chapter: economic, social geographic, civic, and educational. It also provides challenges identified by participants not identified in the rural literature reviewed.
Chapter five provides the “case” for this case study and describes the development of the network over the last five years. This description reflects the development of a multi-level structure, including civic level engagement, the development of relationships between members of organizations, and the recruitment of community members to school-community level action planning teams. The description reflects the three levels of theoretical literature reviewed in chapter two.

Next, two chapters provide findings specific to the research questions, developed from the multi-level review of the literature. Chapter six deals exclusively with mobilization at all levels of the network structure. Chapter seven provides details on issue framing and the related emergent theory of change, in which participants identify the ways in which the network seeks to address the problems they identified.

Finally, a discussion of the theoretical concepts that cut across the findings section is presented in chapter eight, along with a conclusion and recommendations both for future research and for rural leaders.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The complexity of cradle-to-career networks suggested the need for an interdisciplinary, hybrid framework. While a review of literature on such networks and related multi-sector collaboration and partnerships suggested several alternative frameworks, this study utilized a social-political and policy oriented framework. Three bodies of literature contributed to the development of this framework, reviews of which follow in this chapter. The nascent research on cradle-to-career networks and related approaches to linking educational organizations, such as P-16 partnership councils and education-focused collective impact initiatives, constitutes the first body of literature. Given the relatively recent development of such networks and partnerships, the literature remains largely descriptive in nature. However, it identified several important features of these efforts. The review of this literature focused mainly on the original STRIVE site in Cincinnati, in part because it has been held up as an example of successful collaboration for school change, and in part, because the network selected for this study adopted the STRIVE model.

Two related political science theories, urban regime and civic capacity, constitute the second body of literature. Together, they provide grounding in community level efforts for educational change. While much of this literature focuses on urban areas, scholars recently applied these theories to small, economically depressed cities in the Rust Belt.

The sociological literatures on social capital and social movement-related issue framing constitute the third body of literature. The inclusion of this literature responded to gaps in urban regime theory and civic capacity theory, both of which largely ignore the mechanisms and processes through which people come together and through which consensus develops.

Collaboration and Partnership: Conflated and Differentiated
Within the literature on multi-sector efforts for educational change, scholars use the terms collaboration and partnership, making a review more difficult. Lawson (2013) identified collaboration as existing between individuals and partnership as work between multiple organizations. The lack of distinction between these two terms obscures the existence of two units of analysis in this work: individuals and organizations (Lawson, 2013). While collaboration and partnerships can proceed apart from one another, collaborative partnerships in which cross-boundary collaboration is supported by organizational processes and structures, may be greater able to “move the needle” on the most complex and intractable social problems. Collaborative partnerships require the recognition of interdependence between organizations and individuals with the understanding that working alone none can achieve their goals (Lawson, 2013).

Similarly, this review indicates the need for including both units of analysis in a conceptual system that emphasizes their fundamental differences, as well as their relationship. A sampling of the literature indicates the need for and significance of such a refined framework.

**Multi-Sector Partnerships with Cross-boundary Collaboration**

Over 30 years ago, Trist (1983) provided a rational for collaborative partnerships. He claimed that complex social problems must be tackled using inter-organizational efforts. Three key assumptions underlie the use of collaborative partnerships as an intervention strategy for community level outcomes. First, these collaborative partnerships must address goals which individuals or organizations working alone cannot meet. Secondly, the participants should represent the diversity of the geographic area and the area of concern (i.e., education). Lastly, shared interests among partners must facilitate consensus (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000).
Citing the necessity for cross-sector collaboration in addressing the most challenging public issues, Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) reviewed the existing literature of cross-sector collaboration. Although they use the term collaboration throughout, Bryson and colleagues in fact focus on organizational partnerships. They defined cross-sector collaboration as “partnerships involving government, non-profits and philanthropies, communities, and/or the public as a whole” (Bryson et al., 2006, p.44). They further elaborate the need for “the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately” (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006, p.44).

Bryson and colleagues (2006) derived twenty-one propositions from their review of the literature on collaborative partnerships. Table 1 provides a summary of these propositions.

Discussions of the contribution of these propositions follow.

<table>
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<th>Table 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cross-Sector Collaboration Propositions</strong></td>
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<td>Proposition 1: Like all inter-organizational relationships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to form in turbulent environments. In particular, the formation and sustainability of cross-sector collaborations are affected by driving and constraining forces in the competitive and institutional environments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposition 2: Public policy makers are most likely to try cross-sector collaboration when they believe the separate efforts of different sectors to address a public problem have failed or are likely to fail, and the actual or potential failures cannot be fixed by the sectors acting alone.</td>
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<td>Proposition 3: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when one or more linking mechanisms, such as powerful sponsors, general agreement on the problem, or existing networks, are in place at the time of their initial formation.</td>
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<td>Proposition 4: The form and content of a collaboration’s initial agreements, as well as the processes used to formulate them, affect the outcomes of the collaboration’s work.</td>
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<td>Proposition 5: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they have committed sponsors and effective champions at many levels who provide formal and informal leadership.</td>
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<td>Proposition 6: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they establish—with both internal and external stakeholders—the legitimacy of collaboration as a form of organizing, as a separate entity, and as a source of trusted interaction among members.</td>
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<td>Proposition 7: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when trust-building activities (such as nurturing cross-sectoral and cross-cultural understanding) are continuous.</td>
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<td>Proposition 8: Because conflict is common in partnerships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when partners use resources and tactics to equalize power and manage conflict effectively.</td>
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<td>Proposition 9: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they combine deliberate and emergent planning; deliberate planning is emphasized more in mandated collaborations and emergent planning is emphasized more in non-mandated collaborations.</td>
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Proposition 10: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when their planning makes use of stakeholder analyses, emphasizes responsiveness to key stakeholders, uses the process to build trust and the capacity to manage conflict, and builds on distinctive competencies of the collaborators.

Proposition 11: Collaborative structure is influenced by environmental factors such as system stability and the collaboration’s strategic purpose.

Proposition 12: Collaborative structure is likely to change over time because of ambiguity of membership and complexity in local environments.

Proposition 13: Collaboration structure and the nature of the tasks performed at the client level are likely to influence a collaboration’s overall effectiveness.

Proposition 14: Formal and informal governing mechanisms are likely to influence collaboration effectiveness.

Proposition 15: Collaborations involving system level planning activities are likely to involve the most negotiation, followed by collaborations focused on administrative-level partnerships and service delivery partnerships.

Proposition 16: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they build in resources and tactics for dealing with power imbalances and shocks.

Proposition 17: Competing institutional logics are likely within cross-sector collaborations and may significantly influence the extent to which collaborations can agree on essential elements of process, structure, governance, and desired outcomes.

Proposition 18: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they build on individuals’ and organizations’ self-interests and each sector’s characteristic strengths while finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector’s characteristic weaknesses.

Proposition 19: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they produce positive first-, second-, and third-order effects.

Proposition 20: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they are resilient and engage in regular reassessments.

Proposition 21: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to be successful when they have an accountability system that tracks inputs, processes, and outcomes; use a variety of methods for gathering, interpreting, and using data; and use a results management system that is built on strong relationships with key political and professional constituencies.

Table 1

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(Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006 p. 46-52)

Bryson and colleagues (2006) identify the first three propositions as contributing to the initial environmental conditions under which multi-sector collaborations typically form. These environmental factors include organizational and institutional constraints, as well as those found in the legal and policy arenas. Within such environmental constraints, individual organizations acting alone will fail to achieve their goals, given the inability of a single sector to impact complex social issues. This failure sets the stage for collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006).

Similarly, policy makers turn to collaboration when individual sectors have failed or are likely to fail working individually.

In addition to environmental factors, particular organizations and individuals constitute special antecedents to the development of cross-sector collaboration: brokering organizations with significant legitimacy bring attention to problems (Gray, 1989; Waddock, 1986). Boundary
spanning individuals with credibility across arenas provide leadership for bringing together stakeholders (Gray, 1989; Kastan, 2000). Specifically, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identify the need for sponsors, who provide resources, and champions that further the collaborative’s agenda.

Moving from the initial conditions, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified several process components in propositions four through ten: the creation of formal and informal agreements; the development of leadership roles and capacity, specifically of those that function as sponsors and champions; the development of legitimacy and trust; management of conflicts; and planning. For this study, the notion of leaders as champions proves particularly salient as these individuals act as advocates for the collaborative’s agenda and work.

Additionally, Bryson and colleagues (2006) emphasize two other factors. One is the role of legitimacy of organizations, particularly the organization that serves as the backbone for the partnership network. The other is the role of trust amongst individuals, especially how trust enables, constrains, and prevents the development of collaborative working relationships among individuals within and across different levels of the network.

Propositions eleven through fifteen address the structure and governance of cross-sector collaboration. Bryson and colleagues (2006) noted that environmental context and the strategic purpose impacts the development of the structure of collaborations. In Lawson’s (2013) words, such collaborations are “fit for purpose, in this context, and at this time” (p. 637).

While Bryson and colleagues (2006) note that networks appear to be horizontal configurations, they require vertically-oriented governance structures such as a lead organization and the development of a new administrative organization to oversee the network. Bryson and colleagues (2006) also identified constraints on structure and governance: the breadth and scope of the goals impacts the degree to which negotiations between organizations must occur; power
imbalances, distrust, and disagreement on purpose; and the competing “logics” of different organizations, or the different operating principles, hierarchies, norms and under which different institutions function.

The last four propositions highlight partnership requirements that impact outcomes. Examples include the need to draw on organizations’ self-interest and strengths; the need to produce immediately recognizable first order changes before engaging in second and third order changes; the need to engage in regular reevaluation; and the importance of cross-sector, data-driven systems of accountability (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

Bryson, Crosby, and Stone’s (2006) propositions for cross-sector collaboration offer a dual advantage. They serve to summarize prior research, and they pave the way for future research on convergence, collective impact, and cradle-to-career networks.

Beginning in the early 2000’s a renewed interest on multi-sector partnerships to support educational outcomes and economic development emerged. In Ohio, a number of such efforts took off during this period, including STRIVE in Cincinnati. A review of the literature on these and other efforts to develop K-16 or P-20 networks follows.

**The Development of Collaborative Partnerships in the STRIVE Model**

The development of collaborative partnerships in the STRIVE model proceeds at multiple levels. First, key community leaders from across sectors come together in a partnership council that provides leadership for the effort. Second, organizational partners must be recruited to work together on the common agenda developed by the partnership council. Relationships, leadership, and agenda setting serve as key elements in the launch of a STRIVE network. Each of these areas is explored further in the following sections.
**Developing a partnership council.** Several key commonalities emerge from the literatures on partnerships, convergence, collective impact, and community organizing for school improvement and change. First, these literatures identify the need to select the right individuals for collaboration and the right organizations for partnership. Lawson (2004) calls this “the right mix of the right stakeholders”—people and organizations whose vested interests serve as drivers for their engagement and resource contributions. Which stakeholders constitute the right stakeholders largely depends on the local educational landscape, the needs goals and scope of these efforts (McGrath, Donvana, Schaier-Peleg, & Van Buskirk, 2005; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), and their geographic span (STRIVE Together, 2014). Bryson and colleagues (2006) drew attention to the need to engage strategically in identifying stakeholders.

What is more, different models for this work demand different mixes of individuals and organizations. For example, in the early K-16 models, participants came from K-12 and higher education, including educators and administrators, as well as parents and community agency representatives (McGrath et al. 2005). In models identified as examples of convergence, the focus on economic growth demands the inclusion of business leaders (McGrath, 2008). The Promise Neighborhood model focuses on bringing citizens onto the governance council, including those living in poverty (Miller, et al., 2013).

The scope of collaborative efforts determines which stakeholders must take part in the partnership council (McGrath et al., 2005). The simplest collaboration, a program collaboration in which two or more organizations work together on a specific project targeted at a relatively small number of students, requires a relatively narrow group of stakeholders from participating organizations. McGrath (2005) highlighted that a program collaborative does not require CEO-
level stakeholders, rather these low-resource efforts function with street-level or middle-level employees and require only coordination of effort among organizations.

More complex pathway collaboratives seek to align education from pre-school through post-secondary and strengthening connections. These efforts target larger groups of students and require a broader coalition of stakeholders from across educational levels. Such pathway collaboratives require CEO-level leadership from two or more educational levels, such as superintendents and college presidents. Such institutional leaders serve leadership functions within pathway collaboratives (McGrath, 2005).

Lastly, policy collaboratives seek to engage in policy advocacy based on site-based efforts. This type of collaborative targets the largest number of students and requires partners from educational leadership, government entities, and the business community, along with grassroots and community leaders. However, stakeholder mobilization does not remain static; rather as collaboratives evolve from smaller project-based operations to pathway or policy collaboratives, they must expand their partnership councils accordingly (McGrath et al., 2005).

The STRIVE model combines elements of a pathway collaborative, seeking to align pre-school through post-secondary levels and to support students at key transition points, with elements of a policy initiative. STRIVE emphasizes the need for CEO level leaders from the local business community, district superintendents, university presidents, heads of social service agencies, and other agencies (Kania & Kramer, 2011; STRIVE, 2014). Such CEO level leaders, particularly in local and state educational agencies constitute important partners for policy changes that affect teacher and administrator preparation and licensure (Lawson, 2013).

Additionally, Hanleybrown and colleagues (2012) identified philanthropic foundations as important partners in the STRIVE model due to their ability to influence funding. Engaging
philanthropic stakeholders influences shifts away from short-term grant cycles to long-term grantee designed projects with more flexible and developmental models (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania and Kramer, 2011).

However, the STRIVE model conspicuously lacks the involvement of parents, educators, grassroots community leaders, and representative students on the partnership council. This selectivity may be consequential because research on school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Shipps, 2003) and community-organizing efforts for school change (Mediratta, et al., 2008) identified parents and educators as key stakeholder groups for shifting school level practices. For example, parents supply valuable information about their children and communities (Warrant et al., 2011), while teachers hold the greatest control over the instructional core (Cuban, 2009; Elmore, 1996; Stone, 1998). Building relationships with parents and teachers thus is an important lever for changes in pedagogy, curriculum, and school climate (Ishimaru, 2014a; Mediratta, et al., 2008; Warren et al., 2011).

The lack of grassroots participation in STRIVE signals a particular selectivity in the model. Without the active participation of educators, administrators, and parents on partnership councils, questions arise as to whether these efforts are able to get inside the core technology of schools. The core technology of schools constitutes classroom practices and the structures that support them.

**Selecting organizations and creating cascading collaboration.** In addition to support from a community wide coalition, or partnership council made up of high-level individuals, cradle-to-career networks require organizational partners. In the STRIVE model, the partnership council provides direction and leadership for a network of networks. These networks form from organizations within the same sector that share similar missions. To reiterate, these networks
operate as working groups, coming together to plan and carry out actions (Kania & Kramer, 2013. Kania and Kramer (2013) described this as cascading levels of collaboration.

Rural areas present challenges to creating a cascading collaboration model organized by sector type. For example, rural areas lack large numbers of social service, health, and mental health organizations (Johnson et al., 2014) from which to develop partnerships (Miller et al., 2013). Limited numbers of early childhood programs (Grace et al., 2011) and post-secondary institutions (McDonough, Gildersleeve & Jarsky, 2010) further challenge cradle-to-career network development in rural areas. While partner agencies in all collaborative models need to overcome ideas of “turf,” networks in rural areas must contend with the large geographic spaces that increase these divisions and may inhibit the formation of partnerships.

Leveraging existing relationships and creating new relationships. Building from existing partnerships contributes to a successful launch of a collaborative effort. One reason is that representative leaders, called stakeholders in the collaboration and partnership literatures, bring the benefits from previous collective initiatives. In short, prior success in collaborations and partnerships builds capacities for, and predicts, future success.

Existing partnerships operating within an area along the cradle-to-career pipeline, such as early childhood, post-secondary access, or workforce development contributes to a more successful launch (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). The recent description and explanation of the genesis and development of STRIVE in greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky provide important details.

For example, several collaborative efforts in Cincinnati preceded STRIVE. During the late 1980’s into the early 2000’s, the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative targeted educational issues, specifically around graduation rates. Community Action Now (CAN) focused on economic and
workforce issues in Cincinnati (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014). These collaborative efforts brought together leaders from across sectors and began conversations around education and workforce development.

From there, the College Access/Success Partnership of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky (CAP) developed. This STRIVE forerunner included a number of school districts, universities, community colleges, technical centers, chambers of commerce, and non-profits in Cincinnati, as well as the surrounding metropolitan area (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

This initial formation provided a core of partners with a history of working together from which to build. Together these partners recognized that post-secondary access and attainment required supporting youth starting at birth and throughout their schooling (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014). In the same vein, this group’s initial members produced a document that outlined local challenge. Partnership council members used this document to engage other key leaders, broadening the group to include business, civic, educational and philanthropic partners, and raising the number of networked organizations to 60 by 2007 (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007) and 300 by 2011 (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

As the key leaders of STRIVE built on previous cross-sector efforts, they enhanced the legitimacy of their new initiative (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Such enhanced legitimacy serves to attract resources as well building trust among partners (Human & Provan, 2000).

These initial studies of cradle-to-career networks provide insight into their origins, development, and continuing advancement. These studies have identified the importance of bringing partners together as a first step. However, they provide little insight into how leaders leverage existing relationships and partnerships or how new relationships create collaboration among people and partnership between organizations to support complex solutions to complex
social problems. This study seeks to understand the strategies and structures used for continuous member recruitment, induction, and engagement as a cradle-to-career network moves from initial stages to launch and finally towards action at the organizational or community level.

**The role of leadership in cradle-to-career networks.** McGrath and colleagues (2005) identified the importance of identifying a leader and determining the leader’s role early on in the development of a collaborative for educational change (McGrath et al. 2005). The literature identifies a variety of key functions leaders play in the successful launch of a network.

Gray (2007) noted the importance of leaders to a successful launch through their contribution of developing a vision, structuring problems, designing processes, handling conflicts, and brokering between groups. Leaders also play key roles as motivators and drivers of change by facilitating the creation of an inspiring vision and recruiting and retaining stakeholders to that vision.

Additionally, leaders serve to champion collective efforts and command respect to bring together CEO level leaders from across sectors (Hanleybrown et al. 2012). Leaders also frame conversations about goals (McGrath et al., 2005), recognize the interdependencies among stakeholders (Gray, 2007) and become a source of continuous communication that facilitates the alignment of effort (Kania & Kramer, 2013). To do this, leaders must have legitimacy among stakeholders and political clout (Gray, 1989).

Leadership for this complex, cross-boundary work requires special skills in working across different groups. Leaders who can bridge and broker between groups serve as important links between non-educators and educators (Stone, 1998). Boundary spanning leaders, also known as intermediary leaders, play important roles in collaboration by engaging partners, controlling information flows, developing innovative solutions, moderating conflict, building
trust and consensus, and helping with resource pooling and expansion (Williams, 2012). Bryson and colleagues (2006) also note the need for such boundary spanners to have legitimacy in multiple arenas in order to bring together stakeholders. Such boundary-spanning leaders may be better able to build new relationships, particularly with those from different professional backgrounds and organizations, as well as with community members.

In addition to boundary spanning leadership as a core partnership council function, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified attributes of leaders-as-people. They note leaders need to have authority in their roles, possess a clear vision for the work, and make long-term commitments to the efforts (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). These leaders also need to act with integrity and exhibit relational and political skills (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Gray 1989; Waddock, 1986).

Bryson and colleagues also identified the need for two kinds of leaders: Those who function as sponsors and those who function as champions. Sponsors possess considerable authority and prestige, as well as the ability to access resources for the collaboration. Champions focus on moving the collaboration forward and achieving goals through their process skills (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Bryson and colleagues also noted the importance of cultivating informal leadership and continually developing leadership capacity in order to ensure succession after inevitable turnover.

**Agenda setting: vision, mission, goals, and the use of data.** Gray’s (1989) seminal treatise on collaboration prioritized agenda setting as an important factor in the early stages of this work. Agenda setting identifies the substance and direction of the collaboration as well as the processes for gaining consensus and developing common purpose. Gray (1989) identified the need for alignment between the agenda and stakeholders mobilized.
Similarly, McGrath and colleagues (2005) identified conversations around vision and mission as a means to engage new partners, particularly when they address how working together can be mutually beneficial (McGrath et al., 2005). Together, these authors highlight the symbiotic and interdependent relationship between mobilization and issue framing. In addition to ensuring stakeholders match aims, the scope of mobilization must also match the scope of the agenda. Sweeping agendas require a broad coalition of partners, yet a large group may become unwieldy. However, a narrower agenda risks losing stakeholders whose interests are not represented, making agenda setting a balancing act (Gray, 1989).

After the identification of an agenda and partners, partners must create a compelling vision and mission (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Kania & Kramer, 2011). Clear action-oriented goals must accompany the vision and mission to support the development of collaborative efforts beyond the launch phase. The creation of a common vision, mission, and goals requires a shared understanding of the central social issue on the part of stakeholders. While many agencies, non-profits, and funders work on the same issues, often they frame problems and define goals differently. For example, they often hold different metrics and use different indicators for success. In some cases federal, state, or funders require different metrics and indicators, creating challenges to the development of a common agenda and shared data systems.

Logsdon (1991) identified self-interest as a key pre-condition for collaboration. Given that stakeholders may have different interests and use different metrics, how do partnership councils move from self-interest to the recognition of enlightened self-interest (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), and interdependence (Logsdon, 1991) in order to develop consensus? Kania and Kramer (2011) identified the need for discussing self-interest and the goals of each organization in order to resolve differences and reach consensus for the development of
community level goals and measurement tools. Ongoing conversations among partners allow networks to develop a common language and develop a consensus (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

Much of the literature on STRIVE and other models emphasizes the need to use data to drive goal setting and decision-making (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; McGrath, 2008). Examining data from across different sectors can shed light on specific local issues, identify where the leaks are in the education pipeline, and pinpoint specific needs (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Conversations driven by data, as well as needs and resource assessments, build consensus around local educational priorities. Several authors identified the importance of using data for consensus building, its contributions to the development of a shared vision and mission, the creation of clearly defined, and plans for reaching them (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; McGrath, 2008; STRIVE 2014).

However, creating a common agenda and identifying community level goals is not as easy or straightforward as it would appear (Hanleybrown et al., 2012). The inclusion of K-12 schools increases this complexity with the often-competing priorities and values at the local, state, and federal level. These competing values result in policy churn, characterized by conflicting and contradictory demands on educators and administrators alike (Henig & Stone, 2008; Stone et al., 2001). Despite the importance of developing a shared agenda for cradle-to-career network development, the literature fails to address the processes through which agreement proceeds, particularly given the challenges of contradictory values, competing demands of funders and programs, and the many metrics and indicators used by various organizations. Rural networks with large geographic scales increase this complexity through the existence of multiple community identities.
The expansion of STRIVE as a national model for cradle-to-career network development further complicates agenda setting in rural networks. If networks embrace the STRIVE Roadmap and Theory of Action, to what degree do local organizations identify need and data to drive the development of consensus? Do these agendas reflect local education systems and priorities, or do they reflect as Pittman and colleagues (1999) suggest the larger, neo-liberal discourse on human capital creation? For rural areas experiencing brain drain such distinctions hold import for whether networks meet local needs or the workforce demands of urban areas.

Lastly, the literature addresses the need to create consensus but does not provide significant detail as to how to do so across two kinds of boundaries: (1) organizational boundaries and (2) personal-professional boundaries. When rural networks include multiple school districts and their communities, such boundaries come with large geographic space and the potential of multiple communities identifies.

Questions remain as to how rural leaders prioritize local needs as well as these place-based community identities? How can a regional identity and set of goals be developed in such a way to mobilize stakeholders from across the area? Place-based, identity development and mobilization need and questions like these are especially salient to rural research.

**From Regimes to Partnership Council: Convergence**

In his research on STRIVE in Cincinnati and similar groups in Ohio, McGrath (2008) describes coalitions that move into a stable partnership council that support organizational partnerships within a given geographical area as an example of convergence. In McGrath’s (2008) conception, convergence depends on the development of locally representative networks of institutions, organizations, and community groups that represent all levels of education, from preschool through post-secondary education. Convergence, unlike earlier K-16 efforts examined
by McGrath and colleagues (2005), operates at a large scale, taking on systemic changes across entire regions (McGrath, 2008).

In order for such regional convergence to occur, vision and mission development must happen across jurisdictions. This shared vision and mission leverages and coordinates efforts and resources across traditional civic boundaries of towns and school districts. This breadth suggests the facilitation of organizational learning through the sharing of regional data and the gathering of multiple networks. These networks serve to bring innovate programs to scale across a large geography (McGrath, 2008). This conception requires both organizational partnerships and coalition building to create a unified vision for educational and economic change across large populations.

McGrath (2008) identified place-based priorities as an important feature of convergence. One of the main ideas is that strong, local, place-based drive stakeholder engagement and action. By placing locations and regions in a larger economic context, convergence can help create an understanding of the connection between education and other institutions and the quality of life in a given geographic area. This connection can help shift local cultures to support college aspirations for all students, an important need in rural areas with historically low rates of post-secondary attainment (McGrath, 2008). Convergence suggests the need for a regional identity and development of shared understanding of problems across large geographies. However, McGrath does not suggest how such identities and understandings develop across multiple communities and school districts.

**Collective impact**

While McGrath (2008) described STRIVE as an example of convergence, Kania and Kramer (2011) identified STRIVE as an example of collective impact. Collective impact refers
to “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 36). Collective impact goes beyond organizational collaboration by including civic leaders and developing new civic infrastructures (Edmonds & Zimpher, 2012) and problem-solving processes (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Like descriptions of earlier collaboration, collective impact identifies key features, including new processes that lead to a shared agenda; common data systems and shared measurement; on-going communication; commitment to continuous improvement processes; and mutually reinforcing activities that create alignment while reducing redundancy. Lastly, Kania and Kramer (2011) state that collective impact requires a unique feature: the identification or creation of a centralized infrastructure with dedicated staff in the form of a backbone organization. While backbone organizations constitute a unique feature of partnership councils, earlier research on inter-organizational collaboration identified the role of a brokering organization in bringing together stakeholders (Gray, 1989; Waddock, 1986). When such an organization has legitimacy, it can draw attention to specific issues with stakeholder groups (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

Like Kania and Kramer (2011), Bryson and colleagues (2006) also draw attention to the potential role of such an intermediary organization as providing governance through decision-making and coordinating activities. However, in the conception of Kania and Kramer (2011), backbone organizations play a more administrative role such as providing logistical support, data collection and analysis, and facilitation for partnership meetings.

These backbone organizations Hanleybrown and colleagues (2012) identified six key functions of a backbone organization: providing strategic direction; facilitating conversations
between partners; handling data collection and analysis; dealing with communications; planning community outreach efforts; and bringing together funding. As many members of collective impact partnership councils serve as leaders in their own organizations, a backbone organization and its staff provides the administrative support that allows the council to focus on collaborative leadership activities.

Kania and Kramer (2011) identified providing direction to working groups as one of the key leadership functions of these partnership councils. These working groups consist of organizational partners from specific sectors, such as early childhood, and form their own networks. The backbone organization staff provides linkages between these networks and the partnership council.

Kania and Kramer (2011) describe this structure, found in both STRIVE and other collective impact efforts, as a network of networks or “cascading collaboration.” In this model of cascading collaboration, a steering committee provides vision, strategy, governance, and accountability mechanisms to working groups who undertake action planning. Aligned and coordinated by this over-arching structure, each participating organization then executes these action plans, with supports from community members (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Community members’ supports derive from the two-way flow of conversation depicted by Kania and Kramer (2013). Edmondson and Zimpher (2014) enhance this framework when they identify the need for STRIVE cradle-to-career networks to complement a top-down leadership and governance model with change from the bottom-up.

Due to the collective impact literature’s use of STRIVE as an exemplar of this approach, the terms collective impact and cradle-to-career network have become somewhat conflated. However, not all collective impact efforts focus on education, and not all cradle-to-career
networks rely on a collective impact framework. However, the Network selected from this study draws from both the STRIVE model through their connection with the STRIVE national network, as well as from the collective impact literature.

Community Organizing

Bottom-up efforts to create school change typically enlist community-organizing strategies. Scholars examining STRIVE and similar efforts typically overlook or under-estimate such strategies because they focus on top-level leaders.

Mitra and Frick (2011) noted this tendency. They observed that many recent studies on civic efforts to create school change have focused on collaboration among local elites. These initiatives, and the research on them, often proceed without questioning the extent to which they proceed with broad, diverse stakeholder representation.

A growing body of evidence illuminates the limitations in such an elitist, top-down approach. Here, researchers have identified the positive impacts of grassroots and bottom-up community organizing efforts on educational outcomes (Ishimaru, 2014a; Mediratta et al., 2008; Warren et al., 2011). These studies provide research-supported insights into how local external actors from all walks of life, working together, may penetrate school structures and impact their core technology—teaching and learning. The import of these grassroots strategies for cradle-to-career systems development and partnership council formation, membership and action strategies thus merits a brief review.

For example, Ishimaru (2014a) identified community-organizing strategies as serving to build relationships among parents. Such bonding social capital creates a platform for relationships to develop between parent groups and schools. In addition to developing new relationships, community-organizing strategies also develop relational power, or the ability of
personal relationships to transform hearts and minds of other groups (Warren et al., 2011). As changes in school practices require sustained efforts on the part of teachers, relational power holds particular importance for parent and community groups seeking to improve teaching and learning (Warren et al., 2011).

In addition, it is noteworthy that community-organizers often make use of adversarial tactics and pressure politics, rather than consensus building and coalition development (Stone et al. 2001; Warren et al., 2011). Such adversarial tactics rather than consensus building contribute to narrow coalitions focusing on subgroups of students and schools, as opposed to entire school districts and educational systems. Similarly, when community organizers target civic leaders around specific issues, such as pollution near schools (Warren et al., 2011), these efforts typically do not include organizations in other sectors, such as health, mental health and social services.

Unlike convergence or collective impact that seeks systemic change, community organizing often starts small with concrete, winnable steps (Pyles, 2013). These limitations suggest the need for bottom-up efforts to be met by top-down efforts in order to create complex, multi-level organizational, system and community-wide change.

**Expanding the Analytical Framework**

Scholars have used urban regime theory and civic capacity identify the importance of developing coalitions and shared issue frames in order to create change in specific policy arenas. However, these municipal-level theories largely dismiss the work of individuals in mobilizing and in creating and sharing their vision.

Stone and colleagues (2001) and Briggs (2008) both dismissed the idea of social capital influencing the creation of civic capacity. They cite civic capacity as a collective, common good,
while identifying social capital as a private good (Briggs, 2003; Stone et al., 2001). Yet, they largely fail to provide an alternative that accounts for the actions of individuals that drive mobilization, agenda setting and issue framing. In order to expand the analytical framework for this study, sociological work on social-movement issue framing and social capital and will be considered in relation to the literature on collaboration and on urban regime theory and civic capacity. Examination of theories of social capital and social issue framing follow in the next sections.

**Limits of the Multi-Sector Collaboration Literature**

The literature on cradle-to-career networks and similar multi-sector collaboratives provides insight into the development of this emerging phenomenon. However, much of this literature remains descriptive, rather than theoretical. The need for a theoretical framework to describe the mobilization of top-level leadership and the development of a shared agenda suggested municipal level political science approaches. The concepts of civic capacity and urban regime theory provide conceptualization of the creation of a coalition with sufficient power to create change in education systems.

However, the multi-level nature of the cradle-to-career networks, with both municipal leaders and working groups of organizations suggests the need for dual units of analysis identified by Lawson (2013): collaboration of individuals and partnerships of organizations. Additionally, the literature does not address how individuals operate within these networks or the roles they play in mobilization and issue framing. Therefore, this multi-level framework is further expanded by sociological theories of social capital and social movement issue framing, which provide insights into how mobilization and the development of shared understandings
proceeds. The next section provides a review of relevant social capital literature and social movement issue framing literature.

**Civic Collaboration for Educational Change: Urban Regimes and Civic Capacity**

Urban regime theory and civic capacity describe coalition building involving government, private, and public entities that support change within a policy arena, such as education. Both urban regime and civic capacity theory address community level coalition building and attempt to identify what gets done based on which actors are mobilized. Civic capacity adds issue framing as a key component, mirroring the need for vision and mission development in the cradle-to-career network literature. A further description of these related theories follows.

**Urban regime theory: exploring its import for rural research.** Clarence Stone defined an urban regime as “How community players are related to one another” (Stone, 1998, emphasis original). As Stone (1989) framed it, bringing together governing coalitions creates a power dynamic that enables the development of “power to,” or the capacity to act, rather than exerting “power over.” With its focus on long-term coalition building for change in specific agenda areas, urban regime theory contributes a community level understanding of the formation of cradle-to-career networks.

Stone (1989, 1993, & 1998) developed the theory of urban regime theory through his analysis of governing coalitions in Atlanta and other cities. Urban regime theory synthesizes political economy, pluralism, and institutionalism in order to describe how local governments work with businesses and communities to accomplish goals in specific policy agenda areas (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001).
More specifically, regime theory views power in cities as fragmented, requiring coalitions to come together in order to harness enough power to govern effectively (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001; Elkin, 1987). To do so, coalitions must overcome the divide between the public and private sectors (Elkin, 1987). In a public-private partnership, Mosseberger and Stoker (2001) identify businesses, which control many resources, as important partners. In this view of politics, policy change requires new relationships (Stone, 1998).

Other political scientists have built on Stone’s (1989a, 1993, & 1998) original conception by applying urban regime theory to other levels and locales. Urban regime theory initially addressed city-level politics. Subsequently, others have applied it at the regional and neighborhood level to examine private-public partnerships in governance in the US and beyond (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001). For example, Mitra and Frick (2011) applied the concept of urban regime theory to the development of collective educational change efforts in small Rust Belt cities.

Rural areas appear to be primed for such theorization. Like urban areas, rural communities have undergone shifts in decision making to include elected government, agencies, public, private, and voluntary sectors. Scholars in the UK in particular used urban regime theory to describe the complexities contemporary governance in rural areas (Goodwin, 1998).

In the United States, many rural areas have experienced growing diversity (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009), and many have long histories of deep social class divisions (Howley & Howley, 2010). These features may impact how people related to schools (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). These features contribute to social isolation and exclusion, limiting the ability to participate in civic life. Recognizing the unique nature of rural communities, urban regime
analysis provides an understanding of the formation of coalitions across sectors, as well as social divides, in order to support civic life and educational change.

**Four types of urban regimes for educational change.** Stone (1998) identified education as one of the community-wide policy arenas in which governing regimes operate (Stone, 1998). Not only do the fragmented power bases in education challenge the creation of a governing regime, the value-laden policy discourses in school systems make the creation of a unifying agenda difficult. While many analysts frame educational reform as an apolitical activity based on objective evidence of “best-practices,” school change is in fact a highly political, value-laden, high reverberation policy arena (Stone, 1998). Both local discourses and national discourses influence local policy decisions, (Henig & Stone, 2008) creating increased complexity for agenda setting. Despite these challenges, regimes have come together in a number of cities in order to address education.

Drawing on his initial work on coalition formation in Atlanta during the second half of the 20th century, Stone (1998) identified two important regime types for education: *performance regimes* and *employment regimes*. Shipps’ (2003) research in Chicago provides two additional regime types: *empowerment regimes* and *market regimes*.

Performance regimes target improving academic achievement of all students. This work requires social-purpose politics that place the greater good above narrow self-interest. Stone (1998) identified parents, business elites, and educators as key stakeholders for a performance regime. Much like the coalitions, convergence, and collective impact described above, Stone (1998) suggested that such regimes also require sustained commitments on the part of stakeholders to a common agenda for educational change.
Many stakeholders lack a full understanding of their actual stake in educational outcomes, requiring significant efforts to bring these groups to the table, as well as to elicit active engagement and the commitment of resources. The development of active engagement of stakeholders requires leadership from a superintendent, mayor or other civic leader. These leaders provide a vision and focus for educational change in order to activate a regime for school reform efforts (Jones, Portz & Stein, 1997; Stone, 1989).

In her research on the decentralization of the Chicago Public Schools, Shipps' (2003) argued that a performance regime must target specific changes to support the achievement of low-income children of color. These changes included shifts in school culture, curriculum, and pedagogy; professional development for teachers; changing the relationship between professionals and parents; and adding socials services to the mix to improve student focus, attention, and behavior.

Proceeding with this conceptualization, Shipps (2003) claimed teachers and parents, unions and community-based organizations makeup the primary constituents of a performance regime, with university researchers serving as secondary constituents. This type of regime requires the development of trust between educators and administrators, and between parents, community members and school staff (Shipps, 2003).

Significantly, performance regimes have proven to be difficult to mobilize in urban areas, resulting in little systemic change in urban education systems (Stone 1998). In particular, bringing teachers and parents together for this type of performance regime has proved difficult (Shipps, 2003). It requires significant top down efforts by school districts to facilitate and maintain these relationships (Henig & Stone, 2008; Ishimaru, 2014a). At the same time, bottom-
up community organizing efforts can create a foundation from which parents can interact with schools and districts (Ishimaru, 2014a), suggesting the need for both types of efforts.

The development of employment regimes also poses challenges for the development of a performance regime. Employment regimes consist of teachers acting together to resist changes in schools, which constitute their workplace. These employment regimes effectively block school change efforts (Stone, 1998), and they involve school personnel other than teachers. For example, school administrators can operate similarly as they often have an interest in protecting the status quo of their work, resisting new demand on their time and new demands for new capacities that prioritize instructional leadership over managerial tasks.

Shipps (2003) suggested that all such employment regimes are obstacles to creating performance regimes. The main reason for this is that employment regimes focus on the maintenance of the status quo and largely serve to protect the employment interests of adults (Doherty, 1998; Shipps, 2003; Stone, 1998). When parents, business interests and other community groups are not actively involved in regimes for school change, educators retain significant power to resist change efforts (Stone, 1998).

In addition to expanding the concepts of performance and employment regimes, Shipps (2003) identified two additional types of educational change regimes. She called one an empowerment regime and the other a market regime.

Empowerment regimes seek to shift power from distrusted, and potentially dysfunctional, central offices to the local school level, such as in site-based management. This shift empowers either teachers or parents as decision makers, but does not require they work together. Sustained teacher empowerment requires the support of teachers unions (Shipps, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1996). Sustained parent involvement requires support from non-profits (Shipps, 2003) or
community organizing efforts, which can increase their social capital (Ishimaru, 2014a), capacity, and political power (Warrant et al., 2011). Empowerment regimes do not require a broad coalition and where there is deep distrust and low legitimacy of school districts, shifting control to parents or teachers may be appealing to elites (Shipps, 2003).

Shipps (2003) defined a market regime as one that relies on strategies taken from the business sector. Charter schools and voucher programs represent the most visible of these entrepreneurial efforts. Both charters and vouchers emphasize parent choice and the resulting competition for students serves as the mechanism to drive school improvement. Other market-based reforms include an emphasis on the efficiency and accountability of corporate models and the privatization of certain functions of schools (Shipps, 2003), such as assessment. Shipps (2003) further differentiated market regimes, stating that entrepreneurial market regimes require business leaders and elected officials as core regime members, while educators and administrators function as secondary regime members. Parents engage in these regimes through their exercise of choice. In corporate market regimes, which emphasize efficiency through outsourcing and downsizing, few constituents beyond business leaders and elected officials are necessary (Shipps, 2003).

Based on Shipps’ (2003) and Stone’s (1998) research, the concept of a performance regime holds the most similarity with the types of coalition building described in the preceding sections. However, both Shipps (2003) and Stone (1998) note the importance role of educators and parents in such regimes, particularly in terms of shifting classroom and school level practices. However, the role of these two stakeholder groups remains under-emphasized and under-developed in the convergence, collective impact, and cradle-to-career network efforts.
Emerging vs. established regimes in collective action initiatives. In their comparative case study, Mitra and Frick (2011) further expanded the conception of an urban regime by introducing two new regime types: *established regimes* and *emerging regimes*. This refinement of the concept of a regime for school change merits further discussion.

In one community, Mitra and Frick (2011) identified the existence of a long-standing group of local business CEOs who previously worked on a number of civic projects. Because this group had a history of working together, Mitra and Frick (2011) termed it an established regime. This established regime mobilized to provide support to the school district after low assessment scores triggered state accountability actions. The regime provided funding for teacher professional development. The regime also donated the time of middle managers from their companies to provide project management support to the central office. However, once the scores improved and accountability measures lifted, this established business focused regime moved on to a new projects in the city (Mitra & Frick, 2011).

In the second case, Mitra and Frick (2011) defined the regime as emerging regime due to the efforts of a new, proactive, superintendent to build new relationships with a variety of stakeholders. While these relationships included local business elites, the superintendent also reached out to everyday people such as hairdressers and auto mechanics who had high access to many community members, in order to spread his vision. This emerging regime appeared more dynamic and resulted in a more dramatic level of educational change. The superintendent spearheaded a campaign to redesign the high school curriculum and the group worked to leverage local, state and federal funds leveraged to build a new campus to support the four technically focused tracks (Mitra & Frick, 2011). In addition to academic restructuring at the
high school, social service agencies came together to streamline services and create centers in or near schools to help families access the services (Mitra & Frick, 2011).

Overall, this research suggests possible articulations for theory and research. For example, regimes that emerge from the efforts of a visionary leader around specific policy issues and develop build new relationships may enact more ambitious school changes than long standing, but less focused regimes that rely on existing networks.

Civic capacity and coalition membership for educational change. Stone and colleagues (2001) built on urban regime theory to develop the concept of civic capacity from their analysis of several urban school districts. Stone and colleagues (2001) defined civic capacity as the organization and mobilization of community actors around specific issues. In this framework, civic capacity is an urban regime in action. Coalition members commit resources and create policy change in a specific arena (Stone 1998). Additionally the breadth of a coalition necessary for civic capacity (Stone et al., 2001) surpasses that required for a performance, employment, empowerment, or market regime. Such a coalition must include broad constituents in order to reach the level of civic capacity. In addition to active participation of a broad range of stakeholders, civic capacity requires a shared understanding of a community problem with sufficient scope to require a collective response (Stone et al., 2001).

Persistent low achievement among many urban school districts represents such a problem requiring a collective response. Jones and colleagues (1997) identified civic capacity as a means to connect communities to urban schools, quoting Sirotnik (1991, p. 264), “To ignore the intimate connection between school and community in the reform and restructuring of urban schooling is to condemn such attempts to almost certain failure.” Such a connection requires directly engaging teachers in the coalition.
Stone (1998) wrote “In school improvement it is imperative that the coalition include educators. Their know-how and their control over operational detail make them essential partners in efforts to improve school performance” (p.15). Including educators in these efforts helps create what Hill and colleagues (1989, p. 11) called the “double helix of school reform.” Jones and colleagues (1997) explained this concept as the connections between the inside loop of educators who are able to take a broad understanding of the concerns of educational achievement and the outside loop of non-educators that provide support. Bridging leadership provides an essential connection between the two groups and helps establish a broad view among educators and sustain interest among non-educators (Stone, 1998).

Significantly, Stone and colleagues (2001) found educator participation in only the three highly mobilized cities out of the eleven they investigated. Likewise, Jones and colleagues (1997) found educators represented a key component in the city they determined had the highest level of civic capacity for school change. Stone and colleagues (2001) suggest that the limited connections between teachers and other groups and their identification of fewer problems in schools reflect traditional sub-system politics in which specialists interact with a limited set of actors who carry out similar policies, but have few contacts with the community at large. Such sub-systems tend towards equilibrium in their limited interactions and authority, as well as in their focus on day-to-day operations (Stone et al., 200).

In addition to engaging teachers directly, proactive superintendents play important roles in the development of civic capacity for educational change (Jones et al., 1997). Mitra and colleagues (2008) also identified a proactive and visionary superintendent as a key leader of civic capacity for school change. However, Stone and colleagues (2001) found that even among highly mobilized districts, superintendents did not play central roles, but were supportive of the efforts.
While performance regimes and the notion of a double helix point to the important roles parents play in educational change efforts, Stone and colleagues (2001) found that parents often held limited roles in cross-sector coalitions. They noted in particular the difficulty low-income parents experience in engaging with teachers or school administrators. Without deliberate efforts from the top down or the bottom up, low-income parents are especially unlikely to be able to engage in these efforts (Henig & Stone, 2008; Ishimaru, 2014a).

**Crossing boundaries and bridging divides.** Balancing the need for a shared agenda with the requirements of a broad coalition consisting of diverse stakeholders creates challenges for creating civic capacity in education. Ansell and colleagues identify the contentious nature of education as a challenge to the mobilization of a broad coalition necessary to create change. The need to bring a wide range of stakeholders together may result in an agenda that lacks clarity and limits action (Ansell, Reckhow, & Kelly, 2009).

The need to balance breadth of a coalition with a focused agenda suggests significant challenges for communities rife with deeply engrained divisions. Stone and colleagues (2001) and others (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedsclaux, 1999; Ishimaru, 2014a) identified the challenges that long-standing racial divisions in urban areas pose to civic capacity. In rural areas, such challenges may include racial or ethnic differences as rural area gain diversity (Carr & Kefalas 2009), as well as long-standing socio-economic divisions the wealthy elites and low-income families, who have been traditionally been ill-served by rural schools (Sherman & Sage, 2011; Howley & Howley, 2010; Carr & Kefalas, 2009).

Important questions remain as to how partnership councils can bridge social and cultural divides to mobilize individuals and organizations to facilitate change. The participation of rural parents may be hindered by social exclusion and social isolation associated with both poverty
and large geographic areas with low population density, making them particularly challenging to recruit, engage, and retain. Community organizing can be used to facilitate parental involvement using bottoms up (Ishimaru, 2014a), or districts can engage in outreach efforts involving top down strategies (Henig & Stone, 2008).

**Agenda setting: who decides and what is the dominant discourse.** The social divisions described above increase the difficulty of organizing and mobilizing stakeholders. Social divisions further challenge the creation of civic capacity by making it more difficulty to develop a common, shared understanding of the community-level educational and economic issues, as well as to generate agreement potential solutions (Stone et al., 2001). Education has proved a particularly difficult arena for the creation of a common understanding due to the ill-defined problem space with few clear linkages between problems and appropriate solutions (Stone et al. 2001), as well as competition of value driven solution (Stone & Henig, 2008). However, skillful facilitation and boundary crossing leadership contribute to mobilization and development of consensus through the sharing of information, ideas, and in particular, data (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

Such facilitation represents a specific approach to agenda setting, or the creation of a shared understanding of the problem and potential solutions that drive action on the part of a coalition (Stone et al., 2001). In part, such agenda setting depend on issue framing. Issue framing refers to the process of creating an interpretation of the world, in which new experiences are compared to previous ones in order to make sense of them (Gray, 2007; Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot, 2003). This process results in frames that provide a means of sense making. The existence of multiple issue frames around complex social issues presents a challenge for creating collaborative partnerships (Gray, 2007).
Even among the cities they found to have higher levels of civic capacity, Stone and colleagues (2001) found low levels of agreement among stakeholders as to the problems existing in the educational policy arena. Two sources contributed to this lack of agreement: differences in problem identification based on stakeholder interests and the influence of national policy discourse on local policy-making.

In terms of problem identification, where one sits in relation to the issue colors the interpretation. For example, teachers may identify the need for sufficient resources as important to being able to do their job effectively. However, business leaders may focus instead on efficiency and keeping their taxes low in the interest of economic growth (Stone et al., 2001).

As stated earlier, values and political discourse contribute to education functioning as a high reverberation policy arena (Henig & Stone, 2008; Stone et al., 2001). National discourses color local actors’ understandings, despite operating at abstract levels while local actors must contend with concrete realities. Tensions between the two create policy churn in education (Henig & Stone, 2008). Under these circumstances, framing mechanisms and language, or discourse, preferences are of particular importance for local areas whose needs are markedly different from those of urban and suburban areas.

Durand (2011) identified three strands of discourse in the national P-16 advocacy and state policies: sociological, economic, and organizational. The sociological frame relies largely on language of social justice, equity, and access to education. The economic frame couches the need for P-16 development as one of workforce development and economic competitiveness through the creation of human capital, as well as increasing efficiency of educational institutions. The organizational frame examines the need to change within the bureaucratic structures of schools, districts and other educational institutions (Durand, 2011).
In particular, the economic frame’s focus on human capital development presents challenges for rural areas in two ways. First while many scholars identify the need for human capital development to stabilize rural communities and their economies (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009; Mitra et al., 2008; Mitra & Frick, 2011), these areas have different human capital need than urban areas with stronger connections to core economic activities. Local leaders must look towards the growth industries in their own areas (Mitra et al., 2008) as opposed to manufacturing, agriculture and extractive industries that are unlikely to return (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009; Mitra et al, 2008; Sherman & Sage, 2011) or to high wage industries that are only found in urban areas. The alignment of rural education to urban needs is a long-standing practice, which has facilitated the out-migration of educated young people from rural places (Carr & Kerfalas, 2009). Without attention to the local educational and economic landscape, the adoption of human capital discourse and frames by a rural cradle-to-career network may increase the chance of highly educated young people seeking employment in urban areas.

Secondly, as Howley (1991) and Theobald and Nachtigal, (1995) and others have argued, when rural schools focus on human capital creation alone to solve the problem of brain-drain, they may fail to address the important civic and social as important functions of rural, place-based education that help young people remain in their communities. Therefore, the shift in national discourse from social justice towards human capital development (Durand, 2011) may further limit the ability of rural networks to frame their work in terms of the local community.

The Role of Relationships, Networks, and Social Capital

Although Briggs (2008) and Stone and colleagues (2001) dismiss the notion of social capital in the development of civic capacity, the cradle-to-career literature identifies social capital as an important factor for the launch of a network, as well as a result of the creation of
such networks. For example, Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2007) identified social capital as a key component in launching cradle-to-career networks and developing collaboration between individuals, including both bonding social capital and bridging social capital.

McGrath and colleagues (2005) identified the creation of social capital as an important outcome of K-16 efforts. More broadly, scholars identify social capital at the family (Coleman, 1988), school (Goddard, 2003) and community level (Gold, Simon, Mundell, Brown, 2004; Ishimaru 2014a; Warren et al., 2011) as supporting school change efforts. Based on these analyses, the following section explores social capital as a means to fill in the conceptual gap in civic capacity theory as applied to partnership councils and cradle to career networks.

**Social Capital.** Social capital theory, which describes interpersonal networks, the quality of relationships, and resources embedded in these networks (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001), has broad applications. Sociologists have used social capital theory to explain differences in outcomes at levels from individuals (Coleman, 1998) to cities (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994). This section explores several definitions and their application for the study of cradle-to-career networks.

Among the first to describe the phenomenon of social capital, Coleman (1988) defined it as relational networks with social trust and shared norms. He used this idea to explain differences in student outcomes, such as graduation rates (1988). In particular, he identified closed networks with dense ties as resulting in positive outcomes through the strict application of group norms (Coleman, 1988). In this conception, social capital resides in human relationships.

Others such as Lin (2001) have defined social capital as the resources available within a social network. Social capital in this view depends on the composition of networks and
individuals’ locations within them (Lin, Ao, & Song, 2009). Such definitions often focus on the conversion of social capital to human capital and economic gain (Portes, 1998).

Putnam (1993) defined social capital as “features of social organization, such as, trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p. 167). However, Putnam’s (2001) work takes civic participation and democracy as important outcomes for social capital at the state level. In their analysis, Szreter and Woolcock (2003) locate social capital as a property of the group or network, rather than individuals or their relationship. Similarly, Putnam (1993) defined social capital at the collective, community level and applied his definition at the state level.

This study takes the view that individuals build and maintain social capital through their interpersonal interactions, the development of trust, the creation of shared norms, and the reciprocity of such interactions. Both the structure of these networks and their functional qualities possess import for the analysis of a cradle-to-career network. However, the outcome, mobilization and shared issue framing among a wide range of stakeholders, suggests the need to examine social capital from a collective, municipal level outcome.

The identification of networks or relationships, and trust and shared norms in both Coleman’s (1988) and Putnam’s (2001) identify the two key components of social capital: structural elements and functional elements. Each merits further explanation below.

**Structural elements: social networks.** Social capital relies on the structure of networks, the relationships between individuals, and the density of such ties. In Coleman’s (1988) conception of social capital, closed networks in which all members know one another can facilitate trust, increase access to information, and create strong social sanctions. Coleman (1988) argued that closed networks generate social capital to support education. However, Burt
(1992) argued that open networks, those with structural holes, increase the flow of non-redundant information and offer new opportunities to connect to other individuals.

Similarly, Granovetter (1973) identified the import of weak ties in the development of community action groups. Weak ties, such as those formed by shared employment or participation in community groups, increase personal communication to recruit individuals to a cause. On the other hand, in seemingly close-knit communities, ties are either strong or absent, resulting in many tight social groups that are isolated from one another. Such isolation limits the ability of community organizing efforts to mobilize (Granovetter, 1973). Additionally, weak ties are important for the creation of a democratic organization not governed by hierarchy, such as might be found in a cradle-to-career network (Blau, 1980).

In addition to open or closed networks and weak or strong ties, the relative status of individuals contribute within the network contribute to its structure. Bonding social capital takes place between individuals in like groups and of like status (Ishimaru, 2014a; Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital is the connection between individuals who belong to different groups and have different social status. Bonding social capital can help overcome power differences and allow for bridging social capital to be formed (Ishimaru, 2014a). Linking social capital is similar to bridging social capital in that it occurs between social unequals; however it describes the interactions of people with public institutions, such as public schools. Linking social capital requires effort on the part of institutions to engage those who have often been subject to social exclusion (Szreter & Woolcock, 2003). This idea parallels Stone and Henig’s (2008) assertion that in order to bring low-income parents into school change efforts, schools, and districts must engage actively in capacity and relationship building with parents.
Cradle-to-career networks present an alternative to the typical, hierarchical bureaucracy in education, which might suggest that partnership councils with abundant structural holes and weak ties to individuals outside their main social circle may be better able to build networks that include bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. On the other hand, those with dense ties may have a head start in the development of a shared issue frame based on shared norms and trust to engage in difficult conversations. However, whether partnership councils develop theories of action that prioritize the importance of using existing social networks to spread the vision and mission, as well as the need to develop new forms of bonding, bridging and linking social capital in order to facilitate changes inside educational institutions with the support of community members, remains an empirical question.

Functional social capital: quality of interactions. Bryson and colleagues’ (2006) review of the literature on cross-sector collaboration underscores the importance of the functional aspects of social capital. While the structure of social networks determine the pathways for information to travel, functional attributes including shared norms of reciprocity and trust, facilitate information transfer.

Bryson and colleagues (2006) highlighted the importance of trust within a collaborative effort, noting that trusting relationships form “both the lubricant and the glue” (p.47) that allows the work to happen and keeps the stakeholders together. They identified three areas of trust: interpersonal relationships, confidence in organizational competence, and a common bond and sense of good will (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone; Chen & Graddy, 2005).

In the same vein, Huxham and Vangen (2005) noted that collaborative efforts start with varying degrees of trust and underscore the importance of trust building as an on-going activity. Paralleling Bryk and Schneider’s definition of relational trust, others have identified that trust
develops through sharing information, demonstrating competence, expressing good intentions,
and following-through with commitments (Arino & de la Torre, 1998; Merrill-Sands & Sheridan,
1996).

Thus, the structure of relationships in the networks matter, but so does relationship
quality. How each partnership council attends to the structure of their network and the quality of
interactions, particularly with educators and parents, may impact whether they are able to create
linkages to schools to support change.

**Issue Framing in Social Movements**

In addition to expanding the analytical frame using social capital theory, the sociological
theory of social movement issue framing fleshes out the political science theories of urban
regime theory and civic capacity. Issue framing as a key component in civic capacity formation
(Stone et al. 2001). Similarly, the literature on social movements has identified issue framing as a
key component in collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). Together, this suggests the
importance of understanding how coalitions frame issues.

Collective action frames represent sense making on a collective scale. These frames
require active participation on the part of movement members to work through contention and
disagreement (Benford & Snow, 2000). In social movements, issue frames have two key
purposes. First, they create meaning for members (Goffman, 1974) through negotiation of shared
understandings (Gamson, 1992). Secondly, collective action frames also serve to mobilize
adherents and demobilize detractors (Snow & Benford, 1988). In this way, issue framing not
only sets direction for partnership councils, but also serves to bring together new individual and
organizational partners.
Issue framing in social movements occurs through three key tasks: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing (Benford & Snow 2000). Diagnostic frames seek to identify a problem. In movements advocating policy or economic change, diagnostic frames typically identify a specific victim of injustice (Benford & Snow, 2000). Once groups have identified the cause of a problem, prognostic framing identifies a potential solution. The original framing of the problem limits the potential solutions available. Following the identification of a problem and a potential solution, motivational frames provide compelling reasons for people to join the cause. Motivational frames represent communications used to recruit individuals to the cause (Benford & Snow, 2000). Collective action frames can vary in their breadth and the degree of inclusivity, and some frames have a greater credibility with actors, particularly those that draw on evidence (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988). Taken together these three tasks move from building consensus to building mobilization for collective action (Klandermans, 1984; Benford & Snow, 2000).

Benford and Snow (2000) identified processes that go into creating collective action frames. Discursive processes refer to conversation and written communication that individuals undertake in order to retell events in ways that create a new interpretation and vision. These communications also serve to embellish or amplify existing values and beliefs. Social movements, like partnership councils must be able to overcome alternative views internally and externally. Once developed, members communicate frames broadly, both verbally and in written form. Slogans and other branding efforts provide a readily transmitted conceptual core of understanding. These discursive processes are dynamic and ongoing throughout interactions within the group (Benford & Snow, 2000) and can change depending on the target audience of framing activities (Benford & Snow, 2000; Coy & Woehrle 1996; Ellingson 1995; Evans 1997).
Cradle-to-career networks and their partnership councils possess some of the same elements of a social movement. For example, the literature on cradle-to-career networks identifies the necessity of creating a compelling community level vision and mission. The literature also identified the importance of widely communicating this vision and mission to recruit new individuals and organizations to the work. Therefore, the sociological literature on social movement issue framing provides insight into how these groups develop a collective understanding and share it to the wider community. This literature suggests inquiry into the processes partnership councils use to create diagnostic frames that are used for problem identification.

Similarly, in relation to Stone and colleagues’ (2001) work, the literature on issue framing suggests that which stakeholders participate may be as important as the processes used. This is likely to hold true for prognostic frames, with different constituent types seeing different solutions. In brief, who participates in framing activities may ultimately impact how issues are framed and communicated in order to recruit new members to the work. New members necessitate continuing efforts to develop shared understanding of local issues, resulting in a ongoing cycle of recruitment and issue framing.

**Putting Mobilization and Issue Framing into Action**

In addition to understanding how each network has come together and how they have created a common understanding of the educational and economic issues faced by each community, this study seeks to understand how differences in these areas might impact the theory of change of partnership councils hold for cradle to career network development. As urban regime theory suggests, different types of reform actions require different actors, this study suggests that different actors and different understandings of the problem may limit the types of
reform actions available to cradle-to-career networks. In particular, differences in the mobilization of parents and educators are hypothesized to impact the theory of change. The following section is a selective summary of the literature that addresses theory of change in partnership councils and other collaborative partnership efforts and develops implications for future research.

**Theory of change.** Two related concepts, theories of action and theories of change, inform the development and analysis of the third research question. Theories of action and theories of change outline the internal logic of an organization, or in this case a cradle-to-career networks, in their efforts to meet their desired outcomes. The third research question examines the network’s theory of change in context of the composition of stakeholders mobilized and the development of shared issue frames. This question is structured to bridge the divide between social analysis and strategic social action.

Theories of action describe the intent of an organization as they carry out their work to meet goals. Designs and actions reveal these intentions (Schon & McDonald, 1998). Theories of action may exist in formal diagrams and documents, or they may exist at an unwritten level. The beliefs, attitudes, and values that guide individual’s actions represent espoused theories of action (Argyris, 1995).

Theory of change describes how complex change initiatives, such as partnerships and collaboration, move from the current situation to the idealized vision of the future. Logic models typically depict theory of change and identify causal relations and pathways towards desired outcomes (Lawson et al. 2007). However, similarly to theories of action, individuals may have their own espoused theory of change, particularly where a formal document is lacking.
STRIVE’s published theory of action (STRIVE Together, 2015) for the development of cradle outlines the steps partnership councils take to creating a sustainable partnership and network and to move towards systems change. STRIVE’s theory of action largely focuses at the partnership level of activity, not at the activities inside partner organizations.

For this study, an analysis of how the participants think about generating change at the community and organizational levels contributed to the development of a local theory of change, depicted in a logic model. This logic model takes up where the STRIVE theory of action leaves off in order to create a better understanding of how community mobilization can affect educational change.

The network selected for this study uses the term theory of change in their internal logic model; therefore this language will be used to describe their efforts. However, STRIVE uses the language of theory of action to describe their logic model and that language has been retained to describe their model.

Summary

The literature on multi-sector community collaboration for the development of cradle-to-career networks is largely descriptive and atheoretical. While it identifies key stages and actions to launch cradle-to-career networks, it does not connect these efforts to more general theories of how community level change is undertaken. Urban regime theory and civic capacity provide important contributions. Both seek to explain how governing coalitions come together to create change at the collective, municipal level.

However, coalition building requires the formation of new relationships between individuals, as well as between individuals and institutions. This suggests a clear interpersonal aspect to the formation of civic capacity that can be explained by social capital theory. Social
capital theory also helps identify how information flows in order to understand how groups come to identify community-wide problems and potential solutions (Stone et al., 2001). Social movement issue framing provides further insight into the development of such problem and solution statements that in turn drive theory of change or theory of change development, as well as contribute to the espoused theory of change held by network members.

**Methodological Concerns in the Literature Review**

Much of the literature on cradle-to-career networks and related efforts, urban regime theory and civic capacity employ city-specific or network level case studies. Such studies derived mainly from qualitative analysis of interviews and document reviews. Among these are the cradle-to-career studies by McGrath and colleagues (2005), which examined K-16 efforts in 16 cities through cross-case comparisons; McGrath (2008) and Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2007), both of which used case studies of several of the P-16 councils that have developed in Ohio. Lawson and colleagues (2007) used a multiple case-study method to derive theories of change for collaborative youth-development projects.

Stone’s initial work on urban regime analysis (1998; 1989) also drew on city level case study analysis. In their work on civic capacity, Stone and colleagues (2001) also employed city-level case study methodology. They drew largely on interviews and document reviews, along with some survey data (Stone et al., 2001).

Shipps (2003) used a single case study methodology to explore and extend urban regime theory in Chicago’s decentralization experiment. Ishimaru’s (2014a) study of community organizing and civic capacity formation also used a single case study based on interviews and document reviews. Mitra’s and colleagues’ work on civic capacity in the Rust Belt includes both single case study (2008) and comparative case study methodology (2011).
Similarly, much research in rural education relies on case study methodology, highlighting troubled areas or promising practices. Carr and Kerfalas (2009), Sherman and Sage (2011), Budge (2006), and Corbett (2007) all employed community level case study analysis to examine the role of schools in the out-migration of young people and McDonough and colleagues (2010) used case study methodology to examine the constraints on post-secondary enrollment in a rural community.

Schafft and Jackson (2010) identified case study methodology as particularly appropriate for research in rural areas because it maintains a focus on the views, perceptions and voices of people living in diverse rural areas. Despite the difficulties in generalization this can cause, similar stories have story emerged from these authors work in Iowa, Northern California, Washington State and Canada’s Atlantic coast.

Much like studies of urban regimes and civic capacity, studies of issue framing have relied largely on qualitative analysis, including ethnography and case studies of individual social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Like cradle-to-career networks, social movements are rare and largely context dependent, which suggests case study as an appropriate methodological tool (Yin, 2014). Additionally, studies on framing seek to understand why and how different frames are created and communicated, as opposed to examining outcomes. Durand’s (2011) study of P-16 advocacy and policy used discourse analysis, a specific qualitative methodology that examines written and spoken language, to look at state level policy language compared to the body of P-16 advocacy literature.

An abundance of case study research in cradle-to-career networks, urban regimes, civic capacity, and rural education suggest the use of other methodologies to increase generalizability through statistical analysis. However, cradle-to-career networks remain rare and complex
phenomenon and their implementation depends greatly on their context. This study proceeds using case study methodology due to the unique and complex nature of cradle-to-career network development and the need for research in rural areas to remain grounded in context. Additionally, this methodology is recommended due to the need to map the conceptual and operational territory of the development of a rural cradle-to-career network. Details of the case study methodology selected for this study will be outlines in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The literatures reviewed in the previous chapter suggest three interrelated research questions:

1) How do community and organization members mobilize in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

2) How do community and organization members frame issues in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

3) What are the characteristics of the theory of change? How do mobilization and issue framing contribute to this theory of change?

Qualitative Case Study Methodology and Design

In order to answer these research questions this study utilized a qualitative, case study design. Yin (2011) identified five key features of qualitative research that recommend it for this study: 1) examining the meaning of people’s lives in real world conditions; 2) representing the views and perspectives of participants; 3) examining the context in which people live; 4) contributing to existing or emerging concepts that theorize human behavior; and 5) using multiple sources of data.

Together these features of qualitative research provide a good fit for this case study’s focus on rural schools, communities, and cradle-to-career system building—as described in the first two chapters. First, given the diversity of rural communities, research in these places depends significantly on context (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). Similarly, context plays an important role in the development of cradle-to-career systems as they depend largely on the local educational landscape (McGrath et al., 2005).
Secondly, identifying issue frames and theory of change both depend on the ideas held by individuals. Qualitative research methods are needed to derive participants’ socially constructed perspectives on local problems and potential solutions.

Third, the relatively rare nature of a rural cradle-to-career network suggests case study methods as a fitting design (Yin, 2014). Of the 49 STRIVE sites (STRIVE, 2014), four are in non-metropolitan counties and of the 21 Federal Promise Neighborhoods that received funding, only one is in a rural area and one in a tribal community (Miller et al., 2013). Similarly, case study methodology is well suited to contemporary phenomena, such as emerging cradle-to-career networks (Yin, 2014).

Lastly, case study methods have also been identified as appropriate for understanding of complex inter-relationships, such as those between stakeholders in a workforce development project, as well as the non-linear development of individuals and projects (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). Cradle-to-career configurations are examples of such non-linear initiatives. For example, McGrath and colleagues (2005) noted that while there are stages of development of K-16 and similar projects, groups may move forward and back between them, or advance in a single area but not all. Case study methodology thus provides a strategy for addressing this endemic complexity.

Furthermore, case study methods are well suited for research structured to map new theoretical territory (Yin, 2014) because it enables researchers to examine relationships among many potential variables (Creswell, 2013). This study seeks to build new theory on the civic and social drivers of cradle-to-career network developmental trajectories with a particular focus on rural, place-based needs.
However, case study methodology has significant limitations that merit mention. For example, case studies sacrifice larger samples for greater depth of understanding, and this feature may limit generalization of findings to other cases (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). Unlike statistical methods that extrapolate findings through statistical probabilities, case study research is not predicated on generalizability of the findings. Despite these important limitations, case study methodology has the potential to expand, extend, and create new theories for application elsewhere (Yin, 2014). This study’s focus on theories of action is a special extension of this idea.

The table below outlines data collection and analysis strategies, descriptions of which follow.

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<td><strong>Motivational Frames</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Aspirations for youth</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Educational agendas</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Workforce agendas</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Local vs. National discourse(s)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theory of change:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moving from collective impact to educational change</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meeting Observation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key informant interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Content analysis</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Vision for creating community, economic, &amp; educational change</em></td>
<td><strong>Network Participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focus groups</strong></td>
<td><strong>Logic model creation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Role of participants in school change efforts</em></td>
<td><strong>Convener/Backbone Staff</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*internal</td>
<td><strong>Documents</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*external</td>
<td><em>internal communications</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>*communications</td>
<td><em>external communications</em></td>
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Table 2
**Unit of analysis.** The unit of analysis selected for this study is the cradle-to-career network itself. This selection was informed by Lawson and his colleagues’ (2007) study of youth development partnerships, and Lawson and Anderson-Butcher’s (2007) study of P-16 councils in Ohio, in which the unit of analysis was defined as the network. However, these studies largely focused on the partnership council that provides leadership for such a network.

Unlike the networks examined in earlier studies, the Grand Isle Network has three distinct levels. In order to capture mobilization, issue framing, and emergent and espoused theory of change development, the study sought out participants at each level. The network as a unit of analysis, therefore, is defined as a group of individuals with a history of working together under the auspices of the Grand Isle Network\(^1\), which was formally launched in 2011.

Like the aforementioned earlier studies, the network is embedded within a larger community context. Similarly, this study uses a holistic model that examines the network within the local context.

**Sample selection.** A purposive sampling strategy (Yin, 2011) ensured the identification and selection of a rural community with an active cradle-to-career network. In order to delimit the study and align the study with a current policy initiative in New York State, sampling focused on networks using the STRIVE model. Therefore, the STRIVE website served as the first source for identifying potential sites. Identification of networks outside of metropolitan areas relied on Census, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the National Center of Educational Statistics definitions of rural (Appendix A).

Based on these definitions, I identified three networks as being in non-metropolitan counties with significant rural areas: two in the Midwest and one in the Northeast. Examination

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\(^1\) The network, its backbone organization, and all locations have been given pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of participants.
of publically available documents contributed to the determination of whether the network had evolved beyond the launch phase. These documents included lists of leadership council members, activity calendars, meeting minutes, blog posts, and newspaper articles.

This process narrowed the pool down to two networks. Conversations with network conveners further determined whether the network had begun to move toward action. Based on these conversations, one of the networks in the Midwest appeared to be moving toward action, with plans to release baseline data to the community and strategies developed to work with community members around the data. In contrast, the network in the Northeast appeared to be undergoing a period of significant reorganization in mobilization and other activities after the turnover of a key leader.

After selecting the Midwest network, I sought permission from the Network conveners to conduct the study. Henceforth this special initiative is referred to as the Grand Isle Network. This pseudonym is one of many employed to ensure participant and initiative confidentiality.

**Data sources.** Case study methodology proceeds with multiple data sources and thus depends in part on triangulation of the findings (Yin, 2011). Fieldwork proceeded in two rounds with a weeklong visit in November 2014 and another week-long visit in June 2015. Data collection utilized multiple sources, including interviews with key stakeholders, focus group interviews with network members, document reviews, and observations of selected Grand Isle Network meetings.

**Participants.** A criterion sampling strategy identified key participants and focus group participants based on 1) active participation in the Network; 2) representation of key constituent groups identified in the literature; and 3) geographic diversity. Key stakeholder groups included parents, educators, school administrators, (Shipps, 2003; McGrath et al., 2005) business leaders,
social service providers, representatives of government agencies, (McGrath, 2008), and funders (Hanleybrown et al., 2012), as well as the network conveners and other backbone organization staff (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Table 3 lists the number of participants by stakeholder group.

In addition to geographic diversity across the seven school districts encompassed in the Grand Isle Network, efforts were made to recruit participants at multiple levels of the network. First, at the top, two iterations of a partnership council have provided leadership for the efforts of the network, such as agenda setting, communication, and development of data systems. Secondly, a middle layer is composed of subcommittees, such as the communications committee, that interact with both the partnership council and others outside the network. This middle layer also contains three organizational partnerships, in early childhood, K-12 education, and out-of-school time. Lastly, participants engaged in action planning at the school district level were recruited.

Three factors were influential in participant selection. First, conversations with the convener determined which members of the Core Team had a record of active participation since the formation of the group in 2011. The convener identified approximately thirty individuals from the publically available list as active participants.

Secondly, the researcher sought individuals representing stakeholder groups identified in the literature. These groups include K-12 teachers and administrators, early childhood program leaders and teachers, post-secondary education administrators, county social service agency managers, businesses leaders, non-profits managers, and individuals identified as representing parents.

Thirdly, the researcher tried to identify and recruit participants from multiple school communities in order to provide geographic diversity. Recruitment proceeded through the use of
publicly available email addresses, which served as the first point of contact with letters and consent forms sent to individuals electronically. Publically available phone numbers for Core Team members’ employers served as a second point of contact. The table below shows the breakdown of study participants by sector for each round of fieldwork.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Type</th>
<th>Core Team</th>
<th>Interview/Focus Group Participants 11/14</th>
<th>Interview/Focus Group Participants 06/15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Educator/ Support Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Administrator</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Agency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back Bone Organization</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to diversity of stakeholder types, geographic representation also was a factor in stakeholder recruitment and selection. Efforts were made to include participants from across the various school districts in the greater Grand Isle area yielded individuals with ties to four school districts: Big River, Little River, Winslow, and Green Lake. Additionally, several participants had ties to the charter school in Grover. Although not representative of the entire breadth of the Network’s geographic span, these individuals within these districts appear to be the most active in the Network’s efforts.
**Procedures.** Fieldwork took place over two separate weeklong visits to the site, first in November 2015 and then in June 2015. I coordinated fieldwork around two key events, the release of student survey data in November, and a visit from the external evaluator who helped facilitate several meetings, as well as conducting focus groups with Network members.

**Instruments.** Both key informant interviews and focus groups used a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed for a degree of replication. Individuals and groups were asked the same or very similar questions during both rounds of fieldwork. However, this protocol was adaptable, i.e., it was not overly structured such that it eliminated the opportunity for the researcher to probe an informant’s thinking or ask follow up questions (Neumann, 2011).

Document reviews also were protocol-driven. To ensure document collection yielded necessary materials, I created a checklist. These protocols can be found in Appendix B/Informed consent and participant privacy. Prior to all focus groups and interviews, the researcher explained the project and potential uses of the findings to all participants. Per IRB requirements, the researcher explained participants’ rights, including withdrawal from the study and privacy precautions. Permission was sought to audio record interviews and focus groups. Participants had the option of having the recording device turned off at any time. Participants in the smaller meetings received similar explanations of the project, potential uses, and their rights as participants. As the larger community meeting was open to the public, no consents were sought.

In order to maintain privacy, the researcher de-identified transcriptions of interviews and focus groups, using stakeholder type or role within the network to identify speakers. The recordings were safeguarded on a password protected external drive and they will be destroyed upon completion of analysis. All organizations and locations have been given pseudonyms,
unless they are part of national organizations, such as the United Way or the Boys and Girls Club, which are present in many communities across the country.

**Data Collection.** Sixteen interviews were conducted in November and fourteen more in June, for a total of thirty stakeholder interviews. All interviews were audio recorded with permission of participants and transcribed later. While efforts were made to conduct all interviews in person, scheduling difficulties required six interviews to be conducted via telephone. These interviews also were audio recorded and transcribed. Drawing on interview data, the researcher created interpretive field notes. These notes recorded ideas and themes that emerged during interviews.

The second source of data was small focus groups with stakeholders. Because access to meetings of the Core Team and community action groups was limited, these focus groups provided an opportunity to observe how individuals interacted with one another and signaled the level of shared understanding they had at the time.

In November, two focus groups were conducted with three participants each, for a total of six participants. The first group consisted of Core Team members who also represented the Grand Isle Network for Youth (GINY), the after-school group associated with the Network. The second group consisted of Core Team members who worked with workforce development efforts prior to and after the Network’s development. Like the interviews, these focus groups were recorded with the permission of participants and transcribed.

In June, an external evaluator hired by the Grand Isle Network conducted several focus groups and interviews. Prior to these focus groups, we exchanged questions to assure we were able to collect needed data. The researcher attended three focus groups and audio recorded them with participant permission. They were transcribed for analysis. These three focus groups
included thirteen stakeholders from a variety of sectors who led community action planning events. A total of 19 individuals participated in focus groups.

The third source of data consisted of documents. Due to limited opportunities to observe Core Team and other meetings, documents served to provide records of what transpired at these meetings. They also enabled me to cross check individual’s recollections of events. Documents collected included meeting minutes, internal communications, blog entries on the Network’s website, and media reports on activities of the Network. Collection of approximately 200 documents occurred in three rounds: November 2014, June 2015, and September 2015.

Lastly, the researcher observed several meetings. In November 2014, over two hundred individuals gathered to discuss the student survey carried out in the spring of 2014. In June 2015, the external evaluators from the Quest group held several meetings with a variety of Network groups. These meetings included a goal setting session with the communications subcommittee; a meeting in which the governance council and communications subcommittee worked to finalize a revision of the Network’s vision and mission statements as part of the transition from the larger Core Team to a smaller governance council; and a professional development meeting of secondary social studies teachers. Observations of these meetings were recorded by hand.

**Data analysis.** One of the challenges of case study methodologies is the large quantity of data that must be organized and analyzed (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). The NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012) software program facilitated organization and analysis of the interview, focus group, and document data, along with field notes and analytic memos.

The data analysis strategy included both deductive and inductive processes. Deductive analysis proceeded from a set of codes developed *a priori* from the literature review (Miles,
Huberman & Saldana, 2014). These codes reflected the study design, with four main categories: descriptions of community and local context, mobilization, issue changing, and theory of change.

The community context codes addressed strengths and weaknesses identified by participants, as well as aspirations for youth. Mobilization codes included identifying existing and new relationships; mobilization activities and events that brought people together; the use of communication strategies; and social capital, including existing networks, the development of new relationships, and trust.

For issue framing, codes included identification of challenges in the community, as well as the location of these challenges (i.e. whether issues were identified as state challenges, such as low school funding; regional issues such as transportation, or issues specific to a single community or school, such as teen suicides). Other framing codes included the content of the frame, such as whether the issue was educational, economic, civic, social-emotional, or organizational. Lastly, the researcher coded frames as diagnostic, prognostic, or motivational (Benford & Snow, 2001). Theory of change codes initially included factors associated with school change.

Inductive approaches complemented the initial deductive analysis and expanded the number of codes within each category. Inductive analysis proceeded with the aim of identifying themes and concepts not found in the urban-centric literature on cradle-to-career networks, civic capacity, and urban regimes. Inductive approach began with the identification of themes recorded in the interpretive field notes, analytic memos, and summary reports.

This resulted in the generation of new codes with in established categories, particularly in the areas of community context and the theory of change. The new codes developed from the data included aspects of mobilization including participant engagement, invitation of network
members, and identification strategies for new participants. Within framing, new codes focused on issues related to access to programs, quality of programs.

During a second round of coding, additional categories were generated from inductively derived codes: communication, existing school practices, Foundation/Backbone organization, grassroots organizing, leadership, planning vs. action, previous multisector efforts, and participant roles.

In addition, theory of change codes were derived from the data based on the salient factors participants believed to be drivers for change in order to create success for all students and meet the vision and goals of the network. In addition to aspects of in school changes anticipated by the literature, participants identified a number of key avenues for change: relationship building between youth and adults, social-emotional development and mental health supports, shared learning, communication, data-driven decision making, alignment of programs, and in particular the role of youth voice and leadership. These codes and the operational definitions can be found in Appendix C.

A second coding cycle followed the initial deductive and inductive coding cycles, as recommended by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013). The goal for this second round of coding is to identify patterns in the data. These pattern codes typically include categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people and theoretical constructs. These pattern codes can be then mapped into networks in order to identify causal relationships (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). At this stage the relationship between each line of inquiry within each case was developed. At this stage, peer debriefing was used to corroborate findings and eliminate bias.

A third round of analysis utilized axial coding in order to relate concepts to one another. Matrix displays aided this analysis. Throughout the coding process, emerging themes and
concepts were collected in analytic memos and peer debriefing was done with an expert in cradle-to-career systems.

Throughout the coding process, analytic memos were kept to record concepts and themes as they emerged, as well as to pose questions to follow up. The researcher then added these memos to the data set. These memos aided in writing the final report. In addition to memos, two summary reports were developed from the site visits, drawing largely on field notes and memos. Through these summary reports, themes across different levels of the Network became apparent. These summary reports were also sent to Network conveners with a request to identify any factual inaccuracies. The conveners did not provide responses. Chapters 4 and 5 were also sent to the conveners for member checking with a request for identification of factual inaccurate and these chapters were returned with minor corrections.

**Deriving a theory of change: from civic capacity to school change.** In addition to content analysis, the researcher created a logic model depicting the Network’s theory of change for the Network. Such theory of change logic models depict how participants understand the origins of the network, its development, and the causal relationships between developmental pathways and desired outcomes (Lawson et al., 2007). Like Lawson and colleague’s study of youth development partnerships, this study combined qualitative case study methods with logic model development.

Such qualitative methods are well suited for examining espoused theories of action based on their complex, socially constructed nature, as well as their fluidity (Lisy-Macan, 2012). While STRIVE provides a generic theory of action for creating a network, there is a gap between collective action and educational change that remains untheorized. In order to bridge this gap, informants were asked to backward-map, i.e., provide retrospective accounts of their design
decisions, regarding the development of the leadership councils and the local networks structured to actualize their respective visions for success (Lawson et al., 2007).

The final model was constructed by empirical data derived from multiple sources, including interviews and focus groups, meeting observations, and documents such as meeting minutes. This theory of change and logic model was compiled from participants’ espoused theories of change, or individual understandings of how they believed goals would be met (Argyris, 1995).

Maintaining reliability and validity. Maintaining validity and reliability in a qualitative case study is challenging. It requires constant attention throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Yin (2014) emphasized three types of validity that must be maintained during data collection and analysis: construct validity, internal validity and external validity.

Construct validity requires the use of multiple sources of data, such as interviews, document reviews, etc., as well as the establishment of a chain of evidence through data protocols and the development of a database for all data, field notes, memos, and reports. Construct validity also requires developing the correct operational measures for what you wish to study. Researchers going into the field must be clear about what they are seeing and making sure they are able to recognize the phenomenon in question when they encounter it. Another way to maintain construct validity is to share findings with key informant to determine whether the researcher has truly captured the important aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2014). In order to maintain construct validity in this study, interview, focus group, and document collection protocol development were informed by the literature reviewed in chapter 2.

External validity, Yin (2014) wrote, can be maintained using theory to guide a case study and by defining the domain of study. While this study sought to develop new theories to aid in
the understanding of cradle-to-career network development in rural areas, it has a basis in urban regime theory, civic capacity theory, collaboration and partnerships, and theory of change research. These bodies of literature aided the determination of what data to collect, as well as suggested areas for analysis. These areas included identifying previously existing relationships and new relationships developed specifically for the work, as well as data needed to identify both issue frames and the processes used to create them and the local theory of change connecting community level collective action to school change.

Additionally, member checking was used in service of this study’s validity and reliability. Network conveners were provided with multiple opportunities to identify factual inaccuracies (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). Such member checks can insure accuracy and provide additional insights (Yin, 2011). Toward this end, the researcher developed summary reports of each site visit, and shared them with the Network conveners with a request to check for factual inaccuracies. The conveners did not provide a response at this time.

Secondly, chapters four and five, which describe the local context and the development of the Network, were sent to the conveners. One of the conveners provided corrections for several factual errors. Thirdly, network structure presented in chapter five and the logic model presented in chapter eight were sent to the conveners. One convener reported that the network structure appeared accurate and that the logic model reflected her understanding of work, but also provided her with insights as to how others in the network understand their efforts.

Additionally, to reduce the risk of bias when the researcher serves as the main analytical tool, my dissertation supervisor served as a peer debriefer at each stage. This included conversations about themes identified at various stages of analysis, including during the development of summary reports, during coding, and during the writing stage.
Challenges and limitations. The endemic complexity accompanying collaboration among individuals and partnerships between organizations posed challenges for a single investigator. In particular, identifying social networks completely without a more focused social networking instrument proved difficult.

Moreover, the development of cradle-to-career networks and similar initiatives are often non-linear (Lawson et al., 2007; McGrath et al, 2005), which added to the challenge of teasing apart the developmental trajectory of each network. This research challenge is further complicated by this study’s reliance in part on the memories of individuals to describe past events (Neuman, 2011). The use of meeting minutes and other documents helped alleviate these difficulties.

This study was limited by its scope of data collection. Interviews of stakeholders who are not currently part of the leadership council would have provided additional information on mobilization as well as enhanced understanding of why certain stakeholder types suggested by the literature are not involved presently in the Grand Isle Network.

Predictably, time and budgetary constraints were instrumental in decisions to limit interviews to the leadership council. This limitation provides an important direction for future research. It should examine barriers and challenges for participation of certain groups, particularly parents, students, teachers and school administrators, in the development of a leadership council for collective action for educational change.

Delimitations. A case study of a rural, complex STRIVE initiatives offers bountiful opportunities to pursue several lines of inquiry. However, such a case study with multiple methods completed by a single investigator cannot attend to all possible research questions and lines of inquiry. Therefore, this study was delimited accordingly.
The study focused solely on the network and its local context, which meant that certain phenomena of interest had to be excluded. For example, interesting and important questions regarding the role of external support provided by state-level P-20 policy and initiatives, the interaction between networks through the STRIVE Together national network, and the connection between local cradle-to-career network development and state level Race to the Top policy implementation could not be addressed. Questions related to these several developments await future research.
CHAPTER 4: PLACE MATTERS—A DESCRIPTION OF GRAND ISLE COUNTY

This chapter provides a description of Grand Isle County and the seven school districts that participate in the Grand Isle Network, three of which lay in neighboring counties. In addition, this chapter provides study participants’ descriptions of the challenges, strengths, and aspirations for youth. The chapter title reflects the main assumption for this analysis: place matters in cradle-to-career initiatives, especially so in rural places.

Wolch and Dear (1989) argue that geography and social lives of a community influence each other dynamically. Milligan (1998) argued that such dynamic interactions proceed through emotional attachments to place, which draw on previous experiences, and color how individuals think of potential events. In their work on theories of action in youth development partnerships, Lawson and colleagues (2007) also note the while partnership efforts include similar attributes, they are “dependent on, and influenced by, the local histories, local cultures, and unique features of the places where people live and work” (p.31).

This chapter begins with demographic characteristics, local history, and a description of the seven school districts with which the Grand Isle Network shares geographic barriers. These descriptions provide background for the next set of contextual descriptions, which highlights the rural challenges to the development of cradle-to-career networks or other collective impact efforts identified in chapter one. These challenges include the local economy, social geography, and civic government, along with the educational environment.

Additionally, participants identified two further challenges not identified in the rural literature that informed chapter one. First, they identified needs in the mental health and social service sectors, particularly as they relate to a recent rash of suicides or attempts by teens and
young adults. Secondly, participants identified competition in the non-profit sector as a challenge.

In addition to these challenges, this chapter provides participants’ descriptions of the strengths in their community, which many identified as the basis of the development of the Grand Isle Network. Lastly, this chapter outlines aspirations for young people across the Greater Grand Isle Area.

The extensive focus on place in this chapter reflects conveners’ statements on the importance of the local context in their work. This chapter also sets the stage for the findings presented in chapters five, six, and seven, by providing not only contextual details about the Grand Isle area, but also how residents view and describe their community and the region.

**Physical and Demographic Characteristics**

Grand Isle County, a geographically large non-metropolitan county, sits in a remote corner of a Northern Midwest state. The county encompasses nearly 3,000 square miles, a large portion of which is national forest. State forestlands also make up a considerable portion of the county. Pine, spruce, and cedar forests dominate the gently rolling landscape. Lakes, wetlands, and cleared fields break up the forests. In addition to the abundance of timber, the land contains significant mineral deposits.

Fewer than 50,000 people live in Grand Isle County. The average population density is 20 individuals per square mile. Participants reported an aging population, with a large percentage of residents over the age of 55. The median age in the county at the last Census was 44.6. Over 90% of county residents identified as white in the last Census. Native Americans represent the largest minority group in the county. Countywide, over 90% of individuals over 25 graduated from high school, while just over 20% of residents hold a four-year degree or higher (U.S.
Census Bureau, 2010). Over 10,000 individuals reside in the county seat of Big River. The smaller cities, townships, and villages range from less than 200 to approximately 2000 people.

The county median household income of approximately $45,000 in 2013 dollars fell below the state median of nearly $60,000. The poverty level of over 12% was slightly higher than the state poverty rate. The most recent unemployment rate from the Bureau of Labor Statistics was approximately 5%, slightly above the state average. However, participants reported that unemployment is an issue, suggesting that there may be individuals who have dropped out of the labor force that have not been included in the official unemployment numbers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

When asked to describe the Grand Isle area, one participant said, “It’s a little bit harder to describe the county on a whole because I think it is really broken up a lot more by these individual towns.” This comment reflected other study participants’ statements on the differences between the towns and school districts in the county and greater Grand Isle area. In particular, participants described differences between two kinds of community economies: logging communities and mining communities.

Further increasing the geographic complexity, the Grand Isle Network encompasses three school districts in neighboring counties. Like the outlying communities in Grand Isle, these school districts rely on Big River as their economic hub. Together, these districts along with those in Grand Isle County make up the greater Grand Isle area. These constituent school districts are described in the next section.

**Constituent School Communities**

Four school districts serve the various cities, towns, and villages in Grand Isle County. In addition, three districts in three neighboring counties located to the west, south, and east join the
Grand Isle Network. These districts serve communities for which Big River serves as the nearest population and economic hub. These school districts cover large geographic expanses. Many participants noted the great distances between the smaller communities scattered across the county. They also noted that many students may travel up to an hour each way to school on the bus. Additionally, the Grand Isle Network includes the Grover Charter School, which serves students in these three counties, as well as areas to the north of Grand Isle.

*Figure 1. Schematic Map of the Greater Grand Isle Area*

The schematic map above shows the relative location of each of the school-communities, each of which has been given a pseudonym. Grand Isle County, at the center is represented in blue, and neighboring counties in other colors. The Native American Reservation is green. The starred communities represent locations of schools, grouped by the color of their star to show district affiliation. For example, Hawk River and Elk Falls make up a consolidated district,
shown in purple, with an elementary school in one community and a secondary school in the other.

**Big River.** The largest school district is the Big River District, which encompasses Big River and several smaller communities. Participants identified Big River, the county seat, as the hub of employment, industry, resources, recreational activities, and retail for the county and surrounding communities. Over one fifth of the county population lives in Big River. Despite this, participants who live or work in Big River described their community as rural, just as those who live or work in the outlying school districts did. However, many noted that as the biggest community, Big River boasts the most opportunities and resources for youth and adults alike.

The center of Big River contains older buildings, such as an old school converted to a shopping center. Small shops and cafes fan out across the main intersection. The paper mill sits incongruously in the middle of town, on the banks of the river that bisects the community. Across the river, a new library with a timber ceiling and large windows overlooks the water. Up the road, a recently expanded YMCA offers new opportunities for young people, as well as those living in a nearby retirement community.

To the north, single-family homes spread out towards the new high school, with attached state of the art performing arts space. The Big River School district serves Big River, as well as several outlying areas. In addition to the high school, the district oversees the three elementary schools in town, a middle school, an alternative high school, and programming in a residential mental health and drug rehabilitation facility.

The Big River School District also oversees the Little River K-12 school located an hour drive away along winding roads through the national forest. This remote school serves Little River and several smaller communities scattered across the forest. One participant working in the
Child Protection Agency in Big River described the community in Little River as particularly tightly knit, with members coming together to take care of their own. She noted few Child Protection calls from this area, but noted when they do occur it is because the community has run out of options of their own.

Heading west out of Big River, gas stations, and shops give way to a long stretch of straight highway going through Blue Sky. The highway passes by the steam stack of the coal-fired power plant, tucked behind a stand of trees. The rail tracks through town bring trainloads of coal to the plant. The Big River School District oversees the small elementary school in Blue Sky.

**Hardwood City.** To the south of downtown Big River, hotels and motels, along with national fast food chains, and small restaurants line the main route out of town. A large big-box store and grocery store sit in new developments at the outskirts of town. Hardwood City lays twenty miles to the south, along the main route to the largest metropolitan area in the state. Hardwood City School District enrolls less than 300 students in grades K-12. Although Hardwood City sits in a neighboring county, its small school district is part of the Grand Isle School Collaborative.

Moving to the east of downtown Big River, automotive stores and other retail enterprises give way to winding roads and open countryside. The Grand Isle Community College sits at the edge of town. The community college offers 17 associates programs in education, the social sciences, geography, and natural resource management, as well as a number of certificate programs. Local employers reported working with the college to ensure connections between their programs and the local labor market. Several area high schools noted connections with the college, as well as some of the other community colleges and vocational colleges in the region.
Two state colleges serve the region, one seventy miles to the west, the other over 80 miles to the east.

**Green Lake.** Further east is the Town of Green Lake. It is home to several historical buildings, including the school, dominating the downtown area. Green Lake boasts the local ski hill, which has both alpine and Nordic ski trails, along with tubing. Like many districts, the Green Lake School district serves many smaller communities. These communities include some of the smaller mining communities on the edge of a large mineral deposit. Recently, the Green Lake District closed the middle school, choosing instead to renovate the high school to create a 5-12 Junior/Senior High school. The Junior/Senior High serves approximately 600 students and shares its cafeteria with the elementary school, which is connected by a tunnel under the streets. The elementary school enrolls approximately 400 students.

**Hawk River and Elk Falls.** Heading further east into the hills, sits the communities of Hawk River and Elk Falls. These communities formed a consolidated school district in the 1960’s. This consolidation remains a source of conflict in the community, with one of the conveners reporting that “people still talk about it like it was yesterday.” Together, the consolidated school district enrolls approximately 500 students in an elementary and a secondary building. Due to shrinking enrollments, their sports programs have joined with those in Green Lake. Other attempts at shared services include a joint superintendent and business manager and shared transportation. Recently, the districts reverted back to separate administrators. These collaborations, however, increased anxieties about consolidation, closing schools, and the resulting loss of both identity and the school as a community center. The previous principal of the Hawk River-Elk Falls Secondary School stated that among the mining towns in the northeastern portion of the county, the closure of a school precedes the death of a community. He
stated that families leave to be closer to their child’s school and without a school, new families do not take their place.

Mining rather than logging formed the basis of the economies in these communities. A new mining operation with advanced technology to take advantage of minerals left behind by earlier efforts was identified as providing a recent boom. However, this company has recently entered bankruptcy proceedings, reflecting the boom and bust nature of mining described by participants. Additionally, a multinational corporation headquartered in India owns a mining operation in Hawk River. This international enterprise has encouraged foreign nationals to move into the area, resulting in new population diversity in these previously isolated and insular communities. Further, a Foundation staff member reported that due to the foreign ownership, decisions are made that are not in the best interest of the community.

**Grover Charter School.** To the southeast of Big River is the small town of Grover, with fewer than two hundred residents. One participant described Grover as a “tiny community; there is a post office and a bar that is open sometimes… you can go by the bar on a Friday night and the lights are all turned off, so you just never know.” She continued, noting that other than the snowmobile train and the river through the middle of town, there’s “not much else.” Grover houses the local charter school, serving approximately 100 students from across the greater Grand Isle area in grades 6-12. The charter school provides an individualized, hands-on approach to education. Students travel from across the Grand Isle area to attend the school. One participant reported the tensions of introducing 100 adolescents into a town with less than 200 residents. The people that live in Grover, maybe some of them accept the kids and some of them don’t. And whenever there is trouble of course it’s got to be the kids.”
**Pine Hills.** Further to the southeast, along a road that passes by fields, trees, and very few homes is the community of Pine Hills. Unlike the rest of Grand Isle, a few agricultural operations contribute to the local economy, notably dairy farms. Although Pine Hills is approximately halfway between Big River and the closest metropolitan area, very little was observed on the state highway. Participants described this community of just over 500 and its school district as one of the most isolated in Grand Isle. The Pine Hills school district serves less than 250 students in their elementary and secondary schools.

**Winslow.** Following the highway to the west from Big River, the town of Winslow lays at the edge of the national forest. Logging, rather than mining, historically formed the economy on the western side of the county. Approximately 1,000 residents call Winslow home. In addition to serving the town of Winslow, students travel from a number of smaller villages on the Native American Reservation and scattered through the forest. One participant stated, “Our students travel from those smaller communities into big town of Winslow which literally has one stop light. Altogether, the elementary and secondary schools in the Winslow School District serve approximately 900 students.

The superintendent described the district and community as diverse, with 40% of students coming from the Native American villages. Participants reported a limited economy. In addition to the history of logging by participants, they noted a growth of the tourism industry taking advantage of the many lakes. Participants reported the small hospital and the school district as major employers in Winslow, although the superintendent reported that while many of the support staff lives in town, many of the teachers live in Big River. One participant who grew up in Winslow and currently teachers in the high school reported moving back to start a family
“because we wanted everybody to help raise our kids.” She described a sense that all of the adults in the community look out for all of the children.

**The Native American reservation community.** Approximately 1,000 tribal members lived in a number of small villages across the Reservation northwest of Winslow. One study participant noted that a tribal council governs the Reservation, and that many residents work for the Reservation. According to one resident, villages on the Reservation date back to 1600’s. She reported that although many place names in the county come from the native language, many residents do not know the long history of her people and do not have an accurate understanding of their community. While she noted the high prevalence of poverty, single parent families, and substance abuse on the Reservation, she felt that many in the white communities held negative stereotypes of Reservation residents.

She also noted misperceptions on both sides, stating, “And some of the reasons that they are those things, is because of the historical trauma. So, I really think that that plays a huge part in how things go on here and how perceptions between both sides.” She reported the need to build relationships between the two communities. Few white participants mentioned the Reservation, but those that did recognized the historical “disruption” and “trauma” created by white policies over the last century. A few mentioned recent efforts to build relationships across this racial and cultural divide, including several programs run by the Grand Isle Foundation.

The superintendent of the Winslow District reported the long history of conflict evolved into a “peaceful coexistence, not necessarily interdependence or it's more about a peaceful coexistence.” He also reported some mixing of students, “if you go to the lunch room, you'll see a table that's all Native American, then you'll have a table that's all white kids, and you'll have a
table that has some mixed.” He also stated that as long as the two communities have lived near one another, there is not complete integration.

Another participant reported the white community has not made significant efforts to integrate the two cultures, while a third noted that the courthouse flies a Reservation flag as well as the state flag. In addition to the Winslow District, a Bureau of Indian Affairs School serves students from the Reservation, but is not currently participating in the network. One participant noted the strong leadership at this school but lamented the deteriorating physical conditions and limited resources.

**Timber View.** South of Winslow sits Timber View, a small town in the next county over. Timber View lays within the national forest boundaries. The center of Timber View houses a small grocery store, gas station, bar, and post office. Just beyond the main strip lies the school, which serves approximately 300 students from town and the outlying villages. Four smaller community-learning centers in the district serve approximately 100 students. This district structure reflects the extremely low population density in this remote corner of the Grand Isle area.

**Challenges in Grand Isle**

Participants were asked to describe their community and to identify local challenges. The following sections summarize participant descriptions and challenges within each of the following areas: economy, social geography, schools, out-migration of educated youth, mental health, and the non-profit sector.

**Economic challenges.** Logging, and later mining, played significant roles in the development of Grand Isle County and its constituent towns and villages. The first European settlements supported logging operations. In the ensuing years, the main employers relied on the
rich natural resources found in the forests and in the foothills in the northeastern corner of the
county. Participants reported the long winters and short growing season limited agricultural
enterprises in the area. While dairy farms originally occupied the land cleared by loggers, the last
of these operations reportedly closed recently. Today, study participants identified the power
plant, paper mill, and the hospitals as major private employers. A new mining operation as well
as smaller tourist and hospitality, employers, round out private sector employers.

Participants reported the mining industry experienced many up and down periods in the
last 20 years. Recently, the new mining operation provided opportunities for employment of high
school graduates. However, the mining industry appeared to be on the down swing again early
2015 and in early 2016, one of the conveners reported one of the mining operations had filed for
bankruptcy.

The paper mill has likewise experienced a downswing in recent years, with the shift
towards electronic communications limiting the demand for paper. In response to this trend, one
participant reported efforts underway to find new uses for wood pulp, including bio-diesel and
other chemicals for use in plastics and food additives that would help bolster the local forestry
industry.

Study participants described the area as one of natural beauty and host to many summer
recreational activities. These factors appear to appeal to tourists. Tourism accounts for such a
significant proportion of the economy that the USDA typology identified the county’s economy
as tourism dominated. The factors influencing this assessment include a high proportion of jobs
and earnings in the following sectors: entertainment and recreation, accommodations, eating and
drinking places, and real estate. Additionally, the proportion of vacation homes factors into this
typology (USDA, 2015).
Other participants emphasized the expansion of the local health care industry, both in the more populated county seat and in some of the outlying communities. This expansion has created demand for Certified Nursing Assistants and other credentialed individuals in the nursing field. Another participant noted growing opportunities in providing services related to senior living, reflecting others reports of an aging population in the area. Two participants also reported the growth of new opportunities in manufacturing. Additionally, participants noted the schools and the county are large public sector employers, along with the Grand Isle Foundation that serves as the backbone organization in the network.

In addition to downsizing in the mining and logging sectors, participants also noted a shift to low wage employment. In particular, the seasonal work in the tourism industry and the low wage food service and hospitality sectors were cited as contributing to economic difficulties.

Study participants identified poverty and low employment as economic challenges across the greater Grand Isle area. One participant noted the unemployment rates in the area have been historically above the state average. Others identified the high percentage of students in the county qualifying for the federal free and reduced price lunch program. These rates range from nearly 40% in Big River and up to over 70% in Winslow, where the superintendent reported that “Poverty is public enemy number one.”

**Challenging social geography in the Grand Isle area.** The large size of the county and greater Grand Isle area presents familiar, predictable challenges to the social fabric of the area. One such challenge is reduced access to services and opportunities in the outlying areas. Large distances in particular create challenges for low-income families, for whom transportation can be difficult. While participants acknowledged the existence of bus service, they also noted that it is very limited and it does not meet transportation needs of low-income families.
School districts serve multiple communities, spanning considerable distance. For example, some students travel thirty or forty miles each way from home to school. Students attending the charter school travel even greater distances. Participants identified the significant distances that students travel to school as a limiting factor in some students’ ability to participate in after-school activities. School bus schedules do not facilitate participation, and many low-income parents cannot travel to pick up their children after school. Only one district, Winslow, reportedly had some limited late bus service that allowed students to participate in sports and the Boys and Girls Club activities after school. The superintendent reported that he, along with the school board, remained committed to providing this service to students.

Although many participants reported access to afterschool programs presents a significant challenge to many families, the director of the youth drop-in center and faith-based after-school program in Big River, reported that, even among low-income families if these activities are valued, they would find a way for their children to participate. However, he also reported finding a way for children to participate is easier for families with more extensive social networks, suggesting that social isolation may further limit the opportunities of low-income students and those in outlying areas.

Limited transportation coupled with large distances appears to have created isolation for those living in the smaller communities and villages. One participant reported that in one of the smallest villages to the northeast, there is only one high school student. In addition to creating challenges to providing services, participants also identified transportation as a barrier for engaging individuals in outlying communities in the work of the Grand Isle Network. Although some participants identified the use of gas vouches in the past as one way to compensate for the
challenge of transportation, most expressed that transportation remained an unmet challenge across the board.

In addition to the challenges of unemployment described in the previous section, participants also identified substance abuse and domestic violence as challenges related to poverty. These problems reportedly have a geographic dimension, increasing along with distance from the central hub of Big River. Other participants reported higher levels of poverty, substance abuse, and single parent families on the Native American Reservation.

Several participants also identified bifurcation in the socioeconomic status of the area, reflected in the contrast reported by one participant between the million dollar homes around Grand Isle Lake and the children who live in homes with “partial dirt floors” or trailers. A number of participants noted this division between the haves and have-nots. Participants reported that they perceived those in formal leadership positions tended to overlook the poverty in the area and for many others, poverty is an abstract problem, making it difficult to discuss with community members and leaders alike.

In addition to a socio-economic divide, participants noted a cultural split between the more educated professional class, many of whom have relocated from elsewhere in the state and across the Midwest, and those who were born and raised in the Grand Isle area. Those native to the region were described as generally not having college degrees and being less well off financially. Participants reported the social class bifurcation was reflected in the aspirations for youth as well. One reported, “The kids that are doing well, I would say they want to move on and be successful. The ones that are struggling, my sense would be they just want to get by.”

**Educational challenges.** Participants identified state accountability mechanisms, particularly student assessments, as a challenge to the local education system. Participants
ascribed teachers’ large workloads and high stress levels to the challenges of trying to cover the required curriculum. In particular, state accountability in the K-12 system was seen as a significant roadblock to being able to meet individual students’ needs and for enacting change in the schools.

Other challenges identified in the schools included the difficulty of providing small class sizes, rigorous courses, and electives, particularly in the smaller districts. While shared services, virtual classrooms, and joint sports programs with other districts mitigate this somewhat, there is resistance to consolidation and fear of school closings.

In addition to funding challenges, other participants identified that schools are not well equipped to meet the needs of students who are not in the top half academically, noting the struggles of their own children. Several participants expressed the feeling that the schools did not individualize education enough to meet the needs of all students. Several parents identified this as the reason their children attend the charter school, which focuses on individualized, project-based learning and one reported his son attends school in the closest urban area because the school in the community could not meet his needs. A school administrator in the Big River district also stated that even with Response to Intervention, a system of tiered academic services, the schools did not adequately meet the needs of students who don't fit neatly into boxes.

In addition to challenges in the K-12 districts, participants reported limited access to early childhood programs continued to be a challenge. In particular, middle class parents lamented the high cost of private programs and the income restrictions of the Early Childhood Program sites. These sites combine Head Start and district funds to create increase opportunities for low-income students in particular. Only Winslow was identified as providing a sufficient number of slots in their program to allow non-income qualified children to participate. The superintendent reported
his own child attends and that he is pursuing means to expand the program with space in a new elementary build. He stated he felt many more children in his district would qualify, but parents needed to take advantage of the program.

Despite identifying challenges in early childhood and K-12, participants tended to speak favorably of the local community college, identifying it as a key community asset. Similarly, participants noted other public and private colleges in the local area that serve students in the Grand Isle area. While one K-12 principal reported that college completion levels were not where he would like them to be, overall participants noted fewer challenges in the post-secondary sector.

**Hollowing out the middle vs. pathways to staying.** Although participants reported the strength of the local community college, others noted the most successful and ambitious students set their sights higher than the local post-secondary options. Participants reported these students often left the community for college and tended to take jobs outside of the community. Despite this, several participants noted that adults in their 30’s are returning after gaining education and work experience in several urban areas in the state. Participants reported these young adults want to raise their families in their home community and that many young people appreciate the small community, the wealth of recreational activities, and the slower pace of life. However, one of the Grand Isle Foundation staff members reported that a significant number of students leave the community to attend one of most selective colleges in the country and that they typically do not return to the area.

Others identified the value of education beyond high school as one that split along these socioeconomic lines. Participants noted that in the past, manual labor jobs in the mines provided stable employment with middle class wages. However, jobs at the mine currently require more
education and are not as stable. Participants reported that not all members of the community have recognized this change. One participant worried that the recent reinvigoration of mining jobs would provide a false sense that unskilled labor would again provide a living wage for young people now and in the future. Participants also reported that the paper mill and power plant now only hire applicants with two-year degrees. One participant noted that there needed to be viable options for non-college bound students. Another participant noted the need to develop pathways to allow students to gain skills necessary in the local labor market and reported biotechnology as an emerging sector that could leverage natural resources for 21st century applications.

**Mental health and social service challenges.** Several participants identified unmet mental health needs as a challenge in the community. They emphasized a recent series of suicides and attempts by teens and young adults across several of the school districts and one participant reported a history of suicides by young men in the county. Participants also emphasized that these tragedies have pervasive impacts in their small, tight-knit communities, often noting personal connections to those that have committed suicide or made attempts.

Participants noted that the school personnel in particular, as well as parents, were ill equipped to deal with student mental health needs and the wider repercussions. One school principal reported as a state, school counselors have very large caseloads and budget constraints have limited the ability of schools to provide this support for students. However, he identified partnerships with local mental health agencies to bring mental health workers to the schools. Another principal reported scrambling to work with the truancy prevention non-profit to provide training to teachers and to redouble systems in the building to identify students struggling and to connect them with resources.
**Challenges in the non-profit sector and civic funding.** In addition to the challenges identified in the literature, participants also identified the non-profit sector as an area of difficulty in bringing people together. Several noted the financial challenges in the non-profit sector, include competitions among organizations fighting for the same dollars. One non-profit director reported seeking funds from the community has become increasingly challenging through the years, despite the giving nature of community members. Competition for funding has constrained partnerships and has been instrumental in creating “turf issues.” However, since the start of the network, there has been more cooperation and efforts to minimize duplication and maximize programs.

Others noted the need to raise funds for projects, such as a new recreational structure in Big River, because there were limited funds available through the city government. Efforts were being made to roll it into the plans for a new elementary school in hopes that it would pass the bond vote. Similarly, space for more early childhood classrooms in Winslow was folded into the bond vote for a new elementary building.

**Strengths in the Grand Isle area: natural and human resources.** Although participants identified a number of challenges in their community, most quickly noted the strengths of their community. They often spoke of their communities with a sense of pride. One participant noted that a strength of the community is the combination of small-town values with a progressive mindset about moving forward together. Other participants described the strengths of the community as being “progressive,” “never satisfied,” “always wanting to reach higher,” “hardworking”, “collaborative”, “giving,” “friendly, “and as “hitting above its weight.”

Another participant noted the rich arts and cultural activities available in the area, noting the state of the art theater located at Big River High School and the Big River Art Center as
resources that set the Grand Isle area apart from their neighboring counties. Other cultural and recreation opportunities include an orchestra, a community theater, extensive youth sports programs, the new YMCA building in Big River and the local ski hill, golf course, and trails located in Green Lake. However, the majority of these activities and amenities are concentrated in Big River, limiting access for both youth and adults in the outlying communities. This suggests “the geography of opportunity and access” is an important feature of the county.

Participants also viewed natural resources as a key strength. These resources included timber and minerals. Others noted the extensive recreation opportunities offered by the national forest, state forests, and county owned land, as well as the numerous lakes. These recreation areas draw a large number of tourists, particularly in the warmer summer months, as well as providing residents with extensive access to outdoor activities, such as boating, hunting, fishing, hiking, running, and skiing.

Moreover, participants identified interpersonal relationships as an important resource in the community. Many attributed the strength and authenticity of relationships to the rural nature of the area and noted that people interact with each other in a variety of contexts. Several study participants reported that the Grand Isle area has a history of collaboration in the social services and education arenas. For example, the Grand Isle County Resource Center located in Big River houses the County Health and Human Services Department, the Big River early childhood special education classrooms, and the Workforce Center. The resource center also has a café that provides meals for those in need. Participants reported the Resource Center to be unique in the region, if not the state.

Other consequential examples of prior collaboration include the Early Childhood Program, which includes the local school districts, Head Start, and county social service
programs. Another is the Grand Isle School Collaborative, a group that includes the superintendents of the seven Grand Isle School districts and representatives of the community college. These important collaborative efforts are described more fully in chapter five as important antecedents or sources of readiness for the development of the Grand Isle Network.

**Shared Aspirations with Place-based Differences**

Many participants identified providing students with the skills and character traits to do whatever they want as an important goal of the initiative. Many stressed that success does not look the same for every child. For example, one participant reported, “You know, you want people to get a feeling of what is out there, what is available to them and not feel that they're pigeon-holed because of where they grew up and where they went to school, that their options aren't limited. And so, it comes down to, what do you want, you want success for everyone, and in whatever shape or form, and it doesn't look the same.”

A number of participants also identified two main aspirations for young people: educational, specifically around post-secondary attainment, and economic, centering on gainful employment. Although some participants identified the link between these two aspirations, not all participants mentioned both sets of aspirations. One participant reported that the message from family and teachers in the community is one of that conveys the notion that educational success, such as getting good grades, will provide young people with opportunities to go on in school and work.

In terms of post-secondary attainment, several participants identified a pro-college message from the community. Many offered an additional qualification: They prioritized any sort of post-secondary education, including two-year technical degrees and more traditional four year colleges. Interviews with participants revealed that post-secondary aspirations appear to
differ between communities. For example, in Big River, many of the highest achieving students aspire to leave the state to attend Ivy League and other top tier colleges. Top athletes aspire to play on Division I teams in college. A number of participants reported that in addition to academic preparation and sports, many young people in Big River take advantage of the multitude of extracurricular activities, some to the point of being overbooked and overextended.

Winslow provides a contrasting picture. In this rural community, the aspirations to post-secondary education are different. One high school teacher in this district reported the pro-college message translates to a large number of young people joining the National Guard and other armed force branches in order to receive the GI bill to support their post-secondary education. The location of military bases within a three-hour drive allows these young people to remain connected to their communities while pursuing their education and military service in the National Guard. Others mentioned education as an aspiration for young people and noted that even among the traditional manual labor industries of mining and paper milling, the increased technology required new hires to have at least a two-year engineering degree.

The Green Lake District provides an additional contrasting vision of aspirations for young people. The principal of the Green Lake Junior/Senior High School reported the importance of vocational education in both his district and the Hawk River-Elk Falls High School, where he previously worked. He identified welding, carpentry and a new Certified Nursing Assistant certification program as popular vocational tracks for students at Green Lake. He also noted the importance of connections to local community colleges in Grand Isle and in neighboring counties and stated, “We try to really, truly, clearly send the message of how valuable and valid a two-year degree is.”
Participants noted another important distinction within goals for young people. Aspirations for young people in the community differ as a function of their family system status, i.e., whether they come from a well-to-do family or a struggling one. One participant reported that some low-income families recognize education as a means to break the cycle of poverty and convey this message to their children.

However, another participant reported that among many low-income students and families, there is a lack of hope. Others noted that for some parents in the outlying community, there is a sense that high school was good enough for them so it should be good enough for their children.

While some college-educated participants reported supporting their children taking time to explore post-secondary and career options, they appeared to assume that eventually their children would complete a degree or certification program. Post-secondary aspirations appeared to be a source of tension in a number of ways, including a lack of opportunities for those not bound for traditional higher education. Additionally, as in many rural communities, there is a tension between wanting students to attend college and wanting kids to stay in the community.

In terms of employment, participants reported the aspiration for young people to find living wage employment and noted several high need fields locally, including nursing and engineering. Participants noted not all of these careers required a four-year degree; many are attainable with a two-year degree that young people can obtain locally. One participant reported the need to provide opportunities for the best and brightest to remain or return to the community. Another noted the need for employment opportunities and educational opportunities that would draw young families to the region in order to balance out the aging population.
Yet another participant reported some young people look to mining and other industries to enter the workforce straight out of high school. However, one participant in particular stated she worried that the recent mining revival provided a false sense of security for recent high school graduates who were taking entry-level jobs without pursuing post-secondary education. This fear appeared to be well founded as participants reported that after a brief increase, the mining industry was on the downswing again.

In addition to educational and employment opportunities, several participants reported aspirations for young people to remain connected to their community. One stated the aspiration for young people was for them to become active citizens and community members. Another noted that young people want to feel connected and be accepted by their peers, as well as adults.

While many participants who talked about education and employment were not as explicit, they implied the desire to see young people as contributing members of their communities. One of the community college employees identified civic aspirations for young people: “I want them to be active in the community. I guess I want them to respect the community. I want them to know that it's part theirs, part their neighbor's, part everybody's.” She also reported the aspiration for young people to be able to give back to the community as adults.

**Summary**

Study participants, whether they lived in the smaller communities or in the county seat of Big River, described their community as rural, characterized by large distances between settlements. They identified their communities as facing multiple needs and challenged by limited resources. However, this rural identity is not uniform. The existence of regional identities alongside individual community identities is particularly noteworthy.
For example, while some participants who lived or worked across multiple communities tended to report a sense of regional identities, others emphasized identities linked to the individual school-communities. Those with deep ties to the smaller, more remote areas were reported to hold a greater identification with the individual community than the county. In particular, residents of the mining communities of Hawk River and Elk Falls were cited as being fiercely loyal to their home communities, and their high school sports teams.

These differences appear to impact education-related values and goals, particularly at the post-secondary level. Those in Big River were more apt to describe limited interest in post-secondary education than those in the outlying communities.

Many of the challenges identified by participants reflect the geography of the county and surrounding areas. Every participant identified transportation as a challenge for youth and adults alike because the large geographic scope and low population density limited access to programs and services for both groups.

Many participants reported poverty as a challenge in the community, particularly on the Reservation and among residents in the outlying communities. Towns reliant on the up and down mining industry have experienced more precarious economic conditions. While some participants explicitly identify and emphasize poverty, other participants reported that it is often invisible, particularly to County leaders who do not always “see” and appreciate poverty’s importance.

Moreover, participants identified challenges in education at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels. Regarding the K-12 system, several parents and one K-12 administrator reported that the schools do not meet the needs of “students who do not fit in the typical box.”
At the post-secondary level, challenges appear to be dependent less on the quality of options available, as most participants spoke highly of the local community college and those in neighboring counties. Rather, conflicts over the value of post-secondary educations pose the main challenge. Competing values, along with differences in community identity across the greater Grand Isle area, appear to have contributed to the variety of aspirations for youth held by participants, as well as those reportedly held by community members at large.

Additionally, participants identified several key strengths. These strengths included high levels of volunteerism, a progressive orientation, and relationships that come from small communities, interactions of individuals across multiple roles, and previous success stories with collaborations and partnerships. These strengths, when coupled with leaders’ strong aspirations for students, schools, and communities in this county, were instrumental in the progressive development of the Grand Isle Network, which is described in the next chapter.

Last, but not least, participants’ characterizations paint a dual picture. Alongside countywide commonality is the importance of place-based uniqueness. This duality manifests in participants’ descriptions of their identities, commitments, perceptions, and aspirations. Where cradle-to-career system development is concerned, it raises important issues regarding the unit of analysis for planning and action strategies.

CHAPTER 5: LAUNCH OF THE GRAND ISLE NETWORK

The structure of this study provides salient details regarding the development of a Cradle-to-Career education system in a rural area with multiple school districts. Special interest resided in how individuals have organized and mobilized for collective action in order to achieve the
outcomes they prioritize; and with continuing interest in the unique rural social geography and other contextual factors.

This chapter provides a description of the Grand Isle Network and its development, covering the period from initial conversations in 2009 through activities as of June 2015. This description relies heavily on narratives of the Network conveners. These key informants are full-time employees of the Grand Isle Foundation. Participants reported this foundation serves in the capacity of a backbone organization, as described in the collective impact literature (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Interviews with members of the Grand Isle Network’s leadership and Foundation staff provide additional details. Meeting minutes served to provide documentation to support participants’ memories.

The chapter starts with a brief description of the Network, highlighting key differences between the Network and the STRIVE model, as identified by participants. This description is followed by details on two key sources of advanced readiness: the Grand Isle Foundation and prior collaborative efforts along the cradle to career trajectory. A detailed description of the launch of the Network and its evolution to its current form follows. Finally, the chapter concludes with descriptions of key turning points in moving from planning to action: the public release of student data and the development of new infrastructure. This infrastructure includes the creation of a smaller leadership group and community action planning groups dubbed “pockets of readiness.” The analysis concludes with a discussion of the levels of the network, including civic, organizational, and community.

**The Grand Isle Network Structure**

With its goals spanning birth through post-secondary attainment, Grand Isle Network can be described as cradle-to-career network; however, participants were more likely to describe the
work as “collective impact.” The Network includes members of school districts, county agencies, non-profits, and businesses in the Greater Grand Isle area and seeks to foster a collective vision of developing successful young people to create a stronger community. The Network consists of three levels, depicted in the figure below, and is supported by a backbone organization. One full-time and one part-time convener are employed by the Foundation and work directly with the Network leadership, subcommittees, and pockets of readiness. Theses conveners facilitate meetings, harvest notes, and engage in on-going communication efforts, among other activities.
Figure 2. Structure of Grand Isle Network

Figure 2 above illustrates the structure of the Network, including the relationships of these different groups. The first level represents the leadership of the Network. In the original configuration, a multi-sector group, locally known as the Core Team, provided leadership functions. These functions included the creation of a common agenda and a coordinating goals document; identification of indicators aligned to the goals; and development of shared measurements. In January of 2015, the all-volunteer Core Team disbanded in favor of a more carefully selected Governance Council, which has taken over leadership functions. The Core Team and Governance Council have been aided by several subcommittees that worked in
specific areas, such as the development of a communications plan and the identification of shared measurements or indicators.

Within this middle level, two additional groups join the subcommittees. The first of these are the educational collaboratives. Two of these predate the development of the Grand Isle Network, and once developed after the Network’s launch. The second group is a more loosely affiliated group, the community connectors. These individuals bridge the Governance Council and the community action groups, locally known as pockets of readiness. These pockets of readiness are groups with an interest in the development of young people in the individual school communities. Some of these groups were pre-existing and some came together around the student survey data released in November 2014.

The structure of the Network reflects input of both the STRIVE model and collective impact literature, as well as the local context. In 2010, the Network, still in the developmental stages, began to connect with the National STRIVE Network. Since then, participants have traveled to STRIVE cites in Cincinnati and Milwaukee, and members have taken part in several national STRIVE meetings. Similarly, the 2011 article on collective impact in the Stanford Social Innovation Review sparked the interest of foundation staff and reportedly provided language for locally developed efforts. In particular, the concept of a backbone organization resonated with Foundation staff, who stated they were well situated in the Grand Isle area to take on those functions.

However, this network is not a replication of the STRIVE model for educational collective impact. Participants report making the STRIVE model their own through adaptation of the roadmap to their local context and efforts to focus on grassroots mobilization. Participants
describe their approach as “STRIVE-ish” and “STRIVE-esque.” Three perceived differences, offered by participants, provide insight into the unique character of the Grand Isle Network.

First, many participants noted that the STRIVE model focuses on mobilizing CEO level leaders and leveraging both corporate and philanthropic giving. However, participants noted that this model does not necessarily work in their rural context. Among the economic challenges of their rural community, participants reported a lack of large corporate entities and major donors. Participants also reported that the owners of the multinational corporations that run the paper mill and the new mining operation do not make decisions with the community’s interests in mind. Notably, these employers are not represented among Network leadership. In comparing themselves to other STRIVE sites in the state, participants reported they simply did not have the type of corporate power and money available.

Secondly, Foundation staff chose to take a community-organizing approach to bringing people together. This bottom-up strategy contrasts with STRIVE’s top-down approach. This strategy decision appears to have been influenced by recognition of relationships as a key asset in their rural context. One participant stated they used community-organizing strategies to engage stakeholders, “We need to be really intentional about building, about having coffee with, very conversationally, very Saul Alinsky-esque community organizing: find that person, go to them, what do they care about and help them uncover how they connect with the work.” This bottom-up approach contributed to the development of the Core Team. This group emerged from a larger group of stakeholders intentionally invited to large community gatherings to identify issues and opportunities around education in the Grand Isle area. Although the Core Team self-selected based on their interest, time, and energy to provide leadership in this area, their diverse
composition, including all of the school districts and a wide range of sectors, reflect the efforts of
the conveners to bring particular individuals together.

In addition to differences in mobilization of the Core Team, conveners also reported the
leaders served different roles than those in the STRIVE model. One of the conveners reported
that the role of the leadership council sets the Network apart from STRIVE, “One of the things
that I think makes us different from a lot of the STRIVE [networks] is that the governance
council’s job, is really about connecting the work on the ground in communities to the broader
context.” An example of this bottom-up approach is the development of the Core Team. In the
STRIVE model, a group of CEO level leaders from across sectors sets the agenda for the
network, providing the vision, mission, and leadership (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014).

Third, the Network adopted a unique approach to collective impact. This is particularly
visible in the Grand Isle Network’s approach to cascading levels of collaboration. In their
description of collective impact, Hanleybrown and colleagues (2012) identify the creation of
working groups composed of similar organizations around shared problems as a key component.
Given the scarcity of organizations and the challenging rural terrain, the Grand Isle’s network
conveners envisioned the creation of action planning groups at the local school-community level.
These pockets of readiness bring together adults and youth who have stakes in student outcomes
in each community. One of the conveners described the work of the Network as providing means
for these pockets of readiness to connect and engaged in exchanges of information to facilitate
quicker learning across the Grand Isle area. Another convener described this approach as
developing Networked Improvement Communities, or NICs.

This unique cradle-to-career network grew over the course of five years. However, the
seeds for these efforts, the conversations between the Foundation and GISC superintendents, fell
into richly tilled soil in the form of significant readiness at the individual, organizational, and community levels. These readiness factors include the Grand Isle Foundation itself and several earlier multi-sector and collaborative efforts, constituting pieces of the pipeline along the cradle-to-career spectrum. Together, these unique features constitute a form of advanced readiness beyond the collective impact preconditions of a champion, financial resources, and urgency for change as identified by Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012).

The Backbone Organization: The Grand Isle Foundation

Core Team members identified the Grand Isle Foundation as a special resource in the area. This private foundation was started in 1941 by a local business leader using the proceeds of the sale of the paper mill. The Foundation espouses a commitment to the economic viability and wellbeing of rural communities in the greater Grand Isle area. The Foundation’s home giving area encompasses the 25 communities in the county, as well as several communities in neighboring counties. In addition, the Foundation works with rural communities across the state in its focus areas of developing leadership capacity and expanding economic, educational, and social opportunities.

Foundation staff members interviewed for this study identified previous experience that served to prepare them for collective impact work. This experience included statewide broadband advocacy and study trips to Finland and Sweden to learn about sustainable forestry practices. It also included involvement in an Early Childhood Partnership, the Grand Isle School Collaborative, and the Grand Isle Network for Youth. These efforts positioned these key leaders to ready the Foundation to take on the role of backbone organization. A Core Team member also noted that the Foundation’s work with GISC and other initiatives also set the Foundation up for collective impact work.
One of the conveners emphasized that the Foundation had a special developmental asset. It and its staff possessed the social capital needed for gathering and connecting functions. One Foundation staff reported that they have over 500 local alumni of their leadership program “who are predisposed to working with us on something like this.” In addition to developing relationships through their programs, others reported that the Foundation leaders have worked strategically to earn the trust and good will of the community. Participants reported that the Foundation enjoys a great degree of trust and good will in the community, in part due to actions taken on behalf of the organization and its staff to do the right things in the community.

Additionally participants identified the importance of the financial commitment of the Foundation in supporting the work. Even so, foundation members noted that there was a conscious effort not to allocate significant financial resources to the work beyond the salaries of the two conveners. The one large financial contribution the Foundation made is a three-year grant to the Quest Group for the creation, dissemination, and analysis of a youth survey based on the Network’s roadmap. An additional grant went to the development of a data dashboard that will bring together data from a variety of educational and other sources.

Almost unanimously, participants reported the Foundation was the key ingredient in the successful launch of the Network, many Core Team members responded the Foundation and the efforts of the conveners to plan and facilitate meetings. One Foundation staff member reported, “We [the Foundation] hold the container. And that's, I think that's part of the strength of the collective impact model is that it does recognize the need to have somebody that holds the container.”

**Pieces of the Pipeline**
In addition to the Foundation’s strong reputation in the community, this backbone organization also contributed significantly to the “strong history of collaboration,” highlighted in the previous chapter. These collaborations included efforts in early childhood and K-12 school and serve as a special form of readiness identified by Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2007). Descriptions of these collaborative efforts follow; and with an interest in describing how building from existing partnerships contributes to a successful launch of a collaborative effort, particularly when existing partnerships operate within an area of cradle-to-career focus, such as workforce development or early childhood (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007).

Significantly, these multi-sector collaboratives continue to operate today. They maintain unique identities apart from the Network. At the same time, they maintain connections to the Network via members who sit on the leadership teams of multiple efforts. For example, the chair of the GISC leadership group also holds a leadership role in the Early Childhood Partnership and sits on the newly formed Governance Council of the Network. A description of each of these prior collaborations follows.

**Early childhood.** An important, long-standing collaborative effort in the Grand Isle area is the Early Childhood Partnership (ECP). The Early Childhood Partnership began in the late 1990’s, when the Grand Isle Foundation community advisory board recommended to the Foundation board that they invest in early childhood education. Broad community engagement in a public forum contributed to the development of ECP’s mission: “To deliver comprehensive wrap-around services to children and their families while evaluating the long term impact of the investment.”

Over the next several years, action teams developed programs and activities to promote early childhood education and supports for families. Foundation staff to traveled to urban areas
across the Midwest to learn about different programs and bring new ideas back to the community. In 2004, the Early Childhood Partnership formally launched with members from the business community, Head Start, and the local school districts. At the end of 2004, the Foundation awarded ECP with a $1.5 million grant to provide services for 100 children and their families throughout Grand Isle County. These funds allowed sixteen early childhood classrooms to open in the fall of 2005.

Since 2004, the ECP expanded to 36 classrooms and now employs 130 early childhood educators. The ECP serves the communities of Big River, Green Lake, Little River, Winslow, and Hawk River-Elk Falls. The Early Childhood Partnership combines funding from the school districts, Head Start, and the Foundation. School districts also provide in-kind donations of classroom space, as do the Resource Center in Big River and the community center in Winslow. Recently the Foundation committed $20 million over the next ten years and the partnership received a significant grant from the federal government. The Early Childhood Partnership also provides training and support to two Head Start sites on the Reservation.

Currently, employees of a variety of organizations make up the governing board and leadership team of the Early Childhood Partnership. These individuals include a local community action agency and their Head Start program, the County Department of Health and Human Services, the County Children’s Mental Health office, the County Probation office, the County Family Services, the Grand Isle Community College, Foundation Staff, and all eight of the GISC school districts.

In addition to multi-sector governance and experience with braided funding streams, the ECP provides experience in using data to measure outcomes. Since 2007, the group has released annual evaluation reports of their programs. The director of the partnership reported that the
longitudinal data collected on the “intensive wrap-around model type of childcare [is showing] the achievement gap is closing and they are able to show that they're ready for kindergarten because they've had it.” The superintendent in Winslow also noted the differences in kindergarten readiness scores between children who attended an Early Childhood Partnership and those that attended the reservation Head Start or did not attend any preschool program. 

The Early Childhood Partnership contributed readiness to the development of the Grand Isle Network in several ways. First, it contributed to the Foundation’s experience in bringing in large groups of community members to identify needs in the area, as well as bringing together key leaders in the necessary sectors, including early childhood, K-12, social services, and business. The Foundation and Early Childhood Partnership members also gained experience in traveling beyond their community to learn about programs elsewhere with the intention of adapting them to their local context. Partner organizations and members of the leadership team gained experience in working together, braiding funds, aligning efforts, and using shared measurement protocols. 

**K-12 schools.** In addition to the collaborative effort of the ECP, the school districts in the Grand Isle area have worked together for over twenty years. Originally, the school districts came together around a shared asset: a fiber optic network that connects the schools and allows students across all districts to take courses in other schools via Cisco Telepresence rooms. For example, this shared technology allows students in any of the districts could take Native American language courses, not just students in Winslow. The districts aligned their school calendars and bell schedules to support these virtual classes and undertook some joint programing, including credit recovery. One superintendent reported that the schools were now so interdependent through GISC that it would difficult to “unpick.”
Approximately ten years ago, conversations among the superintendents turned towards leveraging relationships among the districts and the community college to increase efficiencies and save money. At the time, the superintendents formalized the partnership by signing a joint powers agreement, creating the Grand Isle School Collaborative (GISC). The conversations among the GISC superintendents took another turn five years ago. According to the GISC chair, these conversations shifted towards “teaching and learning and what we could do for what our core business is…education.” Around this same time, the GISC superintendents began meeting with the senior leadership team at the Grand Isle Foundation to discuss their overlapping goals.

These conversations lead to discussions of creating a more intensive and intentional partnership to support education in the Grand Isle area. The GISC and the Grand Isle Foundation have since signed a memorandum of understanding, in order to develop sustained partnerships “to uncover and develop opportunities to align our work in support of all students.” One Foundation member identified as this agreement a means for the Foundation to engage more intentionally with “key local actors” and to begin to move from early education as an intervention to a cradle-to-career model. She identified this memorandum of understanding as an important catalyst for the formation of the Grand Isle Network.

The GISC provided readiness to the Grand Isle Network in the form of existing partnerships among the school districts and on-going conversations among the superintendents. In addition, GISC appears to have provided an opportunity for one superintendent in particular to develop relationships and become a leader across the Grand Isle Area. The current chair of GISC, the superintendent of the Winslow District, served as a Core Team member and currently is part of the governance council. He was among the group that visited STRIVE in Cincinnati and many in Winslow and Big River mentioned him as an important leader in the Early
Childhood Partnership, GISC, and the Network. Behind the conveners, participants most often mentioned this superintendent as a key player in the Network.

**Post-secondary education.** As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants identified the Grand Isle Community College, in Big River, as a particular strength in the community. This community college serves many young people who are the first in their family to go to college and offers two-year Associates degree programs in number of human service, business, technology, and natural resources fields, as well as certificate programs in the healthcare field.

The community college serves as a member of GISC and is involved in a number of other collaborative efforts to support post-secondary enrollment and attainment. Relationships between K-12 districts and the Grand Isle Community College also include the TRIO education talent search and the Upward Bound programs, both of which serve low income students and provide college readiness skills and supports for enrolling in college.

Additionally, instructors at the community college engage with employers to develop programs aligned with local workforce needs. For example, a manager at the power plant reported working closely with the college to develop the power generation program to prepare young people to work in the power plant. He also reported that the college’s commitment to working with local employers has provided students with opportunities to gain skills needed in the local economy, creating a pathway for young people to stay in the community, or to return after completing a four-year degree elsewhere.

Other collaborative efforts include efforts connect high schools and colleges in order to facilitate enrollment in post-secondary programs. This programs to allow students to earn college credits prior to graduation. As part of a statewide program, high school students can take college courses in their junior and senior year, if they have met the GPA requirements and tested into the
college level courses. Core Team members identified programs and partnerships with other regional technical and four-year colleges that support students in earning college credits in high school. Furthermore, several schools use a college and career readiness program during their student advisory times. The state university system developed this program to focus on advising and college readiness skills of high school students. Many of the prior efforts in post-secondary realm vary across school districts. Even so, they have provided a basis for linking K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and workforce development.

**Workforce development.** In addition to efforts involving post-secondary institutions, other efforts have been underway to increase the quality of the workforce in Grand Isle. The local chamber of commerce has several workforce development initiatives. For example, a program brings business leaders into classroom. A summer program, in partnership with the chamber, provides opportunities for high school students develop “soft skills” and prepare for interviews. One of the Core Team members cited heavy involvement in these projects and one Governance Council member cited these projects as the reason she got involved with the Network. She also cited her own interest in the Network due to a lack of individuals trained in her field, senior living, and nursing.

The County Resource Center houses a workforce development program and one employee of this organization reported she travels to schools to work with high school students, as well as working with young adults in the community. Earlier partnerships in this area appear to have brought several Core Team and Governance Council members to the Network, as well as highlighting the connections between a healthy workforce and a healthy community.

**After-school programs and services.** The Grand Isle Network for Youth (GINY) connects of out-of-school time providers who meet monthly to discuss programing. . This network is
committed to increasing access for students to quality out-of-school time programs. A participant who also serves on GINY spoke of the work as trying to “bring the kids to the programs, or the programs to the kids.” Additionally, GINY seeks to increase the quality of the out-of-school time programs. To that end, Core Team members noted that GINY recently completed a quality assessment of six programs using the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool. A co-written grant supported this work. In addition to providing experience in using data for decision-making, GINY appears to be a forum in which members have started to work towards common goals aligned with the Network. While GINY existed prior to the development of the Grand Isle Network, one of the conveners reported their work has become “more focused” under the influence of the Network.

The development of the network. Participants interviewed in November 2014 reported that the development of their Network took considerable time and effort, and they emphasized the importance of building a solid foundation for action. Many expressed a sense of hope that the Network had reached an important turning point in moving from foundation building and organizing to action. When interviewed again in June of 2015, participants reported that action-oriented, data-driven initiatives aligning with road map were underway in several of the school communities. Figure 3 below provides a summary of key events in the development of the Network, beginning with early conversations in 2009 and concluding with the action-oriented initiatives taking shape in the spring and summer of 2015.
**Figure 3. Developmental Timeline**

**Early conversations and catalysts.** The genesis of the Network began in 2009 and 2010 with conversations between staff at the Grand Isle Foundation and the superintendents of the seven districts of the Grand Isle School Collaborative. These conversations sowed the seeds of the Network by identifying a common interest in academic achievement and workforce development within shared geographical bounds. In addition to these local conversations, several external catalysts contributed to the initial development of the Network and shaped its launch.

Although the Grand Isle area is isolated, it was not immune from the national education discourse surrounding No Child Left Behind. One of the conveners reported the rhetoric of
failing schools provided a call to arms that coalesced in 2009. At the same time, the work of Geoffery Canada in the Harlem Children’s Zone rose to national prominence and provided an alternative narrative to the failing school story of NCLB. During an educational conference held in the state capital, the GISC superintendents and Foundation staff encountered Canada’s narrative of the importance of community to the healthy development of young people and the importance of integrating social service supports into schools. The GISC superintendents and Foundation staff embraced this message and their conversations shifted away from schools towards a more holistic understanding of what children need to be successful. Many participants reported the Network’s efforts are broader than schools, including focuses on out-of-school time, mental health, youth voice, and positive relationships among youth and adults. Following these conversations between Foundation staff and GISC, the Foundation hosted three community gatherings in 2010. A description of these community gatherings follows.

**Expanding stakeholders & developing the core team.** In 2010, the Foundation hosted a series of community conversations around education. Drawing on the Foundation’s previous work on the “eight dimensions of a health community,” conveners identified stakeholders representing what the “cross-sector of a community looks like.” The conveners described inviting these stakeholders from each of the seven GISC school districts. According to the GISC superintendent, this conscious effort to bring a diverse group to the table “provide[d] an opportunity for [our educational] differences to be shared and for our common interest in children to be strengthened.” The Grand Isle Foundation and the GISC superintendents sent invitations to these selected stakeholders and reportedly, approximately 100 individuals attended each of the three meetings.
The key question that drove conversations at these meetings was how to bring “educational success to the region’s children and future workforce.” The conveners used a strategy called Technology of Participation to facilitate these conversations. One of the conveners described the first of these meetings as identifying the current reality in the Grand Isle area, including assets, challenges, and hope. At this meeting, participants sat in small groups and described their own positive educational experiences, the observed success of others, and specific challenges faced by a student in their lives.

These conversations yielded a set of challenges in four areas of need: students from ages 11-20, families, schools, and the community. For students, two themes emerged from these conversations. The first theme identified the need for role models and one-on-one support for young people. The second identified the need for better job training and experiences. Family challenges included income, transportation, time, and knowledge of the school system. School challenges tended towards economic and political issues, including funding levels and state assessments, along with low parent involvement. Lastly, community level challenges focused on poverty and a lack of communication between districts and with parents.

At the second meeting, the facilitators asked participants to envision positive changes they would like to see in the next five years within each of the four areas of need. At this meeting, participants identified opportunities to support young people, such as changing school calendars to a European model and expanding the existing early childhood collaborative. They also identified or clarified additional needs such as greater access to support systems for families and increasing their skills in helping their students. Each individual opportunity identified by community members represented fairly narrow and predictable issues, such as increasing instructional time in the K-12 schools. However, taken together the issues identified covered a
broad range, from early childhood programs through workforce development and employment, and incorporate students, families, schools, and the community.

At the third and final meeting, Foundation staff presented a draft strategic plan that served to as a call to arms for the creation of the Core Team. Significantly, they reorganized the narrowly identified issues and solutions from the second meeting into four broad categories of priorities. The categories included forward-looking educational transformation, bold employer investment, unprecedented community support, and leading edge family engagement. Additionally, this strategic outline identified areas of overlap between these our priority areas, such as increasing partnerships between educators and employers, and developing family friendly schools.

During this final meeting, Foundation staff issued a call to arms, asking participants to self-select on a continuum. First they asked those who felt they had the time, energy, and passion to lead efforts in these four areas to improve opportunities for youth success in the Grand Isle area to put their names in the center of a bulls-eye.

This group of forty individuals from across communities and sectors became the Core Team. Over the course of four years, this “all comers” group met monthly to provide leadership and direction for the Network. The major contributions of this group included developing guiding principles for working together and drafting the initial vision and mission of the group in the form of a roadmap. Members of the Core Team formed several subcommittees that focused on specific areas such as communication strategies and identifying key indicators for data collection and decision-making.

The Influence of Collective Impact and STRIVE
While the formation of the Core Team represented a key moment in the development of the network, Foundation staff reported the original strategic plan generated from the community meetings “failed to gain traction.” This caused the initial efforts of the Core Team to stall in 2010. However, Foundation staff and conveners highlighted a turning point in 2011 that provided a source of inspiration to move forward.

In 2011, a Foundation staff member brought to the attention of the Foundation leadership and the Network conveners the Kania and Kramer article on collective impact, which had recently been published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. According to one Foundation staff member, this article was helpful in several ways. First, it put language to what the Foundation had been attempting to do locally, with both the Network and other initiatives. Second, the article also introduced Foundation staff to the STRIVE network in Cincinnati.

One Foundation staff reported earlier success in leading community members on learning trips. Based on this strategy, a group of approximately 20 Core Team members traveled to Cincinnati with Foundation staff to learn about STRIVE. In June of 2011, this group visited STRIVE and spoke with their leaders. This group returned with renewed energy and a copy of STRIVE’s roadmap, which served as a catalyst to revisit the strategic plan. This group presented their learning to the larger Core Team, which then embarked on a yearlong process to develop their own roadmap. A description of this process follows in the next section.

**Development of the Local Roadmap**

As stated above, the community gatherings in 2010 identified local needs from a strategic plan and goals were developed, but failed to gain momentum towards action. However, the STRIVE roadmap proved consequential for the Core Team by providing team members the opportunity to reexamine the original strategic plan. Conveners reported the Core Team quickly
reached consensus that they could not adopt the roadmap wholesale, but rather needed to adapt it to their community context and needs.

Many Core Team members described the adaptation of the roadmap as a long process. Many paired comments on how painful the process was with laughter, suggesting both a stressful episode for the Core Team, as well as one on which they look back fondly. Participants described this process as including many focused discussions and facilitated conversations around identifying goals. In order to develop consensus around such contested areas, backbone organization staff described a “fist to five” strategy. Rather than a straight up or down vote, this strategy allows members to register degrees of agreement, from five being all in to a fist being complete disagreement. One backbone staff noted that this provided opportunities for continued conversation, as well as the ability reach agreements, while still allowing an individual’s concerns to be recognized.

A review of meeting minute notes indicated the need to develop a shared understanding of success early on in this process. During interviews, Core Team members, conveners, and Foundation staff noted that success had to be determined individually for each student and that success was enabling them to meet their own goals. This individualized approach may reflect challenges in creating consensus among a wide range of stakeholders, including educators and employers, and tensions about how best to serve youth while stabilizing the community.

Meeting minutes also reflect conflicts between those persons who wanted to prepare young people to work in the current industries available locally and those who wanted young people to be able to have the skills to work anywhere. This conflict reflected the broader rift in the aspirations for young people described in chapter four. This tension appeared most strongly in disagreements about post-secondary attainment. Specifically, many participants viewed the
community as not being ready to embrace a college-for-all-goal. They identified the history of manual labor in the extractive industries previously providing living wage jobs as a main cause for this. Others noted fears among community members that increasing four-year college attainment in particular would increase the number of young people leaving.

In addition to tensions around post-secondary attainment and career aspirations, participants identified K-12 achievement as an area of conflict. These tensions included animosity of educators towards the state accountability assessments. Additionally, some educators advocated moving away from STRIVE’s goals of 3rd grade reading and 8th grade math proficiency as indicators in order to be inclusive of all students, particularly those with special needs. The goal for K-12 education subsequently was identified only as “mastery at the current learning level.”

Participants identified development of the local roadmap as slow and difficult work to gain consensus among diverse Core Team Members. One convener described it as painful, and “word-smithing in a large group.” This diversity included representatives of a wide range of sectors, including education, business, and social service agencies. This diversity also included representatives of the various school communities described in chapter four. These stakeholders had to craft a regional set of goals across different economic, cultural, and educational conditions within their own communities.

**Moving towards Action**

Many participants marked a turning point to action between the two site visits in November 2014 and June 2015. This shift was supported by a key event, the release of student survey data, and a shift in the infrastructure of the Network. Additionally, participants reported
the growing recognition of the need to address mental health and youth suicides as a catalyst towards action.

**Aligning data collection to the roadmap.** In 2013, with the roadmap in place, the Network appeared be poised and positioned to begin moving towards action. Yet, the Network needed a sense of where to begin. One of the conveners reported collecting data as an important first step. Driven in part by the STRIVE model, the indicator subcommittee worked to identify measurement tools to evaluate goals at each developmental stage, from pre-natal through entry into the workforce.

While the Foundation provided a grant to a technology company to create a data dashboard to enable school employees and others who work with students to bring together multiple sources of student level data, including state assessments and state health department surveys. Rather than a public, community-level data dashboard as seen in other STRIVE sites, this dashboard would provide those who work with students a more complete set of data.

However, rather than relying solely on existing data to measure progress, the Network wanted to develop a set of indicators specifically aligned to their roadmap. A second grant went to the Quest Group. This educational research firm has significant prior experience in developing surveys around student and community assets, as well as with working with schools and community groups nation-wide. Working with the indicator subcommittee of the Core Team, the Quest group developed a student survey for grades 7-12. This survey drew on their previous work but was adapted to assure that it aligned with the roadmap.

In the spring of 2014, Quest piloted the survey with four school districts, as well as piloting strategies to work with community members to create action plans from this data.
Participants reported this technical assistance initiative provided an important learning experience. The pilot helped identify which stakeholders needed to be present at these meetings.

In the fall of 2014, students across all seven districts completed the survey. The conveners reported plans to repeat the survey annually or biannually to track impacts at the community level. Unlike the data dashboard, the student survey data report has been made public on the Network’s website and conveners reported that disaggregated school district level reports have been provided to the pockets of readiness. In addition to these reports, one community connector reported asking Quest staff to run specific analysis on low income students to provide talking points when working with his own organization and with community members.

**Releasing the data report card.** In November of 2014, the Grand Isle Network and Grand Isle Foundation hosted a large community gathering to release student survey data from over 2,000 7th-12th graders. In the following section, this meeting is described in depth as it provides insight into the types of community gatherings held by the Network and the Foundation. Additionally, many participants interviewed in November and June, identified this community event as a turning point for the Network. In particular, they identified this meeting as generating momentum for action. Together these factors warrant the thick description of this event that follows.

The data release took place in the conference center at the newest hotel in Big River. Under a vaulted timber ceiling, approximately 200 community members gathered around circular tables. A copy of the roadmap in full color lay at each place setting. A podium on a riser occupied the front of the room, flanked by two projection screens displaying Twitter and Instagram feeds with a hashtag for the event. Two buffet tables lined opposite walls.
As people entered the room and found seats, the band from the Grover Charter School played contemporary, alternative music. The entire cheer squad from the Hawk River-Elk Falls High School, dressed in their uniforms occupied a table near the front. Other high school age students arrived with adults, and participants later reported bringing their own children to the meeting. Others reported that school leaders arranged buses to bring students to the meeting, including all the way down from Little River. Core team members took up their posts at different tables, ready to facilitate and lead conversations with community members and youth.

One of the Network conveners opened the meeting by recognizing the youth in the room and stating, “We have a lot to learn from you and our conversations will be richer because of you.” She further noted the importance of listening to youth speak about their lives and introduced the survey. She also introduced the Twitter hashtag and asked adults to ask a young person for help with Twitter. Next, the director of the Boys and Girls Club in Winslow introduced the roadmap. He shared his own passion for the work and belief in the importance of building relationships to support education. Visibly emotional, he ended, “It takes a village to raise our youth. I’m glad the village is here.” He then invited participants to engage with the data and their table host to start the conversation. Over the next half hour, table groups look at the data and engage in quiet conversation. Individuals meandered to the buffet and back to their tables.

After a while, a Core Team member moved to the podium to share highlights from social media. Next, the Winslow superintendent and GISC chair presented more background on the survey. He identified the importance of looking at community level data to “move the needle.” He also spoke from the perspective of a parent, not just his role as superintendent. Like the director of the Boys and Girls Club in his district, he expressed a deep personal and emotional
connection to the work. He then invited individuals to discuss at their table what brought them to the meeting. After, he reiterated the importance of non-academic factors for success, citing the research of Joseph Murphy on the need for academic press combined with a positive school climate.

Next, the Winslow superintendent identified the need for youth connections to school and community, for parents and community members to engage with schools, and for positive and professional school climates to support teachers. All of these things, in his words, “need to be on full cylinders,” and he echoed the importance of relationships mentioned by the Boys and Girls Club Director. He went on to identify things he found surprising in the data, such as more kids reporting access to a computer than a supportive adult. He ended with a quote from the Bible and the Gandhi quote, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

After a stretch break and another check in with the social media, a convener invited the participants to move to a table with the aspect of the roadmap they were most interested in discussing. People moved to different tables and the most popular among the youth appeared to be the “feels accepted” table. So many young people, including the entire cheer squad, moved to this table. This group of youth became a large circle of chairs around one of the Core Team members who facilitated the conversation. Discussions about perceptions of lack of respect between adults and youth, post-secondary education, and community service programs drifted across the room.

After half an hour, another Core Team member invited the groups to share out about their table conversations. A mix of adults and youth stood to provide a summary of the discussions on their topic. At the “feels accepted table,” the Core Team member shared out the honest and lively conversation of his large group, noting that many youth do not feel accepted. Another group
shared that transportation creates a barrier for youth to be engaged in creative activities, as well as the number of older high school students that work and grade requirements that sometimes bar youth from these activities.

Reflecting a local source of tension discussed above and in chapter four, one young man questioned the aspirations of students to attend four-year colleges. He stated wondered if there were sufficient jobs in the community to support the 80% of survey respondents who reported an aspiration to a four-year college degree. He also stated a need for better guidance in schools to help young people understand all the opportunities.

Other areas of note included the trend that older teens feel disconnected from adults and their community, reported a lack of engagement in school and other activities, and reported less confident in their academic abilities. In particular, an adult connected the lack of relationships reported by older teens, particularly boys, and the recent suicides across the area. She said, “There’s more we can do, we’ve seen the sadness and tragedy, but also good things and we should focus on that.”

In a more lighthearted moment, one young woman suggested to engage more youth in programs, “Let the kids develop the out of school activities, not adults, and the adults just supervise. And pay for it.” Many in the audience chuckled at this suggestion.

After a final social media check-in, the director of the Grover Charter School, joined by some of the band members, took to the stage to begin wrapping up the meeting. They spoke of the need to keep the momentum going, to maintain connections between youth and adults, and to provide opportunities for young people to connect with one another. Like the other speakers, the director noted his personal connection to the work. His summary statement was inspirational:
“this summarizes my life, to give kids a voice, to be in a community where adults sit with kids and talk about this stuff.”

Following his comments, a TED Talk clip on how to start a movement was projected on the screens. Another video clip showed a group of people starting to dance, following the one “lone nut,” emphasizing the importance of the first followers, who then follow other followers, not the leader. The video continued by noting the need to nurture first few followers as equals, to make it about the movement, not leader. Several young people started dancing along to the video.

The Charter School Director summarized these developments. “We are our own movement, we have some lone nuts, but we’re going to find more followers and we’re going to crack this nut and make changes. And we’re going to look at the data and see the growth. We’ll come together and unite.” He then invited participants to engage with the data, as it will become available in their communities and to leave their names and contact information if they were interested in being part of the movement. One of the students then thanked the group for coming out and making positive differences.

Finally, the cheer squad lined up at the front, while a school board member of their district introduced each by name. One of the girls introduced their choice of song, Taylor Swift’s “Shake it Off,” as about bullying, shaking it off, and how things are better when people work together to support one another. She then invited everyone to get up, dance, and “shake it off” with them. As the girls performed their cheer, audience members stood and clapped along with the music. As people started to filter out, a number left cards in the boxes, indicating their interest in continuing conversations about the survey data and the Network’s efforts.
**Building momentum.** As noted above, many participants described the data report card event as a turning point towards action. In addition to simply building enthusiasm among community members, participants reported several other key outcomes that built momentum for action. For example, one participant reported that the survey data provided a more concrete understanding of local issues. He stated the survey could be used to start conversations with community members and ask them to help in specific areas.

Others reported the meeting served as an important opportunity to forge new connections. For example, the new principal of the Green Lake Junior and Senior High School met a local clergy member at this event, which he reported in June got the ball rolling to start a greeter program in the school. Similarly, a teacher in the alternative high school in Big River and the head of the Big River Basketball association reported meeting school board members, the superintendent, and other community leaders. These new connections helped him develop plans to pursue adding a multi-use field house to the new elementary school going up for a vote in the fall of 2015. He also reported a new connection to an employee of the local community action agency and together they have pursued this plan along with looking at ways to bring a Boys and Girls Club to Big River in order to increase after school offerings in town.

In addition to providing concrete data and new relationships, participants reported two important outcomes of this meeting. First was the recognition of the importance of youth voice in the work. One meeting participant reported being impressed by the youths participation and recognizing that adults need to step out of the way so that young people can generate ideas and solutions themselves. Another stated the importance of youth and adults talking and forging new connections over the data that would not have happened otherwise.
The second outcome contributed to framing by providing recognition of common problems across the region. After the meeting, participants reported the importance of the recognition of the shared challenges across the region and the need to work together. For some participants, these shared challenges were associated with a perceptual shift from a local school community identity to a countywide identity. Together, individuals recognized the need for local action, as well as the need for a countywide approach to certain problems.

For example, one participant stated the meeting “gave a lot of people the opportunity to realize that it’s not just a Big River issue or a Green Lake issue or a Winslow issue, its Grand Isle County.” He noted in particular it helped the youth see that their struggles were not unique but shared by others across the county. He also reported he felt the meeting helped cleared misconceptions that those in Big River do not care about young people in the smaller communities. He said, “We all have the same goal of wanting kids to be successful in the future, and we have to work together. To me, that was one of the biggest things that came out of that, was that we do all have to work together.” Referring to high school sports mascots, he continued, “it’s not the Hawks vs. the Heroes, we’re the Grand Isle area. And I feel like that is very important to me, to make sure that keeps going.”

Following this meeting, there appeared to be renewed action and efforts in the Network. In particular, participants reported the identification of “pockets of readiness” in the various school communities with readiness to engage with district level data. Participants also identified the creation of the Governance Council as an important concurrent shift in moving towards action. Descriptions of the development of these two new pieces of Network infrastructure are provided after a brief discussion of an additional factor that appears to catalyze community
members to get involved. Youth suicides provided a collective sense of urgency, which facilitated collective action. A further description of this call to action follows.

A sense of urgency: teen and young adult suicides. Many participants from across the Grand Isle area and in a number of organizational roles identified a recent uptick in the number of suicides and attempts by young people in several of the school districts. In some cases, these young people were high school students and in others, they were recent graduates. One Core Team member reported the recent suicide of a student with a 4.0 average who was at the top of his high school class, a three season varsity athlete and had run his own business since the age of 16. She reported that by all measures, he appeared to be successful. His suicide, she said, made her question the Network and the notion of success. She said, “We've never really clearly defined success …And for all intents and purposes, he [was] success. But we missed the boat somewhere.” She continued, stating that they now have the data saying that “kids aren't feeling supported or connected or they don't know where to go or who to turn to.”

Another Core Team member reported that because the communities are so small and tightly-knit that each incident has a large impact. Another reported the schools lack the resources and preparation to handle the mental health needs of students or to deal with the aftermath. However, several participants pointed to efforts of the local truancy prevention non-profit and County Public Health agency to provide training to teachers and school staff and one of the guidance counselors reported working with a number of agencies to support students in crisis. One of the principals reported revamping the crisis team at his school in order to make sure kids were being identified and connected to resources. One of the conveners stated she felt the teen suicides and mental health was one in which bringing members of school communities together could facilitate sharing and learning across the county.
Infrastructure to Support Action

In addition to the mobilization of the Core Team, which provided leadership from 2010 to 2014, several new groups now have formed to support the network in moving to action. Two are noteworthy: the Governance Council and action planning groups at the school-community level, known locally as pockets of readiness. Descriptions of each follow.

**Governance council.** During the summer and fall of 2014, a subcommittee of the Core Team met to determine the structure and purpose of Network leadership moving forward, as well to identify roles that needed to be represented on this leadership team. Rather than looking towards self-interested volunteers as the Core Team did, this group identified specific sectors they felt needed to have a voice in the work. This group identified and recruited potential members during the summer and fall of 2014. In December of 2014, the Core Team met for the last time to share a meal and debrief at the new hotel in Grand Isle. In January 2015, the Governance Council met for the first time.

One of the Conveners reported the shift from the larger Core Team to a smaller, more tightly focused Governance Council occurred as a response to examining the STRIVE model and recognizing the need for a more “robust leadership.” She also reported the need for this shift reflected a need for a more “robust accountability” in contrast with the Core Team, where “if someone didn’t want to do something, they could just leave.” In shifting towards a more accountable leadership group, a subcommittee of the Core Team and the conveners engaged in another round of strategic stakeholder identification.

An internal document from August 2014 identified the roles the subcommittee wished to have filled on the Governance council. These included a representation from the following sectors: K-12 education, the faith community, early childhood, County Public Health and Social
Service, the community college, government officials, businesses, juvenile justice, and non-profits. Representatives also included low-income residents and youth, as well as individuals who took on roles as advocates for youth and for low-income residents. In addition to considering roles, the subcommittee looked to create diversity in the group by age, gender, ethnicity, and economic status.

Recruitment of these stakeholders occurred in part through existing relationships. A number of the individuals recruited to the Governance council appear to have previous experience on the Core Team. Of the eight governance council members interviewed, seven reported previous work as a Core Team member in various capacities. These individuals included the GISC chair, a County Public Health Manager, the head of a local truancy prevention program, a member of a smaller community foundation, a workforce development worker, the leader of a faith-based youth group, and a parent living on the reservation. In addition, new stakeholders were recruited, a local judge and an administrator from the community college.

The Governance Council began meeting monthly in January 2015. Meeting minutes record this meeting provided members a chance to get to know one another, to share their motivations for joining, and to learn about the STRIVE and collective impact models. The conveners invited members to use modeling clay to depict their hopes for the Governance council, setting the stage for their shared work.

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2 The complete list included: A representative of the GISC superintendents; a representative of the K-12 principals; a teacher leader or union representative; a representative of the faith community; an early childhood representative; a representative of the County Public Health and Social Service agencies; an advocate for youth; an advocate for low income residents; two individuals who have experienced poverty; a representative of the philanthropic community; two government officials from the County or towns; a representative of the community college; two business owners; a leader from the Grand Isle County Economic Development Corporation; a representative of the juvenile justice system; a representative of the non-for profit organizations; and two youth leaders. As of June 2015, not all of these roles were filled.
Document reviews indicated that the key functions of the Governance Council. In no particular order, these functions are to advocate for a common vision; to work to bring resources to the initiative; to make decisions on behalf of the Network; to ensure accountability to the roadmap; to bring stakeholders together to work on shared goals; to ensure sustainability; and provide accountability to the community. A number of participants reported they saw the Governance Council’s role as taking over many of the backbone and leadership functions previously undertaken by the Grand Isle Foundation. These functions included developing a coherent vision and mission statement that can be used to communicate about the work, providing guidance to pockets of readiness to align the work, and taking on the ability to serve as a financial host and accept donations.

Although the Governance Council had been meeting for six months by June of 2015, there seemed to be some disagreement about the role the group would play moving forward. One governance council member reported his understanding was that the governance council’s role was to “guide the framework, to put meat on the bones and flesh it out.” Another member reported envisioning the governance council providing the guidance and structure to create the roadmap, to create a vision and move it forward. He also noted that the council was still in the process of identifying its role, developing goals, and a structure.

Another member identified the governance council as the group that would set the purpose and direction for the network, serve as the board, and be the keeper and the coordinator of activities. Another stated the role of the governance council was to oversee the whole Initiative and to be the entity that knows all the moving pieces and players.

One member reported the need to organize for the task at hand and the need to move from a loose association towards a more structured group. Members noted that the governance
was working on identifying organizational structures to support the work, including logistics for receiving grants and procedures for decision-making. Members reported that council might function under a joint powers agreement such as the one governing the Grand Isle School Collaborative, or as a separate 501C3 non-profit organization. One participant described developing the purpose and structure of the Governance Council as “slow and tedious, but necessary.”

Grand Isle Foundation staff reiterated the desire to see leadership and backboard organization functions be taken up by the governance council in order to create community ownership of the work. One member stated that a governance council made up of individuals with specific roles in the community would be more sustainable as the backbone organization than the current arrangement of the Foundation serving in this capacity. She also reported that the Foundation has the resources and skills to empower the community to determine how to take ownership of the initiative and to make the effort more sustainable over time.

However, several participants noted turnover in the governance council already, leaving the group with the task of continuing to recruit new members and limiting the ability to move forward as the group continually needed to catch up new members. Similarly, one of the conveners reported shifting these functions to the Governance Council would provide more community ownership. However, within the Foundation itself, another staff member reported skepticism of this arrangement, noting the need for a strong backbone organization.

In the eyes of the conveners, development of the Governance Council represents a shift towards a more accountable leadership structure. The conveners led the group through developing their structure and purpose together. Much like their earlier work with the Core Team, this required slow and deliberate conversations to develop common understandings.
However, in June 2015 there appeared to be disagreements about the purpose and structure of this new form of infrastructure. Despite these disagreements, the Governance Council met in June 2015 to finalize a new vision and mission statement to define themselves and the aspirations of the Network.

**Pockets of readiness and networked improvement communities.** In November, one of the conveners described the next step of the Network’s efforts as working with the pockets of readiness. The conveners described these pockets of readiness as groups that have bubbled up within each school-community.

One stated, “The pockets of the readiness will be grouped, and that’s to be defined as loosely as they want it to be defined. For example, I went out and spoke a couple of times at the Big River rotary. They have an adult and then they have youth component to rotary. So they are already doing things that support youth. They are considered a pocket of readiness because they’re already doing things together, and they see alignment with what they are doing with the roadmap.” She continued, stating that these pockets of readiness will action plan around each school’s student survey data. These conversations would be facilitated by the conveners or by Core Team members who had received training in facilitation and were dubbed “community connectors.” In the beginning of 2015, the Foundation hired an Americorps member to assist in building relationships and mobilizing these pockets of readiness with each of the different school districts.

The other convener described her hopes that these pockets of readiness would become Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow (2010) developed this term to describe the efforts of organizations of the same type coming together to engage in continuous improvement work together on shared problems, leading to accelerated learning. She
reported that the plan was to provide “link and learn” sessions that would allow the pockets of readiness to come together on a regular basis to share what is working and what is not in their community in order to create alignment and accelerate change.

The development of these pockets of readiness within different school communities appears to have been a key turning point in the Network. They merit analysis with an eye toward their origins and development, as well as their initial moves towards action.

**Early Impacts: Pockets of Readiness**

In June 2015, several members the pockets of readiness came together to speak with the external evaluator from the Quest Group about the work that they had undertaken in their school-community since the release of the student data. This work reflects efforts on the part of the conveners to engage members of the pockets of readiness in “link and learn” sessions, in which members from across the communities come together to share efforts and learn from one another. The first formal link and learn session was planned for January, 2016.

Although many participants adamantly stated the Network’s focus is not on schools, most of these pockets of readiness are centered at a specific school. Many of these pockets of readiness are focused on afterschool time activities, but as one school principal reported, schools are where the students are and so it makes sense to begin to develop action plans with youth in their school. In addition to school-community based pockets of readiness, a new group met just before the second site visit: the youth sports coaches in Big River.

Participants in these focus groups and in interviews conducted in June, identified and described specific activities in four school districts: Big River, Winslow, Green Lake, and the Grover Charter School. Additionally, a group of social studies teachers from Big River,
Winslow, Green Lake, and Pine Hills met to look at the student survey data and develop social studies curriculum using the data. Descriptions of these efforts follow.

**Big River High School.** In the largest school district, Big River, participants mentioned several activities that unfolded at the high school since the November meeting. They also described pre-existing activities that align with the Network’s aspirations. Those that pre-date the November meeting included several efforts to connect the high school with post-secondary opportunities, including TRIO and Upward Bound in connection with Grand Isle Community College. Others identified dual enrollment courses offered in partnership with other regional post-secondary institutions that allow high school students to earn college credits in the state university system. Another post-secondary enrollment effort included a statewide college readiness program developed by the state university system. Recently, an internship opportunity developed in partnership with the high school and the local United Way that allows students complete internships for credit.

In addition to academic focused initiatives, participants identified a number of social and civic activities linked to the high school. These efforts in particular appear to have taken off since the November meeting. One participant reported that the number of students participating in the Teen Life program increased. This program is connected to a larger faith-based organization and serves youth in grades 9-12. Teen Life provides an opportunity for students to meet in a neutral location to have fun and to talk about issues they face as high school students, including dating, mental health, substance abuse, and families.

Other student groups at this high school involved in work related to the roadmap include the Hope Club, which promotes mental health awareness. One participant mentioned this group in relation to the recent youth suicides. Additionally, another group at this school is the Rotary
Interact Club, which according to the local newspaper, began in January 2014 through the leadership of two students. The club’s adviser described taking several students to a youth leadership conference. When they returned, students surprised the adults by telling them, “We are starting it and get out of our way.” Since its inception, this service-learning group has offered students opportunities to be engaged in service projects at home and abroad. Internationally, students traveled to an orphanage in Ecuador and subsequent engaged in fundraising activities to donate an industrial washer and dryer.

The advisor of this club put together a group of students who worked with one of the Foundation conveners to create an action plan from the data. In this three-hour session, participants generated a number of ideas. The first idea was an inter-age camp, to bring together students of different ages. The second idea was an animal and people day that would provide an opportunity for youth and community members to meet and mingle. He reported this planning happened in May, but that students had committed to doing work over the summer to put their ideas into action the following school year.

**Big River sports gathering.** In addition to the school based activities happening in Big River, a group of between thirty-five and fifty sports coaches and activity providers came together for the first time in May. Network conveners helped identify participants with the help of several individuals who had attended the November meeting, including the head of the local basketball association and a Foundation staff member who is active in youth sports as a coach. This individual reported that the meeting happened as a result of on-going conversations with one of the conveners, as well as casual conversations she had with individuals in her network. She reported that although it was a difficult decision, the group intentionally started with coaches in Big River. From there, she noted that individuals were identified and invited to participate in
this gathering. One of the conveners noted she had not known many of these sports coaches previously and saw it as a sign of work happening out in the communities.

Many participants noted sports as important and popular out of school time opportunities for local youth. However, a number of participants reported these opportunities were limited to students with the resources to be able to afford fees and parents who could provide transportation, or to those who lacked financial resources but had strong social networks that could help them participate. Others noted for youth living in poverty in particular, a lack of both financial and social resources limited participation. One participant reported that this sports meeting focused on looking at how best to serve youth by increasing the quality of programs and increasing access to programs. Another participant noted that by bringing together coaches from club programs that are not tied to schools, people were able to identify shared issues.

One person shared a special need that surfaced was the need for space and time for various sports to hold their practices. Another participant reported that these conversations about shared needs helped begin to break down siloes as people realized “Boy, they’re in the same boat as we are.” She continued, “It’s all about conversations, and for me, I’ve always said, we can’t do this alone, we gotta come together as a group and make this happen collectively.”

In addition to starting the conversation among coaches, another one participant reported that a chance meeting with local leaders at the November gathering set the ball rolling for this meeting, as well as for plans to develop a multi-use, five-court sports center in Big River. This participant reported that they were looking to work with either the school district to attach this project to the new elementary school or to roll it into a renovation of the civic center. Additionally, this participant reported working closely with a member of the local community.
action agency to bring a Boys and Girls Club to Big River and hoped they would be able to make use of the new activity space.

!*Winslow.* Study participants across the Grand Isle area identified the superintendent of the Winslow School District as an important leader, not only in his own small school district, but in education throughout the area. He serves as the chair of the K-12 school collaborative and is on the advisory board of the Early Childhood Partnership. According to the superintendent, the Winslow School District engaged in activities aligned to the roadmap before the roadmap was developed. He cited the School Board’s commitments to out of school time programs, early childhood, substance abuse prevention, and mental health services as examples.

The superintendent noted the board’s commitment to mental health included hiring another counselor. He and others reported the late buses reflect the board’s commitment to afterschool by allowing students to participate in after school activities, including those held in partnership with the local Boys and Girls Club. Participants across the county noted that Winslow is the last district to provide late busing. Additionally, an upcoming ballot initiative to increase the number of early childhood classrooms at the elementary school reflects the boards’ commitment to early childhood, as does active partnerships with the Head Start sites on the Reservation, which is served in part by the district. Other efforts in the district that align with the roadmap include a state funded anti-substance abuse program; the 5th Quarter program, through which students plan activities after football and basketball games to provide them with alternative activities to drinking; and the Linked Crew, a peer mentoring group.

In addition to district level efforts to align work to the pathway, several groups at the high school level have begun to look at the student survey data with students. Working with a Grand Isle Foundation convener, Americorps Fellow, and another Core Team member, the head of the
Boys and Girls Club program brought together a group of high school students in the spring of 2015 to look at the data. The Boys and Girls Club director worked with teachers and club advisors to identify students beyond the typical leaders. Four students took part in a pre-meeting to identify key issues from the survey they wanted to address, including: “making connections in the community,” “building relationships” and “being prepared for school.” Students, unlike adults, saw being prepared for school as a day-to-day problem for all students, not just as kindergarten readiness.

Next, a group of 15 students was convened to look at the data. The larger group examined the data in these areas and developed an action plan. The group wanted to have a “Sports for all Sorts” night at the school with an open gym and games that would appeal to all students and community members. One participant noted part of the appeal of such an activity is that the school is a “ghost-town on the weekends” and that there are limited recreation opportunities in the area.

Students presented this idea to the school board in the spring and received support. One participant suggested that implementation of this idea would be challenged by the graduation of students involved in its development, as well as turnover of the high school principal. However, another participant reported students were willing to meet over the summer to keep the ball rolling, including raising funds and gathering supplies. Another challenge identified in getting this plan to action was liability of the school during after-hours activities.

**Green Lake.** At the November meeting, Network conveners introduced the new principal of the Green Lake Junior Senior High School to the pastor of one of the churches in town. Like many, the pastor and his congregation were deeply troubled by the recent suicides in Green Lake and across the area. After the November meeting, the principal and the pastor
worked together to put a greeter program into the school. Every Tuesday, retired church
members gather to have coffee with the principal and chat about what is happening at the school.
Afterwards, they fan out across the school to greet the students as they come into the building.
The principal reported this greater program was not unique, but he found it helpful for creating
connections between students and the school, as well as increasing respect among older adults
and teens.

The principal and dean of students worked together to identify a group of adults to look at
the district data. The principal reported intentionality in selecting individuals, being sure to
include those from town as well as the smaller outlying communities served by the school. Being
new to the district, he stated he relied on the connections of the dean of students in the
community to bring people together. He reported inviting business owners, club advisers, and
other influential members of the community. He also stated he was impressed in that people
“from all different walks of life” stepped up and took and interest, as well as their pride in the
schools. Afterward, this group brought in students to look at the district’s survey data during an
all-day meeting at the local ski hill. Similarly, with adults, the principal and dean made efforts to
identify a range of students, not just “the joiners.” The principal said, “I specifically targeted
some kids who aren’t really in those kinds of things, and they’ve been great about jumping in
and doing things. I think that’s kind of what we’re about, showing them that you may not be the
person who stands up there and talks or puts forward things, but you’re still a leader in doing.”

After this meeting, students decided to bring back Community Jam Day, a community
event that happened at the middle school before it merged with the high school. This Jam Day
would bring community members into the school to teach skills such as cooking. Other
community members might take students outside of school to do things like ice-skating. From
this meeting, community members identified activities they could lead. The principal described plans for students to share a proposal with the school board. He stated plans to hold the first Community Jam Day next February, described as a lull between winter sports and the distant coming of spring.

Although not directly related to the Network, but aligned closely with it, many in this school community identified a new group, Rise for the Change. A high school student started this anti-bullying group to provide a safe place for students to come together and talk about issues. The principal cited taking a group of students to a teen leadership event in the state’s urban center as a catalytic event in the development of Rise for the Change, along with three recent suicides of the school’s graduates and three attempts by current students.

This group of students met weekly after school, under the supervision of the school counselor. The group applied for a grant to show an anti-substance abuse film during school and hosted a community event around the film in the evening. The group also arranged a Skype call with one of the teens featured in the film. Working with the principal, this student leader was looking towards the future to engage younger students in the work. Recently, he published a blog on the Network’s website. In this blog, he wrote about his struggles with depression and his desire to start the group to give students a safe place to come together and share.

In addition to the student group, the principal described working with teachers and the community education office, which provides activities for youth and adults in the community, to revamp their crisis team and to put new systems in place to track students. Teachers received training on having conversations with students. Teachers received information on who to contact in case they needed help with a student. The principal also reported creating an email group to support communications among the crisis team to make sure that responses happen quickly and
to ensure kids and their families are connected to resources in a timely manner. He reported using Google Docs to track students. The principal also noted the concern of other students in seeking help from the administrators to address mental health as a school.

**Grover Charter School.** The last pocket of readiness joined a faith community with the Grover Charter School. This school is housed in a small town with approximately 200 residents, but it serves the whole county, as well as areas beyond it. Many described the school as a last resort for struggling kids, as well as one that provided an individualized, project-based approach to learning. Students travel great distances to attend this school, creating challenges for them to connect with both their home community, and with the small town where they attend school.

This pocket of readiness began with an itinerant special education teacher who works with a number of local districts and is a member in a small faith community. Although she did not attend the November data meeting, she accessed a copy of the report on the Network’s website and was struck by what she found inside. She brought the report to her faith community, where they discussed it across several months. In addition to these discussions, she reported talking to her granddaughter, a recent graduate of the Charter School.

This led to a meeting at a local coffee shop in Big River with several members of the faith community and one of the Network conveners. She reported the convener helped guide the conversation around the survey, focusing on the school and community at large. From there, the faith group reflected on the conversation and looked into next steps, including wanting to hear from the granddaughter’s friends as well. This community connector reported taking the initiative of calling the principal of Grover Charter School to set up a meeting. The principal suggested a meeting with ten members of the student council.
In April, these students and several adults met at the Big River library. Using a process extracted from their faith community’s youth conferences, the community connectors guided students through conversations using questions aligned to the survey. They described efforts to communicate to students that they wanted to hear from them, including sharing a meal prior to the conversation and arranging the physical space so students and facilitators sat around an inner circle with the other adults seated in an outer circle.

Facilitators asked students about their communities, their activities, and the ways they would like to be connected to the community. They reported students in this group felt bored as they had outgrown activities available to them, as well as disconnected from their communities. They also reported that the group expressed that they wanted opportunities to be useful in the community, from jobs to community service opportunities. In June, community connectors reported a follow up conversation was in the works and that the principal noted this was a significant development.

Social studies teachers. Although these school-linked activities involved a number of adults from inside and outside the school, including teachers, several participant identified the lack of teachers in the work and one noted the challenges of involving more teachers, including large class-sizes and lack of interest in such activities and in building relationships with students overall. One superintendent reported several challenges of engaging teachers in the work, including the limited involvement of principals due to time constraints, teachers’ own time constraints, and teachers’ focus on immediate needs. Another participant reported that there has been not been a clear call to neither action for teachers nor an “ask” for them to get involved.

At the time of the fieldwork in June, secondary social studies teachers from several GISC districts attended a full day workshop on the student survey data. During this workshop, one of
the conveners provided background information on the Network and STRIVE, and members of the Quest Group presented information about the survey, the statistical methods involved in creating the final report, and the key components of the report. Teachers also brainstormed ways in which they could use the data in a standards-driven classroom, including math lessons using real data and civics lessons.

After examining several items in a whole group format, teachers broke into smaller groups to examine a particular area of interest, such as “meaningful connections.” These groups then shared out their insights and connections made to their own experiences with students in their districts.

Teachers identified several topic areas, including youth participation in sports and the challenges of students participating year round in club teams and funding cuts made on high school teams. They also identified low levels of participation in religious activities, including in districts where there’s early release one day a week for religious instruction; nutrition at home and in the schools; and the impact of divorce on students’ abilities to access out of school activities and their overall well-being. Teachers then spent the afternoon developing curriculum for students to work with the data themselves in social studies classes.

One teacher, who also serves as an adviser for the peer-mentoring program in her school, reported an important decision. They decided to use the data early in the school year so that students would be able to follow up throughout the year. She expressed a desire for the students to connect to the numbers, but also to question the validity of the survey. She hoped that students would be able to make a proposal to community members to move towards action.

This same teacher cited a recent example of student problem solving at her school involving school spirit at sports games. The principal and superintendent met with students,
listened to their concerns, and then allowed the cheerleading squad to visit another school to pick up ideas to bring back for their home games.

Summary

The Grand Isle Network is one of a small group of STRIVE networks located in a rural area. Unlike many urban STRIVE networks, the Grand Isle Network encompasses a large geographic scope, including the entire county of Grand Isle and several neighboring communities for which Big River serves as a commercial hub. Network members reported their rural context provides unique challenges, such as transportation, limited philanthropic and corporate support, and diverse community identities. However, they also reported the strength of relationships in the area provides key assets for collective impact work.

The developmental trajectory of the Grand Isle Network reflects the interplay of these local contextual factors with multiple sources of external influence. Throughout the developmental trajectory, conveners and leaders filtered external influences through their local context, resulting in a unique network structure with multiple layers, spread out across a large geographic space. In particular, Network conveners identified the importance of leveraging relationships as a key asset to compensate for a lack of financial assets and corporate sponsorship. Similarly, conveners reported shifting to a more grassroots oriented approach to bringing together participants. Conveners drew on community-organizing strategies to share the message of the work and to recruit participants at multiple levels, including the two incarnations of the leadership council, the Core Team and the Governance Council. Community organizing strategies also played a key role in bringing together the pockets of readiness at the school-community level.
The development of the pockets of readiness represents the most notable place-based adaptation of the STRIVE model and the collective impact model. Rather than bringing together like organizations to work on shared problems in the model of cascading levels of collaboration identified by Hanleybrown and colleagues, (2012), Network conveners chose to bring together community members and youth within the different school communities to action plan. This unique structure of the pockets of readiness allows individuals in each of the different school-communities to identify local issues using common data and indicators, and to develop local action-plans in alignment with the Network’s roadmap. At all levels of the Network, recruitment of participants appears to have balanced existing relationships with the purposeful identification of missing stakeholders and personal invitations to those individuals.

Such a multi-level approach to developing an educational collective impact effort or cradle-to-career network requires multiple efforts to bring “the right mix of the right stakeholders” together. Moreover, such a multi-level network also appears to require the strategic matching of individuals to Network roles, based on their organizational affiliations, personal relationships, and interest in the work. Throughout this work, efforts were made to develop a readily understandable vision and mission that could bring people to the work.

As will be explored further in chapters six and seven, mobilization and issue framing appears to have been iterative processes during the development of the Network. Both processes required realignment as the Network evolved from a loose affiliation to a more structured Network. The move to create action at the school-community level similarly created needs to revise strategies for mobilization and issue framing.

Discussion
The literatures reviewed on municipal level coalition development and regime building, along with the literature on multi-sector organizational collaboration, provided a two-tiered framework for examining this cradle-to-career network. This multi-tiered framework is particularly apt as the Grand Isle Network operates at multiple levels. At the top, the Core Team and Governance Council provided leadership, direction, accountability, and data for the Network. In the middle, subcommittees, existing single-sector collaborations, and community connectors provide means to connect with both organizations and with members of each school-community. This discussion will address both the municipal level and the organizational level, also connecting the links between each level.

**Civic level.** By bringing together key stakeholders from across sectors around a common issue (Stone et al., 2001), the early stages of cradle-to-career network formations can be viewed as coalition building. Stone and colleagues (2001) note that such coalitions form within a single policy arena, such as public K-12 education. However, cradle-to-career networks embrace endemic complexity of the social problems of education and workforce development. These issues cross multiple policy arenas, including early childhood, K-12, post-secondary education, public health, and social services. Such complexity suggests the need for interagency collaboration and partnership (Trist, 1983) and cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006). This suggests the need for a broader coalition that includes all who have a vested interest in the educational, social, and civic outcomes for youth. Bryson and colleagues (2006) suggest that community members and the general public should be involved in such cross-sector efforts.

Such breadth was reflected in the initial community gatherings, at which participants were invited from a cross-sector of stakeholders Foundation staff believe contribute to a healthy community. This coalition narrowed as participants self-selected onto the Core Team; however
this group maintained representation beyond K-12 and across the geographic expanse of the Network. As the Network moved to action, groups were mobilized at the individual community level, while a smaller, more accountable leadership structure emerged. This shift resulted in a smaller governance council, with somewhat less geographic diversity than the Core Team.

Stone (1998) and Shipps (2003) provide a typology of school change coalitions based on membership. These include performance regimes that include teachers and parents, employment regimes composed largely of school employees, market regimes that rely on business models, and empowerment regimes that shift power to the school level. While the pockets of readiness model could be seen as a means to shift decision making and problem solving to the local school level, and hence as an empowerment regime, overall the Network does not appear to fit any of these models.

However, Mitra and Frick (2011) provide two alternative typologies of regimes. An established regime consists of a multi-sector group with a history of working together on a range of community level issues, while an emerging regime comes together focused around a specific issues (Mitra & Frick, 2011). At the leadership level, the Core Team and the Governance Council appear to combine both established and emerging regimes (Mitra & Frick, 2011). Some members of both groups worked together previously as members of the Early Childhood Program or the Grand Isle School Collaborative. In this way, the Network combined a strong foundation, built on previous experience, with the dynamic nature of an emerging regime, harnessing the energy of new members.

Lastly, Stone and colleagues (2001) identify civic capacity as a regime in action. Between November 2014 and June 2015, participants reported a readiness for action and the beginnings of action within individual communities, suggesting the Grand Isle Network meets
the threshold of civic capacity. However, Stone and colleagues (2001) did not provide a clear understanding of the linkages between a municipal level coalition and changes within individual organizations. The Grand Isle Network’s approach to focusing on community level action differentiates it from both civic capacity efforts and STRIVE and collective impact efforts. These unique, place-based efforts will be discussed further in the next sections on organizational and community level actions.

**Organizational level.** Trist (1983) suggested that complex social problems such as education require multi-sector collaboration as no single organization can reach outcomes on their own. The initial conversations between the GISC superintendents and the Foundation staff appear to reflect an understanding of academic achievement as a complex social issue beyond the scope of K-12 schools alone. This understanding appears to have been bolstered by the presentation by Geoffrey Canada attended by members of both groups.

Focusing on the organizational level of collaboration, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified 21 propositions from the literature, which are listed in chapter 2. Several of these propositions identify environmental factors that provide sources of readiness and elements that support the launch of a collaborative endeavor.

First, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified a turbulent environment as contributing to the development of a cross-sector collaboration. In the case of Grand Isle, there did not appear to be significant turbulence within the local educational environment. However, local concerns about educational attainment met with a national discourse of school failure, prompting explorations for supporting youth outcomes beyond the school walls.

Second, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified a failure or perceived failure of a single sector to create desired outcomes. The Harlem Children’s Zone presentation appears to have
furthered the interest in looking beyond schools to support improved outcomes. Third, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identify general agreement between one or more linking mechanisms as a key source of readiness. This readiness appeared in the form of the initial conversations between the GISC superintendents and the Foundation staff that identified common concerns.

Bryson and colleagues (2006) also identified factors that support the launch of a cross-sector collaboration. First, they noted that the form of the initial agreement impacts the outcome of the effort. They also noted that structures tend to change over time based on ambiguity of membership and complexity in the environment (Bryson et al., 2006). Evidence suggested both factors at play in the Network. For example, the initial agreement took the form of a loose leadership group, but there was little action. The shift to a smaller, more deliberate leadership group with a more formal understanding of their roles and responsibility. This reflects the recognition of the need for a more accountable leadership mechanism to support moves towards action.

Second, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified the importance of deliberate stakeholder analysis. They also identify the need for building on stakeholder competencies. The focus of most of the recruitment effort in the Network appears to have been towards including representatives from particular sector. However, the reconfiguration of the Network appears to have allowed individuals to filter into positions based on both their interest and skill. For example, the community connectors tended to be individuals with broad personal and professional networks, as well as an interest in working with community members.

Thirdly, the pockets of readiness reflect two propositions put forth by Bryson and colleagues (2006). They noted that structure and tasks at the client or service level influence the effectiveness of the collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006). The pockets of readiness represent a
unique structure that brings the Network to the client level through the creation of specific programs and interventions at the school level. Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified the competing institutional logics, or the organizational structures and cultures that differ across institutions, as a creating challenges to forming a cross-sector collaboration. The use of a decentralized structure with community level pockets of readiness may be a way to overcome this difficulty. Similarly, the continued existence of the Early Childhood Program, GISC, and GINY as separate, but linked entities can be seen as a way to allow like organizations to work together.

Lastly, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identify the importance of assessment and accountability. The student survey serves as an assessment for the Network’s efforts by measuring student development and wellbeing. Additionally, the shift towards a more accountable leadership structure and the development of data systems reflects the strengthening of the Network and a move towards sustainability.

Community level. In addition to recognizing the contribution of multiple organizations to youth outcomes, the Network appears to have also looked broadly at community as a source of support. Conveners and Foundation staff identified their use of community organizing strategies to bring people together, chief among these, one-on-one conversations and dialogue with existing community groups. The community connectors also served in this role of bringing together the pockets of readiness in the individual school. While these important actors helped community members identify their shared interests that aligned with the roadmap, they did not engage in the type of adversarial politics often associated with community organizing efforts (Warren et al. 2010). As one administrator pointed out, schools and other organizations are unlikely to change unless parents and clients demand it.
Linking levels. The unique structure of the Grand Isle Network draws on the STRIVE model and collective impact literature, but also reflects adaptations to the local context. In particular, the reimagining of the cascading levels of collaboration (Kania & Kramer, 2013) and collective action networks (Edmonson & Zimpher, 2014) as the community level pockets of readiness reflects a particular adaptation. Given the small number of organizations, particularly in the smaller communities, the pockets of readiness harness community members over organizational partners. Collective impact in particular draws attention to the need for communication throughout the many levels of the network (Kania & Kramer, 2013). Community connectors appear to serve as one source of linking between the network and the pockets of readiness, as well as a means to engage in two-way conversation.

However, the geographical stance has created significant challenges in bringing individuals together for continuous improvement processes. The emerging structure of link and learn sessions reflects the concept of a Networked Improvement Community (Bryk et al, 2015). However, rather than bringing together organizations, these meetings will bring together community members to allow them to learn from one another.

Chapter Conclusion

The unique, layered structure of the Grand Isle Network reflects its developmental trajectory, external influences, and the local context. The pockets of readiness represent the most notable of these place-based adaptations. These community-based action-planning groups leverage the strength of individual community identities and relationships. Given the emergent nature of the Network, it remains to be seen as to whether the link and learn sessions effectively connect these pockets to develop a regional set of understandings and solutions.
In addition to understanding the structure and formation of the Network, this study aims to develop an understanding of the mobilization, issue framing, and theory of change development in a rural cradle-to-career network. Findings in these areas across all three layers of the network are presented in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 6: MOBILIZATION OF A RURAL CRADLE-TO-CAREER NETWORK

The previous two chapters described the unique rural context of the Grand Isle Network, as well as the developmental journey and resultant structure of the Network. These chapters provided a foundation for the analysis of the three research questions on mobilization, issue framing, and theory of change development. This chapter builds from this foundation with a deeper analysis of the first research question: How do community and organization members mobilize in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

This research question on mobilization in a rural area suggested several sub-questions. How and why do people come together from the various communities to support a countywide effort? How are people mobilized in rural areas characterized by low population density and limited availability of organizational partners? Who comes together, from which communities? When did they mobilize in regards to the decision to use a cradle-to-career model?

To address these questions, this analysis considers the dynamic interaction between the social geography of the Grand Isle area, mobilization, and the development of the network.

Importance of Mobilization in Cradle-to-Career Networks and Collective impact

The literature summarized in chapter 2 identifies the need to select the “the right mix of the right stakeholders” (Lawson, 2004) for the development of a variety of cross-sector configurations for community level change. Stakeholders represent individuals and organizations whose vested interests serve as drivers for their engagement in, and commitment of resources to, the network or coalition. Determining the right stakeholders requires several factors, including the local educational landscape, the needs, goals, and scope of these efforts (McGrath et. al, 2005; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), as well as the geographic scope and boundaries (Kania & Kramer, 2011; STRIVE, 2014).
Rural areas challenge the determination of geographic boundaries. These challenges include the small scale of individual communities, low population densities, the large distances between settlements, and the distinct identities among residents. The Grand Isle Network’s geographic scope follows a historical precedent, aligning with the home giving area of the Grand Isle Foundation, as well as the Early Childhood Program and the Grand Isle School Collaborative. The result is that the Network encompasses the entire county of Grand Isle along with several school districts that rely on Big River as a social and economic hub.

The Grand Isle Network’s Rural Social Geography

The social geography of the Greater Grand Isle area, as described in depth in chapter four, provides a source of complexity to the work of mobilizing stakeholders for a cradle-to-career network and educational collective impact effort. This complexity has two related sources.

First, the Network encompasses multiple school districts across four counties, introducing significant complexity in working with municipal level decision-makers. This is further complicated as each district serves multiple communities. The Network encompasses nearly 30 towns and villages, each with their own identity. These identities reflect their historical development, as well as socio-economic and cultural factors.

As noted earlier, employment opportunities vary across the county, with much of the service industry located in Big River, along with the paper mill. Logging dominates the western reaches of the county, while mining traditionally provided employment to the east. Participants reported these mining communities to be particularly insular with their own distinct mentality. In addition to the socio-economic diversity described by, the Native American community contributes to the diversity of an area otherwise described as heavily Scandinavian and German. These economic and social differences contributed to unique identities among the school
districts. The central place of high school sports in many of these communities turns such identities into rivalries.

The second source of complexity resides in the large geographic scope of the Greater Grand Isle Area and the low population density. The overall population density in Grand Isle County is approximately 20 people per square mile, but in some areas, it is much lower. The distribution of population indicates social isolation, particularly of those in the smaller, outlying communities. Participants reported transportation as a key challenge for community members, particularly low-income residents.

Together the great distances covered by the Network and the variety of the communities within it, create challenges mobilization of stakeholders. These challenges appear to have influenced decisions on the part of the Foundation staff to adapt, rather than adopt, the STRIVE model. As described in chapter five, Foundation staff referred to the Network as “STRIVE-ish” or “STRIVE-qsue.” These differences included a multi-layered network with a focus on taking advantage of existing relationships, many of which developed during earlier collaborative efforts. The development pockets of readiness in each school district rely largely on grassroots community organizing to bring people together around local issues. Across all levels of the Network, social capital in the form of existing networks and new relationships appears to have driven mobilization.

**Relationships Matter: Social Capital**

As data analysis proceeded, the concept of social capital emerged as an important theme across participants at the Foundation and among the Network leadership. When asked about the key ingredient to the successful launch of the Grand Isle Network, several participants reported
“relationships.” Attention to relationships appears to start with the Foundation and move through the Network, from the leadership, to the community gatherings, and the pockets of readiness.

Scholars conceptualize social capital as an individual good that accrues benefits to both the individual and the collective (Lin, 2000) or as a collective good that accrues benefits to individuals (Coleman, 1990). Putnam (2001) conceptualized social capital as a civic good that results from interaction of individuals. Across the various conceptualizations of social capital, it is clear that relationships between individuals form the foundation for networks. These networks accrue benefits at multiple levels. In relation to the development of a cradle-to-career network, social capital is conceptualized as a collective good, at the county or community level, that facilitates mobilization. However, such a collective level conception of social capital still relies on the contribution of individuals within the networks and the quality of their relationships.

Social capital appears instrumental in the initial leadership group of the Core Team, the more focused Governance Council, and the pockets of readiness. Four features appear to contribute to the social capital, which enabled mobilization at the various levels of the network. In no particular order, these features were: 1) leveraging of existing social networks through brokering activities and personal invitations; 2) the development of new, targeted relationships through brokering activities and providing spaces for new, trusting, relationships to develop; 3) the identification of enlightened self-interest and shared values among Network members; 4) and the role of trust in moving towards action.

Within each of these areas, key individuals served as intermediary leaders (Williams, 2012). These special leaders served three key roles. First, they acted as boundary spanners to build relationship with individuals from across organizational and geographic lines. Second, they served as brokers bringing ideas to individuals and developing shared understandings across
organizational and geographic boundaries. Lastly, these intermediary leaders served as agenda champions. These agenda champions forward the goals of the Network in their own organizations and social networks.

“Change follows relationships.” Staff at the Grand Isle Foundation in a number of roles reported leveraging relationships as a key piece of their work across the different programs and initiatives in which the Foundation is involved in the county. A Vice President at the Grand Isle Foundation stated, “Change follows relationships.” He spoke at length about the importance of developing relationships across organizations in order to move the work forward.

Additionally, many participants identified interpersonal relationships as a key factor in mobilizing individuals for participation in the leadership ranks, whether for the Core Team or Governance Council, or participation in the school-level pockets of readiness. Several participants explicitly identified their ability to mobilize to “the social capital” in their small rural community. They also talked about “the social capital” generated by the Grand Isle Foundation through their programs in the community. For example, one of the grants officers at the Foundation described their overall theory of changes as “framing and building social capital and mobilizing people equals change. That's one tenet that's a strong undercurrent of how we engage.”

The next sections report findings on how Network conveners and other intermediary spanning leaders in the network leveraged existing relationships and built new relationship to mobilize people for change.

**Leveraging existing relationships.** Both Network conveners reported that existing social networks, developed through repeated interactions by individuals across their different roles in the community, served as a key resource for the work. For example, one stated, “One of the
assets we have are our connections to each other.” One convener reported that people see each other at church, youth sports, and the grocery store and the other stated: “You know almost everybody. You work with them, you live with some, you socialize with them, and these are things that create stronger networks.” In their work to recruit participants for the leadership level of the Network, including both the Core Team and the Governance Council, the conveners leveraged existing relationships.

Both conveners appeared to have broad personal and professional networks across communities. One previously worked in community education, a position that required working with both school district personnel and community members. She has also served on the board of a local non-profit that provides youth mentoring and is reportedly active in her church community. The other has worked with the Native American community and serves on a number of non-profit boards. Many Core Team members identified these individuals as the person who invited them to join the work.

In addition to leveraging relationships for the initial composition, turnover among the first the Core Team members, and later the Governance Council, required continued mobilization. Several participants reported this continued mobilization proceeded through existing relationships, or by “word of mouth.” For example, the director of the Early Childhood Program and Core Team member reported, “I would say most of the recruitment comes through word of mouth, somebody at a higher level decides that it's important for somebody to be at table... Just connections.”

At the Governance Council level, participants reported an intentional process to leverage existing relationships. One of the Core Team members who works for the County Social Service agency served on the nominating committee that worked to identify and invite participants to the
Governance Council reported that the group identified individuals who could fill one or more specific roles.

We used our networks. Who is connected to the businessperson? We literally had papers around the room or working tables to say, who are you connected to? If you're already connected to them, make that call, make that ask, tell them what you’re doing. So, it’s a lot about relationships.

This participant then described the group drawing out their social networks in order to identify how best to approach people with an “education and an ask.” The chair of the GISC superintendent corroborated, noting the importance of bringing messages about the work to existing connections:

We've had it in the past where there's been an identified seat that should be occupied, there's a particular voice that's missing. Once that's been identified, then there’s kind of [conversation about] who has roads into that, or who knows somebody in that community, organization, that could reach out to and talk about work.

The road map supported the “education and ask” in recruiting members from existing social networks, the roadmap appears to have served as a tool to engage members. A County Social Service agency manager reported the usefulness of the roadmap in reaching out to potential recruits. She reported asking individuals where they see their work aligning on the roadmap as a way to help them see how their work fits with the overall cradle-to-career agenda.

For example, a Core Team and Governance Council member described the conversation in which she invited a new member to participate in the Network’s leadership: “I talked about what the Network is, a grassroots group that really wants to promote education and success from
Cradle to Career.” She reported explaining the road map and using it to help individuals see where their work aligns. “So I explain a little bit and then ask, what part of this speaks to you, or what part of this do you feel like you can identify with or are able to offer guidance and assistance? And then I talk about the Governance Council. We’re at this point where we need to create a governing body and would you want to be involved in this?” In this way, this member served as a broker by helping develop a shared understanding that brings people together.

In some cases, these relationships existed in professional networks, such as the GISC superintendent who reported being invited to join the Governance Council by a Core Team member with whom he had a previous working relationship outside of the Network. Others drew on more personal networks. For example, one member of the Core Team and Governance Council works for a workforce development non-profit described her relationship with another member of the Network leadership who is the director of a faith-based youth group:

This is a small community and we all know each other to a certain extent already before this started, at least we knew of each other. [The director] and I have known each other since, for a long, long time. So there are those relationships that go back. He knows my family. I know his family. I know his mother. We go way back.

She continued, “We have a new Governance Council member coming to the meeting tomorrow for the first time. And that’s funny because she used to be one of my at risk youth that I worked with.”

Existing relationships appear to have been instrumental in bringing together participants at other levels of the network. For example, one of the conveners reported that mobilization for the student survey data release event proceeded through “grassroots organizing with people that
[the Core Team members] knew in their network that they thought might be interested in this work.” Several core team members reported the conveners asked them to invited three people in their networks to the data gathering. One participant reported inviting ten individuals and another reported asking her son and several of his friends to join them. In this case, Core Team members served as brokers by identifying individuals within their networks who shared interests in the work and asking them to participate.

Existing relationships also contributed to the mobilization of the pockets of readiness. The Network’s evaluator described some of the pockets of readiness as existing groups in the community, such as the Lions, Kiwanis or Rotary Clubs. These groups already engage in work aligned to the roadmap. For example, in Big River, conveners leveraged an existing student group connected to the Rotary club. These students met with one of the conveners to look at the survey data and develop ideas for bringing community members into the school.

Other new pockets of readiness developed in schools, with youth and/or adults coming together to examine the student survey data for their district. For example, the pocket of readiness at the Grover Charter School developed through two key existing relationships.

The first relationship existed within a small faith-based community. One community connector attached to this pocket of readiness reported:

My attention was drawn to the [student] survey initially by [a fellow member] and as a [faith] community we gather every 19 days for a spiritual renewal…So it was during one of those gatherings that [a fellow member] brought the survey to our attention and over the course of several subsequent 19 day feasts, we had additional conversations about [it].
The second set of existing relationships consisted of family connections. Two members of this faith community who served as community connectors and one of the conveners described meeting together at a local coffee shop with family members and other members of the faith community. The family members included the granddaughter of one community connector who had recently graduate from the Grover Charter School. One of these community connectors reported of that conversation, “[It] got the whole process thinking about you know would it be possible for us to engage a group of youth in this conversation and learn more from them about what their needs are.” From there, one of the connectors, who is an itinerant special education teacher in GISC, reached out to the principal of Grover and together they set up a meeting with the student council to talk about the student survey report and students’ concerns. The facilitation of these conversations in part drew from youth leadership programs within the larger faith community. These connectors served as a bridge between this particular faith community and the school, built on a shared concern for young people and their connections to the community.

Winslow provides the second example. Here existing relationships served to recruit participants for their pocket of readiness. The director of the afterschool program, who served as a Core Team member and later as a community connector, reported, “I found myself going to the people that I always go to that are already doing a lot of other things. They’re my go-to people, I can rely on.” One of those go to people included his wife, a social studies teacher who supervises the peer mentoring group at the Winslow High School and helped organize the workshop for the social studies teachers.

Drawing on those existing relationships, fourteen students were identified to participate in a day of data analysis and action planning facilitated by several community connectors and one of the network conveners. However, the after school director reported a missed opportunity
to engage new individuals, “That would’ve had opportunities to reach other people that aren’t normally reached, to be a part of something like this.”

**Building new relationships.** In addition to leveraging existing relationships at multiple levels of the networks, the conveners and other boundary spanners worked to develop new relationships to mobilize individuals for collective action. In some cases, the need to develop new relationships was predicated by turnover at the organizational level. In particular, turnover among community college administrators and K-12 school administrators resulted in the need to build new relationships. Two examples highlight the necessity of building new relationships in such circumstances.

First, two participants described the turnover of several top-level administrators at the local community college. This turnover left the Core Team, and later the Governance Council without a leadership level representative for this key stakeholder group. The coordinator of the Upward Bound program at the college reported repeatedly engaging with the new Provost and three new deans: “I have been trying to give them information and say that they should just try it out, get involved. So far I haven’t had any takers.” However, one of the conveners reported one of the deans joined the governance team after several conversations with administrators. The dean reported that although he grew up in the area and had many connections, a member of the Governance Council invited him after the group had nominated him.

At the school-community level, the student data gathering served as an important space for developing new relationships. For example, the new principal at Green Lake Junior/Senior High School sat down with one of the conveners to discuss his concerns over the four suicide attempts during the first three months of school. This convener reported identifying a potential connection, “[the pastor] and has been watching this and is not sure what to do about this and his
members of his congregation. And so he came with some members of his congregation because they want to figure out how they can better support the kids in their community.” She continued, “So if we can connect them, if we can pull them with students and with school people and get them in the same room with some good facilitation and come up with an action plan that they can work on. So they can start addressing that local problem.”

Building from this introduction, the principal and pastor met over coffee and worked together to put a greeter program in place at the Green Lake Junior/Senior High School. The pastor recruited members of his church and one day a week, they come to the school, meet with the principal to learn about what is happening at the school, and then move out to greet students as they come in every day. Being new to the building, the principal also reported relying on his dean of students to help identify participants for action planning meetings help with community members and with students. In this way, the dean of students served as a boundary-spanning leader to build new relationships between the principal and community members.

Additionally, an Americorps member was hired in 2015 to build connections between the Network and individual high schools. She reported several challenges to this work. First, she reported the need to build relationships with adults before being able to gain access to youth. Secondly, she reported the challenges of trying to get into seven different high schools across a large geographic area. Thirdly, while she reported attending one of the high schools in the Grand Isle area and having other connections, she described the challenges stemming from a lack of relationships with all of the communities.

*The power of serendipity.* In addition to the strategic development of new relationships in order to mobilize individuals, new relationships have developed more organically. Conveners and other Network members have worked to capitalize on these new connections as they
generated activity around the roadmap in new ways. The data gathering, which brought together over 200 individuals from across the greater Grand Isle area, provided a key venue for this more serendipitous relationship building.

The sports gathering held in May 2015 resulted from one of these serendipitous interactions. The head of the Big River Basketball Association (BRBA) reported a series of introductions at the student data gathering. Sitting at a table in the back of the data gathering, he reported meeting one of the Big River school board members, who served on the Core Team. The BRBA head took the opportunity to share with the board member the group’s need for space. The district superintendent then joined him, followed by the state senator, and conversation about afterschool and youth sports continued.

Additionally, an introduction was made to a Core Team member who works for the local community action agency. This individual had been working to expand afterschool opportunities in Big River by bringing a Boys and Girls Club to town. Together, these two set to work on a plan for increased space for sports programs and other after school programs. The BRBA head described this chance encounter as “serendipity at its best.” These new relationships set into motion plans to work with the school district and the city to develop a flexible, five-court space for sports and after school programs.

In addition to this series of fortuitous encounters, several individuals helped broker the youth sports gathering. The BRBA chair and other coaches reached out to their peers in Big River to come together. Additionally, the Core Team member from the community action agency provided brokering the in form of working across stakeholder groups to identify where their concerns about quality and access intersected.
Without this chance meeting, this important group of afterschool programs might not have come together. One of the conveners, who has two teenage sons and previously worked in the Big River school district, expressed surprised at how few of the coaches she knew personally.

“The supportive people and the positive people tend to attract each other.” In talking about the mobilization of the Core Team, the Big River principal reported that the Core Team came together like “gas theory.” People who share the same values and interests were attracted to the Network and its roadmap. A number of participants reported the importance of shared values and beliefs as key motivating factors for their decision to get involved in the work. Others reported that self-interest played a key role. This self-interest often went beyond individual’s organizational roles, often including their self-interest in the role of parent.

Shared values. Two key values appear to have been shared among members of the leadership level of the Network, as well as the pockets of readiness. One was the importance of positive youth development. The other was a commitment to the community, both locally and as a region. These two key values appear to have provided a means for the initial self-selection of Core Team members, driven motivation to stay involved over time, and served as an a screening mechanism for the more intentional creation of the Governance Council.

In describing what brought individuals to the initial series of community conversations in 2010, a parent and Foundation staff member stated, “Everyone in the room initially was there on behalf of the students, so they all had a common goal of making things better for students.” From the final meeting, participants were asked to self-identify their level of interest and commitment to the work. One Core Team member described this as, “People said, ok, I have time, I have energy and I have a lot of passion around this and I'm going to dig in and work on this. So that became the core team.”
In describing the recruitment of new Core Team members, the GISC superintendent reported that people used their networks to find people with shared values. He stated, “You get to know someone through your work with this committee or that committee, or this organization, or your bowling league. And, you’re identifying those people with common values and beliefs.” He later stated that shared values keep Core Team members returning to the table, “I think they know that kids are important. They know that – they believe in kids and they believe that, in order for us to have a strong community, we have to have strong, capable, and supported kids.”

Another Core Team member involved in the afterschool network reported her involvement stemmed from her values around community and youth, “I’m there because I want to make our community better, so I think that's the main reason that people are still involved in the initiative, I think they want what's best for our community and our youth.”

These shared values appeared to have kept Core Team members engaged during the long development phase from 2011 to 2014. When asked what motivates people to stay involved, one of the K-12 principals who served on the Core Team reported, “I think the people around the table really do enjoy and care about each other and they care about kids. I think that's the thing that keeps people coming back.”

Similarly, at the Governance Council level, a member identified shared values around the importance of supporting youth as the motivation for individuals to participate and as for how individuals were identified for invitation. She said, “We’re all here for a purpose and that purpose is to support out youth and that’s the only reason anybody is there.” She reported the governance council members had been “vetted” for these shared beliefs and “in order to get invited you had to have proven that at some point.”
Others pointed to shared values about the community as a whole. For example, a Governance Council member stated, “I’m just really interested in what they are trying to do. So you have to get people who are really interested in what we are trying to do and some people are interested in it because of their job and that’s not necessarily me, I was only a part time teacher. I am more interested in the community in general and the fact that it just seems like the right thing to do.”

A Governance Council and Core Team member identified the important work of conveners, especially their efforts to frame the issues in ways that bring like-minded individuals to the table. In this person’s words “I think they've done a good job of framing the issue and it’s a simple thing: we want kids to be successful. And then when you start engaging people who can just by nature their own job can bring that message community, the network can just grow. When you talk about kids being successful, I just don’t think that’s a hard sell.”

Foundation staff members appear to have used special facilitation techniques in order to help members of the Core Team and Governance Council identify their shared values and beliefs. One Foundation staff member described using facilitation techniques to draw on participants’ shared values to build relationships and spark motivation:

When you are trying to build [relationships] for the long term, you want to maintain engagement over time. In the middle of this is the purpose. What is so wonderful about the Art of Hosting is we say purpose is the fire, it's the center, and if you can keep asking people, what brought you to the table? It's about the kids, especially in this work, it’s about the kids, it's about the kids. And putting kids in the center.
While strategic facilitation provided opportunities for individuals to identify shared beliefs in a more structured way, the student survey data gathering provided a more informal opportunity for people to come together around their shared beliefs. The BRBA chair identified the data gathering as a way for people with a shared mindset to come together. He said, “And it was just great because I [met people with] similar minds, similar attitudes, similar, needs, and then we can get together and say, ‘Oh, maybe we can do something if our goals are aligned and their motivation is there.’” Similarly, the Core Team member working with the BRBA head to develop the five-court space and expand afterschool opportunities in Big River reported the importance of “mind-share” or what he described as “that piece of quality understanding, that familiarity.” In particular, he noted the need to leverage shared values when talking with different members of the community to promote afterschool access and quality.

“Individual people seeing it in their self-interest to align and work with others.” One principal and Core Team member summed up the role of intrinsic motivation in the development of the Network. He said, “There is persuasion and there's all the different things we do to get people involved but it really comes down to a person's intrinsic motivation, whether or not they actually want to be an active in something like this.”

In addition to shared values, including wanting to see all youth succeed, members at each of the levels of the Network identified the importance of self-interest in getting involved in the work and staying involved. The literature on collaboration identifies enlightened self-interest (Lawson, 2004), or a focus on the common good, as a key factor in mobilization, however participants in this study tended to frame self-interest more narrowly. While some spoke about a desire to help all children, many identified self-interest in their professional roles or in their roles as parents and grandparents. The limited focus on creating and harnessing enlightened self-
interest was further reflected in how members spoke about the efforts. Several noted that in certain circles talking about poverty was a non-starter. Additional findings on this framing can be found in chapter seven. Findings on professional and personal self-interest follow.

*Professional self-interest.* A Vice President at the Foundation reported, “So long before we started Grand Isle Network and long before we became the backbone of that, there have been all kinds of cooperation and collaboration going on in this community. Where does that start? That comes from people, individual people seeing it in their self-interest to align and work with others.” Two Core Team members expressed similar sentiments. Both of the Core Team members who spoke most about self-interest in collaboration had the longest experience as leaders of previous efforts: the GISC chair, who also serves on the board of the Early Childhood Program, and the director of the Early Childhood Program. The GISC chair stated:

> In our experience [with GISC], that means acknowledging your self-interests, not hiding them. Being really open about what it is you need. But at the same time recognizing there's a lot of give and take and you might give up what you want today for what you really need tomorrow. And your win will come at some point.

He continued, describing the collaboration in the after-school program in his district, Winslow:

> “We have here in Winslow, the Boys and Girls Club, and 4H, and Indian Ed, and [others] in my afterschool program, they’re all working kind of arm in arm doing stuff. They have figured that out, you know. But not all organizations have had to do that, or know how to do it.” He cited that competition among the non-profit organizations makes collaboration appear threatening: “So it's hard for folks sometimes to take a look at the work together and identify how is this going to work if we're working together.”
In a similar vein, the director of the Early Childhood Program reported a need to insure that members have their individual self-interests met.

One of the things we do the Early Child Program, every year our leadership team goes around the table and says, are your interests being served [here]? Because it's one thing if you're here for the mission, but if your agency, if you're not getting ANYTHING out of this, then why are you? At some point you kind of disengage because the bottom line is, I'm being paid from my agency to do this stuff, so at some point I have to get something back, a little bit. It might not be all the time, but I think that's important.

Members of the Core Team and GINY also identified self-interest as a motivation to participate in both groups. One identified the challenges of the time commitments to be involved in these groups, but noted that people come because they want to be part of the conversation and take advantage of opportunities: “people come because of who is there and not wanting to be left out. Because, you know sometimes decisions, any GINY funding stuff for a youth program quality or the 21st century learning centers. Opportunities come available and I think that's another piece too.” Another Core Team and GINY member said, “I think all the people at the table want whatever they're working with to have their voice be there as well.”

In addition to wanting their own voices heard, others reported their interest in making sure that the voices who are not always present at meetings have representation. A Core Team member who represents the community action agency and is a GINY member stated that he continues to remain involved due to his role as an advocate for low-income youth and families. He said, “One of the main reasons the community action agency is on it is because the constant
thing we struggle with and fear is not having the low-income voice represented and if you look around the table you have a lot of folks who have, who are like us, who get paid to be there.”

**Personal self-interest.** Almost all of the participants talked about their own children, or in some cases, grandchildren, in relation to their motivated to become involved in the work. A member of the Governance Council and Core Team reported her own experiences with the local school system sparked her interest, “My experience with education here personally with my children was absolutely horrendous, horrendous.” Another Governance Council member and member of the communication subcommittee identified her three children as a reason for her involvement, “I have three children and one of them is in 11th grade and I find that there isn’t good communication between us for kids and trying to figure out what they want to do in their lives.” She discussed increasing communication of existing opportunities as her focus in the Network.

One Core team member reported a mix of personal and professional self-interest as someone who works in the workforce development arena, “For me, I had kind of a dual interest. Contractually, I kind of had to be involved. But from a personal standpoint, I care what happens to our youth. I needed to put energy into this.” She identified this “dual role” as a the reason she “self-selected to the Core Team.” A member of the Core Team and GINy expressed a similar dual self-interest: “I feel as part of my position as community education director, I feel a need to make our community a better place for youth and adults and I feel like it’s a good spot for me to be on their, so I would just be on their due to my position in the community.”

Similarly, one K-12 principal and Core Team member identified both his personal self-interest as a parent and as a principal, “And of course, I have two girls that are also in school, that are ninth and eleventh [grade], so obviously, I have a personal interest in the success of our
schools and the quality of education that our kids will get. But, so I have the personal aspect and I have the business aspect because at some point, I'm going to be employing those people.”

This K-12 administrator later expressed tension between personal and professional self-interest:

This is another interesting dynamic that came out in one of our last meetings, and it became a realization to me that the reason I love that so much is personal. But I represent an organization and there's an anxiety there, where I loose either decision making or resource providing that aren't in my direct control. And so I think it's an interesting dichotomy in that there's really no gain for the school. A lot of it is intrinsic value of bringing people to the table, and yet we represent these organizations that the model says is critical that we have this coverage on.

In addition to identifying their own self-interest as a motivator to get involved in the work, several Core Team members stated they felt that helping others see their self-interest would bring more people into the Network. One principal reported he believed that helping parents, particularly those who are not traditionally engaged with schools, see their self-interest would help bring them into the work:

I think that, communication of the value of this and how it can benefit a parent's individual situation would be a good draw. I don't know necessarily if the parents you described are interested in the good of the whole being part of a process that helps everyone out. But if they saw that it would be of some value for them and their family that would be a worthwhile thing.

One of the conveners reported a similar sentiment of helping retired individuals “see how this is in their best interest to be supporting kids.” A School Board and Core Team member
similarly reported he tries to help people see their self-interest in the work: “It affects every one of us directly or indirectly. And I always relate it back to [school taxes] and people tend to perk up a little. And how it affects you, maybe not directly, but indirectly it impacts every one of us. We all pay taxes. We all want to do well. We want our kids to do well. But we need your input on that. Because you have a stake in this.” He continued:

One of the comments I heard was from senior citizens was, ‘I don't have kids in school, it really doesn't apply' and my comeback was well, directly it doesn't, but indirectly, it does. You help educate kids through your tax dollars, it might be that individual that might be your doctor or your auto mechanic or the person who is working on your house. So really, you do have a stake in this, so when you explain it people, we need your input for this, and maybe not directly, but indirectly, you do. They perk up, their interest is there. And then again, I think we just need to do a better job with that.

Similarly, the community agency and Core Team member reported that he tries to leverage self-interests of the community members in moving towards larger goals, such as increasing access to after-school programs for low-income youth. In addition to sharing that message in advocating for the new five-court field house, he reported he has tried to gain the interest of middle-class parents whose children play sports, stating, “I also need another section of the community that has a close relationship with sports. And that’s where we have the social capital that we’re going to take advantage of, because how many people would come out of the woodwork, you know, to support, you know, something that they did as a child.” He reported this tactic helps, “Because it’s so much closer and it makes my work a lot easier because I can’t have coffee with every person in the community to talk about someone else’s kids.”
Community connectors and others worked as brokers to help others develop an understanding of where their self-interest lies along the roadmap. Some of this work engaged with the concept of enlightened self-interest, much of it focused on how an individual’s organizational or personal interests are represented in the effort. For example, the school board member didn’t just speak about the general common good to retirees, he made the more personal connection to these people’s personal interests in their health and well-being. Similarly, the Core Team member quoted above sought out ways to engage community member’s interests in their own children to reach the goal of increasing afterschool opportunities.

While the literature suggests that enlightened self-interest, these findings suggest that a more narrow conception of professional or personal self-interest may be an important starting point to bringing together people from different sectors. Such self-interest provides a source of intrinsic motivation for members to engage in the work and to stay committed despite the time constraints and logistical challenges. Brokers throughout the network appear to have helped individuals recognize their self-interest as a means to mobilize members.

Trust. Trust serves as both the glue and the lubricant in social interactions (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified trust as an important aspect of cross-sector collaboration and note the development of trust requires ongoing attention. In an organizational context, Bryk and Schnieder (2002) emphasize the importance of competence and the motivation of individuals to do the right things for the right reasons. Recent research on trust across levels of organizations suggests reciprocal trust relies on two-way communication within face-to-face interactions. Such reciprocal trust allows partners to negotiate shared understanding around change, as well as to support flexible implementation of innovations at the client-service level (Lawson, et al, under review).
Both relational and reciprocal trust appears to have played an important role in engaging members of the network, both at an individual level, as well as in the legitimacy of the Foundation and their work in the community. Individually and together reciprocal and relational trust functions as a kind of social glue for improvement as well as a social lubricant (Lawson, et al, under review). Such trust further appears to have facilitated the development of shared frames, discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to trust between individuals, trust in the Grand Isle Foundation and its staff appeared to play an important role in mobilization by providing significant legitimacy to the Network.

**Legitimacy: Trust in the Foundation.** Many participants stated that Grand Isle Foundation served as a key ingredient in the successful launch of the Network. One of the conveners reported these two key ingredients coming together “I would say, it's the relationships. And the fact that the Foundation has been here for a long time, with home community being a primary focus.” She continued by describing her own relationships, “I was in community education, I had good relationships in the schools. I had a pretty good understanding of the challenges they were facing. Even though I wasn't in the K-12 system. And we've worked really hard to keep those relationships sound.” She also identified other staff at the Foundation working to maintain relationships with the school district leaders, “The senior leadership meets quarterly with the GISC superintendents, just information sharing, making sure we're on the same page.”

In addition to Foundation staff’s efforts to build relationships, participants reported the reputation of the Foundation as an organization contributed to the successful launch of the Network. One Core Team and GINY member stated, “The Foundation has really set itself up as a trusted voice in the community… I mean 95% of people have grown to say [they’re] doing the
right things and they and the community partners have earned [trust] and that’s why it’s been able to be successful.” Another Core Team and GINY member agreed that the Foundation does good work in the community: “When the Foundation asks you to be part of something, you need to be part of it. Number one, because you know it is good. Number two, the way they go about doing things is fantastic. And number three they have a lot of money.”

However, the GISC superintendent disagreed on the role of money in the Foundation’s ability to rally community members, “I don’t want to say the Foundation, but I want to say the Foundation. It has nothing to do with money. It has everything to do with their ability to convene and the facilitation they bring to the table.”

"The Foundation was the sticky glue.” The facilitation by Foundation Staff mentioned above by the GISC superintendent appears to have contributed to the development of trusting relationships. Both Foundation Staff and Network members identified the role of facilitation in developing the working relationships amongst Core Team and Governance Council members, which members characterized as “trustful.” One Core Team member said, “I really believe the key ingredient has been the facilitation of the Foundation, without them, this doesn't happen.”

One Foundation staff member emphasized the role the Foundation has played as the backbone, “We hold the container. I think that's part of the strength of the collective impact model is that it does recognize the need to have somebody that holds the container.” Another Foundation Staff member emphasized one of the roles the Foundation plays is providing time, space, and resources to allow participants to develop relationships: “The Grand Isle Foundation was that sticky glue to help give people room – give them the room to step back, take a breath.”

One of the conveners stated the Foundation has significant prior experience in this work, “Facilitated conversations…. this is kind of core to our DNA as a Foundation. We facilitate
people and we feed them, you know we make them stay for them to do their work.” She continued, “We really see facilitation as part of creating a condition for people to do the best that they can do together.”

Both Foundation staff and members of the Core Team and Governance Council described the facilitation processes used by the conveners as providing opportunities to develop trust through conversations. One Core Team member reported the conveners built trust among the group through their use of facilitation strategies. He said, “Their genuine asking of insight from all people and knowing that when you give insight their really taking the time to, you know, it's not something that's shelved. And I think that they have done a good job with that and I think people feel like if they're giving the time to give insight, that it will be looked at and it will be part of the conversation.”

The Foundation staff consciously engages individuals, using several facilitation strategies, to build trust. These ongoing efforts reflect attention to developing trust as social glue. This social glue contributes to motivation of members to continue with the Network. Participants reported that the enjoyment of each other’s company provides a motivation to continue to come to meetings. Such trust similarly served as a lubricant to issue framing efforts.

Relational trust in action: “engage the whole person.” A Foundation staff member described the role of the Art of Hosting facilitation techniques in developing “social capital” and “engagement” She described these methods as seeking to engage the whole person, “You engage people in the process or in a meeting… you engage the whole person. It's not just about one bobble head showing up and they represent the school... it's a male or a female, who is a certain age and a certain background.” She continued, “This is about engaging the whole person. All the meetings have this underlying notion of we value you, and how are you doing and what else is
going on in your life? Once everybody is ok with all of that, then we can begin our meeting. There's always a check-in questions, just a reflection on how everybody is doing. Little tiny practices like that, making sure everybody knows that they are valued way beyond what they actually bring in their brains and their time is profound.” She also described the attention that Foundation staff put attention into creating a welcoming physical space for meetings and others mention that the conveners provide food at meetings, emphasizing the importance of hospitality in developing relationships.

Additionally, maintaining trust has required consideration of individuals and their other roles. One of the conveners reported the importance of “knowing when to back off a little in what you can ask of people. There’s an art to it.” She reported balancing the need to push the out-of-school time group in particular with the need to give them space to do the work. She identified the importance of the “authenticity of those relationships,” particularly in a rural community and the need to maintain them. She said, “There are times the chamber chair can make me crazy. But you bump into each other. You have to get past it and be willing to [work together] because there’s only one chamber chair, there’s only one superintendent. You have to maintain those relationships.”

*The “purpose is the fire.”* In addition to developing shared norms for conversations, the conveners and other Foundation staff appear to have helped develop trust by surfacing participants’ shared values. A Governance Council member stated that the shared values, beliefs, and purpose among the group-generated trust: “I think we kind of trust each other. And I think because we all know that even if we don’t know each other well, we trust that we’re all there with the right mindset. Nobody is there for personal glory. Nobody’s there to promote their
A Foundation staff described their model as combining learning and relationship building. To create engagement over time, she stated the importance of keeping the purpose at the center: “We say purpose is the fire, it's the center.” In the case of the Network, she reiterated that keeping kids at the center helped maintain that focus and develop trust that people were engaged for the right reasons.

“Let’s do the work.” Many participants reported the relationship building and development of trust took a great deal of time. However, they identified this investment as essential for bringing the Network to the point of action. However, the slow speed of such work appears to have created disengagement among members, particularly in the business sector. Participants reported that those in the business sector wanted to see action more quickly.

One Core Team and GINY member stated, “I see positive partnerships from the network. I see sometimes it takes time and effort and energy, but I think what comes out of it is positive relationships.” She continued, “The extra effort is worth it in the long run. And this process was hard. You know, it's taken us many years to get to where we're at and we're still not into action.” While she noted positive relationships in taking time to develop the collaboration, she also reported that this limited action.

In describing the work of Milwaukee Succeeds, director Mike Soika stated, “I have come to realize that partnerships move at the speed of trust (emphasis added)” (as quoted in Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014, p. 149). Although many study participants mentioned social relationships as a strength of their small community, building trust in order to move towards action appeared slow going.
In fact, several participants expressed frustration at the slow speed of getting to action. One Foundation Staff stated that in particular, the business community proved difficult to engage over the long haul:

Our struggle is we’ve got the Chamber of Commerce there and we’ve got one or two of the larger employers there but it’s easier for people who come from agencies or non-profits to come to the table and sit at a table where, frankly, a lot of what is done is about building relationships instead of, “Let’s do the work,” right?

Another Foundation staff member described relationships among the Core Team members as “trustful.” However, this person added that she was “somewhat skeptical about, when are we ever going to get to action.” She continued, stating many people feel like “Let's get 'er done and they get really tired of all...the really, we're looking at this again? Really? Can we move on? And we really are still talking about what the words on the page are?” She continued, “Yes, we really are. So, I think the relationships are really solid. I think people are now just so relieved that we're off the dime a little bit, we finally have an opportunity to move ahead.”

The Grand Isle Network’s leaders encountered predictable challenges associated with the recruitment, engagement, and retention of the business and corporate community. Several participants reported that the representative of one of the biggest employers in Big River had left the Governance Council.

One Governance Council and Core Team member spoke more generally about the difficulty of engaging this stakeholder group: “The business community bailed pretty fast. I think business people tend to be very focus directed. You know this is our goal, point A. We’re at point B, we want to get to point A, how do we get there?” She continued, “And this process has
not been about that. It’s been following the path however many circles and chaos, throughout how much chaos it will take you. Yet again, that trust that we’ll get there eventually.” Another member of the Core Team who represented the business community and workforce development efforts reported:

I would just like to share from a businessperson, in my role as a businessperson, not in my role with the chamber, but as a businessperson who tends to want results quick. It is hard for me to sit…So now that there's finally some more direct things that we can DO, I think you're going to see engagement of other employers. Because I know I'm not the only employer that has that, we've had employers that have backed away, why are we sitting here talking about this?

Even among those who are deeply engaged in the work, such as a Governance Council member who also serves as a community connector expressed frustration at the slow speed:

That is my biggest frustration with this whole process, is that things are talked to death, talk to death, talk to death, talk to death and then that next little piece doesn’t happen and sometimes it just takes a little bit, not even much, to make it move to the next level and I don’t if people are afraid move to the next level or the don’t have the time to commit to it.

She identified not wanting to offend people as a reason for the slow speed: “And they don’t want to step on toes. It might be someone else’s job. They don’t want to be seen as being pushy. It’s always interesting to see how Communities... I don’t want to offend anybody and in not wanting to offend, they don’t do.” The perceived need to maintain relationships appears to limit action, particularly in controversial areas. A member of the communications committee reported a similar sentiment: “It can take a lot of time – we’re taking an awful lot of time to try to figure out
what everybody wants and keep everybody happy instead of just doing it. And we – you can spend years and years and years on planning and never get anything done.” However, one Core Team and Governance Council member stated, “We haven't had the tough discussions to sort of test the relationships yet, that's probably fair to say.”

**Histories of distrust and selective stakeholder participation.** Study participants reported that some stakeholder groups were not represented fully in the Network. Of the groups identified as missing, a lack of trust became evident in three cases: the outlying mining communities, teachers, and the Native American community.

**Representatives from the mining communities.** Despite attempts to identify study participants from across the county, the few individuals identified by the conveners as representing the Hawk River-Elk Falls School District were either unreachable or otherwise did not agree to participate. However, some participants in other school districts provided insight into the consolidated Hawk River-Elk Falls District in the mining heavy eastern part of Grand Isle County.

The current principal of the Green Lake Junior/Senior High School had previously been the principal of the Hawk River-Elk Falls High School. He reported, “There were some challenges when we were trying to get some things off the ground over there in Hawk River.” He also stated, “Trying to get people involved sometimes is difficult. And I think sometimes a little bit of that mentality of, ‘Oh, that’s the Grand Isle Foundation that’s Big River, why would we want to do it?’

This former principal reported that residents of the Hawk River-Elk Falls school district feared further consolidation would add to population decline. In the past, Hawk River-Elk Falls had shared a superintendent with nearby, but changes in the school board reversed that decision.
Currently, the two districts share a business officer and combined sports teams. The students, he noted, support the shared sports teams, while board members and other adults in Hawk River-Elk Falls do not.

He continued, “Every time one of these small community schools closed, it’s been – you know, it’s been the death of the town. And that’s very true in any rural [area]. I think in any state probably, you know, the center is your school because that’s where people come. They want to make sure their kids have that good education. And so anytime that’s going to go, then that’s not going to draw those new young families. They want to be where their school is.” He reported that efforts at collaboration and shared services were viewed in Hawk River-Elk Falls as threats of consolidation.

One of the Governance Council members who works with youth across the county in her position with a workforce development agency stated the following about Hawk River-Elk Falls: “They have a strong history there of feeling kind of like they are being persecuted. There are right in the middle of between two big school districts.” She continued, “[They] have this history that, that comes out of how they see things and it's just a thought, you know they are a small school district, they feel real strong identity around their sports teams and they’ve been forced to do some things because of finances that they'd probably won't do otherwise.”

The unique financial and educational challenges in the mining communities appear to have contributed to a sense of distrust with outsiders seeking collaboration. Participants reported that residents Hawk River and Elk Falls appear to fear that collaboration with Green Lake will lead to further consolidation. In their view, further consolidation with one of the larger districts would lead to the death of their respective communities.
Challenges associated with teachers. A Foundation staff member identified some of the logistical challenges in engaging teachers. She noted that meeting times conflict with teachers’ work schedules. She also identified the pressures put on them by the state assessment and accountability. She said, “My sense is teachers are so stretched trying to just get through the curriculum and teach to the testing requirements… students who in rural areas are poor and less resourced than those in urban areas, traditionally, they travel longer distances, they're higher rates of poverty, and many other social ills. Teachers are just more and more stressed and have to do more to get students to the same point.” The superintendent, who serves on the Governance Council, concurred, noting that of school employees, teachers have the least flexibility in how they use their time. He identified the pressure of state assessments as limiting teachers’ desire to get involved: “If there's any sense that this might not contribute value to [assessment scores], they can't afford to get involved in it.” Several participants reported wanting to help, rather than add to teachers’ “very full plates.”

Another Foundation staff member reported that the Foundation walks a fine line in working with the school districts and teachers, “We walk a very fine line so that we don't encroach on the domain of the K-12 realm, the superintendents, the teachers who are under constant scrutiny and working THE hardest of any in our community to help our kids through the day and to help them meet the standards that are set for them…So we do walk a fine line with influencing the actual in the classroom environment.” Mirroring this view, one of the conveners spoke about the Network not wanting to add another level of accountability for teachers.

Participants expressed a range of opinions on whether the Network should target schools and teachers more. Some participants reported the local schools generally do a good job. Others provided a more mixed view, such as one of the K-12 principals who reported tiered intervention
systems in place in his K-12 building but stated, “Schools don’t do a very good job of meeting individual needs. They have a good organizational systems and structure, but if a student doesn’t fit in that box, how do we get that student [help] without derailing the whole system.” He stated that “outside support is really going to be key for that,” expressing the sentiments of many that schools cannot do it all alone.

Others shared emotional stories of their own children’s struggles in the public school system. However, other participants identified the need to engage teachers in the work. One community connector reported, “[teachers have] been a huge voice that’s missing” because they work directly with students. One K-12 principal who served on the Core Team stated, “I think there might also be kind of a FALSE assumption that education is properly represented through the administration that is at the table.” His statement suggests that teachers’ voices are a missing piece, and their needs may not be addressed by the Network, despite reports of messaging to teachers that the Network is there to support them.

A lack of trust between teachers and community members may explain their lack of participation, beyond the logistical challenges. One Foundation staff reported teachers are “tired of the mistrust from the public of what they do.” A parent who runs an after-school tutoring company specializing in students with learning disabilities expressed that teachers may not be engaged in the work because they feel uncomfortable talking about the problems they face when there are administrators in the room. She stated:

People want to protect themselves. Of course, if a kindergarten teacher goes to the administration and says, I can't do this, they're not going to have a job. So nobody can stand up and say you have unrealistic expectations of what a person can do. I have a second grader now; his kindergarten class had 26 or 27. There was ONE
aide that went back and forth between the two kindergartens. So the expectations that you have of a kindergarten teacher with 26 or 27 kids who are you know in the whole wide spectrum of [development]... I wish that people could stand up and say, this isn’t working.

This Core Team also stated having given up hopes of working in the school district in order to advocate for her child with a learning disability. She stated she saw her role on the Core Team as continuing that advocacy. She said, “And then, so I feel like if I'm in that situation, I'm going to say as much as I can because no one else can, because they need their jobs.” Her statements point to a lack of trust within the school districts that teachers can voice their concerns without fearing for their jobs.

Despite the mixed reports about the involvement of teachers, a group of social studies teachers from across four of the school districts met in June to examine the student survey data and to develop curriculum to use the data with their students. These teachers examined the data report with members of the Quest Group and one of the conveners and developed plans for activities to bring the data to their students in order to create action plans at the school level.

The Native American Community. Participants reported limited engagement of Native American community members in the Network. Although the Foundation has been engaged with an on-going project to develop greater understanding and relationships between the two communities, a Foundation staff member stated, “Unfortunately, they [the Native American community] have not seen themselves in the work.”

Despite this view, one Core Team and Governance Council was identified as representing the Native American community, as well as speaking for low-income parents. This single mother lives in one of the villages on the Reservation and works for child protection
services. She highlighted her role on the Governance Council as being an outspoken voice for
her community and children.

She reported that many in the white majority lacked awareness of the history of her
people and often held misperceptions of the Native American community: “And they don’t
realize that not all Natives are on welfare, not all Natives are alcoholics. And some of the reason
that they are those things, is because of the historical trauma. So I think that really plays a huge
part in how things go on here and how perceptions [are] on both sides.” One of the conveners
also highlighted the role of the “disruption” in the challenges among the Native American
population.

In the Winslow district, which serves more Native American students than the other
districts, the superintendent reported a “peaceful coexistence” between the two groups. He
reported, “If you go to the lunch room, you’ll see a table full of Native American kids, then
you’ll have a table of white kids, and then you’ll have a table that’s mixed.” He noted that
despite the long relationship between the two groups it is not “complete integration.”

While he reported a peaceful co-existence in his community, the Winslow superintendent
reported that despite the overall large turnout at the student data gathering, many students and
parents from his district did not attend. He stated that in particular that parents and students from
the Native American community did not attend the data gathering as it conflicted with an
important cultural event in their community. He reported this scheduling conflict was
“unintentional,” but rather a communication issue. His comments suggest a lack of clear
communication between the two communities on which trust is predicated.

Limitations of social networks: missing stakeholders. Where they exist, relationships,
trust, and shared values facilitate social capital and appear to facilitate the mobilization of
individuals at the Core Team and Governance Council levels, as well as the pockets of readiness in the school-communities. The several groups apparently left out of these relationships may be excluded because of the absence of prior social relationships a lack of trust, and perceptions regarding divergent values.

In addition to missing stakeholders from the mining communities, the teaching ranks, and the Native American community, participants identified community elites and low-income parents as key stakeholder groups missing from the Network. Additionally, one of the superintendents highlighted the need for principals to be engaged in the Network in order to create change at the school level. While logistical challenges were identified in many cases, evidence emerged that in the case of low-income parents and community elites in particular, these relationships were limited by not only day-to-day interactions, but also a lack of self-interest and shared values.

*Low-income parents.* A number of participants reported limited engagement of low-income parents. One K-12 principal implied that low-income parents are “the ones we need at the table. And with us, and that didn't happen. It happened, but it didn't happen consistently.” Another K-12 principal reported the Network attracted people who already engaged with the schools:

A lot of the people we know through interactions in community and professional lives. There’s also the relationship that a lot of these parents who sit on this committee have an interest and tie to schools, so those have already been established to some degree. It seems like the schools are the hub of how these relationships, the people that come to this have interest in education and the schools.
When asked about parents who are not traditionally engaged with schools, he replied, “That is one of the areas that we're looking to improve... And THERE, I think strategies DO need to be developed because it's not going to happen by INVITATION or natural interactions.”

This administrator stated that he believed helping parents see their self-interest in the work would help them engage with the Network: “I think that, communication of the value of this and how it can benefit a parent's individual situation would be a good draw. I don't know necessarily if the parents you described are interested in the good of the whole being part of a process that helps everyone out. But if they saw that it would be of some value for them and their family that would be a worthwhile thing.” Further, he stated his belief that schools and other institutions would change when demands came from clients and parents. This suggests a need to mobilize individuals to put pressure on these institutions.

As stated in chapter four, the value of post-secondary education had a socio-economic component in the county, with many low income parents either not seeing the value or fearing their children will leave for college and not return. Additionally, differences in appeared in the types of opportunities outside of schools that parents valued. One participant reported:

There's also a value system that goes along with [out of school participation] for the kids that probably have a little bit more money, their parents have experienced those things, especially if they were a transplant, they experienced it when they were growing up so they want their kids to have it. And for the parents that don’t necessarily have the money, some of them – for some of them it’s not important because they were never exposed to it. What’s more important is that they have the money to buy a four wheel so they can go hunting and fishing.
She continued, noting the socio-economic factors that determine how people use their time and their expectations for opportunities for their children:

So I mean it’s just a – it’s a experiential and a cultural thing, it’s like, we never did that when we were growing – you know like parents do what they – teach their kids to do what they like to do and if that means working on the car or work – if they’re buying an old boat engine and making sure that works or going fishing or you know so it’s just – I mean a lot of people say that it’s terrible that we don’t have enough stuff – free stuff for kids to do, but there is a lot of free stuff kids do, it’s just that people are either – they are not – it’s maybe not something they value or it’s not something that they’re aware of or maybe they can't get to it.

Recognizing that many parents are not engaged in schools, another Core Team member stated the need to go where these parents are, including Walmart and other places in the community in order to build connections and share information.

**Community elites.** Along with low-income parents, several participants identified community elites as a missing stakeholder group, including local government officials, business leaders, and other top-level decision makers. One communications committee member stated she believed this missing stakeholder group limited the ability to get to action within the different organizations that provide afterschool programing: “Most of the people that are at the table are pretty much programmers and not the movers. And the movers and the shakers make the decisions. And so the decisions never get made so they’re never moved forward.” She noted that superintendents, apart from the superintendent of Winslow and GISC chair, have not been involved.
She continued, “I think you need some really strong leaders,” and listed the city mayor and city administrator in Big River and County executives who can take the lead on making youth development a priority. She emphasized the need for district and city leaders to create momentum around youth:

If it’s pervasive through the whole organization as being important… if the school district says our youth are really important and it’s not just during the school day that they’re important, they’re important all the time. And the city says our youth are important and I want all of my managers and everything to do whatever they can do to make our youth important and the county says you know this is important. Then all these little non-profits and little organizations might get the support and the access to space to use and people started thinking out of the box and collaborating.

Additionally, several participants pointed to the lack of wealthy community members in the work. One of the K-12 principals highlighted the socio-economic disparities in the community, noting that some of his students live in homes with “partial dirt floors” compared to the million dollar homes around the large lake in Big River. One of the conveners described the Grand Isle area as “a community where there are some very wealthy people and some very poor people.”

She continued, noting the lack of interaction among these groups: “And I think the people that have more means and are engaged in the arts and those kinds of things, don't necessarily SEE the struggles of those that don't have…It's a struggle for many families, and those families are often invisible. Yea, so I think that's the biggest challenge, really engaging people that have some means because they don't see the problem.”
A Core Team member agreed, reporting the challenges in talking to community elites, such as the head of the local bank. He said individuals like this do not see the need for extended after-school activities, increased action or higher quality programs, as their own children participate in a wealth of activities available in Big River.

Despite participants reporting that community members interact in multiple social arenas in the community, the economic divisions in the community appear to limit interactions of both the wealthy elites and low-income parents. Overcoming these divisions appears to require more than developing social capital.

**Principals.** While a range of participants noted the lack of teachers, one of the superintendents highlighted the importance of the principals in moving the work of the Network into schools. A number of principals participated on the Core Team, including those at Little River, Big River, Green Lake, and the Grover Charter School. In referring to the districts’ differing levels of capacity in both using data and in mobilizing stakeholders to move things along, this superintendent stated, “I think the principals are key to creating that change…I think if we’re really going to crack into that, I think the principals have to be engaged.”

He continued, noting in his experience as the chair of GISC, “The initiatives or changes we’ve attempted, where we’ve involved the principals early and often, those are the one’s we’ve seen results in…I think the principal is probably the most important person in the whole school.” He reiterated the importance of engaging principals, as “they’re closest to the teachers.” He identified a limited flexibility in principals’ work schedules as a challenge to engaging principals and getting them to invest their time, stating, “I think from a principal’s perspective, it’s kind of like let me know when you’re ready to get something done, then I’ll go to that meeting. And we can work on getting something done and we’ll make it happen. But those 18 meetings it takes to
lead up to that point, I can’t afford to be there.” Together, these comments suggest a need to create structures and processes at the district level to allow principals to participate

**Discussion of Mobilization**

The multiple strands of literature reviewed in chapter 2, coalesce around the need for cross-sector coalitions to support school change efforts. The community organizing literature highlights the need to bring together parents and community members to both engage in adversarial tactics with district leaders and to work with school personnel to change hearts and minds (Warren et al., 2011). Bringing together low-income parents provides a foundation for engagement with schools and other community institutions (Ishimaru, 2014a). Similarly, parents and teachers play important roles in performance and empowerment regimes for school change (Shipps, 2003).

The cradle-to-career and collective impact literature, like the urban regime and civic capacity literature, identify the need to bring together top level community leaders to engage in systems and community level change (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Stone et al., 2001). Such leaders can commit resources, as well as provide sufficient political clout to create change (Stone et al, 2001). However, mobilization of such leaders remains something of a black box. The next section provides a discussion of mobilization efforts in the Grand Isle network at multiple levels, from the civic level down to members of partner organizations, and community members more broadly.

**Civic level.** Stone and colleagues (2001) differentiate civic capacity from social capital. They note that social capital, particularly in Putnam’s conception (1995) is “largely the unconscious byproduct of everyday interactions” (p. 156). On the other hand, they posit that
civic capacity requires conscious attention to its creation and maintenance. They advocate for institutionalization rather than informal understandings (Stone et al., 2001). They state that social capital is so passive that waiting for it to be deployed is akin to “waiting for Godot” (p.158).

As part of this conscious attention to mobilization, Stone and colleagues advance (2001) the idea of “collective cognition.” Such a shared cognition requires actors from across sectors to take on roles of civic leadership roles quite apart from their professional or personal roles. This shared cognition is shaped in part by the policy arena in which it occurs, as well as contributes to the shape of problems and solutions generated in that arena (Stone et al, 2001). In particular, this process has significant consequences for the analysis of issue framing presented in the next chapter. Yet, Stone and colleagues (2001) do not identify what factors contribute to individuals’ initial engagement in this collective cognition. In this way mobilization efforts largely remain a black box in Stone and colleagues’ (2001) work.

The findings reported above suggest that social capital in a municipal area can be consciously harvested and leveraged in order to bring people together. These social capital features include the structure of social networks and the shared values, norms and trust that exist within them. Such work requires the leadership of boundary spanners (Williams, 2012), such as the conveners and other Core Team members who actively used their social networks to recruit participants for community gatherings or the pockets of readiness. These boundary-spanning leaders worked to identify pre-existing relationships, particularly among people with a personal or professional interest in the work, as well as shared values. In other cases, such boundary spanners forged new relationships with individuals representing a missing stakeholder group. Turnover of leadership at the community college necessitated building new relationships with a new administrator.
However, even with strong boundary crossing leadership, significant barriers remained to developing new relationships where values differ and trust has been damaged by a history of wrong-doing or benign neglect. These barriers appear to have limited the mobilization of individuals from the smaller mining communities, as well as the Native American Reservation. Teachers also appeared difficult to mobilize for this reason, beyond logistical challenges.

**Organizational level.** At the level of cross-sector partnerships between organizations, Bryson and colleagues’ (2006) identify trust as a key facilitator of multi-sector collaboration and stated that such efforts require on-going attention to trust building, including the development of cross-sector and cross-cultural understandings. The Network conveners in particular seem to have engaged in on-going efforts to build trusting relationships by ensuring all members can be heard and providing opportunities for individuals to connect on a personal level.

Bryson and colleagues (2006) also identified self-interest as a means to bring partners together. Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2007) identified enlightened self-interest, or commitment to the common good, as a means to bring leaders together. In the case of the Grand Isle Network, individual self-interest, whether professional or personal, appears to have been more compelling for individuals. There appeared to be challenges in engaging individuals around the common good, as opposed to individual self-interest, which will be discussed further in chapter seven because this challenge also had impacts on issue framing.

**Community level.** Where trust cannot be easily forged due to differences in values, a lack of obvious self-interest, or a deep history of conflict, alternative approaches may need to be taken to mobilize important stakeholder groups, such as low-income parents, teachers, and minority communities. Ishimaru, (2014a) suggests that building bonding social capital within these groups serves as an important first step in forging linking relationships between these
individuals and social institutions by creating a foundation and overcoming power imbalances. These linking social capital relationships bring together groups of parents with institutions such as schools, or in this case the Foundation and the Network. Community organizing strategies as a means to achieve such bonding social capital, while schools and other institutions must make concerted efforts to connect with these groups (Ishimaru, 2014a).

In addition to helping community members recognize common problems and develop a shared voice, community organizing tactics typically engage in pressure politics to gain access to the agenda. This suggests that such tactics may unleash conflict that must be overcome. Such conflict may be overcome by bringing community members into decision making processes. Briggs (2008), identified the need to develop new infrastructure that supports the participation of community members.

However, the structure he describes connects community members with a single municipal government within a single policy arena, such as early childhood (Briggs, 2008). One the other hand, the Grand Isle Network encompasses seven school districts in three counties, as well as the Native American Reservation. This rural context creates significant challenges to connecting community members with the multiple municipal level governments through the development of such civic infrastructure.

Chapter Conclusion

Social capital, where it exists, or can easily be forged through the recognition of shared values and self-interest, appears to drive mobilization. Both structural and functional elements of social capital appear to have contributed to the mobilization of the Grand Isle Network at all levels. Structural elements included existing professional and personal networks. In rural areas such as the Grand Isle area, individuals wear many hats and may exist as nodes in several
overlapping networks. In terms of functional elements, trust played an important role in bringing people together.

Significantly, the boundary spanning leaders in the Network actively leveraged social capital. Where social capital was absent, these leaders worked to create it. All such efforts suggest that social capital is not simply a passive commodity. Instead, this suggests social capital is a resource within individual relationships and within a community than can be used to bring people together around municipal level change agendas.
CHAPTER 7: ISSUE FRAMING AND EMERGENT THEORY OF CHANGE

The literature reviewed in chapter two identified the importance of issue framing, agenda setting, and goal selection for civic capacity, collective impact, and other multi-sector efforts structured to create community-level changes. While these literatures use different descriptions, they suggest that without a clear and commonly understood conception of the problem and potential solutions, cross-sector efforts are unlikely to move towards action.

Stone and colleagues (2001) identified collective cognition as a key process that brings people together and shapes shared issue frames for civic capacity. In theory, collective cognition develops through a dynamic process, one that proceeds via repeated interactions and learning. However, extant literature does not provide details about the development of collective cognition. In other words, collective cognition is an example of the classic black box problem.

The social movement issue framing literature provides one solution to this black box problem. It provides insight into framing activities that result in a shared understanding among diverse people and help mobilize individuals to a cause (Benford & Snow, 2000).

This chapter is structured to provide empirically based details regarding how collective cognition is developed through the identification of problems and development of solutions among members of the Grand Isle Network. An emergent theory of change is one product of this analysis. This emergent theory of change, developed by the investigator for this Network’s leaders and participants, represents one view of how the Network will meet the goals. This research-generated theory of change offers an illuminating comparison with a theory of change document created by the Network conveners.

Two research questions and related sub-questions facilitated data analysis and interpretation. 1) How do community and organization members frame issues in the development
of a rural cradle-to-career network? This question gave rise to the following sub-questions. How do people think about local needs and potential solutions? Which individuals hold sway on the creation of a consensus to guide the work? Which communities do these individuals represent? How do issues make it into the partnership council’s agenda and who decides which issues are chosen?

The second question addresses how participants think about solving the issues identified as part of issue framing. 2) What are the characteristics of the theory of change? How do mobilization and issue framing contribute to this theory of change? The following sub-questions follow suit. How do leaders envision their work's ability to create changes in schools or other organizations to achieve desirable outcomes? What strategies and mechanisms are identified for creating a cohesive system out of traditionally isolated educational organizations, including early childhood, K-12, out of school time, and post-secondary institutions?

The analysis begins with key framing activities, expanding on the descriptions of the development of the Grand Isle Network presented in chapter five. Then the analysis focuses on the content of the issue frames, or local problems most often identified by participants in interviews. The third and final section presents an empirically based depiction of the emergent theory of change.

**Framing Activities**

Three important framing activities contributed to the development of shared understandings, as well as the communication of these shared understandings. Several key players appeared to play important roles in facilitating these framing activities.
First, the Network conveners and other Foundation staff facilitated the community gatherings in which community members identified needs and resources. The conveners also worked more closely with the Core Team to develop the roadmap.

Second, the community connectors led table discussions at the student survey data gathering held in 2014. These connectors also worked directly with the pockets of readiness groups to look at data and develop school level action plans.

Third, the communications subcommittee worked with an external group to conduct focus groups among community members in order to begin rebranding the Network in order to be able to communicate its goals more clearly and to recruit community members to the vision. Utilizing documents and interviews, descriptions of each of these framing activities follows.

**Community gatherings.** The series of community wide conversations held in 2010 were developed to elicit input from a range of nearly 100 key stakeholders from each school-community to identify educational challenges across the Grand Isle area. The intentional diversity of stakeholders from across the area “provide[d] an opportunity for differences to be shared and for our common interest in children to be strengthened.” In addition to creating a regional understanding of the educational challenges in the area, these meetings also sought the identification of potential solutions to the question of how to bring “educational success to the region’s children and future workforce.”

The first of these gatherings constituted a diagnostic framing process. Diagnostic framing processes serve to identify the issue and the victim of social problems (Benford & Snow, 2000) Individuals spoke in small groups about their own positive educational experiences, the observed success of others, and specific challenges a student in their lives face. From this activity, four
areas of need emerged: a focus on adolescence and young adult students; the needs of families; challenges faced by schools; and issues in the community overall.

For students, two themes emerged. First, this diagnostic framing identified the need for role models and one-on-one support. Secondly, participants identified the need for job training and experience. Family challenges identified by community members included income, transportation, time, and knowledge of the school system. Participants identified funding and state assessments as challenges to the school systems, along with low parent involvement. Lastly, participants identified poverty and a lack of communication between school districts and parents as major concerns at the community level.

At the second meeting, participants engaged in prognostic framing activities. Prognostic frames develop potential solutions to the issues uncovered by diagnostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). This prognostic framing process used by Foundation Staff asked participants to envision positive changes five years out, and to identify opportunities and challenges for meeting those goals. This meeting yielded a large number of narrowly focused solutions. At the school level, these frames included expanding existing early childhood opportunities and increasing educational time by switching to a European school calendar. While the scope of each opportunity identified were fairly narrow, taken together they represent a broad range, from early childhood programs through employment, and from better supporting families to providing county-wide broadband service.

While the goal of this meeting was to elicit positive changes in the community, additional diagnostic frames emerged. Participants at the second meeting identified the need to provide greater access to support systems for families and increasing their skills in helping their students. This suggests that framing did not proceed in linear process.
At the third and final meeting, backbone organization staff presented a draft strategic plan. In this plan, they organized the narrowly identified issues and solutions identified in the previous community gatherings into four broader prognostic frames: forward-looking educational transformation, bold employer investment, unprecedented community support, leading edge family engagement.

As Benford and Snow (2000) noted, the power of framing is in part in repackaging existing ideas in new ways. Notably, Foundation staff organized the narrower solutions into a strategic plan that covered early childhood through entry into the work force. Further, this strategic outline identifies areas of overlap between each area, such as increasing partnerships between educators and employers, and developing family friendly schools.

In addition to serving as a prognostic framing device, the strategic outline served as a motivational frame and call to arms. At this final meeting, the backbone organization asked community members to self-select into the core team, a group willing to commit to the plan. However, backbone staff reported that these goals failed to generate traction among the Core team. This suggests that in its initial form the strategic plan failed as a motivational frame that could provide compelling reasons for people to join the cause (Benford & Snow, 2000).

**Developing the roadmap.** As described in chapter five, interactions with the collective impact literature and the STRIVE site in Cincinnati provided a spark to reinvigorate the Network. In particular, the group of Core Team members who traveled to STRIVE brought back the network’s roadmap, which was subsequently adopted as the nation-wide model. This roadmap identifies key research-based gatekeepers of student success: school readiness, early grade literacy, middle school math, high school graduation, enrollment in and completion of
post-secondary education, and entry into the workforce. These key transition points are supported by services for students and families.

However, the Grand Isle Network did not simply adopt this roadmap. Instead, the conveners and Core Team engaged in a lengthy process to develop their own roadmap. One of the conveners identified the importance of context as a key take away from this trip: “One of the key learnings was that context matters. And that was a huge learning.” From there she reported, “We could not ADOPT [the roadmap] we needed to ADAPT.”

One of the conveners reported that the initial goals aligned fairly closely to those in Cincinnati network: “Prepared for school, supported inside and outside of school, academically proficient, 21st century skills and enroll in and complete post-secondary education.” She continued, noting one of the key aspects of the Grand Isle Network’s roadmap, “Already at this time we had started seeing the phrase 'every student has access to' starting to emerge.” Others described this phrase as the community’s aspirational promises to all kids.

Aligning these community resources to the educational levels of pre-school, K-12, and post-secondary reportedly caused difficulty as, one convener stated, “We were really struggling with how does this all fit together…Then we started recognizing some of these access things, a stable relationship, the arts, and that those things didn't really fit necessarily with an age, they were more across the spectrum.”

She continued with a laugh, “and some of that stuff was really painful.” She described the challenges of identifying indicators, or data measurements for each goal:

I had it spread out on the floor in the office at one point and looking at how we were trying to get these indicators on the pathway and realizing they didn't really fit there and they were probably more indicators that needed to come later and we
needed to focus more on the broader statements. And so I fed that back to the core team and we dropped indicator level and made it more aspirational statements.

Because we needed to have something that people could really organize around and it was kind of becoming... by getting to that granularity of like 8th grade reading or more the action kinds of things, it was really hard to find the agreement. So I think that's kind of why we moved up to a little higher level.

This convener reported that developing goals for the K-12 education created tension among the Core Team members. In particular, several educators, frustrated with state assessments, pushed to move away from test scores as indicators. In order to create consensus around K-12 goals, participants reported the use of a “fist to five” strategy. This strategy allowed participants to vote yes for a measure, vote yes with reservations, or stop a vote to continue discussions. This process led to a compromise on K-12 goals and measurements, with a less specific goal: “mastery at current learning level.”

In addition to input from the Core Team, the conveners reported soliciting feedback from a number of groups in the community. They reported that a draft roadmap was shared at a GISC teacher in service day and with community groups such as the Lions and Elks clubs.

The resulting roadmap outlines five key areas of development along one side: pre-natal; early childhood; K-12 education; after high school; and early career. On the other side two lists outline what every child will have access to across this developmental span: positive relationships with a range of adults, including guidance and mentoring; opportunities in the arts, physical activities; healthy living and high quality after school programs; and technology. This is followed by a list of what every child will be able to do: be ready for school; demonstrate mastery at current learning level; complete a post-secondary certification or degree program; and
develop the skills for the 21st century. Two social and civic focused goals complement these human capital development indicators: every child will feel accepted in the community and have connections to the community.

The resulting document, carefully designed to not use any of the color combinations of the high school sports teams figured prominently on the Network’s website. The roadmap document was also printed in a variety of sizes from post-cards to an 11 X 17 format described as the “placemat.” These were distributed widely in the community and several Core Team members had a copy of the roadmap posted in their office or conference room. Each participant at the student data gathering received a copy of the roadmap as well.

**Student data gathering.** In November 2014 a large community gathering served as another framing activity. This event represented a shift from framing among the smaller, leadership level Core Team back to framing with a broader representation of the community. However, unlike the previous community gatherings, personal experiences were intentionally connected to student data to drive conversations.

Over 200 individuals attended this event. At the meeting, a series of speakers from the Core Team and the Foundation introduced the survey and the data. These speakers also table for conversations by recognizing the importance of youth and community members in the room. Many Core Team members shared their own personal, and often emotional, connections to the work. One Core Team member and community connector said from the podium, “Education only works when relationships are involved. It takes a village to raise our youth and I’m glad the village is here.” He then invited the table groups to discuss the data reports at each table.

Another Core Team member spoke of his on-going commitments to the community in his role as GISC chair and as a Network member, as well as in his role as a father, before inviting
each table group to talk about what brought them together. After the groups had a chance to talk, he stated the work is “not just schools or groups, it’s up to all of us.” He went on cite research on the need to combine academic press with a positive school climate in which teachers are treated as professionals and parents are engaged. He then returned to the roadmap and spoke of how the survey aligns to it. He stated, “Data provides basis for action.” He then invited the crowd to look at the data and discuss what surprised them, ending his speech an inspirational quote.

After taking time to look at the data again, a Core Team member then invited the crowd to move to tables with different aspects of the survey for more focused conversations. After these conversations, a representative of each table stood and shared observations from their group. Throughout the meeting, a member of the communications subcommittee did a social media check-in, displaying Tweets on the screens at the front of the room and reading some of them aloud.

As the meeting wound down, the principal of the Grover Charter School and a student invited participants to leave their contact information on a card if they wanted to continue the conversation in their own community. They then showed a YouTube video about the power of the first follower in creating a movement, and invited participants to be part of this movement. The meeting concluded with a performance by a high school cheer squads, lending the air of a prep rally.

This meeting largely appears to have functioned as a motivational framing event, or a call to arms. Core Team members played significant roles in this motivational framing by sharing their personal interest in the work and issuing calls to get involved from the podium. Individuals also engaged with the data and connected it to their own experiences to develop their own understanding. The mixed groups that examined each indicator and shared out their observations
appear to have served as a means to move towards a regional understanding of issues, with room for nuances across the individual communities.

Lastly, this motivational framing activity also sought to engage community members for the pockets of readiness. Conveners also collected the names from individuals who expressed a desire to engage in data analysis and action planning in their school community.

**Branding and rebranding.** Participants reported that the vision, mission, goals, roadmap, and communication strategies needed to be revisited. In particular, the roadmap and the Network’s name appeared to be sticking points for participants who wanted to facilitate communication about the effort.

During the interviews in November 2014, many participants referenced the roadmap as the vision and mission of the Network. However, some participants raised questions about the ability roadmap to quickly convey the vision and mission of the Network. They identified such communication as a means to mobilize others to the cause. A communications subcommittee member stated that the “initiative as a whole needs to connect with [people] and help people see how they can access it.”

Others took issue with the emphasis on student success. Many mentioned the sentiment within the group to shift to more inclusive language. One community connector reported youth did not want to be singled out by the Network, rather they wanted to be integrated into the community. Several participants called for a broader definition of the target of the Network. Rather than the narrow role or category of student, participants wanted a more neutral word that would shift the focus from schools to a broader framework that included out of school time programs and relationships with community members. Other participants noted the need for language that included families and older community members.
This rebranding work began at the first Governance Council meeting in January 2015. At this meeting, participants were asked to depict their vision for the Network using colored modeling clay. Motifs included trees, representing the local landscape, with one stating, “The trunk of the tree brings everything together, bearing fruit for our students.” Other members created chains, braids, and links the stated represented bringing together youth and the community coming together. Another described a figure with arms held open to a group of small balls of clay as “Our arms are around all the programs. It’s all about the kids.” Another created a similar visualization of a nest full of eggs, “Protecting our eggs until they are ready to hatch.” Others used stars, and suns to depict a sense of hopefulness. These symbols served as framing mechanisms to help Governance Council members surface their hopes and goals for their work.

Additionally, between November 2014 and June 2015, the communications subcommittee engaged in several activities that focused on possible re-branding of the Network. A communications professional at the Foundation assisted with this work. This subcommittee brought in representatives of a communications firm to conduct focus groups in several of the school districts. They conducted these focus groups to identify what words and phrases resonate with residents and youth.

In sharing the results of these focus groups a communications subcommittee member reported that ‘student’ did not resonate broadly across the communities. However, she noted the word ‘success’ did. She reported residents identifying success with not only academic achievement or financial wealth, but also the idea of a “balanced whole person, someone who is caring, and empathetic, and connects well with other people.”

Reflecting the recursive nature of the framing activities in developing the roadmap, a member of the communications subcommittee collected these ideas to “feed them back to the
Following this summary, the communications subcommittee shared the findings of the marketing firm with the Governance Council. These findings included some of the barriers that limit access to existing opportunities: transportation and money. A communications subcommittee member highlighted youths’ low self-esteem and lack of parental guidance as needs in the community. Notably, she shared, community members did not define success in purely monetary terms, but rather though of success as a well-rounded, honest and respectful young person. She also reported youth want to return to the community for the natural environment and the lifestyle. Lastly, the subcommittee members shared that the focus groups revealed a need to focus on community pride in the messaging of the work. This report to the Governance Council served to add community voices during the work of finalizing a vision and mission statement.

After setting the table for discussion by reviewing these two sources of framing, the communications committee presented the draft statements:

**Vision:** Strong community in which all children, youth and families thrive.

**Mission:** Amplifying the strengths of our communities, achieving together more than we thought possible.

One of the conveners invited the Governance Council to consider these statements, reminding members of the Council’s purpose statement, “Lead, inspire, and collaborate with community partners for the continuous advancement of the roadmap to student success.” She also reiterated the learning from the focus groups: “What we learned from focus groups is that...
kids didn’t want to be called out, they are parts of the community and they want to be equal partners.” Lastly, she reminded participants the need for “We’re all in this together language.”

Following the instructions of the convener to focus on the words that drew them in, the Governance Council members called out: “strong,” “together,” “thrive,” “our and we,” “achieve,” and “amplify.” The convener then asked them to identify what excited them in these statements. Council members responded, “achieving more” and “Strengths that are already here and amplifying them.” The convener then asked the Governance council members to identify what they didn’t like about the statements. One member called out, “children, youth and families, we leave people out.” Others repeated the need for more inclusive language, such as “all.” Another participant wanted “a stronger verb” than “though,” listing, “dream, hope, imagined.” However, a Council member identified the need to keep the message practical, “thought is practical, it’s the things we imagine, but they’re achievable.”

A Governance Council member called attention to the absence of language around learning, noting the difference between schooling and education and stating that students can be any age. Another responded, “I think it’s understood, whether its school or learning. That’s how change happens, through learning.” They continued to discuss how to address learning without the use of the word student, which several agreed moved the Network’s vision and mission to far towards the school districts, which they worried communicated that the work centered on the schools rather than the community. Others also expressed that such language failed to include older adults.

The group then discussed the use of the verb “amplify,” with several of the Governance Council members engaging in playful teasing with the convener about her dislike of the word. Other members brought the conversation back to the video of the power of the first follower
shown at the November data gathering. Others circled back to amplify as an expression of their perceived job to find existing opportunities and actions, and to bring attention to them. Following the meeting, the revised language from the minutes reads:

Vision: Strong communities where all children, youth, and families learn and thrive.

Mission: Discover and amplify the strength within our communities, to achieve together more than we thought was possible.

This language maintained the intent of the original draft, but brings attention to learning and as one member pointed out, shifted towards a more active voice with the use of “amplify” over “amplifying.” During the remainder of this meeting, the Governance Council and the communications subcommittee discussed a grant to develop a new website and the need for a new, pithier, name that would better communicate the Network’s intentions and mobilize people to the work.

Participants reported these shorter statements were more useful than the roadmap for communicating with individuals. Conveners and others reported the roadmap would become more of an internal document than a tool for communication of the Network and recruitment of members.

Along with internal contributions of the Governance Council and the focus groups, the rebranding efforts looked to external influences as well. A communications professional at the Foundation reported the communications sub-committee looked to other STRIVE networks with the aim of finding out what slogans and logos were successful elsewhere. However, she also reported, “I do think I the end there will be some type of geography component.” This importance of place reflected in one of the preliminary drafts of the roadmap, which took the
form of a birch tree, an image one of the conveners described as connecting to the local landscape.

The need to rebrand the Network suggests two consequential shifts. One occurred in the developmental trajectory of the group, and the other was the shift from planning to action. Both shifts included the need to take the message into the community and to mobilize school and community members to engage in aligned efforts. The collection and dissemination of student survey appears to be the main driver of action and a recent series of suicides by young people have added an increased sense of urgency to move to action. The Network released their new, shorter name, inclusive tagline, and colorful logo in February 2016.

**Pockets of readiness.** The next set of framing activities built on the data gathering, but moved from a regional activity to the school level. These activities were undertaken by members of the pockets of readiness with the guidance of community connectors.

These connectors received training in facilitating conversations. Each of these conversations began with the data. For example, the Grover Charter School pocket began with members of the faith community examining the data report together and identifying students not feeling connected to the community as a concern. They then took their concerns to the Principal, who helped facilitate a conversation with students about connections to community. One participant described this conversation:

> Just friendly conversations going on among the participants, and then for the actual conversation we wanted to make it clear that we wanted to listen to the students. We didn’t want to be talking at them; we didn’t want to be hearing from the adults what their opinions were at this particular meaning. So we made
a circle of chairs in the middle that had 11 chairs in it and so I was sitting in one of them and the students were sitting in and then we had the chairs sitting around the outside for the other adults.

Another participant in this pocket reported that the students identified a lack of places in the community for them to congregate that they felt were age appropriate, as well as wanting adults to recognize and support them.

At Winslow, two of the community connectors started with a smaller group of students to identify three things in the data to focus on in the larger meeting. The students, with guidance from the adults, identified connections to community and preparedness for school. The adults expressed surprise that the students wanted to focus on “prepared for school.” To the adults, this phrase meant preparing young children for kindergarten, but for the high school students, this meant getting enough sleep, eating breakfast, and having school supplies. The larger group of students then looked at these three problems and developed an activity they saw as helping to create connections between students and the community. They came up with “sports for all sorts,” an open gym night with sports equipment and board games that would be available to all community members. Similarly, the pocket of readiness in Green Lake focused on students’ connections to the community and likewise developed an activity to bring community members into the school. They decided to bring back Green Lake Jam Days, where community members taught students skills like cooking or ice fishing.

Each pocket of readiness engaged in the development of their own local diagnostic and prognostic frames. Drawing on the student support data, each group identified issues and potential solutions. These groups then began work on implementing these potential solutions in their school communities in the spring of 2015.
**Deliberate attention to building trust.** Throughout the framing activities, participants reported the role of the conveners in facilitating conversations and developing trust. Core Team members in particular identified the conveners’ development of shared norms for discussion as another factor that contributed to development of relationships and trust. The director of the Early Childhood Program and Core Team member stated,

I think [the conveners] have done a good job at meetings saying that we all have the right to say what we need to at the table and that, you don't have to agree with somebody, but you have to agree to listen. And I think that's important. Even if you periodically just say it aloud to remind people. Because I think nothing stinks more than if you walk out the door not feeling like you agree or have been heard.

A School Board member and Core Team member said “[The conveners’] genuine asking of insight from all people and knowing that when you give insight their really taking the time to [discuss it], it's not something that's shelved. And I think that they have done a good job with that and I think people feel like if they're giving the time to give insight, that it will be looked at and it will be part of the conversation.” Participants reported the importance of having all voices heard, even when it slowed down the work, particularly in developing the roadmap.

**Issue Frames**

The various framing activities describe above appear to have contributed to shared understandings held by Network members. Gamson (1987) described such shared understandings, or frames as the "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning.” In describing the challenges in their community, study participants expressed several core ideas around which their narratives coalesced: social justice, including increasing opportunity for
youth living in poverty and reduction of income and racial achievement gaps; challenges faced by schools; and economics, with a particular focus on workforce development.

These categories align with the three discourses Durand (2011) identified in state P-16 policies: social justice, organizational, and economic. However, there appeared significant overlap among categories. For example, workforce development encompassed both economic concerns and educational concerns. Likewise, social justice frames include educational opportunity, as well as access to out of school opportunities. In addition to the discourses identified by Durand (2011), participants identified a fourth frame: social-emotional development, including building relationships and mental health.

Social justice. According to Durand (2011), the social justice framing of the P-16 advocacy literature focuses on providing equitable access for all students across the cradle to career continuum. Durand (2011) identified socialization and citizenship as areas of emphasis within this frame. However, participants spoke about increasing access for students mainly in terms of ensuring a greater supply of young people with the skills and post-secondary credentials needed in the local labor force. Others framed the same concern as one as ensuring that individuals would have opportunities beyond the low-wage, service sector employment that has expanded in Big River.

Access: opportunities and geography. Those who lived or worked in Big River identified a wealth of opportunities for young people. For example, a communications subcommittee member who works in the adult education arm of the community education program in Big River reported, “We have lots of different sports teams that are beginning and then go all the way up all the way into varsity,” Others mentioned the youth sports programs, in particular the Big River
Basketball Association and the very popular youth hockey program. On a drive through the center of town, dance and gymnastics studios were visible.

Others noted opportunities in the arts and theater. A participant also reported, “We have lots of different art opportunities. We have orchestra, we have band, we have a number of piano teachers in town that teach piano, we have choirs – lots – we have church choirs and then we have individual choirs, and we have an art center that teaches really great art classes.”

However, participants described inequitable access to the wealth of opportunities. For example, the Americorps Fellow at the Grand Isle Foundation who worked with a number of school districts as a community connector stated, “I think there’s a lot of opportunities there, but its whether or not that kid has access to it.”

Participants identified two key challenges to students’ ability to access existing opportunities: transportation and poverty. Many noted that poverty compounded the challenges created by the large size of the county and the spread out population.

Many participants identified transportation when asked about the challenges in their community. For example, the principal of Big River High School stated, “Transportation is a huge issue because of our expanse, our rural – you know, where kids live.” A member of a faith-based youth organization stated, “I think that transportation is a huge issue, you know, either having a reliable vehicle and/or gas money.” The director of TRIO and Upward Bound at the community college reported, “Transportation is always an issue. I think I heard that over and over and over with students.” Similarly, a manager of a social service agency reported transportation limited high school students’ opportunities to take advantage of community college coursework: “And [the college] is right here. The high school is in the northwest part of
town and the college is right on the eastern edge of the city. And it's a mile and a half or two miles… but the barrier also is, you also have to have a car. You need transport.”

In particular, participants reported that afterschool participation was limited by transportation. While a majority of these opportunities exist in Big River, transportation challenges participation for those attending school in the Big River District. The high school guidance counselor reported some travel “Forty-five miles away on rural, very rural roads. So for those kids to participate in any kind of an after school activity, forget it.” She also noted that such long commutes become treacherous in the winter: “So not only are you travelling a long distance in the dark on rural slippery roads, and often in a snow storm or minus forty weather…those are some barriers as well.” One parent agreed, “The biggest challenge, given its rural, is transportation. Transportation is a big barrier, especially for students that want to participate in afterschool activities or anything like that, unless that have a parent that can provide that after school transportation, it’s not available.”

These statements point to the lack of after school busing in most of the districts. A number of participants reported that only one district, Winslow, provided late busing that allowed students to stay after school to participate in sports and the Boys and Girls program. While the superintendent reported his commitment and the school board’s commitment to providing late buses, others noted this service was limited. For example, the director of the Boys and Girls club stated:

I think the biggest challenge for the work that I do at the Boys and Girls Club in the afterschool time is that the kids that we work with are spread out so much geographically. Whether it's transportation costs, a lot of the families don't even have a vehicle or can't afford gas or whatever. To me, that's the number one
challenge is it's that we're so spread out that opportunities if you don't catch the bus right after school the opportunities to do anything after school are pretty limited. We do have some options, but it doesn’t meet everyone's needs.

In the remaining districts without late buses, participants reported transportation further limits opportunities for youth to engage in afterschool activities. For example, the head of a truancy prevention organization reported, “So, when we talk about youth engagement, we are just have a tremendous amount of kids who have to ride a school bus home and who can't stay after school to be involved anything and a handful of parents who want to be involved. For them it is a huge, huge task.” A member of the business community who reported he and his family lives ten miles outside of Big River, but spend most of their leisure time there, stated that transportation limited kids involvement and parents ability to be involved: “I think that’s where the main focus and the main challenge is, how rural the communities around Big River are. And that creates a lot of transportation issues and additional costs when we’re trying to think about different ways to involved kids, and ultimately parents in their child’s education. And it all kind of builds from there.”

Others spoke about accessing services more generally. A Core Team and Governance Council member who lives on the Reservation stated, “Transportation. It's huge, I mean if you don’t have a good running vehicle, it’s hard to access these services.” A school board member in Big River expressed a similar sentiment:

Transportation is an issue. Geographically, we're so big. Big River being the regional hub, if you will... And we have a lot of people that live in a rural community and getting to those services gets to be difficult. I've always been a believer that whether you live 60 miles away in this 3,000 square mile area,
people should have the same opportunities as the people that are right here in
town. So that gets to be the challenge of providing those services.

Similarly, a member of a philanthropic agency stated, “The fact that it is less easy to share
resources when transportation is an issue.”

Participants described poverty as compounding the challenges created by transportation.
One member emphasized the need for a working vehicle to access opportunities in the region and
others noted the cost of gas as a limiting factor. While bus service exists, participants described it
as not meeting the needs of community members.

Additionally, participants reported that poverty limits activities available to young people
based on the cost of programs. A school counselor at Big River reported, “Even though we have
all of these wonderful opportunities in our community, often families who are struggling
economically don’t have access to those activities or those clubs or organizations, so getting you
know, involved in positive activities, for our community members who struggle financially, I
think is a challenge.” A social service agency manager and Core Team member noted the
financial barriers for youth to engage in activities, stating, “Not every family is going to be able
to send their kid to the YMCA.” She also noted the equipment costs associated with youth sports
at the Big River High school. Another Big River resident who works in the after-school sector
listed a number of opportunities for young people, but stated, “I think what happens, is this, for
the kids that have, there's lots of opportunity. The kids that are economically [well off] – whose
parents can pay for things, [they have] lots of opportunities.” When asked about other kids, this
participant responded, “And for other kids, not so much.”

A Core Team member who works in a community action agency reiterated the
differences in opportunities available based on income level: “Kids who are disadvantaged or
from families that don't have the luxury, they really suffer.” He continued, linking after-school activities with job skills and future employment prospects: “I think the biggest challenge our area is going to face is the future for those kids. If we're not adequately preparing them for the future, we're going to have a pretty tough time all around when it comes to everything else. I think it might be easy to say jobs right away or the skills gap we have and the high local unemployment sink we've got here but I think we may not be well prepared for the future if we're not addressing those challenges.”

In addition to the cost of transportation and programs, members also identified limited social networks as creating challenges to access. A Core Team and Governance Council member who serves as the director of a faith-based youth program stated:

I think you know, if the parents really wanted the kids to participate and were to pursue maybe other ways or ride sharing or something like that, it probably could still happen, but you’d have to have a highly motivated parent who would be willing to look for ways to get their kids to do whatever it is they want them to participate in, and I think it’s probably you know, a hassle and maybe embarrassing for the parents. Maybe they feel like they don’t fit in or don’t have the right social connections in order to make those arrangements.

He also noted that with the help of adult mentors low-income students can take advantage, to some degree, of the opportunities in the community. He said, “If they have kind of guidance and support from someone beyond their family, they discover that they can do some of the same things [as the well-off kids]. But it takes someone to point out those opportunities for them and, you know, to give them – make them aware of what they can do regardless of their [situation].”
Similarly, the director of the Early Childhood Program identified isolation and social networks as a challenge for students and adults alike in being able to participate in activities. She stated, “You are ISOLATED, and you rely on your transportation. There isn't public transportation… You rely on that neighborhood, if you have one.” This last comment underscores the social component of the challenging geography: those with social connections rely on them for assistance with transportation, while those without remain isolated and unable to access services.

**Poverty.** Participants identified a clear link between poverty and access in their discussions of transportation. Participants also reported poverty as a significant challenge more generally at both the school district and regional levels. However, the discourse around poverty as both a challenge in the community and an area of focus for the Network appeared to be shared mainly by those whose occupational roles took them more closely to the issue, particularly those who work directly with low-income individuals.

School administrators reported their free and reduced priced lunch populations ranged from approximately 40% in Big River to 80% in Winslow. In both communities, participants identified poverty and its attendant social ills as challenges in the community. For example, a school counselor at Big River stated, “There is definitely division between the have and the have-nots, you know, families who struggle with poverty. And often you see these three things go together, poverty, drug and alcohol use, and then domestic violence. So I can say those are the three biggest troubles in our community.”

The superintendent of Winslow concurred, identifying poverty as “public enemy number one.” He explained:
I believe that because it affects everything that we see. It affects people’s ability to get here. It affects their home and how things go at home. Whether it’s creating volatility and stress or it’s just that mom and dad are working two or three jobs so they’re just not there. I think it’s responsible for the mental health issues we’re seeing, which have exploded over the last few years. It’s responsible for the nutritional needs we’re trying to meet.

The manager of the child protection services agency and Core Team stated, “From the chair I sit in [the biggest challenge] is poverty.” Another Core Team member who works for a community action agency said, “Poverty is huge.” A director of the truancy prevention program reiterated, “Poverty is a huge issue here.”

A Grand Isle Foundation staff member followed suit: “You know, high poverty rates, particularly when you get out of – away from the county seat. High rates of domestic abuse. high rates of drug use.” The CPS manager attributed this to a combination of poverty and culture: “Like I said the culture up here is you hunt, fish, and drink beer, snowmobile or whatever. But drinking beer or other beverages is just kinda what you do.” She also reported other forms of substance abuse as a problem associated with poverty. Others noted increased incidence of domestic violence and neglect among low-income residents. Several mentioned these problems increase the further people live from the county seat of Big River.

The CPS manager reported cultural aspects of poverty in these areas, including both weaknesses and strengths:

Some of the outlying areas, such as Winslow or Little River, Elk Falls to our east, there’s a lot more poverty. There’s a lot more cultural things that have to be considered when we're looking at changing, introducing new programs or
changing the way things are. There are some community culture that has to be considered. For instance, Little River, which is 30, 45 miles north of here, they kind of take care of their own. We rarely get a child protection or adult protection call from them, because they sort of just band together as a small community and kind of take care of each other. So when we get a call from there, it's pretty bad because they've run out of options of people in the community that are going to step in and help.

Along with the CPS manager, a parent who lives on the Reservation and works for CPS also reported that low-income children struggle in school due to the lack of support and resources at home. She also noted the stressful situations in which they live making school challenging. The manager of the public health agency, and member of the Core Team and Governance Council, similarly noted that impact of poverty and stressful living conditions on development and school achievement.

A parent who lives on the Reservation stated, “And then if I were talking about our Native students, it would have to be really getting them to care about their education, put forth their efforts. I mean not that they aren’t but sometimes some of the underlying circumstances that they’re facing prevent a full attention toward education. You know, because there’s a lot of – there’s alcohol and drugs, there’s violence.” Of all the participants that spoke about the negative impacts of poverty, only the public health manager used the term ACEs, or adverse childhood experiences to describe them.

The majority of participants who spoke most in-depth about poverty and its attendant social problems worked in organizational and occupational roles in which they interacted with low-income youth or families directly. The superintendent of the Winslow District, which has
the highest poverty rate of the GISC districts spoke the most about poverty of any of the school administrators interviewed. One participant recognized the need to observe the issue first hand. A community education director and member of the GINY afterschool network reported, “When I first moved here, I didn't realize the high poverty rate until I was immersed in it.” Several participants, however, reported that many across the county, and within the Network do not see or “understand the scope of [poverty] county-wide.”

The CPS manager reported that some organizational staff understand “about the child protection issues, the educational neglect issues, kids living in poverty,” while others do not see the full extent of these issues. While she lauded the goals of the Network “to make life better for every child,” she stated, “the kids that we're working with, they just want to know when their next meal is coming from, not are they going to get an iPad, are they going to go to college”.

The Core Team member who works at the community action agency identified this disconnect in the community, with many residents not recognizing the full scale of poverty across the region:

Big River is 49.8% low income. One in two people you see on the street are low income. You ask anyone what you think it is, maybe 30% or 40%, nowhere close. And there is a huge disconnect in our understanding of poverty and our realization of what are our neighbors lives are like. It’s just that experience with the issue and familiarity.

Two participants in particular saw their role as trying to increase that familiarity by advocating for low-income youth and families: the Core Team member who worked at the community action agency and the Governance Council member who lived on the reservation. The first of these advocates works in an organization with an explicit mission of “Building
COMMUNITY to end POVERTY.” He reported that he saw his role as continuing to ensure that the Network maintained a focus on the needs of low-income youth, including ensuring conversations about out of school time programs include not only quality but also access. He stated: “I focused on the low-income piece because if we just, you know, never focus on that, I’m going to do those pieces for the things I’m familiar with and I’m going to forget those kids. So, that’s my goal.

He also spoke of the need to develop the interest of community members more broadly, “The more we can kind of imbue that sense of this is important, I need ownership for my community’s success beyond my own children, the more we raise awareness for the rest of everything going on.” He continued, “We’re not going to end poverty unless we actually get folks moving and caring about those issues just like issues of race.”

Despite being his commitment to advocating for people in poverty, this Core Team member reported having to tread lightly around the issue. He said, “I don’t approach Boys & Girls Club as a poverty issue because that shuts people down.” Rather than using a poverty discourse with certain community members, he reported he frames his advocacy for the Boys and Girls Club in Big River along with the sports courts proposal, trying to tap into the interests of middle class parents in sports programs.

Additionally, he reported advocating for low-income representation at the leadership table. In his words: “I had to fight like a dog to make sure we got low-income participants on our governance council and other stuff.”

Similarly, the parent from the Reservation reported she saw her role as keeping the group’s attention on the struggles of children and families living in poverty. She also reported that she saw her role as bringing the voices of her community into the work. She said, “You
know what, I’m very vocal. And I just speak my mind and tell it like it is.” She continued, “And a lot of people, I can see that they don’t like to hear some of that stuff. But you know what, truth is truth. You cannot outrun truth.”

She described part of her truth telling is helping to shed light within the Network leadership on the racism in the school system. She stated, “There was not a time that I did not have to go up to the [Big River] high school to defend my kids against the racism.” She elaborated on her role on the Governance Council: “I tried to help my other members of the council think about things that just because you’re not experiencing it doesn’t mean that it’s not happening. You know, just because you’re not experiencing it doesn’t mean that it isn’t happening.”

**Education.** While many respondents did not highlight school change as a goal of the network, several noted the importance of education in the community. Participants identified the role of post-secondary education in particular. Many participants linked their discourse on education to workforce development. These connected frames will be discussed in the following section on economic framing.

However, others identified challenges in the K-12 schools, including their failure to meet the needs of students who don’t fit in the box, and the limitations of state accountability measure. Several participants also identified pre-school as an area of need in the community.

One Foundation staff stated, “Academic achievement leaves much to be desired… a litany of woes that had no easy answers.” However, Foundation Staff identified the importance of working on educational issues. One participant summarized the perception research conducted by the Grand Isle Foundation, “So, we know that in Grand Isle County, that the community feels very strongly that education is the #2 priority, after the economy.” Another Foundation staff
reiterated the importance of working on educational issues and bringing in people and organizations beyond the K-12 schools:

And, frankly, what else would you want to be working on? I mean, there’s nothing else more important than trying to improve educational outcomes. And, you know, how are you going to do that? You know, you can’t just rely on school systems to do that. And, you know, if it takes a village, then you’re going to have to figure out structures for making that happen and dedicated resources to keep it – to get that village on the same page and keep them there. And that isn’t done by volunteers and it isn’t done overnight.

**K-12 Schools.** Areas of educational concern identified by participants mainly focused on the K-12 schools’ difficulty in serving kids in poverty, kids with special needs, and kids from diverse backgrounds. One Foundation Staff member summarized this sentiment, “So, I’d say the school system works great for kids who do fairly well, you know, it works great for the top half and it doesn’t work very well at all for the bottom half.” A parent and Core Team member who runs a tutoring center stated:

Our schools I would say are typical. I don’t think that they're great or that they’re bad. It’s typical…I see the achievement gap. And the achievement gap is the same here as anywhere else. The great students are doing great and they are making [the state] look awesome. But we have one of the hugest achievement gaps of any states. One of the top biggest achievement gaps. So we have our low income, learning disabled, all these students, the gap between the high achievers and the low achievers is enormous.
One of the K-12 principals concurred, “I think schools do a pretty decent job of that. I think the schools have systems in place for all of those things to happen. I think the challenge is when we talk about EACH student, EVERY student.” He continued,

Schools don't do a very good job, I don't think, of meeting the individual needs. They have a good system, organizational systems, and structure. But if a student does not fit into that box, then how can we get that student to that place without derailing the whole system. I think those are the challenges. Then why isn't that student, that child fitting into that mold?

He also noted that in his school, Little River, the three-tiered academic intervention system, Response to Intervention is in place. Others noted the existence of the three tiered behavioral intervention system, Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports. However, the Little River principal said, “The outside support is really going to be key for [meeting the needs of all students].” This suggests that schools lack the capacity on their own to meet the needs of all students.

Another principal reported that typically Native American students struggled in the local schools, “what’s happening there to really help that, population that have really struggled with a lot of these things…as we look at how do we close the gap, you know, even academic-wise for those students.” The parent and Governance Council member who lives on the reservation reported that schools have limited ability to deal with students who experience difficult home lives. She also reported her own children experienced racist attitudes in the Big River schools before she moved back to the Reservation.

Other parents reiterated that schools do not meet the needs of all students. One parent reported she elected to send her children to the Grover Charter School. She reported she feels
teachers at Grover place a greater emphasis on the individual and she reported all students have advisers who guide them through project-based learning. A Governance Council member reported her children’s experiences in the school were “horrendous” and reported she homeschooled them. A Foundation Staff member reported for both social and academic reasons, he sent his son to school in the nearest urban area, over 80 miles away. He reported his wife and son live in a rented apartment during the week.

Others cited the challenges of state accountability. One parent identified the connection between state assessments and schools not meeting the need of individual students, “Get rid of standardized testing…. And just because every student works at their own level, standardized testing is just insane to begin with…I truly think that getting back to teaching to the individual…? No two people are alike, especially in learning.” A Core Team member who works for a social service agency reported state policies create problems in the schools:

I think they do what they need to do to be in minimal compliance with the parameters that have been set. Much like us in child protection, we know what the statute is, we know when we need to go out, but your approach is different for every family that you go to. But there's people at the state and federal level both that sit in their little office and make up all these rules, and they are so disconnected from the boots on the ground people, like the teachers and the youth center workers and the people that really are engaged with these children. That sounds good on paper, let's do that, you know? That's not reality for a lot of kids.

Others reported the perception that state accountability has created difficult work environments for teachers and problematic learning environments for students. For example, one convener reported that it would not be productive to add another level of accountability to
schools. She said, “I also know, because I know our school partners pretty well, how much work they are doing on the classroom side kind of things and feel like, with so much accountability measures coming their way from the state and the Feds that we don't have a lot of value add in terms of we're going to hold you accountable to these.” Rather than attempting to create change through accountability, one Core Team member summed up the use of communication with educational leaders to develop changes inside the system:

We, when I say we I mean the core team, we don't have the power to influence change within the education system. But I think by educating educators and policy makers, they have the ability to make that change. So again, going back to what systems do we need to build to create a successful student, and what do we have to change for our current system in order to transition to that other system, the new system so to speak. And that's where that change needs to happen and that needs to be driven by the educators. Right? In my opinion, anyway.

In framing educational needs, participants looked beyond typical school reform discourse. As noted earlier, the work of the Harlem Children’s Zone provided inspiration for their efforts. Reflecting this, the Foundation brought an educational expert to speak to community members about the need for different approaches. One Foundation staff member reported, “And his conclusion basically speaking [using business management strategies in school] is not working very well at all.” She said this speaker “helped them see a different side,” and noted in particular the need to make this connection with people in the business community in particular.

**Early childhood.** In addition to challenges facing the K-12 schools, several participants identified pre-school as an area of need. One parent and Core Team member reported that
students who do not have pre-kindergarten experiences create challenges in the K-12 system, particularly given the large class sizes with over 25 kindergarteners to one teacher.

The manager of the child protection services similarly identified a lack of pre-school as setting students up for difficulties at the K-12 level:

If you can't afford private preschool and you make too much to go to the state or county sponsored program, your kid is sitting at home and when they do get to kindergarten they don't have the social skills, they don't have the… they don't know their letters, numbers that kind of thing that they would get in a more structured setting. So basically, everybody should be able to go to preschool… that shouldn't be financially based.

The Early Childhood Program in Grand Isle County expanded pre-school opportunities for low-income children significantly in the last decade. However, according to their director, their mission is to meet the needs of low-income families not provide universal Pre-K. Participants noted the lack of options for parents who do not qualify for the Early Childhood Program classrooms and who cannot afford private pre-school.

However, there appeared to be variability across the Grand Isle region. The superintendent of Winslow noted that his own children attend the program because there was excess capacity. Despite this excess capacity, he noted that many parents who would qualify do not take advantage of the program. He reported, based on this assumption, the district was seeking a bond to add additional classroom space for pre-kindergarten to the district’s new elementary building. He reported that for the most part the annual data collected by the Early Childhood Program shows that children who have attended these programs enter school with
higher levels of readiness than their peers. He noted that this trend has continued even as the poverty level in his district has increased.

**Economics.** Durand (2011) identified economics, particularly human capital creation, as a key discourse in state level P-16 policy. Participants often discussed post-secondary completion as an educational issue and an economic issue, directly related to workforce development. Participants located this need at two levels: the need for individuals to complete a post-secondary degree or certification in order to obtain living wage employment and the need for the community to create an educated workforce in order to maintain economic viability.

One of the Network conveners, along with others, noted that changes in the two main extractive industries have increased the need for a workforce with more advanced skills. She identified this need as a key call to arms for the development of the Network:

The early impetus with the Network was seeing that the kids that stick around need more skills to be able to fill the jobs that are out there. And I think years ago, the paper mill in town and the mines further up the range would employ people right out of high school. And that's not the case anymore. So the people that don't go on to school really end up more in the service economy, in the lower wage jobs, where they used to be able to have a fairly decent living without school beyond.

She also stated:

If you don't have a two year degree or beyond or an engineering degree you're probably not going to be hired [at the mines]. If you don't have skilled labor of two years at least. The old mining is gone and people are not embracing that. The paper mill is not going to hire you off the street without a degree any more. And if
they do, you have to commit to going to the two or three year program here...The same way with the power companies. They need engineers and, you know it's just they need people who are thinking beyond the skill of labor.

While there are programs at the high schools and the community college geared towards helping students earn post-secondary credential, a number of participants stated many barriers remain. One parent stated, “From a parent perspective that cost is a big barrier for students. So I know in some of the discussions there was some talk about what can be done to alleviate, what is some information that can be shared with these students as far as grants and scholarships, what's available besides just the student loans.”

In addition to financial barriers identified, others reported that many in the community do not value post-secondary education. A Foundation staff member stated, “I think a really important parts of the roadmap, it says that every child shall complete some sort of post-secondary credentialing. Because a big challenge we face in the state... is the culture piece that people are no bought into the fact that kids need post-secondary.”

She reported that in many rural parts of the state educators and community members accept low levels of college completion. A Core Team member who works at the community college agreed, “Working with Talent Search and Upward Bound, has a prep program for kids to go to college, I feel that it's always been an uphill battle with them because education beyond high school is not valued as much as just graduating from high school. There hasn't been, and I think it's happening with the businesses here now, where they're requiring that you have AT LEAST a two year degree if you want a living wage...There just seems to be that mentality that I still could probably get a job if I was a good laborer without a college degree.”
Participants also highlighted the economic challenges created by the cyclical nature of the local industries, mining in particular, as well as the declining demand for paper due to the shift towards electronic communication. Others noted the expansion of low-wage jobs in tourism and the service sector. One Foundation staff member stated, “We have the same struggle as many areas creating higher-wage employment but, you know, do have a really generous supply of entry-level or starter employment, lower – lower-paid employment.”

Despite these challenges, he offered a more hopeful take on the local economy, reporting a local company developed technology to extract chemicals from trees for food additives and cosmetics. He also stated, “I think we’re on the cusp of, I hope, I believe, I have faith that the smart folks are on the cusp of figuring out a set of new technologies to utilize fiber that, you know, as paper declines.”

Other participants expressed concerns that not all youth will have the opportunity to partake in this economic growth. For example, one of the convers reported that a growing recognition that low-income young people who do not have the opportunity to complete post-secondary credentials stay in the community. She stated, “I think people are seeing the issue of the kids that are raised more in poverty or stressful situations are the ones that tend to stay in town because they don’t have the opportunity to go on to education, so they're the ones that go into the workforce.”

Another Core Team and Governance Council member also reported the growing importance of workforce development among the business sector. “I think employers have kind of stepped up to the plate and started voicing the importance of having a decent pool of people to hire.”
A convener reported that employers seek “soft-skills” in addition to the technical skills students gain in post-secondary education: “I think it starts to show, especially for the business community and what I hear from the business community is the difficulty in finding kids that have what they call a work ethic. Or soft skills.” Similarly, a member of the business community expressed the need for workers at the power plant with soft-skills, “I need people who show up for work on time and are prepared for work, are developing solutions, are honest and are ethical. Kind of the life skills you learned at home from mom and dad.” He reported an effort between employers and school districts to develop a “Successful Worker Job Description” with a group of business people and educators. These efforts represent recognition in the community that employers and schools need to work together to support the development of a high quality workforce.

In addition to working with the K-12 schools, participants reported connections between employers and the community college, including a special program for power plant workers. A Foundation staff member reported the key role the community college plays in providing a pathway for residents to obtain post-secondary education aligned with local labor needs:

So if you talk about maintaining and keeping talent here, I mean, that’s a – a critical pathway. And we have been blessed with good leadership at that community college who really works with employers in the area to make sure that their skills needs are being met by students who come out of the colleges either through – well, a lot of times through a specialized programming. But, yeah, you quickly come to learn that not all community colleges have leadership that that’s – that insightful and dedicated to serving the local economy.
While most participants framed economic needs in terms of human capital development, the CPS manager identified the need to bring new jobs to the area:

And I don't know that this committee is going to go into every household and say, come on, I'll help you get a job. I think the general premise of thought in the community needs to be, we need to look at poverty as a whole, not just, they're poor and just leave them be. We have to figure out how to bring more jobs into the community that are maybe, they don't require as many skills but they pay a living wage, so those families can kind of get out of that cycle of poverty.

This Core Team member also noted the scope of the challenge to end poverty, “I really feel like it's going to take a couple of generations. You know when you're coming from a family where two or three generations are living in one physical plant and being dependent on the system throughout the generations, it's hard to change that.”

**Social-emotional development.** Durand (2011) identified three discursive frames—social justice, organizational/educational, and economic—as the main language of state level P-16 policy. These three discourses existed among members of the Grand Isle Network. However, a fourth discourse sets the Network apart from these policies and other cradle-to-career initiatives: social-emotional development. Many participants spoke of the importance of social-emotional development as a driver for their work, with a particular focus on mental health and building social relationships in order to embed youth in the community.

Several community connectors noted that the student voice survey identified that youth do not feel connected to their community. Many identified this as an area discussed with the pockets of readiness. One of the community connectors who worked with the Grover Charter
School reported, “It was very clear to us that the disconnect with the community was a major concern and there was the conversation about boredom.”

The director of a faith-based youth program stated that the youth he worked with in the juvenile justice center and the drop-in center felt that there was nothing for young people to do in the community. He stated, “They’re not involved in a lot of things simply because of where they live and the level – economically, their parents are in, accessibility, travel becomes a problem. For some of these kids, there's nothing to do.” Similarly, a community connector and principal reported kids expressed, “You know, we’re not connected to the community. There aren’t things for – there aren’t things for us to do. You know, we’re not all in sports. We’re not all, you know, connected with those things.”

In addition to concerns over youth who are disconnected from the community, several participants expressed concerns about students under stress from being over committed. A Governance Council member who is the director of a faith-based youth group stated “Some kids have too much going on…between school and homework and many of them have jobs and then extra-curricular activities, they got so much going, they have a hard time fitting everything.”

Similarly, a community connector working with one of the youth pockets of readiness groups stated,

We can’t forget, too, though, that a lot of our kids that are that 16%, who are having mental health issues, a lot of those kids are our top kids and are involved in things. It’s not just our kids who aren’t connected. So how do you—again, what it is that’s causing them to not feel connected, even though that they are? Where on the roadmap is that missing?
In talking about one of the recent suicides, a Core Team member expressed a similar sentiment that young people who fit the typical ideas of success may be disconnected:

So what is success mean? I had somebody close to me whose child committed suicide and that child was a 4.0+, was the top of his class, was a three season letter winner, had his own business at 16, and killed himself. And there's no drugs, there's no girl issues, there's no nothing that they can pinpoint. And for all intents and purposes, he's successful. But we missed the boat somewhere. So, I'm wrestling with that internally. And kind of rethinking my thinking about what IS success?

Similarly, the principal of the Green Lake Junior/Senior High School reported, “We had the one attempt this fall with a ninth grade girl and she, you know, was well-known by kids and involved in activities and stuff.” The principal, along with another Core Team member, reported the wide impact among students and community members of these suicides and attempts. One Core Team member said “You have the one young person who even tried to commit suicide or [succeeded] and that impacted 20 people and that impacted 20 moms and 20 brothers and sisters and 20 grandparents and so by the time you're done, our community as a whole has been impacted somehow. Every single person here is so interconnected.”

Mental health concerns identified by Core Team members and other participants included the isolation of low-income youth and more middle class students who may have too much on their plates. One Governance Council member described this situation as “two streams.” The two-sided aspect of this problem, including both low income youth who are isolated and lack
connections and middle-class youth who are over-committed with activities reflects the deep socio-economic and cultural divides in the county.

A parent and Core Team member reported schools had limited capacity to help students and several school district employees reported the high student-counselor ration among schools in the county and state. One of the conveners identified mental health as an area the Network could provide support and framed social-emotional supports for young people as a means to improve academic performance:

“I also believe that the community engagement work that we're doing will help them support their kids in their schools so that they can focus more on those things. From what I hear from teachers, so much of their day with many of their kids gets to the social-emotional stuff their missing. So the extent to which we can better engage the whole community to address those issues alongside with them, I think will allow them to do more of the focus on the academic. I also know that the teachers want desperately, many of them, to be able to provide those supports for those kids. And they take a lot of that home with them. And so that having another partner in the community that can help carry some of that burden is one of the goals that I have for the initiative. So we're not ignoring the academic because we do think that what we're doing is going to help.

The social-emotional framing among Network members appears two-fold. First, concerns over students self-reported lack of opportunities to be connected to the community and to have productive things to do. The frame expressed concerns over the mental health of these students who are disconnected, as well as those who may experience pressure to be involved in many activities and to be successful. This social-emotional framing appears to be unique among cradle
to career networks as many identify the need for mental health and other services to bolster academic achievement. For many in the Grand Isle Network, the development of civic-minded young people with strong connections to their community and positive relationships stands as a priority in and of itself.

**Issue Framing Summary**

Multi-sector coalitions and partnerships develop in turbulent environments (Bryson et al., 2006). They often develop as response to the demands of complex social problems (Trist, 1983) that individual organizations or sectors cannot solve alone (Bryson, et al., 2006). Such multi-sector coalitions and partnerships seek to improve outcomes at the community level (Roussos, & Fawcett, 2000). To do so, members from across sectors must develop a common understanding of local needs and the development of a shared agenda (Kania & Kramer, 2011). This proceeds through collective cognition (Stone et al., 2001). These activities proceed through three key stages, diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing activities (Benford & Snow, 2000). These frames have four dimensions: context, complexity, elaboration, and appropriateness (Stone et al, 2001).

While framing processes appear linear within the social movement issue framing literature (Benford & Snow, 2000), these processes occurred in an iterative manner in the Grand Isle Network. They began with large community gatherings and moved to on-going conversations among the Network leadership. Additionally, feedback from the community was sought, as well as identification of more concrete issues from the student survey data. The Governance Council also revisited the framing, with a particular focus on the motivational framing that would recruit community members to the vision.
Throughout these framing activities, the identification of problems and solutions also proceeded iteratively. There was continued attention to refine the frames and to identify what is possible and desirable. This on-going process required consensus building, particularly around contentious, value-laden topics such as K-12 achievement and post-secondary education. In addition to group efforts to develop collective cognition (Stone et al., 2001), one-on-one conversations appear to have facilitated the sharing of issue frames more broadly.

The literature on collective impact identifies the importance of the backbone organization staff (Kania & Kramer, 2013) and McGrath and colleagues (2005) identified the importance of boundary spanning leaders. However, neither identifies the key roles such individuals play in facilitating the conversations that contribute to collective cognition.

In the Grand Isle Network, several individuals served roles as facilitators of the issue framing processes. The conveners facilitated meetings of the Core Team and Governance Council in order to elicit ideas and lead dialogue. Core Team members and community connectors received training in these facilitation methods engaged in similar work with community members at the data gathering and within the pockets of readiness. The communications professional at the Foundation and the communications subcommittee brought multiple strands of internal and external framing together to feedback to the Governance Council for final decision-making. Decision-making, even on contentious issues, proceeded through the use of consensus building activities facilitated by the conveners.

Lastly, as the network moved towards action using the student survey data, Network participants appeared to redouble their efforts on motivational framing in order to generate interest and momentum around Network goals. Participants paired urgency with hope in their
emotional messages at the student data gathering. More recently, the Network released its new colorful logo, a catchy name, and a short slogan.

Stone and colleagues (2001) identified four dimensions of issue framing: content, complexity, elaboration, and appropriateness. Among Network members, there was fairly high agreement on the issues with four main discourses: social justice, education, economics, and social-emotional development. The first three of these themes align with the policy discourses identified by Durand (2011), possibly reflecting national discourses on cradle-to-career networks. However, the fourth frame on social-emotional development and connections to the community appear unique to the Grand Isle Network. Many participants identified this frame as one on which the Network could and should act. In this way, participants scaled their goals towards an area in which they felt the complexity and appropriateness of the solution matched their abilities to act.

The implications of this finding are twofold. First, participants identified the challenges of poverty, transportation, and state education policy as too big for the Network to tackle. However, many expressed that social-emotional development and creating connections between youth and community members were areas in which the Network could have an impact. Part of prognostic framing is identifying an area in which the social movement can create change. Therefore, this finding suggests that Network members chose to focus on social-emotional frames because they felt a greater sense of efficacy in this area.

Secondly, this frame reflects the unique needs of their rural community. A long history of suicides by young people with a recent spike in attempts suggests unique social-emotional challenges for young people. Participants reported two types, those who felt disconnected from the community and those who felt overwhelmed by pressure in school and outside activities.
This two-sided issue appears to reflect the duality of the county as a whole. In addition, participants spoke of the need to connect youth to the community not only for the good of youth, but also the good of the community.

**Discussion of Issue Framing**

**Civic level.** As described above, Stone and colleagues (2001) identified the need for a common understanding of problems, or issue frames, in order to move from civic mobilization to civic capacity for change. However, they noted that even where strong agreement exists about the problem space, garnering consensus for solutions remains challenging (Stone et al., 2001).

Although high levels of agreement on framing content was noted among participants, several reported in the broader community issues of social justice did not strike a chord. Participants reported community elites in particular did not connect with poverty as an issue as they do not encounter it on a daily basis. Additionally, there appeared to be disagreement on the extent to which there are problems in the schools. Parents whose children experienced problems were more apt to identify schools as a target for change. Notably, both low-income parents and community elites appear to be underrepresented among Network members.

Secondly, the degree of problem complexity appears to differ by the different issues identified. For example, K-12 education presents a more complex and difficult nut to crack. Participants identified many of the problems in education as beyond local control. Similarly, participants identified poverty and transportation as complex problems beyond the scope of the Network. However, afterschool programs run by local organizations presented a less complex area in which the Network could act. Participants identified the need to increase both quality and access to these programs, as well as increase cooperation between providers. Participants tended
to identify this as an area with relatively straightforward solutions that could be undertaken at the local level.

Agreement on both content and complexity among Network members reflects the efforts of the conveners and other boundary spanning leaders to develop issue frames at multiple levels. Stone and colleagues (2001) suggest that development of such collective cognition proceeds through “dynamic deliberation” (Stone et al., 2001, p. 157). The community gatherings, Core Team deliberations on the roadmap, and the student survey gathering represents efforts to engage both the broader community and the Network leaders in such dynamic deliberations. Such deliberate actions, Stone and colleagues (2001), suggest stand in contrast to the passive nature of social capital.

Yet questions remain as to how collective cognition can be created through dynamic deliberation in the absence of shared values or trust. Particularly, participants highlighted the role of trust in working through contentious issues and the conveners’ commitment to hearing all voices in moving towards consensus as building trust.

**Organizational level.** At the level of organizational partnerships, Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified initial agreement on issues by one or more of the linking organizations. The initial impetus for the development of the Grand Isle Network, as described in chapter five, was a shared concern about educational outcomes on the part of the GISC superintendents and the Grand Isle Foundation. However, the Network further developed agreement on educational outcomes as an area of concern through a series of public dialogues and conversations among leadership.

Bryson and colleagues (2006) also identified the importance of managing conflict. In particular, the development of consensus in the creation of the roadmap and the four issue frames
identified by network members reflects the result of conflict management on the part of the conveners. They reported using consensus-building techniques with the Core Team, as well as engaging in one-on-one conversations with individuals to gain acceptance, if not agreement, of the roadmap. Similarly, Bryson and colleagues (2006) noted the importance of on-going activities to develop trust. The conveners in particular have engaged in trust building activities, such as attention to individuals and developing shared norms for conversations.

However, participants reported that this work took a long time, causing some members to disengage. This suggests a need to balance trust building with engaging in small wins that promote motivation and a sense of efficacy among the Network members.

**Community level.** The social movement issue framing literature identifies key framing tasks that must be accomplished to develop shared ways of interpreting events and shared understanding of problems. These framing activities include the development of diagnostic frames and prognostic frames that identify problems and solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000). Among participants, a high level of agreement emerged around four local issues: social justice, education, economics, and social-emotional development. These diagnostic frames appear to have been developed through on-going, facilitated conversations between Core Team members, Governance Council members and larger groups of community members. Participants offered less clarity on the prognostic frames, or solutions. However, the pockets of readiness served to generate solutions within each school district.

A third framing task, motivational framing, serves as a call to arms to mobilize individuals to a cause. Here, Benford and Snow (2000) identify the importance of slogans and logos to catch attention and quickly communicate the social movement’s aims. The Grand Isle Network members found that attempting to create momentum and mobilize community members
to the cause was hindered by a clunky name and a complicated roadmap. Efforts to rebrand the Network served to finalize the motivational framing that began during the student data gathering.

In addition to the overall framing activities that accompanied the development of the Grand Isle Network, individual pockets of readiness engaged in issue framing in order to develop local solutions. This framing work centered largely on the student survey data and the experience of youth who participated in the various pockets of readiness. However, rather than broad issue frames, these groups engaged in more concrete problem identification and action planning.

**Espoused and Emergent Theory of Change**

The proceeding sections outline the processes and content of problem identification among Network members. Network participants identified four key problem areas, or frames: poverty/access, Pre-K and K-12 education, post-secondary education for workforce development, and social-emotional development and community connections. The remainder of this chapter describes how participants envision the goals of the Network and the means to meet them. The resulting analysis contributed to the creation of a logic model representing participants’ espoused theory of change.

Theories of action describe the intent of an organization to reach their stated goals (Schön & McDonald, 1998). Such theories of action, or theories of change, may manifest in formal plans. These plans often take the form of a logic model, which identifies key steps within particular domains to reach proximal and distal outcomes.

However, individuals also have espoused theories of action. Espoused theories of action are essentially the beliefs, attitudes, and values that guide individuals’ actions (Argyris, 1995). In collecting and compiling these espoused theories of action across participants, an emergent theory of change was developed. The use of such an emergent theory of change is warranted in
this analysis as the draft theory of change, found in Appendix D, does not appear to have been widely distributed. Additionally, participants’ reported that the Network had only just reached the point of action between November 2014 and June 2015, an analysis.

In addition to the logic model, this section provides a discussion of the major themes that arose across participants. While not all participants agreed on how the Network would meet its goals, several themes emerged. These themes included processes to overcome geographic and socio-economic diversity, the importance of communication, the emphasis on increasing community connections and access to afterschool programs over school reform, and the use of youth voice in developing solutions.

**Grand Isle Network’s espoused theory of change.** Analysis of interview and focus group data and documents led to the development of a preliminary theory of change diagram below. This diagram differs significantly from the STRIVE theory of action. The STRIVE theory of action operates largely at the level of depicting the creation of a cradle-to-career network creates system change, but without identifying what changes should be made. Those decisions are left to local partnership councils, based on their data. However, this creates something of a black box as to how partnership council members and community action groups use data to enact change in partner organizations. The Grand Isle Network’s emergent theory of change offers some preliminary insight into those connections. Most important among these is the role of communication between different levels of the Network, as well as with community members more broadly.
Figure 4. Emergent Theory of Change

This emergent theory of change, illustrated in figure 4 above, shows a number of similarities with the draft theory of change provided by one of the conveners. Both show the multi-sector governance council at the top, engaging in two-way relationships. However, the emergent theory of change derived from participants’ statements reflects several areas of difference between how participants think about the Network’s efforts and the formal diagram.

For example, in the emergent theory, participants more explicitly identified the role governance council in setting direction for the Network and serving as an umbrella for the work happening at subsequent levels. In the emergent theory of change diagram the community action groups, also referred to by participants as pockets of readiness, align with the grassroots action in
the Network’s TOC draft. Both depictions highlight connections between these individual groups, referred. The draft TOC identifies these connections as NICs, or Networked Improvement communities. In both the draft TOC and the emergent theory of a change, youth play an important role through the contribution of their voice and leadership.

Key differences between the TOC draft and the emergent theory of change include the identification of local needs using data, particularly the student voice survey. Additionally, the TOC draft does not explicitly identify the role developmental evaluation and feedback from the Quest Group. The role of communication appeared more heavily in the emergent theory of change than in the formal TOC document. Communications, including the formal communications subcommittee, but also the work of individuals, connects levels of the work and links the community action groups.

Furthermore, the emergent theory of change diagram identifies the intermediate indicators identified as important by participants and the two long-term outcomes most often identified: workforce development and connections to the community. These outcomes differ somewhat from those outlined in the roadmap in that they focus on community level outcomes, rather than individual student outcomes. Participants identified wanting young people to be successful, but also to stay in the community. One in particular identified the need to develop viable pathways for young people to develop the skills needed by local employers and others identified the importance of vocational education aligned to local industries.

Two other aspects of the emergent theory of change stand out because they reveal the unique composition and issue framing of this rural network. First, like the draft Theory of Change document, the emergent theory of change emphasizes efforts within individual communities. Secondly, and significantly for a cradle-to-career network, both the draft TOC and
the emergent theory of change lack focus on educational achievement or schools as a target for change. Similarly, the emergent theory of change largely focuses on 7th through 12th graders in the use of data, the identification of intermediary goals, and in the development of community action groups tied to several of the high schools.

**Intermediate goals.** Intermediary goals identify several pathways through which the larger community goals of workforce development and community connects can be created. Intermediary goals aligned with workforce development included completion of education after high school. Participants broadly defined this as any certification program, vocational education, or two-year or four-year degree. Participants also highlighted the need to provide students with soft-skills, such as teamwork and responsibility. These skills were seen as complementing those developed through post-secondary education in the creation of a strong workforce. Many participants highlighted out of school time and after school programs as places where such skills are developed.

The second set of goals addresses community connections. In addition to developing soft-skills, participants reported out of school time programs provided ways for youth to connect to their community. Others highlighted the importance of mental health and ensuring youth have positive connections. Many stated this need in conjunction with the recent suicides noted previously. In addition to positive connections to the community, participants identified the need for students to have relationships with adults in their community. The principal at Green Lake Junior/Senior High School noted in particular that bringing adults into the school as greeters could serve as a mechanism to build respect on both sides.

After school programs appeared to straddle these two intermediate goal areas. Participants viewed after school programs, and more broadly all out of school time programs and
activities for youth, as opportunities to build soft skills and relationships with adults. The focus of many participants on this area as one for action reflects the issue framing described earlier in this chapter. Participants identified after school programs as an area with relatively low complexity. They also identified after school programs as an area in which they could more easily enact change.

In terms of meeting these intermediate goals, participants pointed to the pockets of readiness as groups that would engage in action planning in these areas. A further discussion of the pockets of readiness and participants’ understandings their role in creating change follows.

**Overcoming geography through a decentralized theory of change.** In particular, the two Network conveners and Foundation staff talked about using community organizing strategies to leverage relationships as a way to adapt the STRIVE model for a rural context. They noted the lack of significant financial resources and CEO level leaders, but reported the strength of relationships as a key asset. The use of a bottoms-up strategy of developing community action groups, or pockets of readiness, reflects this community development approach. Participants reported these pockets of readiness, which existed prior to the Network or in some cases mobilized through Network efforts, would create action plans from their disaggregated student survey data. This structure results in a decentralized theory of change, or theory of change, with efforts aligning to the roadmap driven by individual communities.

For example, one participant reported there is often a sense that in Winslow, “Big River doesn’t care about us.” Several other participants reported tensions during the pilot of the student survey data and action planning strategies in the Elk River-Hawk Falls School district. Core Team members led these sessions, but were not necessarily members of the community in which they did so. One of the conveners reported:
One of the things we learned through the pilot data...there was a lot of suspicion that came with that. What are you trying to do here? I think there’s been enough top-down done here in the communities that there was a lot of suspicion and some resistance.

She continued noting this realization shifted to a model that allowed groups in individual communities to action plan and that the Network took on a role of providing data and skilled facilitation, in the form of the community connectors.

Although not explicitly stated, this approach appears to balance the need for a shared issue frame and the need to get to action. The large geographic space characterized by significant socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity appears to have challenged the development of a shared regional level issue frame. The community level approach allows each group to use data to identify local challenges and develop local solutions. Similarly, this approach may provide individual communities with a sense of ownership, in particular as number of participants noted that members of some of the outlying communities typically felt that Foundation efforts focused heavily on Big River and didn’t apply to them.

**Building connections across geography.** Although the espoused theory of change prioritizes action planning at the community level, several participants identified the importance of opportunities to connect across these groups. The region-wide gatherings, including the data release, represented important opportunities for individuals across the different communities.

One Core Team member who lives and works in Winslow stated:

One of the things I really appreciated about the November convening is that it have a lot of people the opportunity to realize this is not just a Big River issue or a Green Lake issue or a Winslow issue, its Grand Isle...the kids were recognizing
that they were lacking the same things in Winslow as they were in green Lake and Big River. I felt like the kids, just making that connection that the world is bigger than Winslow.

He continued stating the people’s perceptions of the communities as different is “not reality” and “a lot of those perceptions were cleared up at something like [the gathering] where everyone comes together in the same room…we do all have to work together and get rid of those perceptions.” Alluding to the high school sports team rivals, he summarized, “It’s not the Hawks vs. the Chiefs-- we’re the Grand Isle area.”

In addition to large community gatherings as a way to provide connections across the communities, conveners and the evaluator spoke of creating Networked Improvement Communities. The concept of a Networked Improvement Community comes out of the work of Bryk and colleagues (2015) and describes networks of similar organizations that engage in continuous improvement efforts together, accelerating learning. Conveners described this model as contributing to the Network’s ability to share what’s working across communities. In addition, they identified “link and learn” sessions for members of the pockets of readiness to come together and share. One of the conveners reported:

We know these communities can’t just plan in isolation, because there are going to be some common issues that are regional, so we will connect these communities once or twice a year. Take the leaders of each of these pockets and put them in what we’re calling ‘Link and Learn’ sessions, where they can get together and talk about what they’ve learned, talk about what they’re working on and then identify if there’s a regional issue that we really need somebody to dig in and help us figure it out. And if there’s a regional issue that comes up, we’ll
convene a regional group that works across both regionally and locally… in a continuous improvement model.

In June, the evaluator introduced the concept of “link and learn” sessions that would bring together pockets of readiness to learn from one another. The focus groups held in June represent the first of these meetings. While some focus groups engaged individuals from the same pocket in order to develop a clear picture of activities within each of these communities, others engaged individuals from across communities. For example, one focus group drew participants from both Green Lake and Deer River. The first formal ‘link and learn’ session were scheduled for February 2016. This session began with a presentation by the evaluator on the findings from the June visit.

However, participants in the focus groups identified the need to increase the informal opportunities to come together at backyard BBQ’s and over “hot dish” to talk about the work and share ideas. One Core Team member and community connector identified such informal settings as a way for people to connect around the work: “People can have these conversations in backyards, that’s where the best conversations happen.” Another Core Team member and community connector agreed, “If you’re having a conversation in your backyard over a hot dish, how can you get upset? You can’t! You can talk about things.”

“Communication is the work.” The need for such informal opportunities to discuss the work across parts of the network underscored what one convener described as “communication not just about the work, but communication is the work.” People perceived communication in both formal and informal capacities as an important driver of the work, serving to bring new individuals into the network, to develop shared understandings, and ultimately to contribute to the development of action aligned to the roadmap.
In addition to community connectors who identified the role of informal gatherings to communicate about the work, several participants identified the importance of sharing the roadmap with their professional and social circles. One member of the Core Team and governance council who works in a public service agency noted the need to spread the message of the roadmap within her organization: “right now [our job] is to engage others and tell others about our story and talk to our populations that we work with.”

This work also proceeded more informally through individual’s social circles. One Core Team member and community connector said, “I think we need to go out and have more conversations… I think we need to reach out, whether it’s one-on-one, one-on-two or one-on-six, I think we need to have the basic conversation, ‘This is what student success is, [this is what the Network is], this is where we’re at, this is what we want to accomplish, this is where we need your help.” Another reported bringing the message to his Rotary Club, as well as its student group. A foundation staff member and sports coach in Big River reported, “My peers don’t know…they know something is going on in the community, but they don’t have the words to put to it.” She continued, “I have taken it upon myself, in my own spheres of influence, to bring the data to people…So, I’ve just on my own behalf, started showing up at places and bringing data.” She then provided an example of bringing the data to the Big River Basketball association and building a connection to those coaches around the field house proposal, noting the need to build bridges between different groups: “You need to connect to others who are having a similar conversation.”

Similarly, communication within personal networks led to the development of the Grover pocket of readiness. One member who works as a special educator across the GISC schools, brought the student survey report to her faith community. Participants described how the
conversations about the survey and their concerns inspired two individuals to use their personal relationships to connect with students at the Grover Charter School. This led to members of the faith community working with students at Grover to discuss students’ concerns in the areas of the survey. Together, these informal, personal communications illustrate the statement of one of the Foundation staff members that “change follows relationships,” and contribute to the role of communication in the espoused theory of change.

More formally, the communications subcommittee appears to have been the only committee of the Core Team that survived the transition to the new leadership structure. These individuals identified a series of actions and goals they see as integral to advancing the Network’s efforts. First, the communications subcommittee contracted with a branding agency to conduct focus groups around the roadmap in order to get a sense of how individuals across the communities connect with the Network. This work directly connected to rebranding efforts, including choosing a new name and developing brief vision and mission statements to more readily communicate about the Network than the roadmap, which many found cumbersome. The subcommittee also talked about working to get a grant to hire a company to redesign the website, as well as looking to shift the content from amplifying national reports on collective impact to reporting on efforts in the local communities.

Limited educational influence. The literature on urban regimes and community organizing suggest that the limited mobilization of parents and educators in the Grand Isle Network may limit the ability to influence change within schools. Although the roadmap includes three areas of educational attainment, readiness for kindergarten, grade level mastery, and post-secondary completion, many noted that the Network was not targeting schools for change efforts. Several noted the burdens of accountability placed on teachers and not wanting to
add to teachers’ plates. One Governance council member emphasized not wanting to add more to school employees that are “maxed out.”

Similarly, Stone and colleagues (2001) noted the framing of issues limits potential solutions. Consistent with the framing of the importance of social-emotional development among participants, several participants reported that providing increased support for mental health and relationships for youth would lead to improved school outcomes. This view appears to reflect the efforts not to blame schools, but rather to take a more holistic approach to student success.

Such framing appears to have created trust that allowed school districts to join the efforts. One of the high school principals reported that they had to overcome negative perceptions on the part of the community, but that trust building began when “the school district sees that these people aren’t attacking us, and that they really truly want to help.” However, the inability to identify problems within schools due to the need to maintain this trust, limits potential solutions to those outside of schools.

Similarly, one of the conveners reported that rather than focusing on academics directly, they sought an alternative path to academic achievement, focusing students’ social-emotional development. She stated, “From what I hear from teachers, so much of their say with so many of their kids gets to the social-emotional stuff their missing. So to the extent to which we can better engage the whole community to address those issues alongside [teachers], I think it will allow them to focus more on the academics. She continued, “Teachers want desperately, many of them, to provide those supports for kids. And they take a lot of that home with them. Having another partner in the community that can help carry that burden is one of the goals I have for the initiative.” She also stated, “I have resisted saying there’s a direct line between ‘we do this and it’s going to move the needle on [assessments]. But then, at the same time, I do know that kids
that have the social-emotional supports we’ve laid out in the roadmap are more likely to better.”

One of the Governance Council members and superintendents concurred, “I think that if our kids’ social-emotional needs were being met, the academic part would take care of itself.” He continued, “The teachers are really good, they’re working really hard, but if they had kids that were ready and able to learn and came to school without baggage… I’m confident they could learn what they need to learn and do great on any kind of assessment.”

Reflecting the focus on social-emotional development, many participants talked about the need to build relationships between youth and community members, as well as the need to increase access to quality out of school time activities. One convener said, “Our afterschool system is pretty non-existent. There’s a lot of individual programs doing one day a week after school, nut there’s not a really robust system in place.” A commutations committee member who works in community education stated, my “vision is to have a five day a week after school program in all the schools and have these programs collaborate together and work together so we have a seamless afterschool program.” A Core Team member and community connector emphasized the need to increase afterschool opportunities and reported working with a Boys and Girls club in the nearest city to bring one into Big River. He reported trying to ensure that within conversations about quality sports programs that “we actually affect the access to sports programing.” To this end, the Grand Isle Network for Youth began in 2012 to bring together aft-school providers to engage in collaboration, including a recent quality assessment conducted by six of the partner organizations.

Youth voice. The parent who represents the Native American community on the Governance Council reported advocating young people in her role as Network leader. She stated, “And so it’s important for me to keep that in mind especially when I’m sitting on the
Governance Council, paying attention to that because if you’re going to be a voice for those little kids that can’t tell you, you know, anything, then it’s important to pay attention to that.” She also stated she advocated for the inclusion of youth voice in the work:

I tried to tell them, well, let’s talk to the kids because it’s a bunch of adults making the decisions for these kids that we think we know, you know. In my culture where I was taught that – listen to those young – listen to the young people, especially those little bitty tiny kids because they’re so new from the creator that they know things. And so I mean, even teenage, they’re so open and they’re so straightforward. And they’re so truth-speaking that it’s huge to listen to them.

Finally, participants’ identifying the importance of incorporating youth voice and leadership in the Network’s efforts represents one of the most unique characteristics of the espoused theory of change. One Core Team member stated, “You know what I like about this whole project is that they’re listening to the kids.” Several participants talked about the importance of students developing solutions and the community’s responsibility to help put those solutions in place. The Boys and Girls director reported wanting to let students decide what activities to do and adults find ways to pay for it. He continued with a laugh, “I think adults, educators in particular, get the idea that I’m the smart one, and I know what you need… But I feel like we’re at a level now where we’re able to set aside our egos and say, tell us what you want.”

The need for student voice was manifest in three areas: the student voice survey, the data gathering, and in the pockets of readiness. Rather than using state assessment data for the baseline data report to the community, the Core Team, the indicator subcommittee, and the Quest
Group developed a survey for youth in grades 7-12. This survey drew on the Quest Groups previous youth development survey and aligned with the elements of the roadmap. Additionally, youth took part in the release of this data. Several school leaders brought student groups to the gathering and others came with Core Team members. They participated throughout the meeting in the table discussions, Twitter feed, and sharing out with the entire group what they’d talked about at their tables.

Lastly, the pockets of readiness groups in Grover, Winslow, Green Lake, and Big River revolve directly around student voice. While each group came together differently, all prioritized hearing from students. At Grover, community connectors described setting up the conversation space so that the students sat in an inner circle and the adults sat around the outside, in order to make clear whose voices were the most important.

At Winslow, several students worked with the conveners and community connectors to determine which elements of the survey and roadmap to focus on with the bigger group. One of the community connectors and Boys and Girls Club director in Winslow reported working to ensure this group had representation from those beyond the usual suspects such as the team captains and student government.

At Green Lake, one of the student groups derived from the interest of a student in addressing bullying and suicide in the high school, with the support of the school counselor and principal. The Americorps volunteer and community connector also reported doing work in these communities in order to find adults who would support the students and help advocate on their behalf in order to move the students’ plans forward. At Green Lake and Winslow, students took part in presenting their plans to the school boards for approval.

**Discussion of Emergent Theory of Change**
Civic level. Benford and Snow (2000) identified that the development of the initial
diagnostic framing limits subsequent prognostic framing efforts due to the need to match
problems to solutions. Additionally, the scope and scale of the efforts require matching the
Network’s sense of efficacy with potential solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000; McGrath et al.,
2005). These efforts to move from problem to solution describe the development of a theory of
change that outlines how groups intend to meet their goals.

Stone and colleagues (2001) identified two types of frame specifications that align with the
development of a theory of change. First, they used elaboration to describe participants
understanding of local needs. They cited the importance of deep understanding of local needs
over the use of reform buzzwords (Stone et al., 2001).

In the Grand Isle Network, participants identified local needs, such as poverty,
transportation, and youth development. However, many lacked clarity on the specifics,
identifying the roadmap as the vision. Participants also described the roadmap as “aspirational.”
When asked how they were meeting their goals many responded, “we’re not there yet.”

However, with the release of the student data and the mobilization of pockets of
readiness to work on issues in each school district, there appeared to be a shift towards greater
specification of issues and elaboration of local needs. Notably, participants did not just rely on
the buzzword language of STRIVE or its roadmaps to describe their efforts. In particular, the
conveners and Foundation staff took care to differentiate their efforts from STRIVE. They noted
a shift away from the use of state assessments to measure academic achievement and the
development of a student survey specifically aligned to their roadmap. This survey included
many aspects of positive youth development in and especially outside of school.
Secondly, Stone and colleagues (2001) used appropriateness to describe the fit between the problem as identified by participants and the potential solutions offered. Stone and colleagues (2001) found that most solutions offered relied on existing conceptions of school reform and incremental change strategies. To the extent that academic issues were identified, participants tended to focus on providing students connections, support, and experiences outside of school. One convener reported this would also have an impact on educational outcomes, but was not the main goal. The full extent of elaboration at this stage remains unclear as the pockets of readiness who will be carrying out change had only just begun their work. Similarly, the shift to the Governance Council appeared to create some instability in the understanding of how the effort would get to outcomes.

In addition to describing potential solutions, Stone and colleagues (2001) also looked at policy impacts at the district level. They found a correlation between more highly mobilized cities and educational policy effort, as measured through the use of local taxes for education and a variety of school reform efforts. However, they provide limited insight into how mobilization translates into changes at the organizational level that serve to meet shared goals (Stone et al, 2001).

**Organizational level.** Similarly, the STRIVE and collective impact literature highlights continuous improvement practices using local data (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014; Kania & Kramer, 2011), but do not identify pathways to meeting goals. The emergent theory of action described above provides insight into how Network members at multiple levels envision change to support their key overall goals of developing workforce and the connections of youth to the community. This last goal aligns with rural scholars’ calls for place-based educational opportunities that attend to both civic and social aspects in order to embed youth in their local
communities (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008; Howley, 1991). While the expansion of the Boys and Girls Club in Big River and a partnership with BRBA pointed to an area of partnership and collaboration, participants offered few examples of how the Network would support such efforts beyond the three collaboratives already in place (i.e., GISC, GINY, and the Early Childhood Program).

However, a Foundation staff member reported that the Foundation’s role as the backbone organization has changed the way the organization works. He reported that Foundation staff engaged in an exercise to identify with colored sticky notes where their organizational roles and personal roles in the community align to the roadmap. This created a visualization of how all the staff efforts align with the roadmap. He reported that that people in the organization now work across different departments to better coordinate their work. He also noted that grants officers now look for alignment to the roadmap in their funding decisions.

**Community level.** Participants’ emphasis on not only using youth voice to drive change, but also engaging youth in the change process, further underscores this connection to community. Although few participants explicitly stated such opportunities for youth as a means to engage in leadership or other skill development, the inclusion of youth in the pockets of readiness suggests both a means to engage youth and to develop civic and social skills Network members identified as important.

Lastly, both the composition of the Network and the issue frames identified by participants appear to have contributed to the development of the theory of change. Shipps (2003) in particular highlighted the need for parents and teachers to mobilize for performance regimes that prioritize the pedagogical, curricular, and school climate changes that support the achievement of low-income and minority students.
However, the Grand Isle Network overall has mobilized few teachers and few low-income parents, suggesting changes at the school level may not be part of the overall plan. Similarly, in terms of issue framing, participants more often located the needs outside of schools and some noted that overall care was taken not to blame the schools. Together, this may explain the emphasis on out of school time programs in both workforce development and community connection capacities. The dynamic interplay of mobilization, issue framing, and emergent theory of change development will be explored further in the final chapter.

**Conclusion.** This chapter identified the main findings for the second two, related, research questions on issue framing and theory of change. Issue framing proceeded iteratively, moving through various configurations of community members and Network leaderships. These framing activities were initially facilitated by the Network conveners and other Foundation Staff, and later by the community connectors. These conversations served to diagnosis local problems and identify those that the Network could act on, as well as generating potential solutions. These potential solutions fed into participants understanding of the emergent theory of change.

Although these processes appear to have contributed to a high level of agreement in the content of issue frames, participants identified that the Network could only act on some of these issues. Notably, poverty and transportation were seen as being too large for the Network to tackle. Additionally, the challenges associated with K-12 schools were often identified by participants as located outside the realm of local control. This left two of the four issue frames as targets for action: economics and social emotional development. These two issue frames generated several prognostic frames which server as the intermediate goals for the Network. These areas are identified in the theory of change diagram: post-secondary completion,
developing soft skills among youth, building relationships, and mental health provision. Out-of-school time programs were seen as a leverage point to create change in these four areas.

CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS & LIMITATIONS

This case study set out to explore the progressive development and mobilization of a rural cradle-to-career network for collective impact. For rural communities, cradle-to-career networks provide an alternative model to traditional school reform efforts to reverse brain drain. They do so through the development of a workforce aligned to local needs and by attending to the social and civic structures that support youth staying in their communities.

Rural areas present unique challenges to the mobilization and issue framing required to develop a network. These challenges include economic, civic, educational, and social geographic configurations that are markedly different from urban locales. This is particularly problematic cradle-to-career models developed in urban areas have spread to rural areas. To the extent urban models are transported automatically, potential threats arise for rural communities. Similarly, the human capital discourses that accompany these models may be out of synch with the needs of rural communities and their economies. Relying on such urban-centric national discourses risks increasing the number of youth with skills and ambitions matched to urban economies as opposed to the needs of the local labor market.

The interests of advocates for particular models such as STRIVE and Ready by 21 also need to be examined critically. Mindful that these advocates appear to be intent on scaling up their models across the nation, caution is recommended when and how these models are implemented in rural and other non-urban contexts. As these models gain prominence on a national and international stage, this study makes a timely contribution to the literature by
providing a detailed case study of a rural, cradle-to-career network. This final chapter provides a discussion of the findings structured by each of the three research questions:

1) How do community and organization members mobilize in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

2) How do community and organization members frame issues in the development of a rural cradle-to-career network?

3) What are the characteristics of the theory of change? How do mobilization and issue framing contribute to this theory of change?

In addition to summarizing the findings in each of these areas, this chapter presents five additional findings, all of which cut across the three research questions. These findings pertain to: 1) the dynamic nature of civic capacity; 2) the role of trust; 3) the importance of the legitimacy of the backbone organization; 4) the need to adapt the network to a local context and social geography; and 5) the need to develop a variety of leaders for layered network structures.

Following the discussion of these findings, this chapter offers conclusions, limitations and areas for future research. Implications for community leaders and policy-makers also are outlined.

**Summary Findings**

**Mobilization.** Throughout the literature reviewed in chapter 2, the importance of mobilizing “the right mix of the right stakeholders” (Lawson, 2004) emerged as a major theme. The civic capacity (Stone et al., 2001) and cradle-to-career literatures (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014) emphasize the importance of mobilizing CEO level leaders in coalitions. However, rural contexts require a more flexible approach to determining who the right stakeholders. Similarly, the right mix of the right stakeholders appears to change as a network evolves.
The findings of this study reiterate the importance of mapping the educational terrain (McGrath et al., 2005) in the development of a cradle-to-career network. In addition, the economic, educational, social, and geographic challenges presented by rural communities suggest the need for additional mapping efforts. These mapping efforts include the social terrain, including both personal and professional networks. Significantly, this study suggests the need to map the geographic terrain in order to understand the spatial components to social, economic, and educational challenges. For rural areas in particular, this type of mapping may be key to creating a network that can mobilize members from across communities.

**Leveraging social capital.** The literature on civic capacity frames social capital as a passive characteristic of relationships (Stone et al., 2001). Stone and colleagues (2001) suggest civic capacity as a more active quality. Rather than relying solely on social relationships, civic capacity is created through “collective cognition.” This collective cognition develops through the use of deliberate and dynamic processes that occur in civic settings.

In contrast to this dominant view, the findings of this study suggest that at least in rural areas, social capital can be strategically leveraged, or activated, as a resource to bring people together and develop shared understandings. The development of shared understandings is supported by shared values and beliefs about the importance of youth and community. Trust further facilitates mobilization.

The activation of social capital was evident at all three levels of the network. At the level of civic engagement, participants reported drawing out social networks to identify members for the Governance Council. At the level of bringing together organizational partners, the sense that people came together for the right reasons appeared to facilitate the development of trust. In bringing together community members for the student data gathering, Core Team members
reported inviting people in their networks to attend. Lastly, conveners worked to identify existing

groups at the district level to engage as pockets of readiness at the district level.

Where pre-existing groups were absent, the conveners and community connectors
worked to develop new relationships. Conveners and community connectors also harnessed new
relationships that developed in relationship to the work. These included the pocket of readiness
at the Grover Charter School, which formed out of faith-based and family relationships, as well
as the sports gathering which developed out of new relationships formed at the data gathering.
Leveraging emerging networks reflected what one Foundation staff member reported as a
strategy to “follow the energy.”

**Community Organizing.** Where relationships, effective communications, and trust were
absent, mobilization appeared to run into roadblocks. This suggested the need for alternative
strategies to reach missing stakeholder groups, including low-income parents, outlying mining
community members, the Native American community, and teachers.

Ishimaru’s (2014a) research suggests that community-organizing strategies can be used to
build social capital within these groups in order to provide a foundation from which to engage
with institutions that typically have more power. Similarly, she suggests that school districts, or
in this case, the Network, needs to engage strategically in building linking relationships with
these groups. According to Ishimaru (2014b) school building leaders have pivotal roles to play in
engaging in community organizing activities to support change inside schools. However, while
principals mobilized as part of the Core Team, there were suggestions that this key stakeholder
group was not effectively engaged in creating connections to teachers or parents.

Such efforts may require organizers to help community members identify common issues
and recognize their self-interest in the work. More importantly, such community organizing
strategies include building the capacity of community members to engage in issue identification, research, and negotiation with public officials (Warren et al. 2011). Although Foundation staff in particular identified the importance of community organizing strategies in their work, the large geographic scale and complex social geography presented barriers.

This challenge suggests the need for a larger number of community organizers to spread out across the various communities. Additionally, the comments suggest the need to develop these community organizers within each community in order to build on existing relationships and trust.

**Leading from the middle.** While the community organizing literature focuses on grassroots community organizing, much of the literature on collective impact and STRIVE identify the need to mobilize top-level leaders. Fullan (1993) suggested the need to bring both groups together in order to create change. However, in rural areas with limited numbers of “movers and shakers” and CEO level leaders, alternative approaches prevail.

Although participants used the phrase “grassroots” many of the individuals mobilized appear to be middle class professionals. These stakeholders enjoy significant bonding social capital in both their personal and professional networks. While some small business owners and superintendents have engaged with the work, many Network members appear socio-economically, and organizationally, to be leading from the middle.

This “leading from the middle” mobilization pattern appears dependent in part on the local rural context. As Flora and colleagues (1992) noted, there appears to be limited municipal government capacity at both the county level and at the level of individual towns and villages. Similarly, as suggested by Howley (1991) the peripheral nature of rural economies has
contributed to a lack of business leaders such as those found in urban areas. Even among the largest employment sectors, the CEO level leaders are not directly engaged in the community.

For example, one of the mining operations and the paper mill are both owned by multi-national corporations with headquarters overseas. Similarly, the headquarters of the company that runs the power plant is located 80 miles away in an urban area. In Big River, the retail and service sector is made up largely of national chains, such as Target and Jiffy Lube. In the absence of the engagement of these major employers, smaller business owners have mobilized as members of the Core Team and Governance Council.

Community elites, broadly defined, matter in rural communities. Several participants noted their absence in the Network. The literature on collective impact, cradle-to-career, and civic capacity literature identified the need to mobilize community leaders in order to engage in systems level and policy level change. Without the leadership of such community elites there may be limited avenues through which to pursue change.

Similarly, participants reported community elites lacked an understanding of and priorities for poverty in the Greater Grand Isle area. Poverty in rural areas may be invisible due to the geographic landscape. Additionally, several participants stated that elites do not “see” the challenges created by poverty. Therefore, efforts to create more personal connections between community elites and those living in poverty may be warranted. This further suggests a need to develop a sense of enlightened self-interest (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007) in community elites that do not have a direct personal or professional self-interest in the work.

Issue Framing. The literature reviewed in chapter two identified the importance of developing a shared issue frame in order to drive multi-sector collaboration, cradle-to-career
network development, collective impact, and civic capacity. However, the literature provides few details on how such efforts proceed and fewer on how they proceed in diverse areas.

*Collective cognition.* Stone and colleagues (2001) offer the concept of *collective cognition* to describe processes for developing shared understandings. The development of collective cognition proceeds through the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and considerations of the perspectives held by others. The result of such conversations, also called dynamic deliberations, is a broader understanding of needs and potential solutions (Stone et al., 2001). Stone and colleagues (2001) stress that these conversations are bound by the norms and expectations of civic participation.

In the formation of the Grand Isle Network, issue framing and collective cognition development proceeded through iterative processes, at multiple levels. These processes included large community gatherings, on-going conversations among the Core Team members, focus groups with community members, and efforts on the part of the Governance Council and communications subcommittee to rebrand the Network. This complex and multi-leveled approach mirrors the structure of the Network. The process of developing collective cognition in the Grand Isle Network appears to have been challenged not only by differing perceptions by stakeholders of different sectors, as identified by Stone and colleagues, but also by the diversity found in the social geography.

Initially, Foundation staff sought out input from a wide range of stakeholders from across the Grand Isle area during the community gatherings held in 2010. These events were structured to identify local needs and potential solutions, and then finally to provide feedback on a strategic plan. From there, the Core Team of forty individuals from across sectors and
communities worked to develop a roadmap. This work was supported by consensus building strategies, along with individual conversations between members and conveners. As the challenges accompanying diverse viewpoints on the Core Team were overcome, the deliberation process also appears to have contributed to a roadmap with very broad goals. In particular, the goal for K-12 education reads, “Mastery at current learning level,” but does not define student success in terms of grade level proficiency or other concrete indicators. In addition to developing a shared understanding within the Core Team, during the development of the Roadmap, the Core Team and conveners took drafts into the community to gain feedback. This engagement process reflected a commitment to capturing the voices of a larger group of stakeholders beyond civic leaders and the grassroots orientation of the Network.

Similarly, after the development of the roadmap, the student survey release represented a further step in creating shared understandings. This framing activity, however, moved beyond collective cognition at the level of the leadership and represents an attempt to create a broader understanding among community members. In order to do so, local data was used to develop a sense of urgency at the public gathering. This sense of urgency paired a sense of hope, created through emotional statements about the need to work together, to create change means to begin to mobilize the pockets of readiness at the school district level.

All such efforts to bring a shared understanding to the community were supported by efforts of the communication subcommittee to develop a new brand for the Network. This rebranding effort focused on making the work of the Network easier to communicate and more accessible to community members.

The work of the communications subcommittee also revealed the importance of balancing a regional collective cognition with the need to maintain individual community
identities. The unique identities of the component districts and long-time rivalries suggest challenges in creating shared issue frames, or collective cognition, in rural areas.

The development of collective cognition among Network members represents the efforts among Network leaders to engage in a variety of framing activities. Benford and Snow (2000) identified three crucial types of framing frames for social movements. Diagnostic frames identify and distill problems. Prognostic frames identify and clarify a potential solution. Motivational frames include slogan and logo selection that provide an easily identified brand (Benford & Snow, 2000). Each is described next.

**Diagnostic framing.** Part of diagnostic framing includes identifying a target for change (Benford & Snow, 2000). Foundation staff led a number of activities to facilitate the development of diagnostic frames and targets for action. The initial conversation between Foundation staff and the GISC superintendents appears to have identified a joint area of concern among the two groups: educational attainment and economic prosperity in the Grand Isle area. At this stage, the external input from Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children’s Zone helped shape the conversations around where to locate the sources of these challenges. The conversation moved beyond schools and towards the other aspects of a community that support educational achievement and student success.

This broader focus was confirmed during the first community gathering in 2010 during which participants were asked to generate local issues in education. This meeting identified four categories: the needs of adolescents and young adults, the needs of schools, the needs of families, and the needs of the community overall. The breadth of the challenges identified suggest that the Network goes beyond the typical social movement issue framing, but rather looks to a broader, more complicated conception of educational and economic problems.
Benford and Snow (2001) identified the breadth and flexibility of a diagnostic frame as an important component to bring people together. The more inclusive and flexible a frame, the more likely it becomes a generic master frame. Such generic frames appeal to a broader range. As some participants stated, it is hard to argue with the most basic premise of the Network: to improve the lives of kids. Yet, the details of how to do that proved to be more decisive.

**Prognostic framing.** Prognostic framing develops a proposed solution to the problem, as well as strategies for carrying out the solution. Part of identifying prognostic frames, is determining the scope of what is possible. The content of the original diagnostic frame limits the potential solutions and strategies that can be matched to it (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Like diagnostic framing, prognostic framing occurred in stages. The second community gathering generated ideas from participants about how to address the problems identified in the first meeting. Many of these potential solutions were narrow in scope, perhaps reflecting a limited conception of what is possible or alternatively, a narrow understanding of individual issues. The conveners played a key role in consolidating these narrow, programmatic approaches into a strategic plan that outlined four key areas from cradle-to-career. This strategic plan, along with external input from STRIVE, appears to have broadened the idea of what could be accomplished.

Significantly, participants identified key problem areas in which Network efforts would be insufficient to address. Many participants who identified specific educational problems situated those issues outside of local control. Chief among these areas was the state educational policy climate. While some participants looked to state funding shortfalls, a majority that identified educational challenges identified the state accountability systems based on student assessments as a major problem. Yet when asked participants responded there were not any
current plans to engage in state level policy advocacy. Instead, participants looked to what was possible in their own community to support teachers and students in the face of this immovable challenge. Similarly, poverty and transportation were identified as major concerns, but also as beyond the scope of the Network.

Motivational framing. Benford and Snow (2000) identified motivational framing as the final framing task for social movements. Like the other framing activities described above, motivational framing proceeded in an iterative manner across multiple levels of the Network.

The lack of traction around the first strategic plan, and a busy and complicated document suggested a lack of attention to motivational framing. Benford (1993) identified four properties of motivational frames that provide compelling reasons to engage in collective action: severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety. When combined, these various aspects must appeal to those the movement hopes to engage. In particular, there needs to be a balance between severity and urgency and efficacy in order to prevent a sense of helplessness in the face of insurmountable odds.

The conveners and others offered various calls to arms during the Network development, starting with the invitation to join Core Team. Individual invitations proceeded through the use of the roadmap. Some found this document to support helping individuals see themselves and their work on the roadmap, but others found it overly complicated and cumbersome. Many also stated the roadmap was the vision and mission and offered a limited understanding beyond the document.

Recognizing the limitations of the roadmap as a communication tool, the Governance Council and communications subcommittee engaged in developing a new vision and mission statement. These shorter statements were identified by participants as more quickly
communicating the purpose of the Network. At the same time, these groups worked to develop a new, colorful logo and a short tagline in order to provide readily recognizable communications. This work proceeded with the assistance of a branding and communications firm.

Lastly, the student survey gathering served as a rallying call to the community. This meeting combined personal and often emotional testimony on the urgency and importance of the work with the hopeful message that together the community can make a difference.

**Social movement issue framing and questions of identity.** Benford and Snow (2000) noted that individual and collective identities contribute to the development of issue frames. Reciprocally, all such framing in a social movement may also contribute to the evolution of individual and collective identities (Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992).

Participants identified the large community gatherings in particular as opportunities to develop shared understandings of the regional aspects of local problems. Participants also implied that these gatherings serve another important function, to develop a sense of shared regional identity. For example, one participant stated these meetings provided an opportunity to develop the sense that “We’re Grand Isle County,” not a collection of individual communities or school districts with their own allegiances.

This assertion fits with Benford and Snow’s (2000) two claims regarding the reciprocal relationships between framing processes and both individual and collective identities. However, in large rural areas, the multiplicity of historically entrenched, community identities recommends a dual approach. Such an approach requires maintaining and embracing the identities of each community, while also developing a shared regional identity. This approach further requires the need to recognize that shared issues such as poverty may have different causes and expressions in individual communities (Dyson, Kerr, Raffo, & Wigelsworth, 2012).
**Theory of change.** As Benford and Snow (2000) and Stone and colleagues (2001) noted, the initial framing of problems limits available solutions. An example is provided by the Network’s unique focus on social-emotional development in the derived theory of change. This particular diagnostic framing suggests certain avenues for change, while excluding others. Similarly, the connection between post-secondary education and economics identified in chapter seven is also reflected in the emergent theory of change.

All such theories of action are the products of the network and partnership members who have committed to advance the agenda. Lawson and colleagues (2007) note that theory of action development depends on the unique mix of stakeholders in a partnership or collaborative effort. Missing stakeholder groups, such as low-income parents and teachers, may identify different issues and different pathways to change. Stone and colleagues (2001) noted that teachers tend to see fewer educational problems, but when they do, educators focus on resources. Similarly, Shipps’ (2003) research suggests parents bring to change efforts understandings of their children and communities.

Lawson and colleagues (2007) also suggest that theory of action development in a partnership or collaborative effort reflects the unique challenges in each local context. The challenges associated with a rural context appear to have impacted mobilization and issue framing, which in turn impacted the emergent theory of action. The resulting theory of change focuses less on organizations and more on community level action on the part of the pockets of readiness. This unique feature of the theory of change reflects the need to align work in each community to the Network’s vision, but also to provide significant decision-making at the school district level to capitalize on each community’s identities and strengths. These pockets of
readiness also reflect the need to create ownership at the community level, rather than efforts being seen as emanating from the Foundation and Big River.

**Dynamics of civic capacity.** Stone and colleagues (2001) present mobilization and common issue framing as static characteristics. In other words, they exist, to varying degrees, or they do not. In contrast to this static view, this study’s findings suggest a more dynamic interplay of these two aspects of civic capacity. This dynamic relationship is depicted in figure 5 below.

![Figure 5. Mobilization, Issue Framing, and TOA](image)

Structural and functional elements of social capital contribute to the mobilization of Network members. In turn, the composition of the mobilized coalition contributes to the identification of problems and in the discourses used to discuss them. This problem identification limits potential solutions, as does the coalition’s sense of efficacy. Shared understandings of the problem and potential solutions are created through ongoing conversations. These conversations contribute to a collective cognition that drives the theory of change development, matching problems to actions. Throughout this dynamic process, the need to maintain mobilization of particular stakeholders may limit the way issues are talked about, ultimately impacting the theory of change.
For example, Shipps (2003) identified the need for these stakeholder groups to be mobilized in order to create change at the school level. Consistent with Shipps’ (2003) claim, teachers and low-income parents were key stakeholder groups identified as missing, and the derived theory of action did not identify schools as a target for change. While parents shared negative experiences with the schools, the need to maintain trust with administrators appears to have limited conversations about schools in the Grand Isle Network. As a result participants did not prioritize school change and the focus shifted to afterschool programs and other out of school time activities.

In addition to mobilization influencing the initial issue framing, these frames appeared to have contributed to further rounds of mobilization. Such mobilization included the need to replace Core Team or Governance Council members due to turnover of individuals in their organizational roles or members who left the Network leadership for various reasons. This subsequent mobilization at the leadership level appeared to proceed through one on one conversations drawing largely on the diagnostic and prognostic frames contained in the roadmap.

These subsequent rounds of mobilization included the development of the pockets of readiness within each school district. Part of this mobilization included Network members inviting members of their social networks to the student data gathering. This mobilization proceeded through one-on-one conversations about the Network. Following these conversations, several speakers at the data gathering used motivational framing to create enthusiasm and commitment. Individual table leaders also served as brokers to facilitate conversations around the student data.

Together, new understandings of local issues affecting youth and the enthusiasm of the speakers contributed to the mobilization of new members, such as the BRGA chair who played a
role in the sports convening. The conveners collected the names of others who were interested in the Network. The conveners and community connectors worked to connect these individuals through additional conversations. Mobilization at the community level proceeded through conversations around the student survey data. These mobilization strategies reflected a new stage in the development of the network as well as the need to bring the work to the district level.

Mitra and Frick (2011) provided a complementary interpretive framework. They suggested that emerging civic capacity creates a more dynamic and committed coalition capable of moving to action at the school level than established coalitions. The Grand Isle Network appears to have leveraged the strength of both established coalitions and emergent coalitions. The established coalitions included members of GISC, GINY, and the Early Childhood Program who have a history of working together and working with the Foundation. Emerging coalitions occurred at multiple levels, including the Core Team, which included members of previous collective efforts and others. The pockets of readiness in particular reflect a conception of emerging coalitions, coming together in each community around specific needs identified in the student survey data. These groups appear pivotal in moving to action at the district level.

Together, these findings underscore the importance of mobilizing “the right mix of stakeholders,” but with a caveat. The right mix may fluctuate at two key developmental stages: 1) as the network evolves from launch to action; and 2) when it moves from leadership level decision-making towards change at the community or organizational levels.

Similarly, framing activities may move from more specific problem identification to a more emotional call for mobilization as the development moves from leadership towards action on the ground. These findings suggest that Network leaders and conveners need to engage in ongoing efforts to ensure mobilization matches needs outlined in the frames and attend to how new
voices shape the existing issue frames. Additionally, the findings suggest a need to map forwards and backwards to align the coalition, issue frames, and theory of change in order to get to action.

**Trust.** Geller and colleagues (2014) theorize trust as a foundation for the special kind of civic mobilization that leads to collective efficacy and collaboration. In the rural Grand Isle Network, trust played a similar foundational role in mobilization of stakeholders. Trust played a further role in the development of collective cognition in the formation of issue frames. Where such trust was absent, stakeholders and their voices were missing from conversations.

Two forms of trust appear to have supported mobilization and issue framing. First, relational trust which Bryk and Schnieder (2002) used to describe interactions within an organization. They highlighted the importance of competence and perceptions of motivation to do the right things for the right reason. The Foundation’s reputation supported the development of relational trust between the Foundation staff who serves as conveners and the community members who mobilized in the Network.

Second, reciprocal trust appeared to facilitate difficult conversations. Participants reported that messaging on the part of conveners and others that meetings were safe spaces for all to share their viewpoints. Similarly, two-way conversations between conveners and Network members appear to have contributed to the development of such relational trust (Lawson et al, in press) across organizational boundaries.

However, the need to maintain trust appears to have limited contentious conversations. One convener reported recognizing she could only push people so far because they see each other everywhere, from the grocery store to their children’s sporting events. Similarly, a K-12 administrator reported that the lack of blame on the schools allowed the districts to engage.
Further, where trust was absent mobilization appeared limited. This limited engagement of teachers, low-income parents, and the Native American community also suggests that these voices were not captured in the framing process. Without their own voices and self-interest in the work, these stakeholders may continue to be difficult to engage either in the leadership level or at the school district community level of the pockets of readiness.

Geller and colleagues (2014), like Bryson et al. (2006) suggest that trust requires intentional and continual efforts to build and maintain. The on-going intentionality of conveners supports these earlier findings that trust building in multi-sector collaborations is never done.

**Legitimacy of the backbone organization.** In addition to the importance of relational and reciprocal trust at the interpersonal level, the legitimacy of the Grand Isle Foundation in the community bolstered mobilization and the development of collective cognition.

Hanleybrown and colleagues (2012) identified the need for a backbone, or intermediary organization, to employ individuals with strong leadership skills in order to bring people together. The findings from this study also suggest the importance of identifying a backbone organization, but with an important addition. This intermediary organization must enjoy a strong reputation for doing the right things for the right reasons in the community. In a word, stakeholders must view the intermediary organization as “legitimate”—the backbone metaphor’s accuracy depends on it. In addition to engaging community members who want to be part of the Foundation’s “good work,” this legitimacy may have helped the conveners quickly establish interpersonal trust.

**Adaptation to social geography and the pockets of readiness.** As discussed in chapter five, the greater Grand Isle area spans a large geographic space, encompassing seven school districts across three counties. Mobilization and issue framing appear to have been challenged
not only by the geographic space that separates individuals and communities, but also by a range of identities, beliefs, and values across the area.

The unique pockets of readiness structure represents a particular place-based adaptation to the challenges of developing an overarching regional vision (McGrath, 2008) while acknowledging that communities in close proximity may not experience social issues the same way (Dyson, Kerr, & Wellings, 2012). This structure allows groups of youth and groups of community members to come together within each district based on their own level of readiness to engage in the work. Some of these groups engaged in work aligned with the roadmap previously, while others were mobilized specifically to look at the student survey data. Additionally, this structure along with the disaggregated data allowed each school district to examine the trends in their own community.

This structure reflects a thoughtful consideration of how to develop a network capable of action when outlying communities may see efforts on the part of an organization in a larger community as threatening or “top-down.” While participants identified the Foundation as having significant legitimacy in the area, others noted that in the outlying communities there is often a perception that the efforts of the Foundation do not consider them or their needs.

Network conveners and the evaluator from the Quest Group envisioned creating links between the pockets of readiness to facilitate the exchange of ideas. As envisioned, the “Link and Learn” sessions would provide opportunities for members of these pockets of readiness to engage in shared learning activities. One convener mentioned the concept of Networked Improvement Communities.

The concept of a Networked Improvement Community comes out of work by Bryk and colleagues (2011) on the need to remake the work of educational research and design. They
wrote, “Networks enable individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustaining collective attention on progress toward common goals” (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011, p. 5). Such a network allows organizations to engage in the work of problem solving by examining the validity of local knowledge, by developing a local understanding of the nature of problems, and by advancing improvement across organizational boundaries (Bryk, et al., 2011; Englebert, 2003).

Additionally, networking the pockets of readiness appears to accommodate the rural context of the Grand Isle Network. This strategy maintains each group’s focus on their local community and allows each group to draw on their community’s identity, while at the same time creating spaces to recognize common problems. Like the larger community gatherings, these sessions provide an opportunity for participants to develop a shared, regional identity.

Bryk and colleagues (2011) identify the intentional nature of such networks and the need for structure. However, participants of several pockets of readiness expressed a preference and desire to engage community members in informal gatherings. Recognizing a sense of how the community does things, one participant memorably exclaimed, “If you’re having a conversation in your backyard over a hot dish, how can you get upset? You can’t! You can talk about things.” This suggests the need balance the recognition and respect of way things are done in a rural community engage with the need to engage in more structured forms of shared learning and problem solving.

**Leadership for layered structures.** The development of a layered Network structure, including the pockets of readiness, requires a variety leaders and leadership activities at each level. These leaders work to maintain mobilization, develop both regional and local action frames, and develop a theory of change that can lead to action. McGrath and colleagues (2005)
identified the need to encourage and respect a variety of leadership roles in educational collaborations. They identified four key types—visionaries, executives, facilitators, and fundraisers—and noted each type can surface at any level (McGrath et al., 2005).

Visionary leaders are those that see the bigger picture and can articulate a deliberate direction for a collaborative. These leaders play motivational roles in drawing others to their visions (McGrath, et al., 2005). Executive leaders manage administrative tasks and juggle multiple changes and initiatives to see through the plans of visionary leaders. Facilitators work to make connections and ensure on-going communication. They support working groups at all levels and ensure follow through (McGrath, et al. 2005). These facilitators engage in boundary spanning, intermediary leadership (Williams, 2012). Lastly, fundraisers engage in the work of seeking funding through grants and resource sharing, as well as providing financial oversight (McGrath, et al., 2005).

In the Grand Isle Network, three types of leaders emerged as being important to forwarding this work: visionary leaders and systems thinkers; brokers and boundary spanning intermediary leaders; and agenda champions. The first two leader types share conceptual territory with McGrath and colleague’s identification of various leaders. However, agenda champions appear unique with in the collaboration and cradle-to-career literature. Additionally, as Flora and colleagues (1992) noted, in rural communities, individuals “wear multiple hats.” It appeared in the Grand Isle Network that individuals took on multiple leadership roles over time. Each type of leader is further discussed below and depicted in figure 6.
Figure 6. Leadership for Layered Structures

**Visionary leaders.** The literature on cradle-to-career networks and collective impact identify the need for a visionary leader (McGrath et al., 2005). Similarly, Mitra and Frick (2011) identified the importance of a visionary leader in the development of emerging regimes for school improvement. These leaders examine the local landscape and craft a vision for the future.

Within the Grand Isle Network, visionary leadership appeared to be more diffuse. Several individuals identified a Foundation staffer who recently retired as a visionary leader. This Foundation staff member previously took on a leadership role in the Early Childhood Program and sought external input from other communities engaging in early childhood education initiatives. Similarly, she appears to have scanned the external landscape in order to support the nascent development of the Network. This Foundation staffer brought the collective impact
literature to others in the Foundation and participants reported the Kania and Kramer (2011) article put words to locally developed efforts. This led to the STRIVE learning trip and a renewed sense of what was possible in the community through collaboration.

In addition to this Foundation staff member and other leaders within the Foundation, the GISC superintendents served in part as visionary leaders in seeking out initial conversations about education in the Grand Isle area. In particular, the GISC chair stands out as a visionary leader both in his own district, where he has championed early childhood education, data-driven instruction, and after-school programs, but also for the Network itself.

**Intermediary leaders: boundary spanners and brokers.** In addition to visionary leaders who set the direction McGrath and colleagues (2005) identified the importance of facilitative leadership on the part of those that turn vision to action. In the same vein, Williams (2012) emphasized intermediary leadership. In his conception, Williams described intermediary leadership to refer to strategies used to mobilize and connect different groups. This special intermediary leadership requires significant flexibility because collaboration and partnership efforts are negotiated in context (Williams, 2012).

Significantly, intermediary leaders serve as boundary spanners who cross organizational and professional lines to build relationships with individuals in different sectors (Williams, 2012). This description fits the conveners in this study. They hold formal positions that require them to cross boundaries and build relationships, and at least one previously held another position that required this skill set.

Other Network members also engage in boundary spanning and crossing work. For example, a Core Team and Governance Council member who also serves as a community connector engages with school districts across the area in her role in a workforce development
organization. She reported relationships with members of all of the school districts, as well as youth she had worked with over the years.

Williams (2012) also identified persons who do not have such formal roles but who must engage in this work to meet their objectives as boundary spanners. For example, the Director of the Boys and Girls Club in Winslow is not required to engage in collaboration with other organizations. However, in order to create a five-day a week after school program in the district, he has engaged with 4-H and other organizations to put a comprehensive, and collaborative, program in place. The superintendent reported members of these organizations work “arm in arm” and it is clear that the efforts of the Director of the Boys and Girls Club facilitate this cooperation. The Boys and Girls Club director’s work in Winslow appears to have provided both motivation and skill to work across boundaries in a number of roles related to the Network.

Williams (2012) also emphasized that intermediary leaders serve as brokers. Brokers are important in collective impact initiatives and cross-sector collaborations because they help to negotiate differences and prevent divisive conflicts. The brokers in this study included the two conveners who engaged with a wide range of Network members and community members. In particular, they severed to broker a common understanding and consensus through their facilitation of the roadmap and other meetings. One convener in particular worked directly with the pockets of readiness as a facilitator. These conveners hold formal positions that require such boundary spanning leadership.

In addition, several Core Team members served as brokers in an informal capacity. They did so by bringing the message of the Network to their respective professional and social circles. For example, one of the business owners reported reaching out to a large number of her friends and acquaintances to attend the data gathering. Similarly, the public health manager spoke of
sharing the roadmap with her department and using it to communicate with potential Governance Council members. The Core Team member from the community action agency also served as a broker, trying to gain wide community support for a new sports complex, as well as advocating for low-income residents in the Core Team.

The community connectors played similar roles, but in a somewhat more formal way, having been trained in facilitation by Foundation staff. At the student survey gathering, they facilitated conversations about the data generally, as well as specific issues. These conversations led to the identification of specific problems highlighted by the data, which were then shared out to the whole gathering. These community connectors also worked with pockets of readiness to facilitate meetings and action planning. In these and other ways, brokers played important roles in developing shared issue frames. Williams (2012) emphasized the importance of these people and their work:

Theatres of collaboration are especially fertile sites for the assembly of people and organizations with different frames. In practice, frame awareness increases the likelihood of conflict and dilemma, because policy debates stem from multiple and conflicting meanings, stories, and values about the nature of social phenomena (p.28).

The large geography covered by the Network and the sources of diversity between the different communities suggests the need to engage a wide variety of boundary spanning leaders who can broker collective understandings across organizational and community boundaries. These leaders serve in both formal and informal capacities. Some received special training and others engaged in such actions based on their own skills and volition.
Within the Grand Isle Network, many of the same individuals who serve as boundary spanning relationship builders also serves as brokers, serving to develop shared understandings. The Network conveners in particular serve this role through their facilitation of conversations among the leadership groups, as well as more broadly with community members.

Other Core Team members highlighted their own efforts at brokering, including meeting with individuals to discuss where people envision themselves on the roadmap and helping the surface their self-interest in the work. In this way, brokers served to bring the message about the Network and its goals to individuals in their networks. Brokers who take the Network’s vision into their social networks and organizations serve a particular type of role that appears to contribute to the development of action on the ground. These particular types of brokers are discussed more fully below.

*Introducing agenda champions.* Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified the importance of champions in the development of cross-sector collations. They found such champions serve in particular to develop legitimacy of the collaboration. Such legitimacy includes communicating about the Network as an entity that is recognizable to internal and external stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2006; Human & Provan, 2000).

Within the Grand Isle Network certain individuals served to function as champions, but in a more nuanced manner. In addition to building legitimacy, agenda champions serve to cross boundaries in order to advance the agenda of the Network. These agenda champions communicated broadly about the Network, particularly the roadmap. They also began the work of aligning their organizational efforts to the Network’s roadmap and overall vision.

For example, the superintendent of the Winslow School District spoke about several initiatives in his district that align with the roadmap. These initiatives include the use of data for
instructional and programmatic purposes; seeking external grants to support positive youth development projects and out-of-school time activities; and increasing early childhood classrooms in the district.

At the Winslow district, as second agenda champion emerged, the director of the Boys and Girls Club. In addition to working across boundaries as an intermediary leader, the director took the initiative to pursue activities aligned to the roadmap within his formal position. This included the development of a seamless five-day a week after school program with a number of partners, as well as developing a summer program with academic and enrichment components. In addition to pursuing these agendas within their organization, both the superintendent and the Boys and Girls director spoke passionately and emotionally at the student data gathering of their personal commitment to the work. As such, they served as key figures for conveying motivational framing of the work.

Two other agenda champions worked in alternative capacities within their social circles. The first was the member of the faith community that brought the student survey report and her concerns the congregation. She then enlisted her granddaughter to talk about the data and her own experiences at the Grover Charter School. After this exchange, this agenda champion pursued a conversation with the principal. This conversation then led to the development of the Grover pocket of readiness. This agenda champion spoke about pursuing efforts with students and the school overall during the summer and moving into the fall to keep the connections alive.

The second of these social network agenda champions reported bringing the roadmap to her networks, including the parents she encounters as a youth sports coach. This participant reported multiple entry points in her interest to the roadmap, including her job at the Grand Isle Foundation, her role as a youth sports coach, and her son’s learning disability. She stated, “I feel
like every part of my life is involved in the roadmap conversation.” Seeing a gap in understanding among youth sports coaches and parents in Big River reported taking it upon herself to bring the student survey data and the Network’s message to these individuals.

Although her role at the Foundation is not directly related to the Network, she appears to see herself as someone who can spread the vision of the Grand Isle Network and the student data within her own social network.

*Needs for different types of leaders.* The literature on cradle-to-career networks highlights the need for identifying and developing leaders (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray, 2007; Kania & Kramer, 2013). As McGrath and colleagues (2005) noted, cradle-to-career networks depend on multiple types of leaders who engage in different sets of activities. In a small rural community such as Grand Isle, leaders may have to wear multiple hats and engage in different types of leadership activity based on Network needs.

Bryson and colleagues (2006) identified the importance of both formal sponsors and informal champions in providing leadership for collaboration. The findings of this study also suggest the importance of those in formal leadership roles. These formal roles include those such as the Winslow superintendent who also serves as the GISC chair, as well as the Network conveners. Similarly, these findings also identify the importance of informal leaders who take initiative to communicate about the Network, build new relationships, and engage in efforts to align their organization’s work to the Network’s vision.

**Conclusions**

The main findings summarized above support four interlocking, action-oriented conclusions: civic capacity requires multiple forms of leadership; complex rural contexts require...
multiple mapping strategies; developing network structures requires leveraging community assets while attending to weaknesses; and national models require adaptation to local contexts.

Civic capacity requires multiple forms of leadership. Civic capacity in cradle-to-career networks and partnerships is a dynamic entity. As such, civic capacity requires ongoing attention to roles and the provision of resources for mobilization and issue framing. These roles and resources include the work of several types of leaders. These leaders include visionaries who identify a better future and communicate this vision broadly. These leaders also include boundary spanning intermediary leaders in formal roles within a legitimate backbone organization. These leaders must be able to bring people together and facilitate collective cognition and help diverse people share responsibility for moving the coalition forward to action. Within the capacity of a backbone organization, such intermediary leaders allocate resources to create the times and spaces for mobilization and issue framing to occur.

These leaders include coalition members who engage in informal boundary spanning and brokering to champion the agenda within their respective organizations and social networks. These agenda champions help move the network from a loosely aligned coalition to a collective impact formation, especially as each organization’s priorities and efforts are aligned with the overall network’s vision. Lastly, all coalition or network members contribute to the dynamic development of civic capacity through their trust-building actions and communications.

Complex rural contexts require multiple mapping strategies. Context matters in a rural cradle-to-career network development and operations. The complexity of rural contexts requires two related action maps: 1) Mapping the educational terrain, as stated by McGrath and colleagues (2005); and 2) mapping the rural social geography. Both sets of maps desirably include professional and personal social networks.
Alongside identifying potential members among such networks, these maps ideally would identify the community groups experiencing social isolation and exclusion, such as low-income parents and racial or ethnic minorities. Such social isolation and exclusion resulting from poverty is exacerbated by the rural landscape and difficulty in accessing transportation to the social spaces in individual communities, as well as larger social hubs such as Big River. The literature on community organizing for school change in particular highlights the need to engage these individuals in order to create schools that better serve their children.

Similarly, this mapping work requires surfacing where distrust exists between groups. In some cases, this may be obvious such as the distrust caused by histories of racial tensions. In the case of Grand Isle, this history manifests as the disruption of Native American communities and culture caused by white policies. In others cases, distrust may be more subtle, including class-based differences. Fears related to employment also emerged, including teachers’ fears for their jobs if they identify problems in the school system.

Additionally, this mapping should include identifying the various identities across the individual communities. In the case of Grand Isle, there were clear differences in identities among the logging and mining communities, as well as between Big River and the outlying areas. Similarly, differences in values suggest the need to identify which communities hold certain values. Together, these areas suggest the need to develop framing that respects differences while surfacing similarities.

Lastly, this mapping includes asset mapping in order to identify strengths in the region from which to build a network. This requires identifying physical resources, organizational capacities, individual competencies, financial resources, and social capital.
Leveraging community assets while attending to weaknesses. Participants in this study stressed the importance of building from local strengths, including their social capital. However, several gaps in mobilization and framing emerged that suggested the need to develop action strategies to fill these gaps to increase social capital. While this gap-filling work may include efforts such as providing financial resources for low-income residents to be able to attend meetings or providing teachers with substitutes and release time. Such gap-filling work also requires the need to build new relationships between members of groups with a history of distrust, such as teachers and administrators, low income-parents and school staff, and across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries.

These new relationships then support learning across the different sectors of the community. For example, some inner-city schools have implemented neighborhood walk programs to introduce teachers who do not live in the same communities as their students to the social geography and the challenges faced by residents. In a similar manner, there appears to be a need for community elites to engage in learning about poverty in their communities and seeing its impacts first hand. Where there are no natural interactions to support this, strategies need to be put in place to facilitate such learning.

In addition to developing formal strategies and spaces to develop new learning and new relationships, several participants in this study highlighted the importance of informal opportunities to engage. This suggests attention should be paid to engaging individuals in such informal spaces as backyard barbeques and other recreational activities.

Adaptation of national models to local contexts. The complexity of rural communities requires the adaptation of national models for cradle-to-career network development. These
adaptations include structures and strategies to mobilize missing groups, as well as to bring the network’s agenda into communities and organizations.

The Grand Isle Network provides a visible example of local adaptations of national models. Leaders described their work as “STRIVE-esque.” They also combined STRIVE with the collective impact model.

Perhaps above all, Network leaders developed place-based adaptations and innovations. The pockets of readiness, community connectors, agenda champions, and link and learn structures are all examples of such adaptations that address the vast geographic space and various community identities that contribute to the complexity of the social geography in Grand Isle. This structure also allows each community to engage with the network’s agenda as they develop readiness through community level mobilization and issue framing.

**Implications**

Based on the study’s findings and conclusions, four overarching implications for community leaders and policy-makers are considered: 1) the importance of place in developing coalitions and networks; 2) the need to build from community strengths via asset mapping; 3) the identification of a backbone organization with significant legitimacy in the community; and 4) the need to develop trust. Each of these implications is discussed below.

**The importance of place-based coalitions and networks.** The findings of this study reiterate the importance of developing place-based networks and coalitions. Such place-based networks require the consideration of both spatial geography and social geography, particularly when collaborative efforts span multiple school districts and communities. Consideration of both types of geography requires strategic mapping of the terrain. This terrain includes educational
institutions, social service agencies, non-profit, organizations, faith-based communities, and other groups that formally or informally provide support for students and families.

Additionally, this terrain includes social networks. The conveners reported intentional stakeholder selection for the initial community gathering. Similarly, Core Team members described mapping social networks to identify connections for recruiting Governance Council members. Additionally, study participants noted the importance of shared values in bringing people together and vetting Network leaders in particular for those values.

For community leaders, this requires mapping social networks and social geography, as well as the economic and educational terrain of a rural area. Additional efforts must be made to identify and overcome causes of social isolation and exclusion, as well as sources of historical distrust. Community leaders need to develop strategies to identify and engage stakeholder groups, as well as on-going focus on building trust across organizational boundaries, community boundaries, class boundaries, and ethnic boundaries.

For policymakers seeking to scale up cradle-to-career models, the importance of local context requires a recognition that implementation requires flexible adaptation over fidelity. Despite claims that these models are portable, they require significant adaptation to the local landscape in order to both bring people together and to get towards action in the various school districts and communities.

**Building on strengths.** In addition to mapping the terrain, identifying strengths in the community is an important precursor to the creation of a cradle-to-career network. In addition to traditional asset mapping, this includes identifying social resources such as faith-based groups or community organizations. Early on, Grand Isle Foundation staff identified the strength of relationships as a key asset in the community and set out to leveraging relationships through
community-organizing efforts. They also noted that such a grass-roots approach made sense for a community without high power CEO’s and without significant financial resources from taxation, philanthropy, or corporate giving that they identified as supporting other networks in the state.

Additionally, Foundation staff identified building social capital as part of the way they do business. Therefore using a relational approach builds off the existing strength and capacity of the backbone organization. This orientation towards the community appears to have contributed to the ongoing development of relationships and trust.

For community leaders in seeking to adapt models for cradle-to-career network development to local contexts, this suggests the need to identify and build off strengths. However, the findings suggest that these efforts need to move beyond typical asset mapping to look for social networks in the community. Similarly, such asset mapping may require the consideration of assets in both the larger geographic scope of the network, as well as within each individual school community. Engaging community members in such efforts may also serve to mobilize them to the network.

State level policy-makers similarly should engage in asset mapping across in order to identify the building blocks for regional cradle-to-career networks. Similarly, policy-makers should consider the asset maps created by local networks in order to target funding and other resources to support areas of strength and bolster areas of weakness.

**Backbone organization legitimacy.** The central role of the Grand Isle Foundation and reports of a strong reputation in the community suggests the need to identify a backbone with organizational capacity, resources, and significant competency on the part of staff, but also to select an organization that holds sufficient legitimacy in the community. In particular, the findings suggest the importance of a backbone organization seen as doing the right thing for the
right reasons within the community at large. Such legitimacy appears to support mobilization as community members have faith in the organization to engage for the right reasons.

Network development takes time. The findings underscore that the work of collaboration is slow and there are no quick shortcuts to getting to action. Additionally, the findings suggest that cradle-to-career network development requires on-going attention in three key areas. First, mobilization is not one and done. Rather, mobilization requires on-going attention to continuing to engage existing members, to reconnect them when they move away from the network, and to replace members lost due to turnover at the organizational level or the network level. Several members noted their intent to retire from their organizational roles in the new future and question their continued participation. In such cases, succession planning could support the continued mobilization of members of the right organizations.

The findings highlight the recursive and iterative nature of issue framing. Not only did framing activities move back and forth across levels of the Network, they also moved back and forth between types. Similarly, ongoing attention must be paid to developing trust. Such trust facilitates mobilization as well as the on-going processes of issue framing. Efforts to build trust may be complicated by organizational boundaries and community lines, which include geographic, historical, values, and identity boundaries. In areas where there is a history of deep distrust, these efforts require more time and patience. Additionally, participants noted that the convener developed and maintained trust through their skillful facilitation and their attention to recognizing each person’s unique contributions beyond their role of stakeholder.

The need to attend to on-going efforts to mobilize individuals, to develop and communicate issue frames, and to build trust suggest the need for community leaders to identify a legitimate organization and to invest in backbone staff who serve as conveners. First,
individuals should be selected for skills in boundary spanning and brokering in order to engage in these on-going social interactions.

Secondly, resources must be allocated to ensure these skilled individuals can carry out their jobs. The literature on backbone organizations (Hanleybrown et al. 2012) suggests that the structure of the backbone can vary, including distributing tasks across individuals at different organizations. However, the findings of this study suggest that one or more full-time employees may best serve the discursive and iterative nature of network development. These employees then dedicate their time to facilitating meetings, engaging in a variety of communication strategies, and meeting with groups and individuals to maintain engagement.

The Grand Isle Foundation has engaged in the work of training community leaders, both locally and in rural communities across the state. Study participants identified individuals who have received this training as being predisposed to engage in the type of work that goes into developing a cradle-to-career network. Policy-makers should consider investing in such community leadership programs and scaling up those that exist to encourage the development of boundary spanning and brokering leadership across states.

**The importance of trust.** Trust played an important role in mobilizing the Network and developing the issue framing. However, where trust was absent, mobilization did not occur and as a result certain voices were excluded from issue framing. As Geller and colleagues (2014) suggested, coalition leaders need to seek out “seeds of trust” (p.116) in order to build new relationships.

For community leaders, this study suggests several strategies for building trust. First, the use of community organizing strategies to elicited self-interest of individuals, provide venues for their voices to be heard, and help them see how they can further their interests by joining the
Network. Such community organizing strategies also offer the opportunity to build bonding social capital among groups such as low-income parents, which then can serve as a platform to engage with school districts and other organizations.

Similarly, community organizing strategies can be used to bring members of multiple community segments together to build opportunities for bridging social capital. While formal gatherings such as the student data gathering provide spaces for people to interact, participants identified the importance in their community of casual interactions, suggesting leaders attend to how things are done in each community. In rural communities, such efforts require bringing people together across large geographic areas, requiring significant resource be allocated to facilitate transportation.

Second, community leaders should provide facilitated opportunities for groups to learn about each other and their concerns. Trained facilitators help create an environment in which all voices can be heard by developing and enforcing group norms. In Grand Isle, efforts to bridge the divide created by the “disruption” have proceeded through another project sponsored by the Foundation, but the findings suggest the need to join such efforts. Histories of deep distrust require significant time to overcome.

For policy-makers, the central role of trust suggests the importance of recognizing the cradle-to-career networks require significant time to mobilize and to move toward action with a shared agenda and common issue frames. Similarly, the attention to relationships requires resources and training beyond typical public administration.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While the qualitative case study design of this investigation provides a thick description of a rural cradle-to-career network, it also comes with limitations. Each of these limitations
suggests areas for future research. Similarly, the unique configuration of the Network, and the backbone organization in particular, recommend future research into the development of rural cradle-to-career networks.

First, the focus on a single, unique case limits the generalization of findings. This is particularly true given the import of context to rural research and the diversity of rural communities in the United States and elsewhere. Future research should consider cradle-to-career networks and other educational collective impact efforts in other rural communities. Including other rural case studies in a cross-case analysis would serve to further refine the findings on how context contributes to mobilization, issue framing, and theory of change development. A cross-case study would allow for an examination of how differences in mobilization and framing shape networks, as well as their theory of change. Such research would provide a more solid foundation for both practitioners and policy-makers seeking to increase the number of college and career ready youth in rural communities, as well as to stabilize their populations.

Second, this study is limited by data collection carried out by a single researcher over a short time span. Unlike an ethnographic study, this phenomenological approach did not allow the researcher to become embedded in the community and observe the dynamics of the development of the Grand Isle Network over time. For example, data on development of mobilization and framing often relied on the memory of individuals in interviews and focus groups. While documents served to triangulate these findings, this result may be an incomplete picture. Similarly, there were limited opportunities to observe individuals engaging with one another to determine the quality of their social interactions and determine how trust functions in conversations about contentious issues. Future research should seek out opportunities to observe
the dynamics of framing and mobilization through ethnographic research or participatory action research. Such research would provide a clearer understand of how framing processes unfold and the role of local and national discourses in shaping local networks and their theories of change.

Third, the study focused solely on participants who have been actively engaged in the Network. Participants who had left the Network or who were never involved were not interviewed. Therefore, there is limited data to determine why certain stakeholder groups have not engaged or how these stakeholders view local needs. Similarly, while care was taken in attempting to recruit participants from across sectors and the seven school districts, some areas were not represented in the study. Many Core Team members represented larger communities, resulting in a smaller pool from which to recruit participants from Pine Hills, Hardwood City, and Timber View. Similarly, the communities of Hawk River and Elk Falls were underrepresented among the Network members. As a result, information on the Network in these communities is limited. In particular, information on the Hawk River-Elk Falls district mainly came from individuals outside of this community. Future research should seek out stakeholder groups who have not mobilized in order to better understand the barriers to mobilization, as well as the extent to which different discourses, values, beliefs, and trust impact whether stakeholder groups mobilize or not.

Fourth, as many cradle-to-career networks do not prioritize youth voice the importance of speaking with students who participated the pockets of readiness was not anticipated. Therefore, the institutional review board application did not cover minors and no youth were interviewed as part of the study. Where youth are engaged in network leadership or local action planning, future research should consider their experiences. Such research could identify how cradle-to-career
networks serve as opportunities to embed youth in their communities and support the social and civic development that may reverse brain drain (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008).

Fifth, the unique nature of the backbone organization of the Grand Isle Network provides a limitation to the findings. The Grand Isle Foundation itself has a unique history and long history of work in the local area. Similarly, the Foundation played a key role in the launch of the Grand Isle Network, first through conversations between staff and the GISC superintendents and later through hosting the community conversations. In other networks, the backbone organization may not be a founding organizational partner.

Therefore, more research needs to be done on backbone organizations in rural areas. In the absence of such a highly regarded organization with experience in collaboration, how can rural leaders identify or create a backbone organization? What organizational capacities leaders consider in their selection? How do rural leaders identify individuals with competency to serve as intermediary leaders within such a backbone? How do backbone staff build legitimacy across rural communities? How do backbone organizations and their staff develop the capacity and competencies to facilitate a cradle-to-career network across multiple distinct rural communities?

Sixth, this study considered the development of the Grand Isle Network at the local level, but did not consider the state policy climate. In part this focus was due to the design of the study, as well as the limited connections to state policy made by participants themselves. However, as Durand (2011) noted, more research needs to be done to connect state level P-20 policy discourse with the creation of networks at the local level and local discourses. Similarly, future research should consider how discourse spread through the STRIVE national gatherings, which bring together cradle-to-career network leaders from across the country.
Lastly, the findings of this study suggest a need to further investigate the role of social capital in mobilization and issue framing in other types of communities. In particular, how do leaders leverage or create relationships to bring people to the table across neighborhood, social class, or racial and ethnic lines? What strategies can be used to build trust? How is consensus on local needs developed in communities with different social geography configurations? Whose voices are heard and whose are excluded? What efforts are made to include voices that are typically subjected to social isolation and exclusion?

As Mitra and Frick (2011) identified, much of the literature on civic capacity lacks critical attention to how issues are framed and in particular, who is doing the framing. Answers to these questions have implications not only for collective impact in cradle-to-career networks, but more broadly in rebuilding democratic participation and developing local cross-sector leadership for complex social problems.
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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

US Census Bureau

“Rural” encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people; Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

Town-Fringe: Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.

Town-Distant: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.

Town-Remote: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.

Rural-Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural-Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural-Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp

US Department of Agriculture

1) Micropolitan (micro) areas, which are nonmetro labor-market areas centered on urban clusters of 10,000-49,999 persons and defined with the same criteria used to define metro areas.

2) All remaining counties, often labeled “noncore” counties because they are not part of “core-based” metro or micro areas.

Appendix B
Protocols

Interviews November 2014

Introductory Script

Hello, I am Sarah Zuckerman from the University at Albany’s School of Education, and I am conducting a study of cradle to career networks.

I appreciate you taking time to help me with my study. I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. I hope to hear from all of you in order to capture as much information as possible. With your permission, I will tape record your responses to ensure accuracy. I can stop the tape at any time if anyone is uncomfortable. I will maintain the confidentiality of your comments, and your identity will not be revealed in any notes or publications.

This interview should take about an hour (preset with number of questions)

If you agree to participate, I will need your consent in writing.

Questions

1. Just to get started, can you (each) tell me how you’ve been involved in the Grand Isle Network and a little bit about your role in the Network?

2. Can you describe your community for me?

3. What are the biggest challenges facing your community?
   (Exit question if necessary: what are you going to do about it?)

4. How does the Grand Isle Network address these challenges in your community?

5. Reflect on the origins of the Grand Isle Network, how did it come together?
   a. Who started it?
   b. What initiatives preceded it?
   c. How did those earlier initiatives influence the current Initiative?

6. How did you get involved in the Initiative?
   a. (If more recently involved- how did you first hear about it? Was there a particular person who got you involved?)
   b. How often do you attend meetings?
Alternatively for people who were not involved in the start: How did you get involved? Were there people in the initiative you worked with previously?

7. How does the network recruit new partners?
   a. When was the last time a new partner joined?
   b. Who engages in recruiting new partners?
   c. Have you experienced any barriers or obstacles to bringing new partners into the initiative?

8. What strategies are used to keep all of the partners engaged?
   a. How do you communicate with partners?
   b. How do you communicate with the general public?
   c. Who does this work?

9. How would you characterize the relationships between partners in the network?
   a. How are they maintained

10. Help me understand the vision and mission?
    a. How they were developed?
    b. Who was involved?

11. I saw the Pathways to Student Success document on the website, could you tell me how those goals were identified and who worked on identifying them?

12. How was consensus created about what issues to focus on?
    a. How did this work with people from different towns coming together?

13. Several goals address student achievement: school readiness, grade level mastery, post-secondary enrollment. How does the Initiative plan to meet these goals?
    a. What efforts have been taken in these areas so far?
    b. What plans are there for new efforts?

    (For K-12 admin/educators: What role do schools play in this work?)

14. Are there other changes would you like to see inside K-12 schools?
    a. How would you go about making those changes?
    b. Who would you need to work with to make those changes?
15. What about changes at local colleges, early childhood programs and after school programs?
   a. How would you go about making those changes?
   b. Who would you need to work with?

16. What do you think the key ingredients in your successful launch of a cradle-to-career network?
   a. What makes this network successful?
   b. What and who keep it moving forward?

17. Lastly, is there anything else I should know about how this Network works that I didn’t ask?
Focus Group November 2014

Introductory Script

Hello, I am Sarah Zuckerman from the University at Albany’s School of Education, and I am conducting a study of cradle to career networks.

I appreciate you taking time to help me with my study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. I hope to hear from all of you in order to capture as much information as possible.

I will maintain the confidentiality of your comments, and your identity will not be revealed in any notes or publications. However, as this is a group interview, I would ask that you consider your answers carefully in terms of sensitive or private information. I also ask that all participants agree to maintain confidentiality of what is said here and not reveal anything that is said here.

This interview should take about an hour and a half (preset with number of questions)

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that I have accurately captured the information you are providing. All names will be removed from transcripts and the audio files will be destroyed after the transcription. If you prefer that we do not tape record, which is all right, too.
2. If you do grant permission to tape, you may ask at any time that I stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing.

Questions

1. Just to get started, can you each tell me your name and how long you have lived in the Itasca area?

2. Can you describe your community for me?
   a. Prompt: however you define community.
   b. What do you like most about living in your community?
   c. What are you most proud of in your community?
   d. What are the biggest challenges your community faces?
      (Exit question if necessary: what are you going to do about it?)

3. What opportunities are available for young people in your community?
   a. What educational, occupational and civic opportunities are there?
   b. Can you provide an example?

4. What are your aspirations for young people in this community?
a. What sorts of educational, occupational, civic or social opportunities would you like to see?
b. Generally?
c. For the population you work with?
d. What would it take to create these types of opportunities? (What would that look like?)

5. How did the Itasca Area Initiative for Student Success come together?
d. Who started it?
e. What precipitated it?
f. What initiatives preceded it?

6. Can you tell me about the vision and mission and how they were developed?
a. Who was involved?

7. How were the goals of the network identified?
g. Who was involved in developing them?

8. What or who keeps the network moving forward?
a. How do they do it? Keep people focused? Moving forward?

9. How does the network recruit new people and organizations?
a. When was the last time a new partner joined?
b. Who is a new partner you would like to bring in and how would you go about bringing them into the network?
c. Who engages in recruiting new partners?
d. How have you engaged schools, colleges and early education programs?
i. Can you provide an example?

10. What barriers or obstacles have you encountered in bringing people together?
a. For example, when you developed the goals, were there any challenges in bringing people together?
b. How have they been overcome?
c. Does that happen often?
d. Are there other barriers or obstacles have you encountered in creating the network?

11. What strategies are used to keep people and organizational partners engaged?
d. How do you communicate with partners?
e. How do you communicate with the general public?
f. Who engages in this work?

(For K-12 admin/educators: What role do schools play in this work?)
12. How do you plan to meet your educational goals?
   a. What changes would you like to see inside schools, colleges and early childhood programs?
   b. How will you work with schools, colleges and early childhood centers to meet your goals/ make those changes?
   c. How will you work with other educational organizations, such as afterschool programs?
   d. Can you provide an example?
   e. What would that look like?
   f. Who would you need to work with?

13. What are the key ingredients in your successful launch of a cradle-to-career network?
   a. What makes this network successful?

14. Is there anything else I should know about how this initiative works that I didn’t ask?
Interview June 2015 (community connectors)

Introductory Script

Hello, I am Sarah Zuckerman from the University at Albany’s School of Education, and I am conducting a study of cradle to career networks.

I appreciate you taking time to help me with my study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. I hope to hear from all of you in order to capture as much information as possible.

I will maintain the confidentiality of your comments, and your identity will not be revealed in any notes or publications.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

4. I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that I have accurately captured the information you are providing. All names will be removed from transcripts and the audio files will be destroyed after the transcription. If you prefer that we do not tape record, which is all right, too.
5. If you do grant permission to tape, you may ask at any time that I stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
6. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing.

Questions

1. Just to get started, can you tell me your name and how long you have lived in the Itasca area?

2. Can you describe your community for me?
   e. Prompt: however you define community.
   f. What do you like most about living in your community?
   g. What are you most proud of in your community?
   h. What are the biggest challenges your community faces?
      (Exit question if necessary: what are you going to do about it?)

3. What opportunities are available for young people in your community?
   c. What educational, occupational and civic opportunities are there?
   d. Can you provide an example?

4. What are your aspirations for young people in this community?
e. What sorts of educational, occupational, civic or social opportunities would you like to see?
f. What would it take to create these types of opportunities?
   (What would that look like?)

5. Can you tell me about your role in this position and how you came to have this role?

6. What were your goals in this position?

7. Who did you work with?

8. How did these pockets of readiness/youth groups come together?
   a. How were participants identified, recruited?
   b. What strategies were used to remove barriers to participation (ie transportation)
   c. What was your role in bringing them together?

9. What activities did you do with participants?
   a. What did you talk about with them?
   b. How did you approach the data and identifying the ‘so what, now what’s’?

10. How was a shared understanding of the needs created?
    a. How was agreement or consensus created?

11. What was the result of these meetings?

12. What was the group’s goals?

13. Describe the relationships between participants?
    a. Do you think they changed during the course of the work?

14. What do you think it will take to have adults hear students voices in the work?

15. What plans, if any are there for youth to work with their schools?
    a. Afterschool programs?
    b. Early childhood or community college?
    c. Mental health providers?

16. What are the next steps for the group?
    a. What are the plans for meeting goals?
17. Anything else about the network or your work that I didn’t ask about but should have?
Interview June 2015

Protocol for Governance Council Members (not previously interviewed)

Introduction:

Hello, I am Sarah Zuckerman from the University at Albany’s School of Education, and I am conducting a study of cradle to career networks.

I appreciate you taking time to help me with my study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. I hope to hear from all of you in order to capture as much information as possible.

I will maintain the confidentiality of your comments, and your identity will not be revealed in any notes or publications.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that I have accurately captured the information you are providing. All names will be removed from transcripts and the audio files will be destroyed after the transcription. If you prefer that we do not tape record, which is all right, too.
2. If you do grant permission to tape, you may ask at any time that I stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing.

Questions

1. Just to get started, can you tell me your name and how long you have lived in the Itasca area?

2. What organization do you work for?

3. Can you describe your community for me?
   i. Prompt: however you define community.
   j. What do you like most about living in your community?
   k. What are you most proud of in your community?
   l. What are the biggest challenges your community faces?
      (Exit question if necessary: what are you going to do about it?)

4. What opportunities are available for young people in your community?
   e. What educational, occupational and civic opportunities are there?
   f. Can you provide an example?
5. What are your aspirations for young people in this community?
   g. What sorts of educational, occupational, civic or social opportunities would you like to see?
   h. Generally?
   i. For the population you work with?
   j. What would it take to create these types of opportunities? (What would that look like?)

6. What is your role in the student success initiative?

7. How did you get involved?
   b. Specifically in the governance council?
   c. Were you asked by a specific person?

8. What motivated you to get involved and stay involved?

9. Please describe the work of the governance council for me?
   a. Role of the council
   b. Goals of the council?

10. I saw the Needs and Purposes statements in the meeting minutes, how were those developed?

11. What are the goals of the council?
    a. How were they created?
    b. How did you come to understanding them?
    c.

12. How are members of the governance council encouraged to continue the work?

13. How is the work communicated to other members of the network and/or the public?

14. How are new members of the council identified if needed?
    h. How would you go about bringing new people in?

15. How does the governance council work with other groups in the network?

16. How would you describe the relationships between the council members?
    a. With other groups in the network, the conveners, the pockets of readiness, schools and other organizations?

17. What or who keeps the governance council moving forward?
a. How do they do it? Keep people focused? Moving forward?

18. I saw that you are also a member of the communications committee, could you tell me about the work of that committee?
   a. What are some of the goals of the committee and how do you see their purpose in the structure of the Initiative?
   b. Who is the target audience for communication?
   c. What strategies are used to communicate with different groups?

19. How do you see your work or the work of your organization aligning with the pathway?

   a. Communications
   b. Facilitators & community connectors
   c. Pockets of readiness
   d. Schools and other organizations?

20. What do you want to change for kids?
    a. Which kids?

   (Probe here specifically for afterschool programs, mentioned last time, and schools)

21. How will the work of the student success initiative make that happen?
    a. Who else in the community do you need to work with to make that happen?

22. Is there anything else about Grand Isle Network or the governance council I haven’t asked about but should have?
Interview June 2015 Foundation Staff Interview

Introductory Script

Hello, I am Sarah Zuckerman from the University at Albany’s School of Education, and I am conducting a study of cradle to career networks.

I appreciate you taking time to help me with my study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. I hope to hear from all of you in order to capture as much information as possible.

I will maintain the confidentiality of your comments, and your identity will not be revealed in any notes or publications.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that I have accurately captured the information you are providing. All names will be removed from transcripts and the audio files will be destroyed after the transcription. If you prefer that we do not tape record, which is all right, too.
2. If you do grant permission to tape, you may ask at any time that I stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and we will stop.
3. Before we can start, I must have your consent in writing.

Questions

1. Just to get started, can you tell me your name and how long you have lived in the Itasca area?

2. What organization do you work for?

3. Can you describe your community for me?
   m. Prompt: however you define community.
   n. What do you like most about living in your community?
   o. What are you most proud of in your community?
   p. What are the biggest challenges your community faces?
      (Exit question if necessary: what are you going to do about it?)

4. What opportunities are available for young people in your community?
   g. What educational, occupational and civic opportunities are there?
   h. Can you provide an example?
5. What are your aspirations for young people in this community?
   k. What sorts of educational, occupational, civic or social opportunities would you like to see?
   l. Generally?
   m. For the population you work with?
   n. What would it take to create these types of opportunities?
      (What would that look like?)

6. What is your role in the student success initiative?

7. How did you get involved?

8. The convener sent me a copy of the Roadmap team’s charter and I was wondering if you could tell me how this group came to be?

9. What are its goals?

10. I saw one of the responsibilities was to know the pathway document and communicate it to others?
   a. What does that look like?
   b. What strategies do you use to communicate about the Pathway and the Foundations work?

11. Has the Roadmap document and the Roadmap team changed anything about how the Foundation does its work?
   a. How would you see this happening?
   b. Who needs to be involved?
   c. If not, how does it have the potential to change the organization’s work?

12. How do you see the Grand Isle Network as meeting the goals of the Roadmap?
    a. What would need to happen?
    b. Who would need to be involved?
    c. My field of study is K-12 education, so I’m particularly interest in how the Pathway’s work will meet the education goals of school readiness, grade level mastery and post-secondary enrollment.

13. Is there a theory of action or theory of change for reaching the goals of the Roadmap?

14. How do you think other organizations are moving to create this type of alignment to the work?
   a. Based on your work at the Foundation, what would that take inside other organizations?
15. Is there anything else about your work with the Grand Isle Network that I didn’t ask but should have?
### Document collection protocol

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Hard copy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting agendas and meeting minutes (whole leadership/core group)</td>
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<td>Planning documents</td>
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<td>Goal documents</td>
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<td>Vision and mission documents</td>
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<td>Partnership documents and agreements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documents from early child. K-12, post-secondary initiatives</td>
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<td>Documents from health &amp; social service initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal communications/ memos</td>
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<tr>
<td>External communications (presentation materials, media materials, community mailings etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication plan/guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>List of subgroups and members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subgroup meeting agendas</td>
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<td>Subgroup meeting minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper/ other media coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Related links from website</td>
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## Appendix C

### Code book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural Identity</td>
<td>Descriptions of the community that convey a sense of place as rural.</td>
<td>The people of Grover, that live in Grover though, may be some of them accept them [charter school students], some of them don’t and whenever there is trouble of course it’s got to be the kids. I know that. I’ve heard that out there, because when you have 100 kids all of a sudden coming into a tiny community. You ever been to Grover? Tiny community. There is a bar that is open sometimes and a post office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>General aspirations for young people</td>
<td>One of those pieces of that conversation was that this is a community that has two sides. So the aspirations for one segment of the community, for our young people is that they all end up well educated and they go on to, to wonderful careers, wherever that may be. The other aspiration is just that you don’t starve to death. And that maybe you can walk down the street and still hold your head up high. And so the aspirations for young people are different depending on who you ask, and where in the community you ask that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Specific goals identified for the Initiative related to aspirations</td>
<td>My concept of what I know of it is every child is going to feel that they have connection to a caring adult in their life, whether that’s a teacher, a foster provider, a neighbor, a church somebody. That they will have an opportunity to complete school, they’ll have an opportunity to go further beyond in their education if they so choose. Um, just expanding opportunities for every child. I have two kids that know they are going to college. We’ve talked about it since they started kindergarten. There’s lots of families that they never had someone go to college. So I feel like this project really is looking at all children, but it’s really going to help those kind of chronic poverty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization</td>
<td>Activities designed to bring in new participants and maintain commitment of existing participants</td>
<td>So I think for the most part, Governance Council members have used a context or people that they know and the Governance Council has chosen with different areas in mind the faith community and school community and through of word of mouth, they have just been kind putting feelers out there to just see who's interested and giving calls to people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/challenges</td>
<td>Challenges to recruitment of specific individuals or groups</td>
<td>Well, at that point, they discussed what they saw the needs of this particular group, in terms of how they saw this as fitting in to try to address some of those things. Then, we were supposed to have a second meeting, but it was April and it just didn’t happen because there was just no way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Communication</td>
<td>Dissemination of vision, mission and goals to wider community and/or targeted to specific audiences (social media, radio/tv/media, person-to-person, website/blog for the purposes of mobilization</td>
<td>Or people in the community and it was just going and chatting with them about their, how they were mentored as young people and getting them to go back into that. And then having them commit to coming to the meeting last Thursday. So it was just awe inspiring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Data</td>
<td>Use of data from survey or other sources to mobilize people</td>
<td>So those connections, and then secondly, unfortunately, I think there was not enough space and time to process data. It was important to get it on the table, but there wasn’t a way for anyone, except those who really love data, like [BRBA chair] after the basketball association, is a math teacher, right! He took that bit and ran with it, and that’s how we got him really engaged. He had lots of good questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Engagement*</td>
<td>Activities that generate enthusiasm for the work</td>
<td>Sometimes [the convener] gives us homework. Because I am on the Communications Committee I do stuff in between anyway. But we have I mean for the last meeting, we did all kind of look up how did we see this going to the future, whether it would be a joint powers type thing or non-profit or something like that. So that’s kind of how she has given us a little bit of not really homework but things to think about.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Identifying Participants*</td>
<td>Strategies or activities to identify who to invite</td>
<td>And then we kind of made a list of people we think and then might be really good or people who could represent multiple sectors. So -- because honestly the group would be ginormous. And then we just really kind of thought -- put some thought into it. You know, who do we really think would be a good representative or not and then we did -- and ask a brief discussion about the pathway and then and ask. And we did those one to one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Invitation*</td>
<td>Personal ask to join</td>
<td>The governance group is, again, it was, we need people to represent this that and the other thing and who are the right people. And then [the convener], well [the convener] is the one that asked me, so she's going out and asking people that she wants to be on the governance committee. From what I understand, that's how it worked for me anyway.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Meetings</td>
<td>Meetings held between representatives of partner organizations, community leaders and/or community members (examples, core team, community convenings, governance council etc.)</td>
<td>So from that, they planned the three community convenings that happened early in 2010. And that was GISC wide, so seven school district footprint and there was a very intentional process by which they mapped the stakeholders, across sectors, what does a cross sector of a community look like and then look at each of those school districts and did a whole matrix about how they would invite people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Turnover</td>
<td>The opposite of mobilization, mentions of individuals leaving</td>
<td>Quite a few. And it's been a dynamic shift of people in and out. Which isn't always a bad thing, but at times it can be kind of frustrating because there's always a new person at the table you have to get caught up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Values*</td>
<td>Shared values mobilize individuals</td>
<td>I dunno if anything happened from that. I know some of the conversations I did have, some of the people showed up at the convening. People generally care about our kids and where we're at and where we can improve. I think they wanna help, it's a time commitment on their part. Everybody's busy and then they start prioritizing what's important to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Mobilization/Vision &amp; Mission</td>
<td>Vision and mission &amp; mobilization</td>
<td>People get BUSY with their own lives and yet to keep coming around the table because you realize the MISSION, the VISION is good and it's solid, then that's what keeps people coming.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Interest*</td>
<td>Mobilization based on self-interest</td>
<td>I guess my interest in the whole concept of adolescence and, and how they connect to community, started when my now 42 year old son was hitting adolescence and I found out no matter how much I talked to him and I encourage him to have a set direction. The influence of the community was so strong and so I mean the things that, just so strange to me, the things that adults would do and to direct lives of kids. And you just kind, I was just, I was just astonished by that and got involved in things and you know and I have been working in my own way to help change community for a long time now. And seeing those changes but I work for the [regional] office of job training with adolescent at risk adolescent primarily and when the [Grand Isle Network] shifted their emphasis more to adolescent I thought it was</td>
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time for us to get involved in a professional way with that program. And I’ve been seeing changes and whenever they need somebody that they send me an email.

**Social Capital**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of social capital</th>
<th>And probably again, it’s the personal connections. Are you going to be at the meeting, are you? Or who is volunteering, who is helping out?</th>
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**Social capital/closed networks**

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<tr>
<th>Evidence of closed networks--groups whose members know each other or interact in multiple situations and/or roles</th>
<th>I think it’s a combination of things, honestly, the personal relationship everybody has, just knowing one another, whether you go to the same church, whether you're involved in this other group over here.</th>
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**Social Capital/Existing Relationships**

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<tr>
<th>Dimensions of existing relationships and their use for mobilization of new core team members, governance council members, pockets of readiness or community connectors.</th>
<th>Because of my work in Blue Sky I had quite a few connections there. And I also had quite a few connections in Hardwood City because that’s really close to [where I went to high school], so I know a lot of people around there.</th>
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**Social Capital/New Relationships**

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<tr>
<th>New relationships and efforts made to create them during mobilization of new core team members, governance council members, pockets of readiness or community connectors.</th>
<th>Well, it was fascinating because it was – well, I thought it was serendipity at its best because I got in that kind of early I sat in back, I didn’t know what to expect. So I sat back and all by myself in this round table and all of a sudden, wouldn’t you know, one of the school board members came sat right next to me. Well, this is pretty cool. So, I talk to him about our needs. And then he says, “Oh, yeah. Well, somebody else is meeting here,” and da, da, da, da. So, we – I said some with that. But then two minutes later the superintendent, sat next to him. And I’m going, oh, this is even better – not better but even better, whatever.</th>
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**Social Capital/Trust**

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<th>Trust in relationships, existing or new, and how it facilitates the work, or absence hinders the work.</th>
<th>You know, even from school-to-school they struggle to build relationships, even within the same school district. And then, you know, neighboring districts need to – to – to trust and understand each other. Then you got to move out into the, you know, county health and human services, the correction system, all – all – a variety of different kinds of systems, private education. And, you know, gradually building relationships so that when people start to sit down and talk about ideas, their immediate reflex isn’t protect territory and the like but to trust and have confidence that people are looking for win-win, so mutual benefits.</th>
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**Issue Framing**

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<tr>
<th>Framing Activities</th>
<th>Actions, events, activities and conversations through which frames are created</th>
<th>I think we got into small groups, we’re all running together. Brainstorming, I mean it was just brainstorming and then it’s interesting with different perspectives and even persons who’ve</th>
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<tr>
<th>Issue Framing Content</th>
<th>Content of issue/problem framing</th>
<th>Experienced poverty versus the other professionals. A lot of discussion about wording and do you know what I mean?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue Framing Content/Access*</td>
<td>Poverty and transportation limit student (or adult) access to programs and opportunities.</td>
<td>Just people were just in tears as we're talking. Especially around the issue of suicide. Um, it's one of those things that a lot of people have felt really strongly about and they don't know what to do and they're seeing this whole youth piece as something that maybe can address that. We have historically we've had a really high young male suicide rate here. And for twenty years at least, I've known that it’s been significantly higher than other places in the state and other places in the country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue Framing Content/Civic*</td>
<td>Civic participation (being actively engaged in the community through work, volunteerism, club activities, church etc.)</td>
<td>I think that's where the main focus and the main challenge is, how rural the communities around Grand Rapids are. And that creates a lot of transportation issues and additional costs when we're trying to think about different ways to involved kids, and ultimately parents in their child's education. And it all kind of builds from there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Framing Content/Economic</td>
<td>Main problems described as relating to employment, wages, workforce development, employers, finances/funding or efficiency of public agencies</td>
<td>You know, there are the traditional industries—forestry, you know, mining, et cetera, et cetera. You know, all of those industries go through cycles. You know, at this point in time, you know, mining is down again. Two years ago it was going great and now it just fell off a cliff again. Forestry really struggles and has for quite a while and not as much paper being used in the world and that is not going to change. So, we have to find different ways to utilize fiber or wood fiber.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Framing Content/Education</td>
<td>Academic achievement, K-readiness, Post-secondary enrollment/attainment</td>
<td>I had a student, my son, who struggled. He’s not a good student. Never will be. And part of it for lack of effort but it’s not – it’s not just a question of effort. Never really felt like the school system was equipped to figure out what his individual needs are meet them. And – and</td>
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so it’s always been a struggle. Now he’s in the Duluth school system and it’s no different. Schools just aren’t equipped to sit this kid down and say, “What is going on with him?” Particularly, as it relates to math.

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<tr>
<th>Issue Framing/Organization</th>
<th>main problems described as the need to change bureaucracy and administration of key educational organizations or the need to connect organizations to solve complex problems through collaboration and partnerships</th>
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<tr>
<td>I would say that when I first started working here, I was really frustrated with the lack of communication that I had with social services, but that has gotten so much better in the last year that I can’t really complain about that anymore, but to me, in comparison to those other communities that I’ve worked in, that was a huge disconnect was between the school counselors and social services, but I feel like we are working together better now, so you’re asking me who else I wish I had more of a connection with?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Issue Framing/Quality*</th>
<th>school or program quality identified as an issue</th>
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<tr>
<td>So that’s why I was so happy to have that sports convening to, you know, if fantastic if we can make that better quality program but also, you know, how to make the access better, how do we all of that part better because I would hate – you know, because this initiative, folks, is less so on the achievement gap and calling out some of those issues or disparities that others do that I’ve been familiar with. So I know the foundation has it in their minds and that many people do but I see a lot of things just being like let’s talk about that, actually say it.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Framing Content/Relationships &amp; Community connections*</th>
<th>Problem identification includes aspects of building interpersonal relationships and/or connections to the community.</th>
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<td>I think they also said they would like more support from older adults, more role models. We asked, “What would you like to see adults doing in relation to youth and their lives?” And they said mentorship, understand talk, someone you can talk to without been judged, taking time to understand just to wave our thought to change someone’s life, and they talked about how they like to be connected to the community. They spoke about jobs, they spoke about whole community get-togethers, with all ages, opportunities for youths to help out and to work hard.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Framing Content/ Rural Identity*</th>
<th>Descriptions of local problems that consider local history, culture, geography, and isolation from population centers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Because we’re just far enough east, kind of on the edge of more of the forestry and lumbering industry that’s more Big River. But, you know, it’s – you know, we are probably close to 50% free and reduced lunch. It’s a high poverty rate because of mining up and down, the rollercoaster ride that they’ve experienced probably over the last 20 years and are continuing to experience that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue Framing Content/Social Emotional*</td>
<td>Social emotional needs of students unmet, mental health, relationships with adults and other students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue Framing Content/Social Justice*</td>
<td>Main problems described as the need for equity in education provided to students between local districts or within the state, access to pre-k programs, out of school time programs and/or post-secondary programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue Framing Content/Values*</td>
<td>Issue identified as some don’t share the same values, such as college education or the importance of K-12 etc.</td>
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<td>Communication of issue frames</td>
<td>Communication of issue frames</td>
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**Issue Framing Location: geographic location or scope of issue**

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<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>identifies a problem as being located within an individual city, town or specific unincorporated area</th>
<th>And the families, you know, a lot of them work for the Reservation. We do have high instances of drugs and alcohol abuse, a lot of single parents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County/Region</td>
<td>issue located throughout county or region (ie transportation difficulties in greater Grand Isle Area)</td>
<td>And then I see, the level of poverty, the level of hunger alone in our Grand Isle County area, it’s very shocking. And when people are worried about those life things, education falls to the back burner, unfortunately, and that’s a struggle</td>
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<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>issues identified at the school district level (i.e. Winslow has higher poverty levels than surrounding districts)</td>
<td>The square mileage that our school district covers is enormous and I’ve asked about it and I’ve been told that financially there would be no way they could provide an activity bus, but in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Problem identified as a national one (i.e. focus on assessment in schools)</td>
<td>Now, it's – you better make damn sure these kids know these concepts because there's a high stakes tensed eventually bearing down on them. And so, this activity here might be good for them and might be more important than that concept that's going to be assessed. But guess what, this has to wait or it has to go.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>issue identified at the school level (class sizes too large in Grand Isle’s elementary schools)</td>
<td>I think schools do a pretty decent job of that. I think the schools have systems in place for all of those things to happen. I think the challenge is when we talk about EACH student, EVERY student. And I see, I hope this isn't straying too far from your question, but, I see schools as really set up to meet those things. I think there will be more change coming from community and outside organizations at the level of support that they provide for students who are challenged by those goals. Schools don't do a very good job, I don't think of, meeting the individual needs. They have Good system, organizational systems, and structure, but if a student doesn't fit into that box, then how can we get that student to that place without derailing the whole system. I think those are the challenges. And then why isn't that student, that child fitting into that mold, um, and I think the outside support is really going to be key for that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Problem identified as state-wide (i.e. low funding for guidance counselors statewide)</td>
<td>Child protection and human services in [the state] are the first things on the chopping block when things are cut. They always put the big pie graph up and, of course, human services is the biggest piece of the pie. Well, yes, it is. It's food support, it's medical assistance, it's child protection, you know all those kinds of things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Language</td>
<td>Process of intentionally creating, identification of a shared language, or incidences of shared language</td>
<td>In the toolbox that there should be stuff about using the hashtag across the county. That hashtag can let people know. This is how you do it when you do it... Getting them all in the habit for that.</td>
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<td>Types of Frames</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>identification of the problem</td>
<td>But the core team started with was this, and this I'll send you. This is the strategic outline from the final... this came out of the second convening and was adopted in the third. So at that time there were four areas that were identified: employer investments, forward looking educational transformation, leading edge family engagement and unprecedented</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prognostic</strong></td>
<td>Involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack, and the strategies for carrying out the plan.</td>
<td>And already at this time, to try to figure out how to map, because Cincinnati had sort of academic indicators on the top and support indicators on the bottom and what we were noticing is that so many of these things on the bottom were not necessarily tied to a particular age and so we were really struggling with um, how does this all fit together. And, oy, it was a long process.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motivational</strong></td>
<td>Provides a &quot;call to arms&quot; or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive.</td>
<td>[Director of Boys &amp; Girls Club] presenting the roadmap... takes a selfie in front of crowd and said posting, chuckles. Made a joke about his tie. Boys and Girls in Winslow, bring people together around the vision, makes this initiative different. Passionate about being in this community initiative, relationships and encouragement, anyone can offer that to a child. (Got choked up). Education only works when relationships are involved. Takes a village to raise our youth glad the village is here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values &amp; Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>Participants state a personal or professional value or belief about education, youth or the work</td>
<td>Education for the majority of people up here, it does matter. So I think depending upon how we go about doing this and once you know we can do things that a lot of people can see results we would continue to be able to do stuff with it which is good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision &amp; Mission</strong></td>
<td>identification of vision and mission</td>
<td>Communications committee has been throwing around those kinds of ideas too. Come up with a mission and then our mission trying to figure out some of those words that stick out and maybe using those in the title and they probably won't use the word student and that's another thing that may change even with just the path way because student is very limiting, we had focus groups to find out what they meant but people really didn't comment on that very much. But I know that in general that's not something we want to probably keep in there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grassroots</strong></td>
<td>Grass roots strategies used. Need for grass roots.</td>
<td>It's kind of grassroots, bringing community members together and now the group has gotten bigger. I'm amazed. The first day I walked in, I went wow, we have every school here, we have business people, we have college people, and we just have interested parties. And identified gaps and did all that as well. So what are we missing? Who do we need at the</td>
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</table>
table? We did a lot of brainstorming. I’m kind of jumping around.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community organizing*</th>
<th>Community organizing strategies used for mobilization or issue framing</th>
<th>You know, we need more hot dishes and potlucks. The community—it doesn’t have to be an organized, “Let’s come to the Grand Isle meeting room” or “the library meeting room.” People can have these conversations in backyards, that’s where the best conversations happen. It’s just a potluck or “Let’s go golfing and come up with a plan!” Whatever it is.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Insider/Outsider</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insider*</td>
<td>born &amp; raised in Grand Isle county/region</td>
<td>Well I’m from the Grand Isle area, so I was born and raised here, and left and lived to college in [city] and then lived in the [metro area] for 10 years and then ended up coming back about 16 years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider*</td>
<td>born outsider of Grand Isle county/region</td>
<td>My husband and I grew up in the [metro area]. And we lived in Montana and then we moved to Florida, and had kids, little ones and decided we wanted to raise our kids someplace closer to the [metro area], but not in the [metro area]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership *</td>
<td>Leaders and leadership activities on the part of network members and conveners</td>
<td>The Foundation convened the senior leadership of the Foundation and the GISC superintendents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Brokering *</td>
<td>Boundary spanning leadership that creates new relationships and networks across groups</td>
<td>I really I think my gift you know to the work and to the world right now is connecting people to people, people to ideas and kind of -- I think somebody said gardening well I'm kind of gardening this days and been involved with this work since before it's started in this incarnation right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Business Leaders*</td>
<td>Business CEO's and/or other leaders in the business community</td>
<td>I own a company called MP, and we have a contract with the area chamber of commerce for helping to manage their workforce development initiative and certain programming within it. So that's how I became involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Civic*</td>
<td>Civic leaders (municipal, county etc) participation</td>
<td>We don't have legislative individuals at the table with us. But we've discussed that, the need for that component, especially when we get to the point where we're going to be leveraging resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Education *</td>
<td>Educational leaders participation (superintendents, college presidents etc,)</td>
<td>He's been involved in this work since the very beginning and he's a superintendent over in Winslow and he just kind of set it up really nice and then I spoke a few words and then turned it over to the students. And they had a whole -- they had like a concept paper, you know, laid out. And so they went through their concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Trust*</td>
<td>leaders build trust within network; work to create consensus</td>
<td>And we actually called out that code of trust a few times, this is, what's said in the room, you have to trust your partners and those kinds of things. And then speak as one when we're done, so once we made a decision, like there wasn’t a dissenting report. (laughing) And it takes a couple of meetings to do that, but then the rest of the work is easy, it really is. So that’s the process that we went through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Youth*</td>
<td>Youth engaged in leadership/need to engage youth in leadership</td>
<td>I specifically targeted some kids who aren’t really in those kinds of things, and they’ve been great about jumping in and doing things, and I think that’s kind of what we’re about, is showing them that you may not be the person who stands up there and talks or puts forward things, but you’re still a leader in doing.</td>
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### Planning vs Action*

<p>| Planning* | Members identify the role of planning | I think it’s coming, but we’re not there yet. I think we’ve had some good discussions with the core team, but we’re waiting for the surveys to see what the kids think. |
| Action* | Members identify action occurring as part of the Network efforts | I think that’s kind of like pulls the question, it’s like what can we get done between you know April and March, and May whatever it may be. And so they kind of narrowed it down until they got to a couple ideas at which point they voted on their top ideas. And then once they had the idea that they wanted to work on, then we took them through that action planning process where we got them to think of like a step-by-step way to implement this plan. And thinking more about the components that they were going to need to fulfill to get to that point. |
| Impacts* | Participants identify changes the Network has created | I think the Alternative Learning Center is becoming more, more included. You know, I’ve been there five years but I have had some history with the program when I first started teaching in Little River, I was part of their summer school. But I think because of this initiative, there is more of a focus on area kids that isn’t just Green Lake, Winslow, Big River. So, I – it’s beginning and I can see that but I think now even, it can happen more, you know, these connections like you have said earlier. But having the data shows us really, you know, what our kids needed. Right now we’re a school running with five teachers. |
| Previous Multi-sector Efforts* | Prior efforts to engage in multi-sector collaboration/partnership | I’ve been attending another group that [the Foundation] has called the Circle of Healing, which is working with kind of help with the Native American awareness of the difficulties and bring about change and so forth. And so then I think I talk with her there and that’s how she got me kind of guided on and here we are. |
| Afterschool* | Previously existing collaboration/partnerships in afterschool | Well I think Grand Isle Networks for Youth is doing – is moving forward in some areas and directions because they were stuck for a long time, I was there from the very beginning when we first started it and had great hopes that things would move forward and maybe even be able to form some kind of a collaborate |
| Early Childhood* | Previously existing collaboration/partnerships in early childhood | You know, the Early Childhood Program is working with Head Start, those programs really struggle with staff training and retention (Pause) – yeah, they struggle. And so the Early Childhood Program has been able to provide some resources, curriculum, training, things like that to those Head Start sites, which has been really valuable. And I think those Head Start sites have been open to that because they have – they have leadership that’s aware of the need that data prove. |
| K-12* | Previously existing collaboration/partnerships K-12 | Now, you look at GISC that has an even older genesis story. Started out I think with laying closed circuit television cable between the different school districts in the area that are – you know, 25 or 30 years ago or something like that. And, you know, it wasn’t until about 15 years ago they really started to – they started doing some other stuff. They started an online learning program which is now I think the third largest provider of online learning services in the state – |
| Post-Secondary* | Previously existing collaboration/partnerships to support post-secondary enrollment and completion | The college here does a class act program which is – it’s like a two-year program prior to somebody going out into an undergrad program in their education and as part of that they have to fulfill so many clinical hours in various high schools. So I think there’s been talk about kind of teaming up with the kids that are already here that have to do clinical hours. So you have more students, college age students in all these various schools as opposed to one person trying to be nine – seven-nine places at once |
| Social Services* | Previously existing collaboration/partnerships in the social service sector | [Truancy] resources is the, they have the truancy money, but they are also connected with the crisis team, they’re connected to the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workforce*</td>
<td>Previously existing collaboration/partnerships to promote workforce development.</td>
<td>I’m on the Grand Isle Consumers Commerce Workforce Development Committee. Which is guess is another reason why I got involved in this program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connector*</td>
<td>Individuals identified as community connectors/description of role</td>
<td>We were doing a presentation and to a Strive Group and we, you know, everybody had their title with them and my title was kind of ambiguous. I don’t really know what my title was at that time and [the convener] said community Connector and that became the title after that was community Connector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Team*</td>
<td>Individuals identified as Core Team members/description of role</td>
<td>I don’t want to say I’m a Johnny come lately on the committee, I got involved with the core team just about two years ago when I got elected onto the school board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance Council*</td>
<td>Individuals identified as Governance Council members/description of role</td>
<td>And then now through this wanting to kind of restructure they’ve asked me to be on the governance board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pockets of Readiness*</td>
<td>Individuals identified as pockets of readiness members/description of role</td>
<td>So all these little green circles we’re calling pockets of readiness. One of the things we learned through the pilot is we had school data, the surveys were done in schools, and so we went to each of those schools and said, organize a meeting, work out a plan with your data. And schools or/are a community member we had on the core team or whatever. And there was a lot of suspicion that came with that, what are you trying to do here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-committees*</td>
<td>Individuals identified as subcommittee members/description of role</td>
<td>It’s been really – it’s been kind of a rocky road, the communications team when I first joined it was about two – oh gosh at least two years ago and only we were more. And we were pulled together to do the communications for the Grand Isle Network to kind of get the word out on the Network, to maybe put together a brand, to do all the stuff but then every time we tried – and that was another reason why GINY got involved with the Network and why I got put on the communication.</td>
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**Theory of Action**

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<tr>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Accountability as a mechanism for change</th>
<th>And so recognizing that as we get this data, we’re going to be needing to do some decision making. We’re going to need a little bit more robust accountability measure and so when we crafted that meeting,</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Alignment of services, programs, etc. to the Roadmap</td>
<td>Or you get the workforce request that comes in from the chamber that’s been going for the past 12 years and, you know, are they really doing a good job? And are they playing nice</td>
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with the people that they should be playing with? And are they coming to the Road Map meetings? And are they really engaging and connecting? Or are they just sitting at the table because they know they need to be there and going like this. Just leave me alone.

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<tr>
<th>Braided funding streams</th>
<th>Bringing together funds from multiple sources</th>
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<td></td>
<td>That I would see that this initiative is going to be able to maybe access funds for some of those groups. You know maybe that's going to be a piece of the government council to attempt to garnish some grant funding to then get out to kind of our – I'm trying to think of what they call them, they're not &quot;pockets of readiness&quot;, but off all our programming that already exists through schools, and our nonprofit and things that target youth and families and maybe that's part of what the government's council will choose to look at doing. But I think being a group that can helps facilitate conversations and bring different groups together.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Capacity Building*</th>
<th>Efforts to build capacity of members/organizations</th>
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<td></td>
<td>And building the capacity in all of our key partners to be able to hold conversations in the same way. Focusing on the importance of common language.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Client-based demand*</th>
<th>Change comes with clients demand it</th>
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<td></td>
<td>I think, whoever they’re serving, when those requests are coming from those individuals, that’s when the organization will be responsive. I’m trying to think of an example. Like maybe in health care or something, um, where ground swell from the community has forced some change in those institutions on... let’s say sports physicals, and this is a really, this is a, it’s not to the scale of this initiative but every fall, students have to go and get their sports physicals. Trying to schedule individual appointments in institutions where openings are limited finally, I think clinics said, let’s get a couple doctors, let’s do sports physical night and bring in as many as we can and just block out that time. But that’s an example of a demand from their patients, complaints about having to get in immediately because my son or daughter starts practice on Monday, they can’t practice without a physical, so there was a responsive action. But, I think that comes from that the floor. That doesn’t come from the Foundation or the core team, because we see the initiatives every day.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Collaboration between individuals across organizations as lever for improving student outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think, well I think willingness to continue to partner, not only at the administrative level but getting the teaching ranks involved with the</td>
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</table>
community as well. If you’ve taught, you know it’s very difficult for teachers to do anything but be with their kids all day long and they barely have a moment to eat and um, so that part of it is the flexibility of allowing teachers to take part in future discussions and/or actions or strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective impact*</th>
<th>Participants identify collective impact or describe it in their work</th>
<th>I think, you know, I think that's the hard part in general about the work is making the opportunities concrete to help influence, move the needle, so a person who is at the Y or a leader at [faith-based youth organization] or whatever the organization is can identify their place maybe collectively as INY but also as their place individually as an organization where they can look at those indicators and say, “That’s an indicator that I can do something about.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Participants identify communication as leading to change</td>
<td>The Governance Council needs to see communications is not about the work but also it is the work. So when it comes time to write a staffing plan, that communications isn’t an add-on, so they understand communications is an integral part. So that they know it needs more people, more capacity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Driven Decision Making</td>
<td>Data use as lever for improving student outcomes: use of data to plan for instruction; use of community-wide data within schools to target activities and programs to specific populations</td>
<td>And the emphasis on data was very central to our learning there and then everybody that we talked to on that tour talked about their roadmap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Structures</td>
<td>New structures to support data driven decision making: increased access to web-based databases; rescheduling school day to provide common planning time around data; use of faculty meetings to analyze data.</td>
<td>We didn’t have a good way to do that when we started this initiative. And that took a lot of time to find the right way to collect the data, but we have that now and that is a huge milestone for us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage policy makers</td>
<td>The need to engage policy makers at state or local level to create change</td>
<td>Yeah. Well, our vision – my vision on that was we are not set up to be an education policy advocacy shop. We do a good job as a backbone for community initiative. That’s why we brought Growth and Justice into the equation to stitch together different communities that are doing cradle to career. And I don’t know, I’m sitting at a table like this with DS saying, “What a creative movement.” Well, as it turns out, we may want a movement, but the communities aren’t ready for a movement. They are focused on my community of what they need to do. This policy vision is beyond their – you know, just you got</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction and Curriculum</td>
<td>Changes to instructional practices or curricular content as lever for improving student outcomes</td>
<td>So a good example I think is the work that our social studies teachers did this week, you know, that the vehicle for that happening was GISC, it was, “Okay, here – this data's been identified, there's been a link drawn between – potentially between the utilization of this data and some standards – Minnesota standards, how do we go about tying those two things together?” Well that comes to the IASC table we have a conversation so now it doesn't make sense, let's engage our social studies teachers, so I asked, what serves as the vehicle to sort of move those things forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School time*</td>
<td>OST (including formal and informal) as priority for improving student outcomes (example, Boys &amp; Girls Club, the Movement)</td>
<td>Even though it is post-secondary and K-12 on there, it, it, to me the pathway aligns itself to folks more on an outside of school time because extended learning day and raising the importance and awareness of that and how valuable THAT can be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>Partnerships between organizations seen as means for improving student outcomes (shared programing, braided funding, shared data etc)</td>
<td>So it takes long-term commitment of significant resources that allows you to, first off, I mean, it starts with building relationships across organizations. You know, even from school-to-school they struggle to build relationships, even within the same school district. And then, you know, neighboring districts need to – to – to trust and understand each other. Then you got to move out into the, you know, county health and human services, the correction system, all – all – a variety of different kinds of systems, private education. And, you know, gradually building relationships so that when people start to sit down and talk about ideas, their immediate reflex isn’t protect territory and the like but to trust and have confidence that people are looking for win-win, so mutual benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention*</td>
<td>Participants reference prevention</td>
<td>My belief is that you know we're pretty good at throwing money at programs, whether its drug abuse or law enforcement or whatever the case may be, but we don't do a very good job of prevention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships*</td>
<td>Social relationships as lever</td>
<td>So one – if you believe in the notion that change follows relationships, can you sit down and do you have evidence that networks of relationships are being formed and maintained for key players that otherwise wouldn’t have been there? Yup. You know, what’s our evidence for that? There’s plenty of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Type</td>
<td>Change Mechanism</td>
<td>Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult-adult*</td>
<td>New working relationships between adults fosters change in student outcomes</td>
<td>Connect parents with teachers and know that... I know that was a big goal, to alleviate like any would be tensions that are quite common between parents and educators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Mobilization*</td>
<td>Bringing the community together creates change</td>
<td>You know, my biggest push has always been you need to activate the community members through something because [board member] said, maybe you need votes. Because people don’t see this, they don’t realize it. They don’t know what your kids are going through. That’s the next step, is, yeah, making advocacy and putting it out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-school*</td>
<td>Connections between parents and school create change</td>
<td>I just know that it’s going to take a lot of time and a lot of effort on everybody’s part and not like those folks that sit on the governance council or, you know what I mean because we need our parents to care too and we need to engage them and get them involved because in order for a child to do well, they need that connection to their parents. Because I don’t think that – I would have probably never been able to do what I did if I wasn’t – despite my circumstances, you know, it could have gone a whole another way if I can make it by myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student to student*</td>
<td>Building relationships between students creates change</td>
<td>It’s really having some time in each week in the schools that our student is connected with a the same small group of other students and a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-adult*</td>
<td>Building relationships between students and adults creates change</td>
<td>Or, you know, in Hawk River, I remember talking when we were doing this because we did this in Hawk River too. I remember one of my Greeters saying how, you know, a lot of times we’ll be at walk on a sidewalk and there would be kids that would be skate boarding. And for some elderly people, that’s scary because they have this vision that this kid is going to do something to them. That they’re going to hit them and knock them down and whatever. And he said, he remembers that after we started the Greeter program, you know, a kid, you know – yeah, quite a ways away coming down alongside and walks to him. But as they got closer, they stopped and picked up the skateboard, “Hi, Mr. Johnson.” Walking by and getting by and boom jumps on the skateboard and keep going.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Based Interventions</td>
<td>RTI, PBIS, early identification/intervention</td>
<td>think we all use something. I think it might be different. One thing, one form or other, ya know, Response to Intervention, RTI or PBIS, positive behavior intervention systems, but</td>
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basically, quick, early identification of students who are struggling, appropriate researched interventions to get them back on track and careful monitoring and adjustment as needed. So, for one thing that our school does, the high school, we progress monitor every two weeks and we have a list of students and we knew this that we don’t want to stay there and we’re already starting to move beyond, but students who are currently failing any class are identified on a list and then there’s a series of three levels of interventions that they may receive depending on their past history on where they’ve been identified on that list.

| School-linked supports | new mechanisms to connect students and families with services not located at schools, new mechanisms to allow educators and service providers to share information and work together | We have students with great needs in our school, just like every school does and there may not always be a link to the appropriate resource, or that’s a cumbersome process to have the connection being made. A lot of those supports, especially in the areas of ‘every student will have access to’ |
| Shared learning* | Bringing individuals and groups together to learn from one another | Okay one of the things I am seeing as I work in Winslow and listened in on Grover and listen in on Hawk River, and Green Lake, all of these communities are looking for places for kids to be and to be actively involved in community, and are all looking at that. I see – I think that they can build on each other and I think as you are struggling to design whatever it is that’s going to accomplish it over here, I think they are struggling over there and maybe the combined group knowledge is going to be more than important than the smaller pockets of little bits and pieces of knowledge. I think we maybe need to bring that group knowledge into play because there is a lot of group knowledge that we have as a larger community instead of just a smaller pockets operating independently |
| Shifting values* | Participants identify the need to change values in the community | And, you know, if it takes a village, then you’re going to have to figure out structures for making that happen and dedicated resources to keep it – to get that village on the same page and keep them there. And that isn’t done by volunteers and it isn’t done overnight. |
| Site-based decision making | Site-based decision making: increasing non-educators in decision making at school or district level/ administrative restructuring | I think, well I think willingness to continue to partner, not only at the administrative level but getting the teaching ranks involved with the community as well. If you’ve taught, you know it’s very difficult for teachers to do anything but be with their kids all day long and they barely have a moment to eat and um, so that part of it is the flexibility of allowing teachers to take part |
| Social emotional* | Social emotional needs of students need to be met first | My view of the world is the student, [the state] comprehensive assessments is such a tiny sliver of what it takes to be successful for a kid, that I have resisted saying a direct line between we do this and it’s going to move the needle on that (assessments) and so, but then at the same time, I do know that kids that have the social emotional supports that we’ve laid out on the pathway are more likely do better on those things. |
| Soft Skills* | Workforce development, esp soft skills | I think people are seeing the issue of the kids that are raised more in poverty or stressful situations are the ones that tend to stay in town because they don’t have the opportunity to go on to education, so they’re the ones that go into the workforce. And so I think it starts to show, especially for the business community and what I hear from the business community is the difficulty in finding kids that have what they call a work ethic. Or soft skills, there’s a lot of different words they use to try to describe what they’re seeing. And so the early, um, impetus with Network was seeing that the kids that stick around need more skills to be able to fill the jobs that are out there. |
| Student Engagement | Increasing student engagement in school through relationships, activities, motivation for learning etc. | I’m thinking even kids who come to high school, the ones who don’t join anything. Sometimes they might not join because they don’t know how to join or what to join, or even what’s out there. So often, we work as our own individual stakeholders, to go out and promote our thing, but there is such a wealth of programming that kids can get involved in that can help some of that. |
| Youth* | Youth as an avenue for change | You know, empowering students—and I think that’s one thing we have a lot of learning to do on, I mean, I try with my student organizations to have them as student-centered and student-empowered. |
| Youth Voice* | Youth voice prioritized in change | And I was impressed by the youth that were there and their perspective on it. It made me take a step back a little bit and stop and think about, “Oh yeah, you gotta quit trying to fix this. We gotta listen to it from their perspective first.” Help them come up with a solution, you know? Let them drive the solution. |
| Youth Leadership | Youth take leadership roles as part of change | They do things throughout the summer and we’re actually – next week the youth leadership thing with 35 kids are going on this kind of a youth retreat and I think all of the eight that |
committed to doing that are going on that trip for sure. And probably the other ones as well, so there’s opportunities to connect with them and during the process we took emails and cell phone numbers too so they’re all – they all said they were open to come in into the school whenever and do meetings or...
Appendix D
Grand Isle Network Theory of Change

Governance

Regional Context

Working Groups

Systems Action
Intermediate Outcomes
Grass-roots Action
Youth Experience
Roadmap Measures
Youth Outcomes

NICS

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